Political Change and Underdevelopment

Also by Vicky Randall

Women and Politics

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Corruption, Development and Underdevelopment

Understanding Industrial Society

Political Change and Underdevelopment

**A Critical Introduction to Third World
Politics**

Second Edition

**Vicky Randall
and
Robin Theobald**

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Preface

The first edition of this book has its origins in academic attempts to explain and conceptualise the massive social and political changes that washed over the world in the aftermath of the Second World War. Most notably, by 1960, a succession of former European colonies in Africa, Asia, the West Indies and the Middle East finally acquired political independence. In the light of these transformations western political scientists found themselves increasingly challenged to develop frameworks for understanding and predicting the politics of the new nation-states as well as their older Latin American counterparts in what became known as the 'Third World'. The emergence of the 'Cold War' with the two Superpowers, the United States and the USSR, competing for international influence, lent added urgency to the task. Against this background, North American political scientists, drawing heavily upon existing social and economic theory, propounded the concepts of 'political development' and 'political modernisation'. In this perspective emerging Third World polities would experience the same untroubled sequence of economic growth, social stability and democratisation as their western predecessors.

However, the actual pattern of events rapidly confounded the optimistic prognosis of the modernisers. Recurrent political 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 interacted dialectically with 'modernity'. Other writers put social stability before democracy: what Third World countries needed was strong government even though this might entail authoritarian 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 locked in to the world capitalist system. Neo-Marxists, without entirely rejecting the dependency critique, focused on

the diverse ways in which dominant class alignments, reflecting both external and indigenous economic forces, articulated with the post-colonial state.

This was the state of play when the first edition of this book appeared in 1985. Since then things have moved on somewhat, to say the least! First, the literature on Third World states has mushroomed exponentially, reflected not least in the expansion during the 1980s of 'development studies' in British universities and specialised institutes. However, it must be conceded that by the 1990s this expansion seems to have palled, reflecting in part, perhaps, the ending of the Cold War and the fact that the 'Great' powers now needed to know less about their client states. One of the most notorious, Zaire, for example, could thus be unceremoniously 'dumped' and allowed to descend into chaos.

Second, this last point emphasises one of the principal reasons for updating our first edition: the almost incredible changes that have taken place since the early 1980s. It seems astonishing now to reflect upon the fact that when the first edition was conceived and written there were no faxes, e-mails, no world-wide web, very little in the way of IT generally. Virtually, no one was talking about globalisation, post-Fordism, postmodernism or McDonaldisation. And, of course, international as well as domestic politics was overwhelmingly dominated by the not infrequently vicious struggle between West and East, between capitalist and socialist models of development.

Obviously any book with a title such as ours must take account of these and other massive (as well as piecemeal) changes that have unrolled over the last decade and a half. None the less our (we hope) critical analysis remains focused not so much upon the changes themselves but rather on the concepts, models and theories which have been employed to explain them, and in particular the ways in which these approaches have developed over time. However, we intend that this be not solely a book about concepts and theories but one that also conveys something of the nature of politics in less developed countries (LDCs).

The debts in writing a book such as this are considerable. Our first thanks go to our families and friends who have offered us continued support and understanding. We gratefully acknowledge, once again, the help of Lionel Cliffe, George Philip,

Jennifer Todd, Ali Mazrui and Robin Luckham at various stages in the gestation of the first edition. In addition, Robin Theobald would like to express his gratitude to Alan Doig, Michael Johnston, Len Shackleton and John Stanworth – all of whom have supported his research efforts in a variety of ways. Vicky Randall would like to thank several cohorts of students on her Third World politics course for their often perceptive comments and for sustaining her enthusiasm. Lastly, we sincerely thank Steven Kennedy for his good sense and patience.

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