

Editorial

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It may be difficult at first glance to see much unity in the articles which make up this issue of the *IDS Bulletin*. They come from different sources and express a variety of viewpoints. Four of them (Fontaine, Booth, Harriss and Manor) were presented as papers to a workshop on 'The Developmental State in Retreat' held at IDS on 30 June-1 July, 1987. Mick Moore's article is a critical rejoinder to the debate on the state in Africa which was published in the January 1986 issue of this journal. Gordon White's article could be grouped with the first four since, while it was not presented at the workshop, it too deals with the 'retreat of the state', albeit in the highly specific Chinese context. Roberts's article, in contrast, represents a somewhat isolated, if not eccentric, approach to understanding the peculiar experience of economic policy reorientation in contemporary Algeria.

Beneath this superficial diversity, however, certain common themes can be discerned. All seven articles are concerned with the political aspects and implications of contemporary controversies in development policy thinking. Each of them deals with one or more of the key questions which arise once earlier orthodoxies regarding the 'developmental role' of the state in Third World countries are called into question. It is the very variety and number of these questions which account for the diversity of the articles published here. At the risk then of simplifying certain positions and overlooking others, we can identify the following questions which are addressed in this issue.

Are we witnessing a general trend towards the economic 'disinvolvement' or 'retreat' of the 'developmental state' throughout the Third World? Grounds for doubting this are adduced by several contributors. As David Booth points out, there is certainly a world-wide *ideological* trend in this sense, but its translation into reality is another matter. Where tropical Africa is concerned, Booth argues for attaching primacy to factors specific to the region in explaining such 'retreats' as may be occurring, and this line of thought is reinforced in different ways by the contributions of Harriss and Manor on the one hand, and White and Roberts on the other.

Although they discuss the Indian case from different analytical perspectives, Harriss and Manor clearly

agree on the insubstantial character of economic liberalisation in India over the last two years and the strength of those features of the Indian economy and polity disposed to resist it. While they are careful to present the Indian experience as exceptional — the case of 'the dog that did not bark' — and thus tacitly accept that there *is* a general trend, their analyses highlight the salience of local factors, the specific character of a given state and economy, in determining the extent to which economic liberalisation, privatisation or associated policy shifts are feasible and likely.

Ironically, the same point emerges from the analyses of White and Roberts. The irony lies in the fact that in both the Chinese and the Algerian cases, very substantial changes in economic policy, in the direction of liberalisation and privatisation, have indeed taken place in recent years. As such, it is no doubt tempting to claim both of these experiences as important or even characteristic instances of a global trend in the world economy and its reflection in current 'development' discourse. Yet, in both cases, there are strong grounds for the view that economic reform has been a deliberate response to specific internal and primarily political considerations rather than to external forces. In China, White argues, the adoption of a wide-ranging programme of economic reforms should be understood primarily in terms of the logic of development of the Leninist state, a logic which, we may add, should in no way be confused with current world economic trends; there is, after all, nothing new about communist states adopting important measures of economic reform, including the freeing (within limits) of market forces and a degree of toleration of private ownership. It follows that if the experience of China post-Mao is to be assimilated to anything, it should be assimilated to that of the USSR after Stalin rather than, say, the current 'retreat of the state' in tropical Africa. In short, this experience may more realistically be conceived as contributing to the appearance of a global trend than as a reflection of it. Much the same conclusion could be drawn from Roberts's analysis of the Algerian case, in which he points out that the reorientation of economic policy was primarily a reflection of internal political imperatives, and represented not a sea-change in the Algerian state but rather the reassertion of its constitutive principles.

With regard to tropical Africa, different but equally important grounds for scepticism are briefly adduced by Fontaine in his reference to the cases of Burkina Fasso and the Ivory Coast. The first offers the spectacle of a revolutionary regime embarking, of its own volition, upon a wide ranging and even drastic programme of precisely the kind of economic reforms recommended by the World Bank, without any World Bank intervention, while simultaneously reinforcing the institutional instruments of its ambition to command and direct the society (the developing country-wide network of Committees for the Defence of the Revolution). The second, traditionally cited as a *locus classicus* of the liberal development model, at any rate in the tropical African context, and as such an early anticipation of the new norm, furnishes by contrast an instance of *formal* privatisation obscuring the reality of continuing, if now informal, political control inasmuch as the parastatals in question are privatised merely to the intimates of the country's president. In other words, what is dubbed rather hastily as the 'retreat of the state' or 'economic liberalisation' may in fact involve not so much a reduction in the degree of state involvement in the economy as modifications in the forms of this involvement, at least in certain cases.

In other respects, Fontaine's argument may appear to contradict that of the authors cited above, at least in his insistence that 'economic liberalising tendencies . . . were *not* initiated domestically but largely resulted from *international modifications, the forms of adaptation to which were not chosen* by the countries themselves . . .' But since he is speaking only of sub-Saharan Africa in this context, the contradiction is more apparent than real. It is perfectly consistent to argue, with Booth, that factors specific to the region account for such 'disinvolvement' as is occurring *and* for the fact that this process has been largely forced on sub-Saharan African states from outside.

One possible implication of this is that we may begin to develop a typology in which we distinguish between i) those states where the central government is unable to carry through substantial economic liberalisation because of the resistance of powerful vested interests (e.g. India); ii) states endowed with strong governments which are able to carry through substantial economic reforms in an autonomous manner *vis-à-vis* external influences and in a way which enables them to conserve the essential features of their commanding relationship *vis-à-vis* the society (e.g. China, Algeria, Burkina Fasso?); iii) states where the emancipation of economic activity from political interference or control is more a matter of form than substance (e.g. the Ivory Coast), and iv) states with weak governments which have overreached themselves in their attempt to direct and control economic activity and have been obliged to bow to external pressures for economic

liberalisation (as in much of sub-Saharan Africa), in such a way that a qualitative change in the relationship between state and society may be occurring.

The main implications of the fourth case are addressed by both Fontaine and Booth. Does the 'retreat of the state' in this sense, at any rate in tropical Africa, imply the development of 'civil society'? In particular, will it see the emergence, out of the existing essentially plastic and state-dependent, class structure, of new class forces and, first and foremost, new bourgeoisies capable of asserting their collective interests and autonomous control over expanding spheres of production and exchange?

Fontaine, once again, furnishes arguments for caution. He suggests that the development of capitalist relations of production in tropical Africa over the last two decades has not been accompanied by the development of bourgeois classes or 'proto-bourgeois groups' characterised by the degree of economic and political coherence required for them to be able to develop independently within the new politico-economic context of limited and largely indirect state intervention. Citing the Ivory Coast and Kenyan cases, he reminds us of the extent to which strong political connections have been indispensable to 'the various social groups engaged in production and accumulation' and tacitly suggests that the clientelist habits and routines established during the first two or three decades of independence will not be easily broken. Moreover, he points out that the social groups which are most likely to prove capable of taking full advantage of the economic retreat of the state are precisely those which have depended least upon occult political connections in the past, for the excellent reason that they were unable to do so in principle—the various communities which, notwithstanding their formal status as 'nationals', are perceived by the rest of the society as foreign: the Asians in East Africa and the Syrio-Lebanese in West Africa being the classic examples. And, precisely because such groups might be expected to benefit disproportionately from substantial economic liberalisation, such liberalisation is likely to carry prohibitive political costs for African governments, who are correspondingly unlikely to embark upon it.

The argument which Fontaine sketches here concerning 'foreign' or 'expatriate' groups could be regarded as a particular instance of a wider argument which he does not make. A culturally determined propensity to engage successfully in entrepreneurial activities without the benefit of privileged access to the state is not confined to such groups; they are merely the most visible instances of it. In a number of African and Asian countries culturally distinct elements of the indigenous population can be identified which also exhibit such propensities. In West Africa, the Ibos of Nigeria are an obvious example of this; in North

Africa, the Kabyle and Mozabite Berbers of Algeria could be cited; in East Africa, the Baganda of Uganda come to mind. Most of these groups not only occupy extremely important positions within the economic life of their respective countries, but also stand in an ambiguous and often problematic relationship to the state in so far as the state is based upon a political coalition from which they have in practice been largely excluded. This wider argument reinforces Fontaine's doubts concerning the political feasibility of substantial economic liberalisation in many African states. Alternatively, should external pressure for liberalisation prove stronger than resistance to it mustered by vested interests represented in the ruling political coalition, we may expect substantive liberalisation of the economy to be accompanied by important changes not achieved without conflict in the composition of the ruling coalition.

A different line of thought is developed by Booth. Supposing that the 'retreat of the state' in tropical Africa does facilitate the emergence of new socio-economic interest groups, what are the possible implications of this, first, for agricultural development in particular and, second, for the future of the state itself?

In answer to the first question, Booth identifies two main possibilities. Given the findings of much well-known research, notably that of Lipton and of Bates, concerning the deleterious effects upon agriculture of the policies pursued by African 'developmental states', he points out that, *pace* the radical-egalitarian critics of the new economic liberalism, the emergence of new private sector groups may be the best or even the only way of sustaining a more balanced and equitable pattern of development in tropical Africa. But he also acknowledges that the influence of new elite farmer groups may have the opposite effect, that of consolidating or even aggravating the existing pattern of bias, by extracting concessions from the state to particular interests which are socially and perhaps also regionally specific. Such concessions would not only entail the continuing neglect of other rural interests (other classes, other regions) but might actually occur at their expense, in so far as they are financed by cuts in basic needs provision and other services benefiting the rural poor in general. Thus the rise of an elite farmer class could have diametrically opposed effects on the structures of economic inequality and bias, either eroding these structures or reinforcing them. It should be a priority of future research, he suggests, to identify the conditions under which each of these possibilities is more likely to occur.

In answer to the second question, Booth argues that it is necessary to distinguish between the question of the development of the state-society relationship and the question of the state itself. Like Moore, he insists on

the need to jettison simple-minded conceptions of the 'strength' or 'weakness' of the state. The 'retreat of the state' may well imply the weakening of the state *in relation to society*, in so far as it corresponds to, or stimulates, a development of civil society which places new limitations on the scope for arbitrary action of the state and thereby reduces its power to coerce the society. But it need not imply the weakening of the state in other respects, in that the development of civil society may have the effect of imposing a kind of discipline upon the state which actually enhances its capacity to perform its functions effectively and realise its objectives. Thus a reduction in the notional scope of the state may go hand in hand with an increase in its real capacities.

At issue here is whether or not the 'retreat of the state', in tropical Africa in particular, is likely to imply the development of civil society. This question is literally unanswerable for as long as an inadequate conception of 'civil society' is entertained by social scientists working in the field of development studies. There is a real danger that 'civil society' will merely become the latest buzz-word in academic debates and that these debates will be sterile because conducted with debased conceptual currency. This is a point which Booth addresses, but there is a case for taking the discussion further.

Two diametrically opposed errors need to be avoided if the concept of 'civil society' is to be of any analytical use in contemporary development studies. The first is to use 'civil society' as a pretentious synonym for 'society', with no recognition of the difference between the two. This confusion makes it impossible to distinguish between a state which is 'weak' in relation to society because it is 'soft', swamped by what some authors have chosen to call 'the economy of affection' — invested by occult patron-client networks and 'gangrened' [Etienne 1977:92] by clan politics rooted in primordial kinship and ethnic solidarities, and a state which is 'weak' in relation to society because confronted by self-sustaining voluntary associations articulating group interests which remain distinct from the general interest which it is the business of the state to uphold.

The reason why it is desirable to distinguish between these two cases is that in the first, the distinction between private and public domains and particular and general interests cannot be made, because the two spheres are systematically confused, to the detriment of the state's capacity to uphold the public/general interest and acquire legitimacy from its perceived success in doing so. In the second case, the distinction is sharply drawn, the different spheres do not interfere with each other so much as interact in ways susceptible to legal regulation, the domain of the state is clearly demarcated and the legitimacy which the state derives from the effective performance of its proper functions

within this domain is not in question [Roberts 1983].

The second error is to use 'civil society' in too limited a sense, as a synonym for 'bourgeois' or 'capitalist' society. 'Bourgeois society' would be a perfectly reasonable translation of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, had not Marxism succeeded in identifying 'bourgeois' with 'capitalist'. Since it has, it is better to stick to 'civil' as the correct translation of *bürgerliche*. For, while it is undoubtedly the case that, historically, the rise of civil society, in contradistinction both to the domain of the family and that of the state, has gone together with the development of capitalism, it does not follow that 'civil society' is merely capitalist society under another name. The dominance of capitalism as a mode of production is no guarantee of the existence of 'civil society', any more than the supersession of capitalism, other than by totalitarian varieties of socialism, need imply the end of 'civil society'.

In stigmatising these usages as 'errors', I do not mean to imply that 'civil society' cannot be used in these ways. Of course it can. It has been used with various meanings by political philosophers since the 17th century at least. But if its use is to assist us in gauging the implications of current developments in post-colonial states, it must be precise, and this precision can be achieved only if its use is controlled by a clear purpose. Our purpose is to ascertain whether the changes in prospect in the relationship between state and society in tropical Africa and elsewhere, in consequence of the 'retreat of the state' from its former prerogatives and pretensions in economic affairs, are likely to stimulate the development of new social forces which, as Booth puts it, 'are capable of imposing new standards of public morality on politicians and bureaucrats' and thereby have the effect of strengthening the state's capacities. This purpose can best be served, I suggest, if we conceive 'civil society', *inter alia*, in terms of the ideas of citizenship and the rule of law.

The concept of 'civil society' should be understood to pertain to a society of citizens. Fundamental to it is the idea of enfranchisement. A society of disfranchised subjects is not a 'civil society' in this sense. Nor should the idea of 'civil society' be reduced, as Bayart's formulation (cited by Booth) might suggest, to the concept of 'society in its relations to the state . . . in so far as it is in confrontation with the state', for it is unclear that there are any boundaries to the applicability of this concept; all societies, other than a stateless one, may be said to be 'in confrontation with the state'. Rather, 'civil society' exists where society enjoys a *particular* kind of regular (not occasional) relationship to the state, founded upon the fact of enfranchisement in its substantive rather than merely formal sense and thus upon the existence of the effective status of citizen which its members possess, with all the rights *vis-à-vis* the state which this status entails.

If we bear in mind Hegel's notion that 'civil society' is the domain of competing particular and private interests, while the state is the domain of the general or 'universal' interest, that the boundary between the two is, at least in principle, a clear one, and is sustained on both sides by a clear conception of the rights which pertain to each. We can thus see that it follows that the existence of 'civil society' is also inherently bound up with the existence of a developed system of law and the fact that the state itself, in certain critical respects, is subject to this system. The truth of this can be established negatively by reference to the Soviet experience. The obliteration of civil society accomplished by the Bolsheviks, and legitimised ideologically by the doctrinaire identification of civil society and capitalism, was made possible only to the extent that law itself was abolished; the dictatorship of the proletariat, as Lenin repeatedly drummed into his colleagues, had to be 'a state unbound by law', and it was [Clifford 1985].

To determine whether or not the 'retreat of the state' implies the development of civil society in this sense, we need to find out, in each particular case, whether it entailing not only the enlargement, in Booth's words, of 'the sphere of voluntary association and market-oriented behaviour regulated by law' but also the development of substantive, as opposed to merely formal, citizenship and the attendant panoply of civil rights and liberties guaranteed by a system of law which is itself independent of the particular holders of political power at any one time as well as of the pressures of primordial loyalties.

A corollary of subscribing to this demanding conception of 'civil society' is that we cannot expect a rapid or comprehensive development of state-society relations along these lines in tropical Africa in the near future. But the validity of the concept does not depend upon its being applicable to these countries in the immediate future, but upon its usefulness in our attempts to interpret current changes and gauge their longer-run significance. For what is at issue is whether or not the 'retreat of the state' in Africa will open up new directions of social and political change, leading to the establishment of fundamentally new relationships between state and society conducive to economic and social development, or whether it will prove to have been a false dawn, characterised by political and economic 'liberalisations' of equal spuriousness.

These considerations have a direct bearing upon the place of political research and analysis in development studies, an issue addressed at some length by Moore. As Fontaine, an economist, remarks, 'the question . . . will the disinvolvement of the state create conditions for an effective market mechanism to work? . . . can only be answered on the basis of political, historical and sociological findings'. The matter was put in a

nutshell years ago by E. B. Pashukanis, the brilliant Bolshevik theorist of the proletarian dictatorship as a state without law, when he observed that 'economics achieves its potential through the non-economic' [Pashukanis 1929]. It is almost inconceivable that the present 'retreat of the state' in tropical Africa will initiate a development of civil society conducive to the proper functioning of the market mechanism unless it also precipitates the development of new forms of politics within tropical African society. As long as it remains an exclusive affair of civil servants and planners experimenting with new formulae for state policy, it can be relied upon to remain politically and socially barren, and the 'economic' will fail to achieve its potential.

That concept of 'forms of politics' is likely to be unfamiliar to the reader is an index of the extent to which political analysis, properly so called has been absent from the debates within development studies. In place of a serious consideration of politics, there has developed an almost obsessive preoccupation with 'the state', discussion of which has been dominated for at least the last decade by the theoretical assumptions and perspectives of political economy. Political economists have often acknowledged the 'relative autonomy of the state' or of 'the political'. But formal acknowledgement of this in the abstract is one thing; actually investigating and analysing that to which this 'relative autonomy' is attributed is something else altogether.

The value of political economy lies in the way it complements the work of political science, among other disciplines. What it cannot be is a satisfactory substitute for political science.

The complementarity of the analytical approaches of political economy and political science is amply demonstrated by the two articles on India in this issue. Harriss's explanation of the 'half-heartedness' of the recent attempt at economic liberalisation in terms of the long-run fiscal problem of the Indian state and the conflicting interests and the balance of forces within the class coalition which underpins it offers a very different perspective from that provided by Manor's exploration of Rajiv Gandhi's assumptions and (mis)calculations, the nature and evolution of Congress machine-and-pork barrel politics and the structure of the Indian polity. But these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive: are both essential to a rounded understanding of the case in question. But the complementarity exemplified here is made possible by the fact that, in India, a well-established system of state and politics exists. Because it is well established, the extent to which policy is determined by features of the political economy can be identified, as can the influence of specifically political factors. None of this necessarily applies everywhere else, least of all in tropical Africa, where the question of the 'retreat of the state' is inseparable from the

question of the 'failure of the state'.

The implications of this are explored in depth by Moore, whose article provides a timely and thorough analysis of the limitations of political economy in this context. As he points out, 'the application of political economy assumes the existence of the state apparatus itself and therefore assumes away what some observers believe to be a (or the) key question about contemporary Africa: the non-existence of the material and/or cultural preconditions for the effective functioning of governments'. In other words, political economy can explain the content and evolution of economic policy in a given state, but it has nothing to say about the particular character of the state itself. It deals with the material basis of the political structure (namely, the economic structure), but does not deal with the nature of the political structure directly. Moreover, it tends to an entirely mechanistic conception of the political structure, and in assuming that this machine is driven by factors outside itself, entirely overlooks the ghost *in* the machine, the form of politics which animates it, and by which the influence of external pressures and underlying economic factors is mediated.

The behaviour of states is unquestionably influenced by economic factors, but the construction and constitution of states is another matter. States are not emanations from the economic essence of society, they are political constructs, that is they are deliberately constructed by particular forms of politics and their constitutions are determined by the character of those forms. And they are in reality constitutive of society rather than derivative of it.

The effective constitution of a state is not a piece of paper. Outside Western Europe and North America, the piece of paper in question is almost invariably window-dressing, which is to say a pious fraud. The only state in the world which actually takes its piece of paper in dead earnest is the USA, and the American constitution, as Bernard Shaw once observed, 'was a guarantee to the whole American nation that it never should be governed at all' [Shaw 1933]. Everywhere else the effective constitution of the state is not some document, but the set of principles upon which it is founded and in accordance with which it must needs be governed *or else*. The United Kingdom has no piece of paper, but it has an effective constitution, a set of constitutive principles, the brilliant description of which by Walter Bagehot ought to be one of the founding texts of political science, but is in fact widely forgotten. The relevance of the analysis of a state's constitutive principles to the understanding of the processes by which its economic policy and role are recast, and the way in which these principles are determined by the particular form of politics at the origin of the state are illustrated in Roberts's discussion of the Algerian case.

The problem of the state in tropical Africa, and in many other post-colonial societies as well, is a political rather than an economic problem. It is a question of the nature, strength and coherence of the principles upon which the state is constituted, and of the ability of these principles to facilitate — or at least not inhibit — the development of the social and political forces and processes which combine to form the non-economic medium through which the economic can achieve its potential.

It is not the business of political economy to address these questions and it is not equipped to do so. That academic political science, in its current state, can address these questions effectively cannot be taken for granted, but it is certainly its business to do so. Whether or not development studies can afford, in the short and medium term, not only to acknowledge but also to accommodate the claims of political science in this respect remains to be seen.

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