Political Change and Underdevelopment

Also by Vicky Randall

Women and Politics

Political Change and Underdevelopment

**A Critical Introduction to Third World
Politics**

**Vicky Randall
and
Robin Theobald**

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MACMILLAN

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Preface

In the aftermath of the Second World War, a succession of former European colonies in Africa, Asia, the West Indies and the Middle East finally acquired political independence. Western political scientists found themselves increasingly challenged to develop frameworks for understanding and predicting the politics of the new nation-states of what became known as the 'Third World'. The atmosphere of 'Cold War' with the two superpowers, the United States and the USSR, competing for international influence lent added urgency to this task. Against this background American political scientists, drawing heavily on existing social and economic theory, propounded a concept of 'political development' or 'political modernisation'. In this perspective newly emergent Third World polities would experience the same untroubled sequence of economic growth, social stability and democratisation as their Western predecessors.

The actual pattern of events rapidly confounded the optimistic prognosis of the modernisers. Recurrent military coups, communal strife, political repression and rampant corruption highlighted the evident shortcomings of this perspective, giving rise to a series of critical reactions. 'Modernisation revisionists' emphasised the need for a more subtle analysis of the way in which social traditions persisted and modified 'modernity'. Other writers put social stability before democracy: what Third World countries needed was strong government even if this meant military rule. Such critical reactions all stemmed from an essentially pro-capitalist position. From another direction altogether dependency theorists argued that Third World countries could never achieve meaningful political autonomy so long as they were economically dependent on the world capitalist system. Neo-Marxists, without entirely rejecting the dependency critique, focused on the way that dominant social class alignments, reflecting both external and indigenous econ-

omic forces, formed around the institutions of the post-colonial state.

While the debate around these questions has become increasingly sophisticated, their importance has not diminished. 'Third World' countries now make up over two-thirds of the more than 150 nation-states on our globe. The expansion of development studies in universities, polytechnics and specialised institutes of the United Kingdom is a recognition of the central relevance of the Third World to present and future world economic and political prospects.

The pertinent literature has inevitably mushroomed. There are now any number of case-studies of politics in specific Third World countries or regions, as well as expositions and applications of particular favoured approaches. Yet when, a few years ago, we came to teach a third-year undergraduate course on the politics of underdevelopment, we were surprised to find no single text, not even a collection of essays, covering the different approaches and the relationship between them. This book has arisen largely out of that need to construct a systematic introduction to a crucially important but often difficult and seemingly arcane debate. We have tried to write the book we would like to have found.

Our first objective, then, is to provide the reader with a clear account of the various approaches that have been used in analysing Third World politics, showing how the differences between them reflect changing contexts, assumptions and values. But, second, our treatment aims to be critical: we aim to show what is useful and what should be discarded. Third, we have tried to convey, as far as possible, something of what Third World politics are actually like. We have used illustrations from several countries both to make our argument clearer and to form the basis for some kind of independent yardstick. In a field so vast, and still so full of shadows, as this one, it would be hubris indeed to advocate just one perspective or one line of enquiry. But through our evaluation of existing approaches and their relevance to political reality, we hope that we have been able to make some positive suggestions as to the direction of future study.

The debts in writing a book such as this are bound to be considerable. Our first thanks are to our families and friends

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