

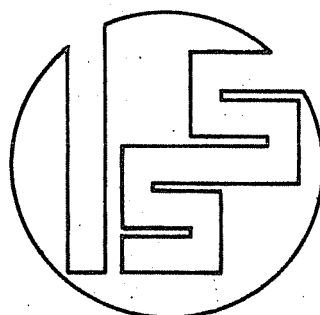
# I.S.S.

## OCCASIONAL PAPERS

**Societal Processes and Policies:  
some reflections on their nature and direction**

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## Societal Processes and Policies: <sup>x</sup>

Some reflections on their nature and direction

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1. How many roads must a man walk down before you can call him a man?  
How many seas must a white dove sail before he can sleep in the sand?<sup>1</sup>

To answer these questions we may perhaps join the singer in suggesting that the answer is blowing in the wind. To approach the matter of our immediate concern and interest as students of social policy, man's and society's development, questions of another nature will have to be asked and the answers cannot be left to the blowing of the wind but have to be searched for within the confines of concrete reality of society and people's interaction.

Central in the social policy programme has been the praemisse that in order to come to a true understanding of the dynamios of the processes of societal change and transformation, harmony of interests between and within societies cannot be assumed and that the implicit insistence on such harmony and identity of interests diverts the attention from the underlying forces shaping society.<sup>2</sup>

There is too much empirical evidence that such a normative assumption too easily induces "a teleological interpretation" of societal planning and policy, which, on the basis of an idealization of harmony in the human community, supports the view of development as a unilinear process which somehow, sometime, someway, will benefit all people, in particular those belonging to the majority who unfortunately have "as yet" not benefitted from the fruits of progress. While inequality and domination appear to have always been an inherent feature in society<sup>3</sup> and in no way exclusive characteristics of a particular period of history or set of societies, there is ample evidence that the colonial process, in particular during the last decades, has in an accelerated way deepened processes towards inequality and domination between the now so-called rich and the poor countries as also within the latter ones<sup>4</sup> to such a degree and on such a scale, that any dream of spontaneous harmony seems dangerous and irresponsible. I submit that it has too easily led to legitimize and promote the acceptance of the "existing order" as ideal and normative. It has served at the same time to reject conflict in its various forms as a source and ferment of change while it has also contributed to obscure an insight in the causes of underdevelopment by concentrating on its symptoms, thereby serving as a handmaiden to policies which intendedly or unintendedly consolidate the status quo and aggravate the process of polarization, in the meanwhile undermining the emergence of a sound and relevant orientation in research.

2. The preference for "deducing an interpretation of society form values", a preference which underlies most of modern social science as it has developed in the West,<sup>5</sup> finds solid support in the various forms of

<sup>x</sup>On the occasion of the closing of the 1971-1972 Social Policy Programme June 1972, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.  
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equilibrium theory, which stress the so-called innate tendencies between and within societies towards balance, thereby minimizing the actual or potential effects of past or present disparities as well as the polarizing nature of the accumulative process in which development and underdevelopment define and shape each other.<sup>6</sup>

It would appear that equilibrium theory has in the same way as the premiss of harmony of interests provided a "metaphysical and teleological" framework for our whole social science thinking and that it has played a major role in determining up to this day "the main concepts of all social sciences and not only of economics".<sup>7</sup>

The extraordinary tenacity of equilibrium theory in permeating our thinking must respond to deeply rooted human needs and interests. Its persistence as an assumption in the analysis of society may perhaps be partly explained in that it serves as a convenient instrument in the defence and rationalization of the interests of dominant groups by their influence in the shaping of cultural values<sup>8</sup> as well as in serving as an expedient response to the need to calm conscience and to overcome the painfully accusing nature of inequality and exploitation.

The non-acceptance of the harmony of interest theory naturally stimulates a dichotomizing view on society and the search for divergencies in interests between groups in society<sup>9</sup> as well as the interest in detecting tensions and opposition "between values and aspirations expressed in a society and the way society actually works".<sup>10</sup>

3. The need to center attention on the identification of interest formation and divergence and its implications can surely not be understood as the natural fruit of scientific interest by itself, but rather as the outcome of the primacy of a moral praemisse in the undertaking of research on basis of the view that exploitation and injustice are at the roots of underdevelopment; equalization of opportunities by transforming society is seen as the basic condition for human and societal development.<sup>11</sup> It is here that lies perhaps the watershed historically and actually between those who look at social science as an instrument in the task of transformation and those who emphasize its use within the context of the "existing order" as a given good and therefore as normative.
4. Implicit in the here proposed view on social science is the rejection of its supposed actual or potential neutrality since it is posited that all human activity, including the work of a social scientist, is carried out within the bedding of concrete societies of which the values and valuations are inevitably reflected in the work of the social scientist, intendedly or unintendedly, manifestly or implicitly. The search for objectivity as the systematization and crystallization of optimum intersubjective experience can therefore not lie in an attempt to save social science by protecting it and isolating it as in a laboratory with the ceteris paribus assumption, thereby closing it off from the concrete changes in the constellation of society, but by making praemisses as much as possible explicit.<sup>12</sup> Only in this way can social science effectively serve as a meaningful instrument for development and a critical guide in policymaking. Research should therefore not be judged by the formal criterion of abstract

scientific standards as such but against the question in how far it has been concretely relevant in explaining the relationships between development and underdevelopment and in helping to discover and anticipate ways and alternatives to effectively eradicate the roots and effects of underdevelopment.

The emphasis on relevance in research (in its widest sense of systematically probing and interpreting social reality) should lead to de-emphasize the aprioristic distinction between a "Western" and a "Marxist" orientation in as far as both would be able in a non-dogmatic way not to take for given an existing social system as the only possible one with only one possible way of the direction of development, but would both promote in a fundamental and critical way the analysis of the "existing order" in view of its potentialities and needs to respond more rationally to the demand of humanization. The constraints created by the need for maintenance and selfpreservation as well as by the internalization of past or prevailing values make it difficult to undertake such research in view of or in anticipation of "a new society". Change being perhaps the most pervasive and predominant feature of the social processes of today, relevance of research is immediately related in my view to the degree in which various forms and expressions of conflict which accompany change would be drawn into the analysis, particularly if this would focus on the contradictions between the different groups which compose society or a set of societies as well as the disproportions between development objectives and means as well as those between societal values and actual conditions on the other hand.<sup>13</sup>

5. The cumulative nature of the polarization process shows itself in a particularly dramatic way in the convergence of inequalities resulting from existing disparities in the archaic rural social structures and from the processes of modernization taking place both in the industrial as well as in the agricultural sector. Hopes that the industrialization process could effectively serve as the decisive dynamic force in national development appear to have been based on the mechanistic assumption that the Western experience of industrialization would, although perhaps with some difficulties, essentially repeat itself, an a-historical interpretation of which the invalidity has been amply demonstrated.<sup>14</sup> Where and while high rates of industrial growth may be obtained, the overall effects thereof tend to remain very limited or are even regressive since, as a result of the structure of investment, often induced or directed from outside, the emphasis is on the introduction of capital intensive industries, one of the products of the exclusive interest in profitmaking. As a consequence, labourintensive industries stagnate or are being replaced and employment opportunities either do not grow in proportion to the increase of need and offer or diminish even. The share of the wage fund in total national income may under such circumstances grow very slowly or even diminish with regressive implications for the income and the social structure.<sup>15</sup> The pressure to respond in the short run to the urgent need for increased food supply to the urban areas, which have expanded in increasing disproportion to its absorptive capacity, is strongly stimulating the modernization of agriculture. There is however growing evidence that the green revolution, while leading to increased production and productivity, tends or may tend to increase unemployment, with again the implicit deterioration in the social structure.<sup>16</sup> Growth is then looked upon as the proof of "innate entrepreneurial capacities" of a minority of rich and middle sized farmers. It is however necessary

to point out that such entre-preneurial initiative is not coming forth out of any "natural disposition or talent" but is rather the outcome of a response to the special opportunities offered to this group as the fruit of economic and political power.

The relative improductivity of the peasantry with which the stagnation of rural society tends to become associated should then not be explained as the product of a "resistance to change" among the rural population and the peasantry but rather as a consequence of the limitations imposed upon this population and this peasantry by the processes of monopolization.<sup>17</sup> A policy of "betting on the strong"<sup>18</sup> has its necessary counterproduct in the "weakening of the weak". The insistence on the assumption that somehow by a process of spontaneous filtering,<sup>19</sup> the acquired expertise and entre-preneurial initiative by the privileged majority does not appear to be borne out by empirical evidence; on the contrary there are too many signs that such an assumption only facilitates and aggravates the process of polarization.<sup>20</sup> The impossibility of the underprivileged majority to respond positively to innovations should not only be sought in the structural constraints which characterize their situation but also by the regressive effects of the dependency situation on their motivational system, as it becomes impaired by the effects of this dependency, the natural counterpart of a situation of structural and cultural domination.<sup>21</sup> These effects which express themselves in such characteristics as apathy, submissiveness, conformity, apparent laziness, inaction, seeming lack of understanding and unrational behaviour may therefore be understood as expressions of selfdefense and their seemingly pathological appearance as too human reactions to the implicit or explicit forms of repression and oppression which accompany prevailing systems of domination.<sup>22</sup>

6. Both the processes of modernization in the industrial and agricultural sectors which entail the above regressive tendencies as a result of increased concentration of ownership or control over productive resources also lead to a new situation of the marginalized population. While previously the hope of employment might have prevailed and its possibility was also theoretically assumed, the newly emerging situation is one no more characterized by potential employability but fundamentally by unemployment. This new situation is qualitatively different from that in the past. The unemployable cannot be seen as potential participants in society but if they are not as yet they will become excluded from it.<sup>23</sup> This process of exclusion may receive special support as a result from a relative identity of interest and mutual support between the modernizing industrial elite on the one hand and the power groups which control the rural areas (agricultural exporters, merchants, landlords and middle size farmers on the other hand). It is their coalition which provides the political base for the process of modernization and the Government's support for it.
7. If the marginal(ized) population cannot participate anymore in society and its development, would it be realistic to expect a possibility for them to participate "without a prior qualitative transformation of the prevailing social and economic system?" A positive answer would in my view be a denial of the internal dynamics of the very system of laissezfaire economic growth as it is imposed in the majority of poor countries and inevitably leads to increased lopsidedness and imbalance between regions, sectors of production as well as to increasing divergencies in interest formation.

It is at this juncture that the concept of participation requires more precise analysis. It would seem that in the face of the above suggested effects of the processes of modernization, both the prevailing postulate and practice of participation in society and development do obscure the real issue and would help to consolidate or aggravate prevailing tendencies of polarization. Thus participation in "development activities" by marginalized groups in the name of national and local development with a view to "improve conditions" may too frequently and easily intensify exploitative forms of surplus-appropriation by power controlling minority groups<sup>24</sup> whereas participation "in the name of democracy" may provide a cover of legitimacy and safety to those promoting and benefitting from the processes of concentration.<sup>25</sup> It may be asked whether as a result of the nature of the processes of growth taking place, the contention of the prevalence of a situation of "internal colonialism"<sup>26</sup> is not diminishing in validity, in as far as the "developed" sector both in the cities and in the rural areas "would no more be generated through the exploitation of the more backward sectors and that it needs them less and less for continued growth".<sup>27</sup>

8. The stagnation of traditional rural society as a result of the maintenance of an archaic unproductive exploitative structure would in itself for economic, political and social reasons require profound and radical reforms. The need for such reforms have however received diminished attention, both as a result of the above described processes of modernization and dualization which not only make the marginalized rural but also the unemployable urban population (in itself produced by the stagnation of life in the rural areas) a-functional and "useless" in the context of the prevailing system. The growing insight that this newly emerging situation leads to closed circuits and islands of growth in a sea of increasing poverty, increasingly threatens the "stability" and diminishes the chances for authentic development to take place, should bring to reason those impeding or delaying the introduction of far-reaching Reforms. The arguments for such Reforms may then be based more on considerations of social justice and political necessity than on reasons of a purely economic order, unless "development from within" becomes a fundamental issue in the considerations of those politically responsible in the given context for their societies' development. The proposition that modernization should only be allowed to take place if a society has achieved "structural maturity"<sup>28</sup> runs squarely counter to the pressures inherent in the process of modernization, as they actually impose themselves. Will such a proposition only be understood after the storm, generated by the marginalizing effects of such modernization, has swept away the prevailing "order"? The prospects of unemployability in the face of continued high population growth combined with the negative effects of dysfunctional distorted educational systems and the impact of capital-intensive technology should provide a forceful warning for those holding power to look for entirely new ways and alternatives in development, based on giving primacy not to profit and growth but to people and their legitimate needs for dignity and a meaningful life. In this context, participation should need to be defined not first of all as taking part in any "development activity" but rather from the point of view of the interests of the marginalized groups as "any action which might promote the transformation of the prevailing societal structure"<sup>29</sup> But can we simply expect structural transformation to be feasible and instrumental in the creation of a more viable and human society if its introduction is not pre-

ceded, accompanied and sustained by a reorientation in the central values and valuation which now sustain or at least take for given the processes of change in the given situation? Historical evidence seems to indicate that the pursuit of either strategy in an autonomous way with the expectation that each of them might somehow automatically generate transformations in the other "sphere", does not lead to a breakthrough to a "new, more human society" but that it either leads (in the case of the "orthodox" socialist and communist societies) to an authoritarian dehumanized type of society, controlled by an uncontrolled and bureaucratic and technocratic privileged and exploitative elite or, in case of the free market societies, to a reinforcement of the processes of concentration and marginalization which stand in violent contrast to the proclaimed principles of dignity and freedom. In both cases, in the orthodox socialist societies where structural transformation was introduced and in the freemarket countries where an appeal is made to a change in values and attitudes, we have seen a similar trend towards centralized or centralizing control, optimum specialization in the division of labour and emphasis on expertness, the primacy of economic growth and the instrumentalization and submission of people to abstract norms and ideals which preach the contrary of what actually takes place and is sought by people in their search for a good and full human life. In both types of societies is the pursuit of solidarity and service constantly eroded and is man alienated, having to "function" primarily as an input, a factor of production and a means to an end, not chosen by himself.

9. Perhaps one of the lessons which we can draw from observing present trends in the world is that the poor countries in pursuing their development can not do so unless they realize their efforts on their own terms, that is to say that no true development can take place unless it is primarily generated and shapes itself "from within". We know also that such a process towards "development from within", which must necessarily include the full mobilization and valorization of all people and all resources primarily in the service of the own society and its population at large, could not take place if it were not rooted in the progressive articulation of an authentic autonomously created image for the own future society, without which such society would inevitably be bound to imported models and systems which would not respond to its true interest and increase its dependence and underdevelopment.<sup>30</sup> Hence the central attention given in the Social Policy Programme to the dialectical relationship between structural transformation and social mobilization as the process of formation of consciousness and organization within the marginalized groups of the population, through which they acquire the necessary power to participate actively, productively and equitatively in society and in the control and development of its resources, and benefit from the wealth and services generated by the mobilization of these resources.<sup>31</sup>
10. While I have suggested before that changes taking place in the poor free-market countries (the same as in the rich freemarket countries) are more a result of societal forces than of formal policies, in the same way I like to stress that in order to understand the forces which may promote the emergence of "a new society, based on a more human order", we should also look not so much for the declared principles of policy but at the actual processes taking place.



If the promotion of "whole man and all men" is accepted as the supreme concrete goal of development, it would only be interpreted as positive if people stand for their legitimate interests and defend these. The emergence everywhere in this context of movements, organizations and expression of protest can perhaps be seen as the coming about of consciousness and the progressive awakening of and acquisition of insight by people that they are entitled by their very existence to participate in the making of their own lives and history, communities and societies, to have a reasonable share in the control and benefits from their societies resources and goods produced from these.

11. Protest in its widest gamut of expression could then perhaps best be understood as a primary form of participation as well as a response to the increasing limitations on people to participate meaningfully and in dignity in society.<sup>32</sup>

Such a protest may then be seen as an expression of the primary right of man to be himself, to "say his own word"<sup>33</sup> and claim the right to live and work on his own terms. If such a claim is accepted as legitimate and is viewed as essential to development, it means that development must necessarily include a process of liberation. Protest is then an answer to structural violence, that is to say, violence which is institutionalized in the social system. It should be stressed that there exists ample empirical evidence lending support to the thesis that people in the defense of their own legitimate interests only tend to recur to the use of violence if and when peaceful means have been exhausted.<sup>34</sup> and they are forced to recur to violent means by the increased violence of those who encroach upon their elementary rights and legitimate interests and make intolerable inroads on their elementary dignity.<sup>35</sup>

Protest movements sometimes expressing themselves in revolutionary action need then not be interpreted as an expression of the forces of evil in man but as a way by which people may (re)gain their basic rights and elementary opportunities to participate in society on their own terms on basis of the preservation of their own dignity. "To say a good word on behalf of revolutionary radicalism is not easy because it runs counter to deeply rooted mental reflexes "of a Western scholar"<sup>36</sup> and perhaps even more difficult for a social policy student or maker.

Action in this sense in its various forms may then be considered an expression of protest in view of the preservational legitimate and elementary rights and human needs of freedom and for equitable participation in society.<sup>37</sup> If the task of transformation in solidarity is the most essential expression of a man's vocation, it becomes impossible not to take position.<sup>38</sup>

12. A first task in assuming responsibility for a student or maker of social policy would be to analyze the true sources of conflict which lead or might lead to a revolutionary situation and help to create insight in the forces generating or promoting such a situation.<sup>39</sup>

A second task would be to study the possibilities of action, promoting processes of transformation in the given context and to formulate critical guidelines in support of a policy in service of structural participation

through various forms of social mobilization and community development.<sup>40</sup> A third would be to analyze possible alternatives for action, which although not directly feasible within a given context, open up new views, help to throw light on the deficiencies of our own societies, may stimulate creative thinking and initiative and strengthen the belief in man's possibilities and capacities to start walking on a new path towards a new society which would be more his, more equal, more open, more solidary and therefore more human.<sup>41</sup> Above all we should not lose sight of the truth that no real insight in the process of change and transformation can be acquired if not in and through praxis. If we believe that we cannot know what we shall not do, that "only through personal participation in the struggle to change reality we can uncover the essence of things and comprehend them", and that there can be no knowledge apart from experience,<sup>42</sup> we may have a helpful starting point on the way in which we may approach our future tasks. All practice will demand reflection and all reflection, in order to serve, needs to be constantly nurtured by practice. As social policy students and makers we may in particular reflect on the meaning of justice and its central integrative role in societal transformation by its non extinguishable demand for equalization in conditions and opportunities. In as far as Social Justice will be the dynamic force in societal processes and policies, it will inevitably be a source of conflict but if men can only discover each other through the realization of justice, such conflict has to be faced because it means facing and learning to accept the other as a human being.<sup>43</sup>

How many times must a man look up  
before he can see the sky  
How many ears must one man have  
before he can hear people cry  
How many deaths will it take till he knows  
that too many people have died  
How many years can a mountain exist  
before it is washed to the sea  
How many years can some people exist  
before they are allowed to be free  
How many times can a man turn his head  
pretending he just does not see

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