

IDRC-008e

Rural Development and Political Change

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UDC: 711.3:323

Abstract: Dr. Hopper argues that the process of inducing national development is pre-eminently a political one; yet political scientists have so far generally failed to discharge their responsibilities to those who seek help in guiding change. He traces the way in which a few individuals grasped the key to rural progress by arguing in the early 1960s that the reason why agriculture in the poor countries continued to stagnate was not that farmers were stubbornly opposed to change, but that they had not been offered new technologies which were profitable under tropical conditions and could be readily adopted by traditional cultivators. The success which the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations had in promoting crop improvements of wheat and rice prompted the question: In how many other aspects of the development process is deficient technology the barrier to change?

Crucial political decisions need now to be made, says Dr. Hopper, if these countries are to put into practice new technologies based on research findings. Political scientists have a central role in offering guidance about the political and social balances implicit in the decisions about moves of modernisation. While the main initiative rightly rests with political scientists in developing countries, they need the support of counterparts in Western countries who share their concern.

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Address to the 42nd Annual Meeting
of the Canadian Political Science Association
at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg,
June 1970

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL CHANGE

When I cast about for my topic and for the substance of my brief remarks to you, I confess being powerfully tempted to accept a safe stance and talk about the International Development Research Centre. In doing so I could retreat behind the whims of language to place before you a statement of my dreams for the Centre. It could be a statement sufficiently skilfully worded so that I could later claim no commitment, or else could explain that I had presumed nothing of the role that the Canadian Parliament has assigned to the Centre's 21 governors, who, after all and in law, are the Centre. I was mulling these thoughts over when I listened to President Nixon on Cambodia. Among the many emotions that assailed me was the realisation that it would be absurd for me to expose you to my pitiable skill in using language to obfuscate purpose, when all of us have been recent witnesses to a master of the art. Tonight, then, I will not talk with vague certainty about the IDRC; instead, I will take a more venturesome route by sharing with you a few thoughts about rural development and political processes, and along the way I will risk a few churlish remarks about the record of the discipline of Political Science in its address (or lack of it) to development issues.

I am emboldened to intrude upon your discipline by a strong personal motive. Briefly it is this. The process of inducing national development is pre-eminently a political one. The boundaries within which the political decisions can be made are set by science and technology, and by the magnitude of resource flows that can be tapped either by squeezing domestic endowments, or by exercising entrepreneurial skills in world trade, or bargaining talent in acquiring international aid. For almost two decades, I have been

both an observer and a participant in the quest to establish the limits of these boundaries; a quest that has centered on a search for ways of easing the potency of their restraint on the political action alternatives open for promoting the prosperity of rural people. After almost two decades of trial that has been rife with error, it is now possible to distinguish the multitude of components that must be joined concurrently and sequentially to generate and sustain in most tropical regions a growing rural prosperity. The key to tapping this prosperity no longer lies only with the scientists and technologists; in each nation it lies also with the social and political arts necessary to organise and focus effectively the will for progress.

Until two to three years ago, those of us who share an active professional dedication to promoting rural development were engaged primarily in the tasks of building a broad conceptual framework of the development process. This task is now substantially complete. With its conclusion, attention must shift to the means of implementation, to the administration and management of processes of change, and to the political decisions that underlie the initiation and control of action. These are decisions that, for want of greater sophistication, I place in the category of political administration or political management.

ROLE FOR POLITICAL SCIENTISTS

For three years this class of behavioral action has held my major attention, not as a professional scholar, nor even as a trained commentator on political affairs, but as one with a deep, personal concern about the welfare of people. Recent advances in tropical agricultural technologies open the promise of a vast abundance for mankind, an abundance that can make the hoary slogan of 'freedom from want' a reality for man now and for those who follow. The decisions to grasp this abundance are, in major measure, political. It is my thesis that the present Brahmins of rural development are those who would venture the prescriptions for the political action and political control of the processes of change. It is a thesis that holds both challenge and opportunity for your profession. Traditionally the Brahmin is the teacher, the one who possesses superior understanding, whose advice is sought as a prelude to action because it springs from a wisdom born of a schooled sensitivity and a

disciplined intuition. The Brahminical mantle is not an easy one to wear, but its responsibilities cannot be ignored by any who claim a special competence or unique insight into the problems that beset man in his desire for progress.

Put rudely, it is my view that political scientists have yet to discharge their responsibilities to those who seek help in guiding change. I submit that your profession has left to the economist, or to the journalist, or even, on occasion, to the casual traveller, the task of interpreting the political ferment induced by the structural alterations in human affairs concomitant with development or (more difficult, but also vastly more important) the exercise of identifying the realignments of political power that must be made to induce or control the development dynamic.

In essence I am arguing that the boundaries placed on rural development alternatives by technical and resource constraints are now fairly clearly known. The baton of leadership in setting development strategies must pass from the technicians to those skilled in the arts of the feasible. The crunch issues now facing most developing nations are those demanding your competencies; and your profession can only escape a deepening involvement in address to them by ignoring your Brahminical responsibilities. I therefore urge you to exercise with greater courage your sensitivities and intuitions as full partners with the other scholars and scientists now engaged in developmental activities. They are partners who have little real comprehension of the underlying political elements they are playing with, and even less ability to use these elements as constructive components in the programs they so diligently attend. There seems little doubt that these are components whose recognition and intelligent accommodation could lead to an easing of the many social, economic or political hardships that accompany the transformation of ancient societies; or, at least, such work could lessen the surprise and shock of unexpected events that too often arise from the instabilities spawned by the modernisation of traditional cultures.

I dare to urge this role upon you because, in the slightly more than two decades since former President Truman proposed to Congress the funding of a program of aid for developing nations, there has been a slow but obvious accumulation of learning about the processes of development. The learning began with the discovery that merely transferring capital goods or even large capital

systems from the 'have' to aspiring 'have-nots' would not reproduce the spectacular results of the Marshall Plan aid program for post-war European reconstruction.

By the mid-Fifties it was obvious to all but the most obtuse that development had dimensions greater than the single axis of capital accumulation. The aid programs of the late Fifties broadened this monolithic approach to include means of enhancing human capacities in recipient countries through training programs and technical assistance focussed on specific productive skills. The donors also increased their support for systems of formal education to ensure the creation of a long-term, growing stock of human resources which would meet the eventual needs of sustained national economic and social growth.

By the mid-Sixties several countries had pushed their development activities into a new class of problems, and aid programs were expanded to embrace direct help to national foreign exchange reserves through allocation of non-project assistance. While this help was often accompanied by restrictions on how and for what and where the allotted assistance could be spent, the real effect was to add another dimension to aid and to deepen our knowledge about the developmental process.

BREAKTHROUGH IN THE 1960s

By the late Sixties a further lesson had been learned. The two largest American Foundations, Ford and Rockefeller, had maintained private programs of development assistance throughout the decades following the Second World War. In mounting these activities they had several obvious advantages. They were private agencies. They could undertake long-term projects because they were free from the budgetary pressures of annual governmental appropriations. They could take risks and apply quickly the lessons of experience unencumbered by the fears and inflexibilities of traditional bureaucracies. They could venture into areas of action closed for political reasons to donor or recipient country programs—areas such as population control. They could act independently of the aid stimulus-response syndrome by making their own assessment of needs without securing concurrence from the legions of so-called experts that invariably screen aid proposals. Finally, they could launch their own thrusts to fill these identified needs

without awaiting formal requests from sovereign governments or going through the elaborate diplomacy that surrounds the negotiating and concluding of governmental agreements. Indeed, the Foundations could view development in a global perspective and, over time, they have done just that by cooperatively stitching together several mutually reinforcing programs of research and action that are conceived and administered as being embraceive of world needs.

Despite these advantages, however, many of the programs of the Foundations must be accounted as unspectacular contributions to total developmental needs. In fact, it took them almost ten years to gain an initial realisation of how they might use their advantages to address global developmental problems. It was in agriculture that the first breakthrough was made. In the past five years, work that was initiated and jointly supported by them has cracked the nut that was the agricultural conundrum, and although the nut is not yet forced open sufficiently to permit the full extraction of its meat, the size of the kernel that is already apparent mocks the gloomy prophecies of incipient cannibalism within the next decade that were made by some a few years ago.

The past three years have witnessed an unprecedented growth in the output of the major cereals in many tropical countries. This fact, however hedged, can only be viewed as a major advance in developmental efforts. As such, it has added yet another lesson to our primer on developmental processes. To understand this lesson it is necessary to review a few of the intellectual fashions challenged and, in some cases, overturned by the rise in farm productivity.

PROCESSION OF BRAHMINS

The passing of power from colonial governments to newly independent peoples found few Western intellectuals prepared to bring guidance and understanding to those responsible for forging predominantly rural populations into new nations. Only the ethnologists claimed specialised competence in the study of non-Western peoples. It was natural, therefore, for them to become the Brahmins of rural development. Their approach, heavily conditioned by the forays into applied anthropology by both English and American workers who had served in the Colonial Office or in the

Indian Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior, took a holistic view of culture that stressed both the dangers and the difficulties of changing the technological or family or social or political basis of traditional societies without including concurrent and offsetting changes throughout the entire cultural matrix. The 'human problems' of technological change became almost a cliché as leaders in the emergent nations sought to vivify the social and economic life of their rural compatriots. The action results of the holistic ideology were embodied, some would say embalmed, in the community development movement that dominated the world approach to rural progress in the decade of the Fifties.

In theory, community development sought to treat the whole village from politics to toilet habits, from house design to farming. The theory was easy: generate a ferment of total change in community life and there would evolve a new and nationally conscious citizenry launched on a course to progress and, not coincidentally, enjoying a larger prosperity from an upsurge in farm output. For a catalogue of excellent reasons the movement did not succeed. By the latter half of the Fifties it was evident that indigenous toilet habits were not all that insanitary, that formal systems of local government were not all that necessary for national stability, that local house designs had much to commend them, and that agricultural output was still relatively stagnant. The last fact proved critical, for it blighted the economic dreams of those who held the new power of independence. Exit the anthropologist as the Brahmin of rural progress.

His place at the pinnacle of the tier of architects of change was taken by the economist. The warm rhetoric of cooperative pride and the dignity of self-help, of social education, of democracy and local government gave way to the cold jargon of the slide rule and the mathematical model. As agriculture continued to stagnate, the rural problem became increasingly a problem of farm productivity translated into input-output ratios, benefit-cost comparisons, savings rates, and capital-output statistics.

Old theories die hard, however. At the centre of the economist's piece there remained the conception of a traditional farmer, slow and stubborn to change, a man of low aspirations or downright contrariness, a person whose motivations were suspect if only because they were unknown. The crux issue was how to raise farmers'

demand for new technologies and for the inputs of a modern agriculture. Few doubted that appropriate technologies existed. But these few doubters held the key to progress.

RASHNESS REWARDED

The story now has many threads. A small group of agricultural economists argued that the traditional, non-Western farmer made his decisions about production with the same economic efficiency as did his Western counterpart. This led to the hypothesis that the cause of stagnation would be found, not in the matrix of human motivation, but in the absence of profitable farm technologies applicable to tropical conditions which could be readily adopted by traditional cultivators. Studies done on farmers' behavior in several developing countries provided strong evidence of a clear response by cultivators to price and profit incentives and of high allocation efficiencies within the boundaries of traditional technology. By the end of the Fifties a handful of scholars contended that inadequate technology, and not a contrary peasantry, was at the heart of the problem. It was held that the technological gap arose from insufficient allocations to agricultural production research in the developing countries, and to a Western ethnocentrism that affirmed unchallenged the belief that, because abundant agricultural technology was available in temperate regions of the world, the task was merely one of transferring it from developed to developing nations.

In an exercise of visionary rashness the trustees of the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations agreed in 1960 to build and support an International Rice Research Institute to be located in the Philippines. The Institute was to devote its attention to discovering technologies of rice production that would enhance substantially the yield of tropical rice in Asia. By 1964 the staff of the Institute had obtained experimental yields of between two and three times the previous best yields recorded for rice grown under tropical conditions. They did it by building a wholly new plant type. In 1965 the Institute launched a program to transfer their new varieties and the accompanying production practices to the peasantry of Asia. The response of this peasantry made history. By 1968 several Asian nations were engaged in serious discussions about the need to control an impending

world rice *surplus*. Exit the model of the peasant as a stubborn, unresponsive block to progress.

There is a parallel story for wheat. The crop improvement work in Mexico that has transformed the world wheat picture in the past few years was begun by the Rockefeller Foundation in 1943 and it had wrought a major change in Mexican agriculture by 1955. It was not until 1964, however, that the full implications of the Mexican research burst onto the world's stage. This research, too, has made history. It also buried deep the myth of a peasantry uninterested in progress.

The conclusions to be drawn from the last six years of experience with agriculture are obvious. In how many other aspects of the development process is deficient technology the barrier to change? And how can these gaps best be filled?

THE LESSONS OF SUCCESS

The lessons behind these questions are prime items on the agenda of aid agencies. They led to the creation of the new International Development Research Centre by the Canadian Parliament. They will establish additional dimensions in the patterns of aid in the Seventies. And, for the time being, they have elected a new Brahminical group—the scientists. But they are a group who hold a different power from those who previously led the hierarchy of architects of change. They bring to their tasks the power to manipulate and exploit and subjugate the physical environment. It is a power that holds far greater meaning for the eventual conduct of human affairs than anything that could be mustered by the anthropologist or the economist or even by the puny growth from the barrel of a gun.

I argued earlier that the issues of rural development are political issues. The technical breakthroughs we have presently in agriculture have proven sufficient to generate the process of change. The impetus they have provided has been powerful, but the gains in real product can be made meaningless within the next few years by the inexorable pressure of population growth unless the developing countries themselves exert a strong will to sustain the dynamic. To do so there must be continued efforts to bring to the farmer the fruits of new research and the production requisites of a modern agriculture. For many nations this means a major

alteration in basic developmental policies, an alteration that rests on action in the political arena. Present technologies of farm production give to a country like India about five to eight years of lead-time in which the growth of food output can exceed the growth in the numbers of its citizens. But unless major policy decisions are made *now* to develop modern irrigation works, to build large fertiliser plants, to establish vastly improved systems of marketing and transportation (to name but a few crucial decisions), Indian farmers will find insufficient support in the infrastructure of services to maintain their present rates of innovation.

The imperative of the 'now' is stressed because of the long gestation period between the moment when decisions are made and the point when the resultant flow of benefits will be derived from them. This lag could leave India once again facing famine. The necessary decisions are not easy to make, however. The location of a large fertiliser complex has more political overtones than the economist can contain in his computer models. The engineering and agronomy of the benefit-cost analyses of irrigation investments ignore the realities of the shifting equilibria of political power inherent in the choices.

Gaining an understanding of the political balances implicit in the patterns of decision required to support agricultural modernisation is in itself a major task. To ask that this understanding should lead both to methods of inducement and to at least partial control of the decision-making and implementation activity is to set what may be a request impossible to fulfil. But I believe that it can be met although, like the other tasks of development, it will yield only to the most inspired, the most competent among you. In facing and solving the challenges of change there is no place for mediocrity.

A TEAM OF SCHOLARS

This task is small, however, in comparison to the real need for the political scientist as a partner on the development team. It is the challenge of predicting the broad course of political events that poses the major test for his disciplinary insight.

I have dealt with agriculture, but the developmental process is a human experience. In the final analysis, the anthropologist is right: it is the whole of human culture

that must be studied. The technical changes in farming practices carry with them an immense danger of a rending of the fabric of culture beyond hope of patching or mending. For all his pretensions the economist is ill-equipped to analyse in meaningful terms either the present structure of social power, or the likely stresses that will be placed upon it by technical change. What does it mean to the social and political stability of a peasant community when new technical opportunities for enhanced income can be seized only by the wealthy through their ability alone to bear the risks of investing in innovation? What does it do to the often fragile fabric of the nation when improved technologies are suited to exploitation in one geographic area and not in another, so that regional disparities of income widen and the benefits of progress accrue to one group at the apparent expense of the other? What are the political consequences of an agricultural modernisation that leaves large segments of rural people without employment opportunities? What is the impact on urban social order of easing stringent food shortages so that popular aspirations can rise, unchecked by the sobering influence of a daily confrontation with a harsh reality? And, above all, how can these effects be mitigated, or controlled, or eased, or used to channel further energy into the process of change?

These are not new problems; they have about them an immemorial air. Perhaps it is too much to expect answers. But, again, they are issues that cannot be ignored or even safely relegated to future historians. They are real problems that demand answers. Someone must address them and press their resolution. Their solutions conjure a troubling prospect for the history of even the past 20 years reveals clearly the human costs of leaving to the rhetoric of the demagogue, or to the twisted visions of the revolutionary radical, or to the pretensions of the parochial expert, the delicate task of balancing the stresses generated by technical change in the many-vector forces that comprise the integrity of a nation. The imperatives of power call for the exercise of rational skills far beyond those held by the untutored journalist or economist or scientist who now weld the fashioned products of expedient resolutions.

A NEED FOR REINFORCEMENTS

I do not want to close by leaving the impression that I

am unaware of the contributions already made by many political scientists to our understanding of development, or even of the excellent work of those few who have been professionally active participants in the nitty-gritty of the process. Nor do I wish to become engaged in the aged debate of the proper place of the scholar: in the ivory tower or on the action front, looking backward with the vision of hindsight or forward into the misty plains of uncertainty. And I do not suggest that the political problems of development are, or should be, the major concern of Western students of political affairs. These problems are rightfully the inheritance of your colleagues in the developing countries and there is ample evidence that they are doing what they can to address the issues at hand. They are of limited number, however, and like scholars everywhere they need the ethos and interchange that comes from being part of a larger community of learned men who share common concerns.

All that I am asking of you is that you become more aggressive in establishing that larger ethos, and that more of you, or of your students, actively seek to participate in the high adventure that is development. The strides of the past few years in tropical rural prosperity rest upon the successful transfer of Western methods of creating new farm technologies. As seen from the Third World, Western help has its greatest credibility in matters technical. Our culture is pre-eminently a technical one and we are respected as much for our efficiency in producing new technical knowledge as for the knowledge itself. But we earn little respect for our ability to solve the difficulties of living harmoniously with the technology we have created; we deserve even less. When bathed in the harsh glare of our own social failings, it takes a large measure of insolence (or is it just blind stupidity?) to argue that any of us who grandly bill ourselves as social scientists can contribute much except confusion to the search for methods of better manipulating developmental processes.

I dare to argue so in part because development will be manipulated, whether we participate or not. If we are participants, I think there is a chance, perhaps a good chance, that we can provide prescriptions for many aspects of social and economic change that will be feasible and socially desirable when judged by the value themes of the host countries.

REAL TEST OF COOPERATION

In part also, my courage rests on a belief that social scholars have yet to learn how to work usefully in multidisciplinary groups. We all seem to agree that to attain complex goals requiring both action decisions and their implementation, we should form task oriented teams of scholars from our several sister social study disciplines. Indeed, in proposals to governments and foundations we make grandiloquent assertions of our full recognition of the limits of each of our special competencies; a broadmindedness that is seldom apparent in the professional themes of a departmental coffee clutch. Despite obvious private doubts, to be openly against interdisciplinary research or multidisciplinary task forces is tantamount to being against motherhood and for sin. Yet social scientists have still to demonstrate an ability to make joint efforts truly joint. Most often each participant in a group endeavor does his own thing and the final product, however edited, is at core a collection of separate views. The difficulties of blending the disparate social disciplines are more formidable than any of us like to admit. The intimidating barriers of specialised languages, of widely dissimilar methodologies, of non-comparable conceptual foundations, of fragmented epistemologies claim their toll by silently ridiculing our pretensions of cooperation.

But despite this gloomy recital, I believe that if social scholars allotted a small proportion of the energy, which they so lavishly devote to the hunt for funds to support multidisciplinary work, to a search for methods of integrating effectively the ruminations of their several studies, they might surprise themselves (to say nothing of the long suffering but ever hopeful philanthropists in the funding agencies) with their accomplishments. In other words, it is a case of 'Physicians, heal yourselves'; and I think we can do so, although only with a lot of goodwill and even more perseverance.

I believe further that, if the healing is to come about, the treatment will not depend on scaling or eliminating the barriers now separating our various arts. The evidence of past experience charts turbulent waters of potential disaster for serious attempts to derive a single theory of social behavior or even a common conceptual basis for social observation and study. However, I think cooperating social scholars could develop significantly better modes of integrating their separate efforts if they

would undertake a serious appraisal of their joint effectiveness within the context of diagnosing and prescribing for a complex real situation. In other words, let us use our techniques of analysis to derive insights about the pathology and vigor of our own group behavior under the stress of striving to apply our collective genius to an external purpose. I would suggest to you that deciphering the manifold issues of development can provide a purpose that will challenge both the individual claims of competence of each social discipline and the ability of a cooperative community of scholars to function as such.

For too long, I have heard scorn heaped upon the economist and the technologist for being bulls in the fragile confines of the social china shop. To be humble for a moment, my colleagues and I recognise, even before those who would rebuke us, that our professional capacities fall far short of the total task of development we are trying to address. My plea therefore is for help, and for the opportunity of forging a true partnership with those who bespeak of understandings we do not have. The partner most needed now is one who holds the credentials and the courage to make meaningful the processes of political change.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

The International Development Research Centre is a public corporation established by Act of the Canadian Parliament "to initiate, encourage, support and conduct research into the problems of the developing regions of the world and into the means for applying and adapting scientific, technical and other knowledge to the economic and social advancement of those regions, and, in carrying out those objects

- (a) to enlist the talents of natural and social scientists and technologists of Canada and other countries;
- (b) to assist the developing regions to build up the research capabilities, the innovative skills and the institutions required to solve their problems;
- (c) to encourage generally the co-ordination of international development research; and
- (d) to foster co-operation in research on development problems between the developed and developing regions for their mutual benefit."

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