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Discussion Paper 8

**FROM "ORTHODOXY" TO "REFORM":
EXPERIENCES OF DEPENDENT
TRANSITIONAL ECONOMIES**

by

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Preface

The question of post-revolutionary transition to socialism in dependent economies has received all too little attention from scholars. However, with major economic reform on the agenda in a number of countries characterized by state socialism and a parallel search for new forms of democracy in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, there is now more widespread interest in the changes underway in socialist economies.

This paper on the transition from orthodoxy to reform in Mozambique, Viet Nam and Cuba - all dependent transitional economies - helps further our understanding of the processes involved. It examines the economic and political logic of changes which in essence represent a shift from the earlier orthodox "dualist" approach, which gave priority to "state-centred accumulation", to a strategy of "articulation" which recognizes different forms of production. As the author points out, this does not inevitably mean abandoning the principle of social control over the economy.

Following a discussion of the nature of the reforms and of the crisis, the paper examines the principal contradictions among different social groups and the state which arise from the post-revolutionary transformation of social relations and the distribution of income and wealth. A central theme running through the paper is that an adequate understanding of crisis and reform must take into account the effects of what the author refers to as contradictory class practices on the capacity of the state to mobilize and appropriate surplus, to plan and to maintain its hegemony.

There are also contradictory state practices, including that of "crowding out" of the peasantry in the structure of resource allocation and of the people's participation or power by bureaucratic and technocratic control.

State-society relations are of course a crucial factor in determining the content and direction of policy. The paper therefore reviews not only the changing social structure in each of the countries but also the forms of participation and organization which people are developing to represent their interests and exert pressure.

The paper will therefore be of interest to all those concerned with social, political and economic structures and processes which aim to achieve a degree of social control over society and the economy in the furtherance of social justice. Further light will be thrown on some of these issues in a new UNRISD project in the field of economic reform and democracy.

Dharam Ghai
Director

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Introduction

During the past decade, governments in several post-revolutionary Third World societies have introduced a series of economic and planning reforms that represent a significant departure from orthodox socialist principles and practice. The purpose of this paper is to analyse why this shift from "orthodoxy" to "reform" has occurred at this point in time.

I focus on the experience of a category of countries which may be labelled "dependent transitional economies" ^{1/}, and, in particular, on the cases of Mozambique, Viet Nam and Cuba. I will also refer in passing to the experience of Nicaragua. Particular attention is paid to policy reforms affecting agriculture and the food system up until 1987.

The central argument which runs through this paper is that the reform process in these countries should not be seen simply as a pragmatic response by government leaders to economic difficulties, or as a belated attempt to correct policy "errors", or as a victory of the "reformers" over the "ideologues" in the Party/state apparatus. Rather, the reforms should be analysed in terms of a response on the part of the state to:

- (a) a set of crisis conditions generated to a large extent by what may be referred to as contradictory class and state practices which undermine the capacity of the state to mobilize and appropriate surplus, plan the economy and maintain hegemony ^{2/}, and
- (b) changes in the balance of social forces which alter the capacity of different groups to influence the policy process.

The paper is divided into four sections. Part I looks very briefly at the nature of the reforms introduced, primarily in areas associated with food and agricultural policy. Part II considers a number of conventional explanations of the reform process in socialist countries and identifies certain limitations with these approaches for analysing the reforms in dependent transitional economies. Part III specifies the nature of the crisis which has prompted the reforms in these countries. Part IV presents a complementary set of explanatory variables for understanding the reform process which focus on changes which have occurred in the balance of social forces and which are themselves the product of forms of struggle as well as changes in social structure, the organization of social

1. The term "dependent transitional economies" refers to economies on the periphery of the world system engaged in a process of transition. The latter involves an attempt to transform social relations and structures characteristic of dependent capitalism and to subordinate patterns of production, distribution and accumulation to social and economic priorities determined by a more or less centralized planning process (Fagen, Deere and Coraggio, 1986). Historically, these economies supplied raw materials to develop a broad industrial base. The reproduction of the economy during the post-revolutionary period has remained highly dependent on external markets and aid.

2. Hegemony is defined here in the Gramscian sense and refers to the system of relations between classes and social groups whereby power is secured, not through coercion, but on the basis of a broad popular consensus, achieved through political, intellectual and moral leadership (Gramsci, 1971).

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