

# CEPAL

## Review

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# C E P A L

## Review

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# The dilemmas of political legitimacy

Francisco C. Weffort\*

*Urgency —the awareness of this urgency— is (...) the essential characteristic of the contemporary Latin American scene.*

*The democratic formula may perish, consumed by the ravages of ineffectiveness. But its death may also be due to a galloping anaemia in the vital sap of its legitimacy. It is important at this point not to entertain any delusions about either threat; the second is much more serious and implacable than the first. (...) the complete evaporation of beliefs, and the total moral collapse implied by the dissolution of that faith —universal anomie in the whole body of society— breeds only despair and extremism.*

José Medina Echavarría

The concept of political legitimacy implies a debate about democracy and politics or, better still, about the possibility of democracy recovering control over the direction of politics after a period in which authoritarian régimes, which did not lack a certain technocratic flavour, discredited democracy to the point of rendering it ridiculous. This means accepting, of course, that the concept of political legitimacy contains an affirmation of principle, one moreover fundamental to any genuinely democratic thinking, which is the primacy of the logic of history over the logic of expediency.

The fact that we are beginning with some abstract conceptual background should not prompt anyone to imagine, fearfully, that the dilemmas of political legitimacy compel us all to take off into the stratosphere. No, at least not all the time. The truth is that when we speak of political legitimacy we are also, and primarily, speaking about very real and very dramatic facts of an historical epoch: of the very epoch in which we happen to live.

The combination of theoretical reasoning with sensitivity to the living experience of history is one of the most attractive features of the thinking of José Medina Echavarría, the great Spanish teacher who, after the Civil War, made Latin America his second country. I also suspect that it will not escape the student of sociology and politics that many of the thoughts which I am about to offer owe their inspiration to Medina, even though the aim is to understand a historical period in which he, unfortunately, can no longer participate. And, as was characteristic of his thinking, and indeed of any thinking which seeks to illumine events and ideas, it is necessary whenever possible to begin by defining what you are talking about. That is precisely why concepts exist and why the first part of this article deals mainly with concepts. I examine subsequently the crisis of certain Latin American countries. (I know that all of them are in crisis but I refer only to some of them.) And in the last section I deal with the dilemmas which I regard as the current dilemmas of political legitimacy and the possibility (only a dream?) of building democracy in this part of the world.

## I

### Legitimacy: description of a concept

In an important work of the early 1960s entitled *Consideraciones sociológicas sobre el desarrollo económico de América Latina*, José Medina,

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with his eyes open to current history, offers a basic description of what sociology and political science understand by political legitimacy: "the gap in the power structure which still tolerates the inadequate transformation of the historical political parties which forged in the past —and

with great success—the system of property is a very serious vacuum because it leaves the roots of legitimacy hanging in the air, without support”.<sup>1</sup> On the following page Medina adds, in an attempt to give concrete meaning to the concept: “It is not impossible that the old classes—the oligarchies of yesteryear—may be capable of winning a new legality if they exert themselves to update their political ‘formula.’” And he continues: “The new organizations—which perhaps have too many defects and shortcomings—of the most important forces of production (...) of modern industrial societies try to fill by peaceful efforts the power vacuum left by the decline of the age-old oligarchy (...).” With his characteristic synthesizing skill, Medina puts to the reader, together with the basic description of a fundamental concept of sociology and politics, the key questions of a whole historical epoch. I will summarize them in four points:

Firstly, when we speak of political legitimacy we refer above all else to the existence, beliefs, standards and values—as suggested by Max Weber, of whose work Medina was indeed the main advocate in Latin America—which shape the arena of social actions and relations, these actions and relations being ways associated with the notion of mutual understanding among the actors. In the specific case of politics, there is talk of the legitimacy of a leader in the eyes of his followers, of a government in the eyes of the citizens of a republic, of a political party in the eyes of its electors, of a class (or élite) as leader of a society, etc. In all cases imaginable, political legitimacy is characterized, however, by a feature specific to the legitimacy of social domination in general. And, again according to Weber, the legitimacy of a relation of social domination will lie in the fact that a person who obeys an order does so as if the order came from an internal disposition, or as if obeying was something in his own interest: “A certain minimum of willingness to obey, i.e., of (external or internal) interest in obeying, is essential in any genuine relation of authority.”<sup>2</sup> In short, the root of the legitimacy of authority lies in the consent of the person who

obeys. Thus we have a very clearly defined concept which can be subjected to very accurate and very specific analysis.

In any event, I think it is important to point out that Medina, and in this case as well he was adhering to the spirit of Weberian sociology, invests the concept with a much broader meaning. With reference to political legitimacy he mentions, in addition to relations of political domination, the existence of a social system. He refers to the system of property, which he believes to contain the matrix of the social, economic and political organization of traditional Latin America. The presence of this system is quite obvious at the political level. For Medina, property is “both protector and oppressor, i.e., authoritarian and paternal. And this image of the relations of subordination—protection and obedience, arbitrary acts and kindness, faithfulness and resentment, violence and gentleness— (...) is maintained intact for a long time when the king is succeeded by the President of the Republic. The model of authority created by property extends and penetrates into all the relations of authority and embodies the persisting representation of the people in the model”.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1960s, when Medina wrote this book, the society and the State which the system of property had produced were in the third or fourth decade of their ongoing crisis, a long crisis which brought clearly into focus the ruins of a disappearing epoch, at the same time that it announced the emergence of a new historical phase. For Medina, this was the appearance of a new society, of a new, modern, urban and industrial social system, no longer rooted in property but in business and the town.

Secondly, when we speak of political legitimacy we refer not only to a social system but also to a ruling class. In Medina, the concept of ruling class has various origins which will be described below. However, the investigation has declared origins in the young Max Weber, wrestling with the vicissitudes of the Bismarckian system and seeking another class to rule Germany which

<sup>1</sup>José Medina Echavarría, *Consideraciones sociológicas sobre el desarrollo económico de América Latina*, Buenos Aires: Editora Solar/Hachette, 1964.

<sup>2</sup>Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. It is interesting to note that José Medina Echavarría was the main translator of this

great work of Weber's into Spanish. The first edition of this work in Spanish dates to 1944, i.e., to the time of the Second World War; Medina, who at that time was in exile in Mexico, had drafted the “Introductory note to the first Spanish edition”.

<sup>3</sup>Medina Echavarría, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

was not the "old class" of the *Junkers*. Weber provides the model, but the investigation is typically Latin American: "In the Latin America of today, where are the groups of men capable of completing the intensive process of transformation which is shaking the continent? To which classes can we turn for support? To the political class born of the system of property which governed, not unsuccessfully, for a long period of its history? To the new bourgeois class born of exports and industry? To the very new proletarian class, barely organized and with scant experience of ruling?"<sup>4</sup>

In the 1960s, many of us who worked with Medina —and we benefitted both from his exceptional culture and from his breadth of mind and his kindly tolerance of differing opinions, in particular those of his disciples— invested the concept of ruling class with a much larger and more ambitious meaning. It was without the slightest doubt an echo of our fascination with a certain concept of a Marxism which I will not call vulgar, but certainly romantic. Following the example of the redeeming mission which the young Marx attributed to the proletariat, the ruling class was something more than merely a ruling class: it was for some of us the vehicle of the potential of the future, of the global evolution of society and of a dream of the redemption of mankind. It is interesting to note that this idealization of the concept of ruling class —a concept constructed on the Utopian expectations invested in the proletariat— retained its validity, even when the class in question, as a candidate for power, was the bourgeoisie. This can easily be verified in the writings of those who still believed at that time in the historical possibilities of the so-called "national bourgeoisie". Moreover, many of those who thought in this way were indeed of Marxist training.

Medina certainly regarded the ruling class as having a capacity for action and transformation with respect to society, but, interpreting the concept in a meaning closer to Gaetano Mosca, Raymond Aron and Schumpeter, he conceived of an historical protagonist of more modest (more realistic?) proportions. As the vehicle of a "political formula", i.e., of a set of justifications for an order and a system, the ruling class must

propose a régime, or a "legality", which must be legitimate (for as we know, not all legality is legitimate) and effective. Furthermore, it must be capable of "completing" a process of transformation which is already under way, i.e., the metamorphosis of Latin America into a modern urban and industrial society.

We are therefore far from the notion of revolutionary negativity which in Marxism characterizes both the proletariat today and the bourgeoisie at the time of its revolutionary rise. In the same way, Medina distances himself from the unified or unifying vision which Marxism, through the strength of its concept of the social whole, identifies in the ruling class. (An example of this thoroughgoing unitarism is Marx's famous proposal: the dominant ideas of an epoch are the ideas of the dominant class.) But we are also far from the fragmentary approaches of some contemporary sociologies which are dazzled by the spirit (or lack of spirit?) of what they call post-modernism. For in these fragmentary approaches, which are content with their own inadequacy, both the notion of the governance of society and the notion of society itself lose their meaning, or at least the sense of global society which traditional sociology has always attached to them, whether the source is Marx, Durkheim or Weber.

For a sociology such as Medina's, an outstanding example of traditional sociology, the fragmentary view of society and the fragmentation of thinking should be understood as additional means of expression of a crisis which is so prolonged that it seems to threaten, in our times, the very possibility of a logic of history. Medina thinks, as he puts it, like "an old liberal", and this means that he thinks like a man who believes in human rationality, without that circumstance preventing him from seeing all the violence and irrationality of which men are also capable. Despite all the great dramas and tragedies which he happened to witness during his life, despite fascism and the Spanish Civil War, despite Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianism, despite the great Latin American crisis, Medina believes that history has a meaning and that it is the task of reason to try to comprehend it. After all these "despites", there should not remain in Medina (or in us) many grounds for excessive optimism. But reason must nevertheless make the attempt, unless it is to become barren once and for all.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 76.

The sociological (political) identification of a ruling class is the very essence of such an attempt. The question Who rules? is also a question about the *meaning* of society and its history. Medina examines the history of Latin America from this standpoint and accords the oligarchies of the past the merit of having established themselves in their time as the ruling class which believes itself on the side of property. Similarly, from this standpoint he also expects that this ruling class will be replaced by another, which emerges "by peaceful efforts" in the process of the formation of a new urban and industrial society.

Thirdly, the concept of political legitimacy therefore militates against recognition of the existence in society of a power structure. Or, as was the case in the 1960s, and still is the case in many countries, of a power crisis. Medina speaks both of a power crisis, of a "gap in the power structure", and of a political vacuum: "a very serious vacuum because it leaves the roots of legitimacy hanging in the air, without support". And there were those who argued, convinced more by the sound of the words than by their meaning and in the pompous tones of false discoveries, that politics, like physics, abhors a vacuum—an argument based on words and therefore of little value.

The point in this case is the importance which Medina attaches to the concept of legitimacy. When he uses the metaphors of "vacuum" and "gap in the power structure", he is merely trying to underline something which is often forgotten: power is not based only on effectiveness (or even on strength); it has to be legitimate. And, as he says in a thought which shocks many people, "when it comes to the pinch, legitimacy is more important than effectiveness", or further on: "People who have inherited the best European tradition will always prefer the possibility of dialogue or, if you like, the perhaps intangible value of legitimacy, over the pragmatism of effectiveness".<sup>5</sup> Could you ask for greater democratic clarity? Could you ask for greater clarity in a criticism of the technocratic evil of a logic of expediency which distorted the meaning of the politics of the 1960s and which, even more

seriously, continued to distort the meaning of politics under the authoritarian régimes of the following decades?

Fourthly, the question of political legitimacy relates directly to the institutional question, the question of political régimes and, in particular the question of political parties. As Medina sees it, the crisis of legitimacy in Latin America is linked directly to the crisis of the "historical parties". These are, for example, the Blancos and the Colorados in Uruguay, the Republicans in the Brazil of the First Republic and, in a more general sense, the liberals and conservatives found on all sides in the old oligarchic régimes of Latin America. I think that this is a specially significant point, when we remember, with Enzo Faletto, that the preoccupation with institutional machinery was not in fashion in the 1960s. At least among sociologists (but it was really more than that—we could speak in this case of the majority of Latin American intellectuals), the institutional question had fallen quite out of fashion.<sup>6</sup>

Medina was thus swimming against the tide when he asserted that political legitimacy, in addition to being a question relating to the social system, to the relations between the classes and to the power structure, was also a question of the then despised institutional forms. When we speak of political legitimacy, we also speak of political parties, of electoral systems, and of government régimes, matters which prompt lengthy digressions in *Consideraciones sociológicas sobre el desarrollo económico de América Latina*. The question of political legitimacy therefore begs the question of "legality", i.e., the whole body of legal institutions which shape the organization of power.

In short, when we speak of political legitimacy, we speak of political democracy, of the democracy which exists or the one which we want to come into existence. "Democracy is, above all, a belief, an illusion if you like, a principle of legitimacy."<sup>7</sup> For, as he says a little earlier, in the immediately preceding paragraph: "... democratic systems depend above all on a convention, i.e., on the belief in the legitimacy of the élite".

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>6</sup>I refer to the participation of Enzo Faletto in the seminar on Changing Development Styles in the Future of Latin America.

<sup>7</sup>Medina Echavarría, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

## II

## Legitimacy and hegemony: historical concepts

These four requirements which I associate with the notion of political legitimacy should not be understood as merely analytical terms which, as such, would be valid for any historical period. The historical meaning of theoretical proposals of this kind can be understood when Medina acknowledges, for example, in the oligarchic classes of this period of crisis some capacity to rule and some concept of national unity, but he also finds in them an attachment to their private interests which is too great to allow them to act effectively as ruling classes. We are thus dealing with an historical constellation in which, on the one hand, the new Lefts, owing both to the urgency of their immediate problems and to their own structure and idealistic dreams, have a weak concept of national legitimacy and, as a whole, possess weak instincts for power and rule.<sup>8</sup> We find ourselves, as already pointed out, in the field of the celebrated thinking of Max Weber. In order to indicate how far such situations can go, Medina makes many references to events subsequent to Weber, specifically the Weimar Republic, with its connotation of the fragility of civilization and democracy in the path of the brutal avalanche of irrationality and violence.

The concept of political legitimacy therefore has a broad political significance in the thinking of José Medina and compels reflection on aspects of the formation of Latin America and of the Latin American States, at least since the independence movements, many of which were accompanied by historical waves created in Europe by Napoleon's ambitions. "... the fact that liberty —the democratic and constitutional aspiration— is one of the essential elements of the original constellation of Latin America, also entails the first great paradox of its history: to have maintained for so long, in complete contradiction, the formulas of an ideology side by side with the "beliefs" and actual behaviour of daily existence. Over the body of an agrarian structure

and traditional way of life was spread the flimsy cloak of a predominantly liberal and urban doctrine."<sup>9</sup>

In this case, therefore, the construction of legitimate political systems was always more difficult and it affected the very possibility of the existence of a State in our countries. The State emerged when the contradiction was resolved, as it was, moreover, by means of some form of compromise. This "contradiction had its weaknesses and compromises in many places; and where this occurred —as in the case of Chile— the genuine organization of the State began early". Taking Chile, where the State was formed much earlier than in the other countries, as an exception, Medina bases his general rule on the formation of the national State in Argentina, taking the battle of Monte Caseros as the starting point. And he adds that where this compromise occurred, we have the content of the political formula of the oligarchic régimes with their traditional distinction between liberals and conservatives.

The notion of political legitimacy in Medina covers a vast historical field, without risk of losing analytical specificity. If we seek a comparison, we will find it, for example, in Marxist thinking, in the concept of hegemony as understood by Antonio Gramsci. Medina refers to States, classes, governments, beliefs, ideologies, institutions, etc. All of this, instead of diluting his thought, follows a clear thread: the thread of trying to understand the possibility that a society may establish structures of governance which are authorized or consented to by the individual members of society. This means that the question of political legitimacy is related to the capacity of a people to govern itself. And this is what, ultimately, lies at the root of the notion of democracy. And this is what we are talking about, finally, when we assert the primacy of the logic of history over the logic of expediency.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44.

Confidence in logical thinking exacts its toll and sometimes places us in embarrassing situations. If we follow, as I do here and have done in other works,<sup>10</sup> Medina's line of thought which, as already pointed out, I understand to stem from the common root of the classics of sociology and politics, the description of the long period which begins in Latin American history with the 1929 crisis and the changes in the 1930s gives rise to objections which must be dealt with. If we speak of legitimacy in Medina's sense (or of hegemony in Gramsci's sense), with the whole historical panorama which we have been adumbrating so far, the period from the 1930s onwards would encompass more than half a century of crisis of legitimacy or, if you like, more than half a century of crisis of hegemony. The objection is that this would be too long a period for a crisis to endure. Any crisis of such long duration is held to transform itself into its opposite, i.e., into the model of its own normality.

The biggest problem with this criticism is that, although it is reasonable at the level of mere theoretical speculation, it is nevertheless contradicted by history as experienced in the past and as experienced now by the participants and protagonists. The fact is that they saw (and still see) the history of which they were part as a history of crisis, and they participated in it in the awareness that it was indeed a crisis. At some points they saw the crisis as a chronic phenomenon but, as in the case of a chronic illness, this does not mean that the patient enjoys full health; nor does talk of a permanent crisis mean in any way that the society-patient is transformed into a stable society, i.e., one capable of establishing for itself the model of its own organization. Throughout that period it was (and remains) a characteristic feature of the Latin American mind to know that things were (and indeed remain) "mistaken", in some way mistaken, whatever the place and whatever the reasons for the "mistake".

In a way, the reference to crisis implies some notion of historical rationality. I think that the

whole period is described as being in crisis because the crisis, although a lengthy one, includes events which are not encompassed in what we believe, both from the theoretical viewpoint and from the standard viewpoint, the society or the State ought to be. It seems clear to me that in this at least, i.e., in the awareness of the crisis and its emergencies, Latin Americans are implicitly expressing their Western affiliation, i.e., their European origins and legacy, as Medina liked to assert. This capacity to make history and to criticize it has something to do with the Latin American condition, a condition which keeps step with Europe at a distance, but without ever separating completely, a condition which from its remotest origins implies having "maintained for so long, in complete contradiction, the formulas of an ideology side by side with the 'beliefs' and actual behaviour of daily existence". In any event, it is certain that taking all the vicissitudes of that long historical period together, nothing could be worse than the cheap Hegelianism which, however, is sometimes found in the best of circles, and according to which "everything real is rational". Anyone who regards a crisis as normal because it is prolonged is one step from renouncing his theory, if he has one, and two steps from renouncing rationality. This type of intellectual attitude is, in truth, a renunciation of things intellectual. Whenever and wherever it held sway among us, it served only to explain away inequalities and it produced the most sinister forms of the worship of irrationality and violence.

For the moment, I can spend only a few lines on this period of crisis. Accordingly, I will just say that, although it was a period of crisis, it was also without doubt a period of transformation, an example of which is the intensification of industrialization and urbanization as an indicator that society is creating the conditions of its own future reorganization. But, in the absence of the oligarchies or the "old classes", society lacks those groups which Medina calls "substitute élites", which can only emerge from the new classes which are being formed. And, without them, the crisis also infects the institutional system, which is stricken by a chronic instability apparent in the continual threats of *coups d'état* and in political phenomena such as populism and military interventions, both of which are

<sup>10</sup>Much of this article is based on the use which I made of Medina's concept and discussion of political legitimacy in my book *O Populismo na Política Brasileira*, Rio de Janeiro: Editora Paz e Terra, 1986, third edition, particularly in chapter 5, entitled "Liberalismo y oligarquía".



attempts to fill the "vacuum", "the gap in the power structure". And, as is typical of any power structure in crisis, this one is not ruled by the traditional élites but nor is it capable of finding replacements for them. These élites hold their ground by means of attempts at restoration or by

virtue of the strength of their traditional social and cultural prestige, and in any event they have a permanence which, although not ensuring the legitimacy of their claims to social domination, is sufficient to guarantee their survival in the corridors of power.

### III

## Modernization and democracy

How do the dilemmas of political legitimacy present themselves at present? I think it is inevitable to begin by noting the existence of a more or less universal feeling of disillusionment in the democratic countries (or the countries in transition) of Latin America. Perhaps this disillusionment is not specific to the emergent democracies, such as Brazil, or those which are consolidating themselves, such as Argentina. It is perhaps a more general phenomenon and not even specific to Latin America. There is talk, for example, of great disillusionment in Spain with the democracy which has established itself since the decline of Francoism, now embodied in the socialist government. Can there be disillusionment with democracy? Can there be disillusionment with politics in a general sense? Are we returning to the political climate fraught with tension and disrepute which, in the 1960s, opened the way to the installation of the military régimes? Are we witnessing the preliminaries to an historical regression?

The topic of political legitimacy is related to the more general question of the legitimacy of politics as such. This is particularly clear in the case of Brazil, but I think it can be generalized, at least in this aspect, to other countries of Latin America. In the midst of the current crisis, many people doubt that a solution to their problems can be found through politics. For example, there are powerful social pressures which have been repressed for a long time and cannot be dealt with immediately. Whether for this or for some other reason, many people—including both individuals and groups and social sectors—realize that they must solve their problems themselves, outside politics, and this is not to

mention those who are convinced that their own and other people's problems simply have no prospect of solution.

*Movimentismo* and corporativism are a manifestation of this and they express, regardless of the social sector in which they emerge, an anxiety which causes individuals and groups to try to protect themselves in some way in the midst of the crisis. Considering only the known social movements and the groups equipped with a well-developed organizational capacity, we can see signs of this in the poor rural workers' movements and in the teaching profession, as well as in the groups of bankers and industrialists. The reasons of economics and social justice which inspire such diverse groups are clearly very different. It is impossible to treat in the same way the corporativism of certain groups of bankers and the *movimentismo* of certain popular groups. Nor can one fail to see the deterioration in the political climate, an odious climate of "every man for himself".

It is a kind of Hobbesian "state of nature", a kind of "state of war" between the most diverse social groups and economic groups. A person who can obtain unduly large profits (or, as is more often the case, interest at speculative rates) does so without paying too much attention to the protests. A person who can defend himself does so with whatever means are available, although he will sometimes clash with other groups which have similar social interests. And a person who cannot exploit or lacks the capacity to defend himself bears the heaviest burden of the crisis (and of the debt). All of this takes place in the frenzied atmosphere created by galloping inflation of close to 20% a month which nobody

is apparently able to control. Similar observations have been made by Aldo Solari and Jorge Graciarena concerning Uruguay and Argentina.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps we are not yet in the situation José Medina describes somewhere in his *Consideraciones sociológicas* as generalized anomie. But we are drawing closer to it; at least, it is to be feared that one day we will find ourselves in it. It is not just a crisis of the State, of a State to which is assigned, amongst other ills, responsibility for being a source of inflation and authoritarianism. It is also a situation of demoralization of political activity and of politicians themselves as figures acknowledged by society. If large groups of the civil society do not believe in politics, how will it be possible to contain the current of authoritarianism which, recharged, continues to flow even after the end of the military régimes, as is demonstrated by the admittedly very different examples of Argentina and Brazil? But more important than that: if there is widespread disillusionment with the democracies which recently came into being, what of their chances of consolidation?

However, I do not believe that everything consists of problems and difficulties. Despite its recent experience of dictatorship, Uruguay is probably the best example available in Latin America of how the modernization of a society can sustain a democratic political culture. The same sort of thing can be said about Argentina, at least with respect to the party system. But, even in the case of Brazil, where the agrarian way of life and tradition are much stronger, the process of political transition —driven forward by the struggles of democratic resistance and the

strictly political struggles— has also advanced under the pressure, extra-political as it were, of the modernization of society, i.e., the intensification of the processes of urbanization and industrialization. These processes, of course, date from long before the existence of the military régime but they have acquired a new rhythm in recent decades.

It can be said in the case of Brazil that the transformation of democracy into a generally accepted value, i.e., into a cardinal element of the political culture, is a recent phenomenon produced by the circumstances of the period of struggle against the military régime (in the case of Uruguay, it must have related to much earlier periods). But, even in the case of Brazil, we can also say that this generalization of democracy as a value owes something to the circumstances of economic and social crisis which accompanied the process of democratic transition and which persist today. In circumstances in which the crisis multiplies the conflicts and spreads them throughout the society, democracy may appear to be an effective mechanism for building a satisfactory political order. It appears to be so, if not for the majority of the society, then at least for the majority of those who, during and since the dictatorship, have fought to participate in politics.

I mean that what appears to be a problem from one angle, i.e., the threat of generalized anomie, may also appear to be a favourable condition, depending on the capacity of the leaders and the institutions to tackle the problem. The same can be said of the effects of the crisis as can be said of the crisis itself. *Movimentismo* and corporativism may be regarded not only as factors of political deterioration but also as the means, at the outset politically chaotic and confused, by which the normal confrontation of interests in a modern and democratic society is achieved. It should also be remembered that the conversion of democracy into a generally accepted value also means that the society retains a sharp memory of a time when the military régime controlled the conflicts in an authoritarian and of course very unsatisfactory manner, at least for the majority of the participants (or of those who aspired to participation). Clearly, the signs of the existence of such a memory will tend to be much more visible in

<sup>11</sup>According to the records of the seminar on Changing Development Styles in the Future of Latin America, Graciarena wonders, for example, about the possible significance for society of generalization of the conflicts in the public services. Although he does not believe in a general trend towards social disintegration, he acknowledges that eventually "very strong phenomena of disintegration may appear". Solari also mentions the question of the strikes in the public services, which did not occur under Uruguay's military régime (or under such régimes in other countries) because they were repressed: "In contrast, the public services are now interrupted quite often and this produces the phenomena mentioned by Graciarena (...) for example, the strikes of health workers, of which there have been several, cause widespread irritation, even among post-office workers, who have also struck from time to time."

Uruguay and Argentina, more modern societies in which the military régimes caused much more damage than in Brazil.

In this same connection it is worth recalling the point made by Luciano Martins about the establishment in recent decades of what he calls a capitalist ethos in Brazilian society.<sup>12</sup> This phenomenon, which probably occurred much earlier in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile, has become widespread in Brazil, spreading even to those regions where many social relations of the pre-capitalist type still persist. Martins is thus describing a process of transformation, already observed from other angles by other researchers, which has led not only to the modernization through the "economic miracle" of the structural bases of the country's capitalist system, but also to the generalization of the values and standards of social and economic conduct required by a modern capitalist system. To express this same idea using Medina's concepts, even in places where models originating from the property system persist, the basis of what determines the whole of social life now originates in the business and urban system.

Do the celebrated advantages of backwardness really exist? Can Brazil be said to have benefited in some way from having arrived at modernization late in comparison with Argentina, Uruguay and Chile?<sup>13</sup> Although it is not possible to speak in general terms of advantages or disadvantages, there is at least one significant aspect which has to be attributed to the country's relative backwardness. Brazil's authoritarian régime cannot be accused of having destroyed the country's economy, a charge frequently levelled against Argentina's military régime. In Brazil, the military gave its reply, clearly a very authoritarian one, to the reformist claims presented by Brazilian society in the 1960s: repression of the popular movements which were seeking social reforms, and takeover of all the reformist claims which necessitated economic changes or other claims which might lead to modernization of the country's capitalist system. These include the reform

of the tax system and the public administration, the modernization of the postal service and communications services in general, the new financial mechanisms for attracting savings, the rationalization (and concentration) of the banking system, etc. Without forgetting the areas in which the military régime's reforms took the direction, not of an alternative to the earlier reformist movements but of counter-reforms, including the reform of university education (a response to the student's reformist movements), the creation of the Brazilian Literacy Movement (MOBRAL) (a response to the adult literacy movements, mostly of Leftist origins), and the adoption of the Rural Worker Statute (a response to the movements seeking agrarian reform).

However, some questions must still be asked. In view of the current difficulties of Brazil's democratization, certainly greater than those of Uruguay and Argentina, can it be said that the earlier "success" of the military régime is favourable or unfavourable for the prospects of democratic consolidation? But there is yet another question. With all their differences of performance, which correspond to the differences between the national societies in which they emerged, have not the military régimes, despite themselves and owing both to their "successes" and to their "failures", arrived at the common result of the final removal of the old agrarian (or pastoral) societies which all those countries were in the past? Both in the cases in which their modernization policies, all of neoliberal cut and following more or less the same models, were successful and in the cases in which they failed, it seems clear that after the departure of the military régimes we are also witnessing the burial of what still remained of the images of those societies as agrarian ones. This means that, at least in the countries of the Southern Cone (including Brazil in this instance), the dilemmas of political legitimacy and the corresponding problems of the construction of democracy are now primarily problems of modern urban societies. This of course is not enough to solve the inherent difficulties of the conquest and consolidation of democracy in those countries, but it at least offers the consolation that the first place among these difficulties is no longer occupied by the typical problems of agrarian societies of the traditional and oligarchic type.

<sup>12</sup>I refer to a statement made by Luciano Martins at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CEDEC) of São Paulo in 1987, during a series of seminars on the Brazilian transition.

<sup>13</sup>I would like to recall in this context the comparative analyses of the countries of the Southern Cone made by Fernando Fajnzylber concerning economic development and social inequality, and by Carlos Filgueira concerning social mobility, presented at the II Forum on the Southern Cone organized by ILDES at Colonia, Uruguay, in July 1985.

## IV

## Legitimacy and political institutions

What are the differences between the dilemmas of political legitimacy as they present themselves in the present and as they presented themselves in the past? In this case it is important to deal with a problem which was only implicit in my exposition and was taken up, expanded and clarified by Adolfo Gurrieri.<sup>14</sup> It is possible to speak of political legitimacy for traditional societies, Gurrieri says, because they achieved some coherence in what Medina called their material, ideological and political "supports". They achieved some coherence between the system of property, the oligarchic ruling class, the party system (liberals against conservatives) and liberalism as a political formula. Gurrieri does not fail to note, now referring to the present period of crisis, that the material conditions have evolved towards a modern and industrial society, but he holds, together with Graciarena, that in this process the concentration of power in society has reached such a point that things have apparently become even more difficult. He says: "There is a basic and apparently increasing inconsistency between the material support and our democratic Utopias." Hence the question which he suggests: does not such a situation make the erosion, if not of democracies, at least of democratic governments, very probable? Instead of democracy serving to change society, is it not doomed to have to adapt itself to the existing society and power structure?

In attempting to answer such questions, I would say at the outset, within the framework of a brief historical comparison, that the dilemmas of political legitimacy, as we can observe them in the 1980s, suggest a quite different picture from what Medina could discern in the 1960s. It is not a less worrying picture; perhaps it is even more worrying, but in any event it is quite different. Firstly, while in the 1960s the system of property, although in crisis, still allowed the hypothesis of a restoration of the oligarchy, but it seems

clear that such a possibility is quite out of sight in the 1980s. Whatever our prospects for the future may be, it seems clear that the "old classes" have finally begun the decline leading to their disappearance as a power factor. For better or worse, the social system of those countries is now a business and urban one.

Secondly, the Weberian question about the ruling class clearly still obtains: the "old class" *no longer* rules and the new one *still does not* have the capacity to rule. But after the military régimes which, with their authoritarianism, denied civil society any opportunity of ruling, the old question of the ruling class would have to be asked from a totally different platform and is perhaps not as difficult as might be imagined. Some people, on the basis of the growth of corporatism and *movimentismo*, will conclude that in a period of prolonged crisis modernization, i.e., urbanization and industrialization, do not contribute to the formation of classes capable of political leadership. Taking a view which I described earlier as less ambitious and more realistic with respect to classes and to the ruling classes in particular, it seems to me that the social sectors at present occupied with *movimentismo* and corporatism are simply making their first attempt at social participation and will eventually assume their political responsibilities. Provided, that is, that politics offers suitable institutional conditions for such a development.

Thirdly, the greatest difficulty lies precisely in the institutional question. In the 1960s José Medina saw the root of the crisis of legitimacy in the collapse of the traditional bipartisan system: "the break-up of the traditional bipartisan union accompanying the decline of the system of property is the result of the profound transformation described earlier, it is the consequence of the emergence of new middle classes —urban and partly rural—, it stems from the collapse into ideological confusion which accompanies or mixes with these same phenomena".<sup>15</sup> In this

<sup>14</sup>I refer to the debates at the seminar on Changing Development Styles in the Future of Latin America.

<sup>15</sup>Medina Echavarría, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

case, the situation remains, *mutatis mutandis*, very similar in the fundamental terms of the problems. In the 1980s, this association between modernization—which Medina expresses in this case as the rise of new classes—the crisis of power (or of legitimacy) and the institutional question—which Medina represents by the question of parties—would have to be not only reaffirmed but vigorously asserted, for the phenomenon of “collapse into ideological confusion” are now much more violent than at any time in our past.

In my opinion, and here I take up a vital aspect of the problems raised by Gurrieri, the *coherence* between the material, ideological and political “supports” *does not come about but is brought about*. And this is a task primarily for the political institutions, especially the parties. As it happens, in the 1980s the “weak link” in the chain between modernization, power (legitimacy) and institutions (parties) is the political institutions themselves, specifically the parties. Despite the progress made in this area, notably in Argentina and Uruguay, which are the most modern countries of the Southern Cone, problems persist that are typical of a poorly resolved, or even unresolved, process of construction of parties. Uruguay still has a system of “traditional parties” which operate more like electoral legends than as bodies capable of integrating demands and determining governmental policies. The Frente Amplio (Broad Front) the “third player” in the game, is the new factor which may be expected to contribute to the modernization of the whole party system.

The case of Argentina, a subject of so much pessimism in military and economic affairs, is perhaps the one which offers greatest hopes with respect to parties. Especially since its last two electoral experiences: the first, which elected Alfonsín's Radicals and threw out the Peronists, the first reverse suffered by them in the open field of democratic struggle, for up till then they had been beaten only by armed force; the second, in which the Peronists, instead of distancing themselves as observers of the democratic game, reaffirmed their commitment to democracy and beat the Radicals in that same democratic field. While it is true, as Robert Dahl says, that democracy begins at the point when—after long years of conflict—the adversaries

realize that the effort to eliminate each other is more trouble than coexisting with each other, we can perhaps justify the hypothesis that the latest electoral contests in Argentina marked the beginning of a modern and stable party system. For such a turnaround to happen, it must be supposed that the two main adversaries will have to draw a little closer together at the very time when the contest is becoming more desperate. This means that both of them will have demonstrated their support for the democracy which guarantees them the opportunity to compete and that they will have isolated the enemies of democracy.<sup>16</sup>

Although it has the advantage of the vigour imparted by its recent economic growth and modernization, the Brazilian situation emerges as perhaps the worst when one examines the institutional question and, in particular, the party question. If we limit the discussion to the big parties, those which at present bear the major responsibility for running the State, the picture is a dismal one. Brazil has big political parties which, however, do not form governments and therefore do not assume State responsibilities. They are parties which exist only for electoral purposes and to cater to the interests of their clients. The big political parties now have something in common with the “traditional parties” of Uruguay but, unfortunately, without that country's democratic political culture. Government policies are not explained until after the elections. In many cases they are not explained until after the party comes to power; or even later, after the government, once elected, begins to form its ministries or departments. At this time, which is one of debate about policies and disputes about posts and sinecures, a separation instead of a consolidation begins to occur between the government and *its* party. From this point the government parties begin to put out signals that they are not responsible for the government, to which they are connected only through those politicians who, in their personal

<sup>16</sup>It would be interesting to see whether this generalization holds good for the small Argentinian parties. Although in somewhat different terms, I find indications that such a hypothesis could be formulated in an interview given by Guillermo O'Donnell to *Jornal do Brasil*, which appeared under the title “Bendito susto” on 24 January 1988.

capacity, have been appointed to ministries, departments or some office which they consider important.

The case of Brazil illustrates, in a negative sense, the importance of the parties for the consolidation of a régime of political legitimacy. We do not have strong parties; accordingly, we have a fragile democracy. But democracy is defended and has so far survived. How? Democracy in Brazil is not defended or practised in an organized manner through political parties, but in a diffuse manner through political movements,

which most of the time lack any clear identity. They are political movements which exist sometimes only in the cultural sense of the word, without even being aware of their own existence; they are mere emanations of the modernization process and of a sense of the worth of democracy which still resists disillusionment. This is a sign of the strength and the weakness of democracy in Brazil. It is a strong democracy because it is rooted in the material "supports", in the "strength of things", but very weak from the institutional standpoint.

## V

### Democracy and reform

A régime of political legitimacy is only possible under a democratic system. This is the great topic on the historical agenda of our countries at the present time. It is what emerges as fundamental from a comparison of the dilemmas of political legitimacy of the 1960s and the 1980s, and this is because democracy is the only system which organizes, i.e., institutionalizes, the consent of the people, without which legitimacy perishes. And this is the only model available to us in our effort to determine the dilemmas of political legitimacy in the present time.<sup>17</sup>

There are times when the great political battle is fought between dictatorship and democracy. Chile in the time of Allende and the Brazil of João Goulart, each with its own peculiar features, are clear cases of the struggle between a democracy of the Left (Allende) and a populist democracy (Goulart) and dictatorships of the

Right. There are several more recent examples of what the battles between dictatorships and democracies mean in the history of the Latin American countries which have had the experience of military dictatorships. There are also times in which the great battle is fought between a different forms of dictatorship: the Russian revolution is an obvious example, but by no means a unique one, of the struggle between a dictatorship of the Right and a dictatorship of the Left, a struggle which, as elsewhere, was resolved in favour of the Left. There are several examples of this kind, especially from the 1930s, which were nevertheless resolved in favour of dictatorships of the Right.

But there are also times —and I think that ours is one of them— in which the great battle is fought on the terrain of democracy. It can be said that this is basically a great historical battle over the meaning of democracy. In Argentina, an activist of the (Peronist) Justicialist Party will have a different view of democracy, perhaps very different from the view of an activist of the Radical Civic Union. In Brazil, an activist of the Workers' Party (PT) certainly has a view of democracy which is quite different from that of a militant of the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB), and these two views of democracy will differ in many respects from the view of an activist of the Liberal Front Party (PLF) or even more from that of the Social

<sup>17</sup>Dictatorships, of whatever kind, mobilize. But régimes of political legitimacy, in the best of cases, usually demobilize. They may in fact mobilize but they do not *institutionalize*. To institutionalize means to establish a legitimate régime, i.e., the pre-eminence of the law —the rule of law. In a mobilization, the supreme value is not in the law, i.e., in institutions, but in the person of the leader or in the party which is doing the mobilizing. The paradigm of mobilization is general mobilization in time of war, the mobilization of an army, etc. In the institutionalization of democracy, the highest value is not in the person of the leader or of the ruling party, but in the institutional rules which allow persons to organize the space of their own freedom.

Democratic Party (PDS). But I maintain that in both countries these and other political forces will be obliged to advocate their view of democracy and to fight their fight over the meaning of democracy on the terrain of democracy.

These countries in transition will perhaps come to have a representative democracy of the traditional liberal type, or a modern liberal democracy, i.e., with some social content, or a modern mass democracy, with broad popular participation, or a modern socialist democracy, i.e., of the masses, representative and pluralist, but also with various mechanisms for direct participation. Yet other hypotheses are possible. For example, it is very possible that in some countries, such as Brazil, democracies of a definitely conservative cut will prevail in the end. In any event, what is certain is that the debate about the meaning of democracy is a paramount issue of our times. No political force which aspires to power, or better still to hegemony, and which can therefore put itself forward as a representative of social forces capable of exercising the functions of a ruling class in society, can simply ignore it. A régime of political legitimacy can only be democratic, and the definition of what is understood by democracy is a fundamental component of the policies of any class which seeks to exercise the functions of a ruling class at the present time.

In the conditions of Latin America, the debate about democracy is a debate about political legitimacy and therefore about the political and institutional forms essential to legitimacy.<sup>18</sup> But it is also a debate about the effectiveness of democracy; the fact of viewing democracy primarily from the angle of legitimacy "cannot stop us recognizing that democracy can die of ineffectiveness".<sup>19</sup> It is clearly not a question of subordinating the value of democracy to economic growth. Quite the contrary, for as Medina says, "when it comes to the pinch, legitimacy is more

important than effectiveness". I recall that in his analysis of the relations between democracy and wealth José Medina advocated democracy as a value in itself in the clearest possible manner: "... in the Latin American situation, it was particularly important to underline the aspects of legitimacy. And since there has been ample reference above to the 'materialist' correlation of democracy and wealth, it is right to stress now the 'idealist' version, which emphasizes above all else the value of beliefs, the weight of age-old 'intangible conventions' (value of the political system, value of the legitimately constituted authority, value of the rules of the game, value of the dialogue between equals, value of the human significance of reasonable compromise)".<sup>20</sup>

There are certainly people in the Latin America of today who want democracy "at the cheapest possible cost". As Enzo Faletto and Anibal Quijano would say, there are those who understand that reform might place democracy in danger and who would therefore prefer to limit it to a minimum. These are the people who, as Faletto says, would seem to understand the subject of democracy in the following terms: "Let us preserve democracy but let us not change things much in order to preserve democracy." In this case, we are heading towards the paradox of a democracy which, in order to survive, must avoid conflicts as far as possible. Or, as Quijano puts it: "If democracy becomes merely a forum for negotiations and conciliation, then everything is watered down, for nothing really undergoes any important change in any area of daily life." Clearly, it is possible that inquiries into the effectiveness of democracy are not superficial inquiries but inquiries into its content, i.e., into its true significance. If democracy does not exist as an arena of conflicts, what is the point of democracy?<sup>21</sup>

Once proper differences are established in the hierarchical values, it must be recognized that questions of social and economic life cannot be regarded as alien to the meaning of a modern democracy. We all know that one of the important engines of democratization is increased employment, correction of extreme social

<sup>18</sup>I omit from the text, and also from my statement, an important question which Palma emphasized in the debates: those who can see in political democracy only elections and parties are also incapable of seeing that the "mere" establishment of a political democracy requires the prior establishment of fairly complex social conditions which do not obtain in many countries of Latin America. This means that the conquest of political democracy may entail the need to make much larger changes than anticipated.

<sup>19</sup>Medina Echavarría, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>21</sup>Again, I refer to the participation of these researchers in the debates at the seminar on Changing Development Styles in the Future of Latin America.

inequality, income redistribution, etc. The question of the building of institutions, i.e., the characteristic question of political democracy, leads on to the topic of social democracy and therefore to the topic of a policy of economic and social reforms.<sup>22</sup> Depending on the parties, interests and classes, there will be different notions as to what the reforms should be, how they should be carried out and whom they should benefit. After the decline of the "old classes" it is hard to imagine any "new class" —be it the bourgeoisie, the working class, the "middle classes" or any other conceivable class that might emerge—which can aspire to be a "ruling class" in society without offering society a prospect of reforms, which later will have to be converted into a policy of reforms.<sup>23</sup>

There is something more. From the 1930s to the 1950s, these topics emerged on a national scale, i.e., in each country, and adequate replies were found at that level. José Medina mentions, for example, that one of the historic tasks of Latin America was the task of national integration, understood as the integration of peoples into one nation, the question of structural dualism, the question of cultural heterogeneity, etc. It is possible that many of these questions remain on the historical agenda of most of the Latin American nations. I think, however, that it is now vital to reassert the

importance of another topic, also dealt with by Medina. I refer to the need for Latin American integration, if not the integration of all of the countries of the region —an unlikely prospect in present circumstances— then at least the integration of the countries which share a community of interests and which already offer the possibility of union. There have been some successes in the efforts to achieve Latin American integration which should encourage new efforts in that direction.

The truth is that, in the framework of an international order which is also in crisis and undergoing redefinition, most of the Latin American countries would encounter enormous and perhaps insuperable difficulties in achieving viability as modern and democratic societies. There are always exceptions, but for the majority the question of integration is an urgent one: either they integrate with each other in order jointly to assert their international independence or they integrate with some bit Power, but in a subordinate position. What does the concept of sovereignty mean for the majority of the Latin American States when, in the present situation, they have to argue the issue of foreign debt with the international financial system? And it should not be forgotten, for all its current importance, that this issue is merely one example. We all know that there are several others.

## VI

### The models and the intellectuals

The dilemmas of political legitimacy, because they refer to the path and direction which society will have to take, have given rise today, as in the 1930s and 1960s, to a debate on the big themes of

the political and economic development of the countries of Latin America. Thus, this new theme (is it really new?) of the institutional construction of democracy is joined on the his-

<sup>22</sup>This topic, a traditional one in political thought in modern times, was taken up again recently, in the framework of the Latin American debate, by Fernando Calderón and Mario dos Santos. See the documents presented by these authors to the symposium on Democracy, Totalitarianism and Socialism, held at the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences, Paris, January 1987.

<sup>23</sup>I mention in passing, as this would be a topic for another occasion, that while reforms, no matter what their origin or inspiration, are essential to the building of a solid democracy, democracy

is not always essential to reforms. Throughout its history, Brazil has been an example in which reforms are an issue between the Liberals and the Leftists, but they only become a question of policy when they pass into the hands of the Conservatives, usually by authoritarian means. Examples of this are the abolition of slavery under the Empire, the social legislation adopted under the Vargas dictatorship, and the recent reforms carried out by the military régime.



torical agenda by the themes of the transformation of society and the viability of the countries of the region as nations. This is the great debate which now engages, or ought to engage, the classes which seek to become leaders one day, and it is a debate in which the intellectuals participate, or ought to participate, be they "organic", "traditional" or of any other kind.

In these circumstances it is essential for us to return to the debates about projects and models which were very much in vogue in the 1930s and the 1960s but which have now fallen completely out of fashion. It is clearly not a question of repeating the dogmatism, whether romantic or vulgar, of the models of the 1960s, with their implicit (or sometimes explicit) authoritarianism, their illuminism and their elitism. Nor is it claimed that the resumption of the debate about projects and models means that we will merely repeat them or define them in the same way as before. However, it happens that we cannot continue without some kind of overall view of these societies, if we seek to make them workable, if we seek to reform (or transform) them and if we seek to make democracy workable through them. In other words, if we seek to rediscover the "coherence" of their "supports".

In a very interesting article Adam Przeworski talks of democracy as a "contingent outcome of conflicts". This phrase is translated into Brazilian Portuguese in a very free but suggestive way: *ama a incerteza e seras democratico*.<sup>24</sup> My conviction, in contrast to Przeworski's is that democracy in Latin America must be, in addition to a contingent outcome of conflicts, a political programme not, or at least not necessarily, a party programme, but certainly a programme of several parties which, despite their many differences on other issues, will have to propose the building of democracy as the first of their priorities. Moreover, it will have to be a programme not only of the parties, no matter how pluralist and numerous they may be, but also of intellectual, cultural, religious, trade-union and professional institutions. In short: it will have to be an organized culture. If in Latin

America we give free rein to the "spontaneous" interplay of forces, as if we were in the presence of an already established political market, we will probably get something much worse than a return to the military régimes. It is very possible that, in the economic, social and political circumstances prevailing in the countries of the region, we may get a deterioration of political values, and manifestations of social degeneration and economic stagnation which will fully restore the verisimilitude of Medina's theory about the risk of generalized anomy, with all the awful and at present largely unforeseeable consequences to which such a situation might lead.

There were many changes in Latin America between the 1960s and the 1980s, but there was no change in the urgency, "the awareness of this urgency", as Medina puts it. This awareness of urgency is today, as it was 20 years ago, "the essential characteristic of the contemporary Latin American scene". At the beginning of the 1960s, i.e., before the 1964 *coup d'état* in Brazil and the series of *coups d'état* in several other countries, Medina issued a similar warning. But at that time Medina conceded the possibility of the restoration of oligarchies, which did not happen, and of military interventions, which did, introducing an era of sad memory in our history. It seems to me that in the present situation, with the possibility of oligarchic restoration excluded, and the probability of new military interventions reduced by the extent of their own decline, it is perhaps not the phantom of regression which causes the greatest fears. If the prospect of democracy collapses, we may perhaps be condemned to something much worse than anything we have lived through in the recent past. In the 1960s Medina used to talk about Weimar and what came after it, but those images seem too distant from us to be regarded as possible. Perhaps we no longer have in view a totalitarianism in the style of Hitler or Stalin. Perhaps we should feel more reassured because we believe that historical regressions of that kind are no longer possible? One of the most important functions of the intellectual is to watch out for dangers and to warn of them, and if possible to propose means of avoiding them.

José Medina Echavarría is an exemplar of the important roles which intellectuals can play

<sup>24</sup>Adam Przeworski, "Ama a incerteza e seras democratico", in the review *Novos estudos*, Analysis and Planning Centre of Brazil (CEBRAP).

in circumstances such as the ones we are experiencing at present. These roles are to collect information, organize knowledge and, if possible, advocate great ideals which safeguard the meaning of politics and of the logic of history. I believe that I do justice to the memory of José Medina, and to my own convictions, when I say that the functions of intellectuals, in this world in crisis in which we live, also include the protection of Utopias, of liberal or socialist Utopias or any others that can be imagined (and let us not forget that liberalism, as Medina says, following Ortega y Gasset, is a "Utopia": "it is the decision to coexist with the enemy; i.e., the capacity for dialogue and compromise"). But there will have to be democratic Utopias and models which inspire the building of democracy and the transformation of a society which still has a long road to travel before it can stand confirmed as a democratic society.

These functions of the intellectual in politics are not to be confused with the party choices which individual intellectuals may make, for, in

the strict sense, party options are options of citizens. As citizens, intellectuals have, as indeed do other citizens, the right to join (or not to join) political parties. But if an intellectual joins a party, he had better be aware that this does not release him from his duties as an intellectual. And those duties concern the collection of information, the organization of knowledge and the construction of the grand prospects of a democratic and civilized society, duties which bind him, beyond considerations of his party, to the whole of society.

The discussion of the work of José Medina Echavarría who, although not a party man, was nevertheless a citizen of fine political sensibility, perhaps offers an opportunity to preserve the role of the intellectuals in politics, of intellectuals who, either within or outside the parties, place themselves in the service of the logic of history, and of the building of democracy.

(Translated from Portuguese into Spanish, and  
from Spanish into English)