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Ways of the Third World

Political freedom as such means little, unless we can do away with poverty and economic contrasts at the same time — so Indira Gandhi about one year ago. Now she has taken the plunge and has drawn one of the possible conclusions from her musings, since she has not succeeded in mitigating the pauperism of the Indian masses or in bridging the gap between classes and castes in her country. When she was indicted for corruption, political liberties, in her view, had ceased to make sense and, by a swift stroke, she swept them away.

The root cause of the dilapidation of Indian democracy is the corruption of India's political parties. But only dreamers who have maintained the belief that the rules of the democratic game as played in the West could overcome the problems of the Third World can be surprised by such events. The system of parliamentary democracy, copied uncritically from the British model, can hardly be suitable for a vast, highly heterogeneous, and poor country.

And if this applies to India — after all, when the country became independent about 30 years ago, India had been able to look back upon a highly-developed civilization, an efficient administration, and the beginnings of a self-propelling industrial revolution — how much more will this be true of all the other countries of the Third World which have started on the path towards their own emancipation? After Portugal has released from colonial bondage Angola and Mozambique, in the South of Africa states governed by militant liberation movements are emerging. Among the 40 or so African countries that have gained independence since 1951, at most only the Ivory Coast and Senegal could be described as somehow democratic, though even they are ruled by a kind of enlightened autocracy. In almost all the other states of Western Africa, military rulers are at the helm, though coups d'état replace one junta by another one. Uniformed dictators, Presidents Mobutu and Giscard d'Estaing, hold sway over Zaire and Nigeria, and Uganda has fallen back into a kind of barbarism which seems to justify the worst prejudices against this type of state.

It seems to be an iron law of history which drives the countries of the Third World into autocratic

dictatorship, and the conceptions of Democracy as worked out in Europe over a period of centuries have failed all these nations. This is true not only of Africa, but also of Asia from Iran to Vietnam and further eastwards to the Philippines and Korea where, over and above all else, China's model calls for emulation.

This poses the question whether the democratic form of government is suitable at all for the Third World with its completely different ethnic, historical, and cultural conditions. The conditions under which a living democracy can exist — the rule of law, a pluralistic structure, the non-violent change of government between competing parties, and free elections — are hardly conceivable for them, for a long time to come.

As a matter of fact, all this is also true of communist, marxist, or socialist systems among developing countries. Such descriptive terms, however, are far from meaning the same as in Europe or in the Soviet Union, *vide* China's mandarinized Marxism which is based on Mao's ruling of 1938: "There is no such thing as abstract Marxism; there is only a concrete Marxism which has assumed a national form, in which it is applied concretely to the struggle under concrete Chinese conditions;" or the declaration of Tunisia's Foreign Minister regarding Socialism during the conference of socialist parties from 30 African states of early July, which sat in Tunis, "that this conference is not in favour of preaching Marxist socialism to the nations of Africa." Since it had been proved impossible to find a better term than Socialism, this was chosen to manifest that policies, development, and planning were all to serve man as a person. And Léopold Senghor pointed out that Socialism cannot mean only doing away with class inequality within one single country but must also contribute to dismantling inequality between developed and developing countries.

In our era of worldwide change it is, therefore, imperative, to do everything for going beyond abstract notions and definitions and their various interpretations, and to find a pragmatic middle road for enabling differing systems to cooperate and to live peacefully and productively with each other.

Hubert Höping