



## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Independence, Liberation, Revolution: An Approach to the Understanding of the Third World*

Tran Van Dinh

New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1987.

### *Communication and Diplomacy in a Changing World*

New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1987.

Although the subject matter is different in the two books, they have a convergent theme: neo-colonialism and the underdevelopment of the Third World. The author's approach to analysis is not exactly Marxist, though *Independence, Liberation, Revolution* comes alive with several interesting quotations from the works of Marx, Lenin, and Mao Tse-Tung. The line of argument sounds like the one used by Andre Gunder Frank (*Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, 1967), but Tran Van Dinh reformulates his thesis on development in the context of unique cultural traditions in the Third World countries. For him, neither the First World (USA, USSR) nor the Second World (predominantly, Western Europe) can pave the way for development in the less-developed countries; they instead perpetuate the existing imperialistic socio-economic order through their new information technologies, undermining in the process the rich cultural heritage and the liberation struggles in the Third World countries. The hope for the Third World, the author concludes, lies in the more effective use of the Non-alignment Movement (*Communication and Diplomacy in a Changing World*), and in the People's Liberation struggles (*Independence, Liberation, Revolution*) that will help the less-developed countries to free themselves of internal and external colonialism.

*Independence, Liberation, Revolution* begins with 'rectification of names' and redefinition of developmental terminology, comparing English usage with Sino-Vietnamese meanings. This is followed by an attempt to draw an integrated model of understanding the general configurations of social realities and communication in the Third World countries. The basic assumption of this model is that underdevelopment is caused by external intervention (through colonialism and neo-colonialism) into the mutually-supportive but community-specific Forming (socio-economic structures) and Transforming (culture, religion, politics) structures in these countries. A quotation from Chou En-lai--"The main trend in the international situation is that countries want independence, nations want liberation and the people want revolution"--sets the structure for discussion of case studies of independence, liberation, and revolutionary movements in Asia and Africa. The book concludes with the observation that it is the People's Liberation movements that hold the key to development of socio-economic justice in the Third World countries. It is however unfortunate, the author laments, that neither the USSR nor the United States "support national liberation movements. They advocate the principle of non-interference in internal affairs of countries;

however, when their interests or influence are at stake, both countries do not hesitate to use armed intervention."

*Communication and Diplomacy in a Changing World* examines the evolution of diplomacy among nations since the pre-colonial times and focusses on the changes that have taken place in conducting diplomatic relations on account of the expanding universe of communication networks. International diplomacy has become 'public', the author suggests, because of the instant telecasts of international conferences across nations. Above and beyond inter-governmental negotiations, the new communication systems have made possible people-to-people 'interactive' programs and allowed people's movement (for peace and social justice) to impact the on-going international relations. The sad aspect of this revolutionary communications technology, however, has been that it has enabled the Superpowers to "engage in a global war of propaganda and militarization of the international communication system." The Third World, the author asserts, has very little influence in the international system because the First World holds hegemony over the means of communication and information. The book concludes with the suggestion that the Third World countries should think of "de-linking" themselves from the existing international system and placing their trust in the Non-alignment Movement. They should demand "the decolonization of culture and information, and the establishment of a New International Economic Order and a New World Information and Communication Order."

Of the two books, *Independence, Liberation, Revolution* is interesting to read but difficult to comprehend. The author's concept of 'development' for the Third World is analytically unclear, and his classification of movements (in particular, the distinction between liberation and revolutionary movements) is confounding. He identifies almost all minority movements in the world - the Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka, the Sikh separatism in India, the Kachin secessionism in Burma, the Muslim protest movement in the Philippines, the Irish and Scottish struggle in the United Kingdom, the Croatian militancy in Yugoslavia, the Biafran civil war in Nigeria, the Quebec separatism in Canada, and many more--as examples of liberation movements. And since liberation movements are defined as anti-imperialist, it appears that the author sees imperialism everywhere except perhaps in Cuba and China. Further, Tanzania and China are described as examples of successful revolutions, and a revolution is defined in terms of "transformation from an alienated to a de-alienated existence, at both individual and collective levels." I am sure that many readers will dispute the example if not the definition of a revolution.

*Communication and Diplomacy in a Changing World* is easy to read but it goes overboard in establishing relationship between the Superpowers' control of information technologies and the consequent insignificant influence of the Third World countries in the international system. While the emphasis on strengthening the Non-alignment Movement to counter the disproportional weight of the Superpowers is a worthy suggestion, it is quite radical (naive?) of the author to recommend that the Third

World countries should "de-link" themselves from the First World countries in a bid to acquire more influence in the community of nations. Finally, the book is somewhat unbalanced in its discussion. The author does not give as much attention to the USSR as he does to the US militarization of the communication systems. I hope this unevenness has something to do with the availability of data and information rather than to any inherent difference in the militarization strategies in the two countries.

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*The Origins of Writing*

Roy Harris

London: G. Duckworth, 1986.

Roy Harris's book *The Origins of Writing* takes a new and fascinating look at an old question. By drawing together and discussing evidence and theories from a wide variety of sources both ancient and modern, erudite and mundane Harris manages to keep the reader's interest piqued through his intricate theoretical musings. In fact his scope of reference is perhaps too large for the slim (158 page) volume and the reader is left feeling somewhat tantalized but unfulfilled. The book seems to lack overall direction and Harris's main point (if indeed there is one) is lost.

Harris begins his book with a preface in which he discusses the question, "what is writing?" While he admits to having no new facts to contribute to the answer he does explain that a general neglect of critical examination of the question and the way it should be posed is responsible for the poor answers which have thus far been put forward. The reader can only assume that his book serves to repair that neglect.

In the first chapter Harris considers writing's place in literate societies, how it is viewed and the legends that surround it. Here the reader is treated to new perspectives on such far flung works as Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*, Edgar Rice Burrough's *Tarzan* as well as Diodorus Siculus of ancient Greece, Joseph Priestly of the 18th Century and the Sequoyah of the North American Cherokee Indians, among others.

Chapter Two, "The Tyranny of the Alphabet" deals with the all pervasive aspects of the alphabet in European cultures which gives an ethnocentric bias to the consideration of non-alphabetic languages. Harris also considers how the close relationship of speech and writing affects "Western" culture's perspectives on syllabic and alphabetic symbols.

The third chapter is devoted to disputing the prevalent theories which claim writing evolved from drawing with the rebus forming the link between picto/ideographic symbols and phonetic/alphabetic writing. He argues persuasively that the rebus is not