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Draft for comments
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POVERTY AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON AND AS A
CENTRAL ISSUE FOR DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Note: This draft is to form part of a paper on "Styles of Development in Latin America: The Concrete Utopias and their Confrontation with the World of Today".

A. Ideologies of development and identification of the target group

Action-oriented ideologies of social change or "development" must identify some class or group as central to the kind of change wanted. In an ideology emphasizing consensus this centrality can mean capacity for leadership and innovation in an ongoing process. In an ideology emphasizing conflict it can mean an irreconcilable contradiction with the existing order, implying that a different order is both necessary and possible. The identification in recent appeals for "integrated development" or "another development" of the "critically" (absolutely, extremely, abjectly) poor as the main target group for policy shifts attention from the fostering of groups expected to assume innovating and stabilizing roles and to reap differential rewards for performing these roles (entrepreneurs, technologists, the middle classes, progressive farmers, etc.) to redressing of the disabilities of the least dynamic components of the national societies, those left behind or hurt by present processes of growth and change. Adoption of the label of "poverty" in preference to other ways of identifying the disadvantaged target group carries with it certain preconceptions on the nature of the problem and on acceptable solutions, but also accords with the blurring of ideological or theoretical distinctions characteristic of concrete utopias devised by committees. The prescriptions for elimination of critical poverty imply a consensus view of future development, while the accompanying diagnoses incorporate conflict interpretations of the past and present. The disapprobation of market forces as arbiters of distribution of the fruits of development, combined with the identification of a beneficiary target group having in common mainly weaknesses, places enormous responsibilities on the nation state and on the world community of nation states as planners and administrators of development. For the most part, however, the appeals avoid any serious consideration of the capacity of the state or the international order to carry out such tasks. Continual use of the passive voice (such and such

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an action "must be" carried out) evades identification of the deus ex machina that is to put down the mighty and uplift the poor.

A discussion of various alternative ways of identifying the social classes or groups whose interests are least served by the existing order may help to clarify the above points:

1. Proletariat, lumpenproletariat, subproletariat. The term "proletariat" is identified with the most influential conflict theory of development. By Marxist definition, the proletariat has a central role in capitalist societies. This role of seller of labour power prepares it eventually to transform the society, with a little help from revolutionary intellectuals, through consciousness of radical incompatibility between the relations of production and further development of the forces of production, and through the capacity for organized and disciplined action forced on the proletariat by its participation in capitalist industry. Poverty spurs it to act, but it is not poverty but a specific form of exploitation that determines its central role in societal transformation. Marx labelled "lumpenproletariat" the urban poor lacking any foothold in industrial wage labour, even the precarious foothold of members of an unemployed "industrial reserve army". The lumpenproletariat were presumably even worse off materially than the proletariat, and their numbers might be quite large, but they constituted merely an ambiguous social force whose future would be determined by the outcome of the struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie. The lumpenproletariat might in certain conjunctures be a source of revolutionary cannonfodder; more often they would be a nuisance manipulable by the enemy.

Introduction of the term "subproletariat" is more recent and recognizes special conditions in countries not predominantly industrialized and with economies dependent on the world centres. In such settings the numbers of people subsisting precariously can become too large to be identified plausibly with an industrial reserve army, and they are not limited to the mainly parasitic sources of livelihood associated with the lumpenproletariat; many of them are engaged in activities that are socially useful or "productive" but technologically primitive and affording very low incomes. The subproletariat can thus be identified as an essential ally or even

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replacement of the industrial proletariat in revolutionary transformation in countries in which the latter is small and relatively privileged. The conception of the "developmental" importance of the class remains the same: that is, it is in irreconcilable contradiction with a bourgeois-dominated economic system that cannot help breeding its own grave-diggers.

The identification of propertylessness and sale of labour power as source of the basic contradiction leading to revolutionary transformation makes it rational to welcome the "proletarianization" of self-employed artisans, shopkeepers and land-holding peasants, even if this results in their short-term impoverishment. Otherwise, their immediate interests and their illusions will predispose them to political tactics that are destined to failure or manipulation by the dominant forces in the existing order.

The state, under certain conditions, may assume a semi-autonomous role of arbiter between classes (Bonapartism) but it cannot be expected to transform class relationships or eliminate poverty until it is itself captured and transformed by the proletariat or subproletariat. Under this conception, demonstrations of the ethical inacceptability of poverty and the duty of the state or society to eliminate it, lacking identification of a social class destined to act, can be no more than propagandistic devices or mystifications.

2. Marginal or marginalized population. These terms, in their more recent usage, have identified population components practically identical with the "subproletariat", but without necessarily drawing Marxist conclusions on their role. Like "subproletariat", they have been associated with attempts to explain and prescribe for apparently new situations coming to the fore in countries still predominantly rural, dependent-capitalist, undergoing relatively rapid urbanization, some degree of industrialization, and accompanying disruption or breakdown of pre-existing rural and urban social structures. The terms emphasize an unsatisfactory relation between the

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groups in question and the rest of society, and it is easier to define them negatively than positively. The "marginal" are not altogether excluded from the changing society and economy, or they would be irrelevant to them - as in the hypothetical cases of completely isolated subsistence cultivators or hunting-gathering tribesmen within the national territory. They are not simply poor, since equally poor social groups may have central although highly exploited roles in the social order. They are not simply exploited, nor simply an industrial reserve army, since the dominant forces in the society may have no use for their services, even as a means of keeping down wage claims of the employed workers, or may prefer not to use them because alternative combinations of capital and manpower present fewer problems and obligations. They are linked to the social order economically, culturally and ecologically, but on terms disadvantageous to themselves and also to the rest of the social order. They do not constitute a class, in terms of common relations to production or class consciousness, and they have no central role qualifying them as candidates to replace the existing order, but their presence indicates that the order is functioning badly, and their growth in numbers and their increasing urban concentration might eventually enable them to destroy it, or at least make its functioning continually more repressive and costly. The question then arises whether measures directed by the state to the marginal groups (particularly education, employment creations and local participatory schemes) can overcome or alleviate their marginality, or whether the social, economic and political orders must somehow be transformed to make possible their participation on acceptable terms. "Marginality" as a label has been compatible with either a reformist or a revolutionary conclusion; this may account in part for its popularity in policy-oriented discussions and also for the more recent waning of this popularity.

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3. The oppressed. Identification of the target population as "the oppressed", in the usage associated in particular with Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, places an ethical emphasis on the injustice of relations between oppressors and oppressed, irrespective of the social class positions and roles in production of the two categories. It brings to the forefront of attention a requisite of societal transformation that is implicit or secondary in the terminologies discussed above: the spiritual liberation of the oppressed population groups through systematic "conscientization" concerning their own situation and their capacity to change the world. It gives an essential role to "pedagogy" from outside the oppressed group (from dedicated intellectuals) but attributes ultimate responsibility and initiative to the oppressed themselves. The transformation of consciousness and achievement of group solidarity have priority over the raising of consumption levels, the seizure of political power, or the achievement of public ownership of the means of production. The latter objectives follow logically upon the former, but their pursuit would be self-defeating or futile unless preceded or accompanied by authentic conscientization. Under this conception, the state is normally an instrument of the oppressors and cannot be expected to take the lead in conscientization. The advocates of conscientization seem to assume implicitly that the state can be expected to tolerate conscientization activities, although this assumption seems to contradict their diagnosis of the sources of oppression. Even in the case of a revolutionary state controlled by forces committed to the elimination of oppression and poverty, conscientization initiatives directed to autonomous participation by the oppressed would have to come mainly from sources other than the state, and might be expected to persist in permanent tension with the centralizing and mobilizing drives that are inseparable from action by the state.

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4. The people. This term is the broadest and vaguest of the identifications of a disadvantaged target group considered here, and in its association with movements labelled "populist" has the widest political currency. Its users generally suppose that the "people" are a majority but not the totality of the national population. They comprise wage workers, peasants, salaried employees and small businessmen as well as "marginal" and "subproletarian" groups. The "people" confront "oligarchs", "elites", and "exploiters", domestic and foreign. As a majority, they have both the right and the power - through the vote and through organized mass action - to make use of the state to achieve a relatively egalitarian income distribution and ample public services. (Or the initiative can come from a political leadership that mobilizes the "people" against the "exploiters" and wields the powers of the state in their name.) The inclusiveness and heterogeneity of the target groups thus identified imply that the legitimate claims of the "people" can be met without irreconcilable conflict between different sectors over their shares of the pie; there will be enough to go around. It is also supposed more or less implicitly that the claims can be met without revolutionary change in the relations of production; the exploiters are to be tamed and milked but not liquidated.

5. The underemployed and unemployed. This identification of the disadvantaged target group accords more readily with the conventional non-Marxist images of economic development than do the others. It centres attention on two directly "developmental" and quantifiable aspects of the plight of the target group: (a) failure to contribute adequately to production of goods and services; (b) failure to earn thereby an income adequate for family subsistence or participation in the consumer goods market. In practice, the description and quantification of the target group as well as prescriptions for it have proved a good deal more elusive than was hoped when "employment" was proposed as a central policy focus for poor countries in the 1960's. Gunnar Myrdal effectively demolished the

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conventional techniques for definition and measurement, in their application to such countries, in Asian Drama. 1/ Attempts to quantify an "unemployment equivalent" in terms of sub-utilization of the economically active population have lumped together quite different real shortcomings in sources of livelihood. A series of country studies and comprehensive policy recommendations organized by the ILO within its World Employment Programme since 1969 have been followed by a shift in emphasis back from the problems of unemployment and creation of more employment opportunities to "the more general issues of poverty and inequality" and by the conclusion that "ultimately, the only way of reducing poverty is to reduce inequality". 2/ Moreover, the weight of evidence now indicates that in most poor countries open unemployment, affecting mainly youths and women who are not heads of households, does not identify the groups that are worst off within the existing order. "Insofar as poverty and deprivation are to be tackled as major social problems, it would be unrealistic and perhaps very misleading and harmful to assume that this can be tackled through tackling the problem of unemployment," 3/

- 1/ "The unsuitability of western concepts of employment and unemployment", pp. 1115-1124, in Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations (Pantheon, New York, 1968).
- 2/ Keith Griffin (Chief, Rural and Urban Employment Policies Branch, ILO), "Employment strategies in world perspective", document presented at Symposium on Employment Strategies and Programmes, Commonwealth Youth Programme, Barbados, Sept.-Oct. 1975.
- 3/ Jack Harewood (Deputy Director, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies), "The magnitude and nature of unemployment in the Caribbean", document presented at the same Symposium.

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6. The critically (absolutely, extremely, abjectly) poor. Concern with the "poor" as a population category manifestly unable to satisfy minimum needs and requiring public assistance on grounds of humanitarianism or maintenance of public order goes back at least to the 16th century in certain European countries. The sociologist Georg Simmel summed up thus the role of "anti-poverty" measures in industrialized societies at the beginning of the 20th century:

If we take into account the meaning of assistance to the poor, it becomes clear that the fact of taking away from the rich to give to the poor does not aim at equalizing their individual positions and is not, even in its orientation, directed at suppressing the social difference between the rich and the poor. On the contrary, assistance is based on the structure of society, whatever it may be; it is in open contradiction to all socialist and communist aspirations which would abolish this social structure. The goal of assistance is precisely to mitigate certain extreme manifestations of social differentiation, so that the social structure may continue to be based on this differentiation. If assistance were to be based on the interests of the poor person, there would, in principle, be no limit whatsoever on the transmission of poverty [sic: probably should read "property"/] in favour of the poor, a transmission that would lead to the equality of all. But since the focus is the social whole - the political, family, or other sociologically determined circles - there is no reason to aid the person more than is required by the maintenance of the social status quo. 4/

This approach to poverty has by no means been superseded in the conceptualizations and the real policies identifiable in many countries:

... we may define poverty as that level of deprivation which in the judgement of society (or in the judgement of those who articulate or claim to articulate public opinion) is so designated.

In and of itself, this definition is so broad as to appear meaningless. As a heuristic tool, however, it provides a more adequate base and focus for our analysis. Once the spotlight is turned not only on the poor but also on those whose definition assigns individuals and groups to this social category, we have taken a crucial step from the sociology of the poor towards a sociology of poverty in the true sense of the term.

4/ Georg Simmel, "The Poor", originally published in 1908, reprinted in Chaim L. Waxman, Ed., Poverty: Power and Politics (Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1968) p. 8-9.

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When the reformer speaks of the poor and the revolutionary speaks of the people, they most likely accentuate different statuses of the same sector of the population. The differences in terminology however, give notice of differences in intent and in sources of legitimation on which the appeal is based. To speak of the poor is to appeal to the conscience or self-interest of the non-poor on moral grounds. To speak of the people is to demand the rights of citizens often in considerably less genteel terms.

In passing, we may note that the above confirms our earlier contention that, for the proper study of poverty, the question when, where, by whom and for what purpose definitions of poverty are made may be more salient than the normative definition of poverty in terms of a given level of economic deprivation. If it is possible to refer to the same individuals and groups alternately not only as the poor but also in terms of such other statuses as the Negro, the aged, the citizen, the unemployed, etc., then the normative judgement which elects to address these individuals or groups as "the poor" is more significant sociologically than the economic indicators to which the designation "poverty" is attached. 5/

International declarations on human rights and social development, however, since the 1940's have called for elimination rather than mitigation of poverty, and this objective began to come to forefront of the international debate over development in the late 1960's, along with the objective of full employment, as part of a reaction against the conventional wisdom on economic development priorities and the blessings of high growth rates. As in the earlier "social development" arguments, the term "poverty" and the accompanying data on extreme consumption deficiencies served to dramatize the failure of prevailing patterns of economic growth to contribute to the well-being of a large part of the population in "developing" countries. They did not commit the user to a precise definition or policy conclusion, beyond the limited economic argument that in populations living in extreme poverty higher consumption is a precondition for higher production. Gunnar Myrdal's Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of

5/ Deborah I. Offenbacher, "The Proper Study of Poverty: Empirical versus Normative Perspectives", in Poverty: Power and Politics (p.41, 52-53).

Nations, a landmark in the rethinking of development of the late 1960's, in spite of its subtitle does not include a heading for poverty in the subject index. Moreover, while this work places considerable emphasis on inadequate consumption as a reason for the inability of the poorer strata to "develop", it emphasizes even more strongly institutional factors, values, and social inequality as inhibiting factors:

Thus it may well be the case that the upper strata in a poor village in India do not have a significantly higher income than sharecropping tenants or landless peasants. Yet there is an important difference between these groups: the former often receive incomes without working while the latter do not ... The inequality in social status creates major incentives to withdraw from productive activity, especially if its pecuniary rewards are minimal. ... The fact, therefore, that everyone in a village may be almost equally poor does not imply that everyone is equal; on the contrary, they are all so poor because they are so unequal. 6/

In the mid-1970's, "elimination of poverty" as central objective of development and identification of the "poor", qualified by some intensifying adverb, as target group are common to all the appeals for new styles of development, or "another development". As was suggested above, the popularity of these formulations derives from their adaptability to the needs of holders of different ideological positions seeking common ground, and also from their hoped-for capacity to arouse world opinion to the shortcomings of the existing order. Thus, any attempt to explore the implications of identification of the critically poor as target group runs up against the difficulty that this formulation means different things to different users.

The following pages try to single out a usage emerging as the lowest common denominator and pointing to certain probable consequences of a policy focus on critical poverty within existing nation states and within the existing world order. Certain suppositions belong to this lowest

6/ Asian Drama, op. cit., p. 569.

common denominator: 7/ (a) The basic problem and reason for preoccupation with the critically poor is their inadequate consumption, particularly their inadequate intake of food. (b) A dividing line can be drawn by means of statistical indicators between the critically poor and the relatively poor, and policy should concentrate on the former. (c) The critically poor can and must be "helped" by public programmes and the allocation of public funds (including allocations by well-to-do countries for the poor of other countries) to overcome their deficiencies. (d) Superfluous consumption of the better-off should be curbed to the extent that it conflicts with meeting of the basic consumption needs of the critically poor. (e) The critically poor manifest cultural adaptations to their plight that help to make their poverty self-perpetuating. (f) The overwhelming majority of the critically poor are in rural settings; therefore rural programmes should have priority. (g) The movement of rural poor to the cities does not bring them real gains and is dangerous to the social order; this is a further reason for relieving rural poverty in situ.

Under these suppositions, the relation of the critically poor to production is viewed mainly in terms of the provision of jobs, training, land, or tools enabling them to produce more so that they can earn more and consume more. The broader questions of whether they can in reality

7/ The most authoritative and characteristic example of this usage is The Assault on World Poverty: Problems of Rural Development, Education and Health (Published for the World Bank by the Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1975). The contributors to Redistribution with Growth, A Joint Study by the World Bank's Research Center and the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex (Oxford University Press, 1974), are more concerned with the relation of poverty to political power and the real constraints on public action.

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produce more, or keep a larger share of what they produce, or take initiatives, or participate in decisions that affect their livelihood, without a transformation of their relationships with the rest of the society or a transformation of the society itself, are not ignored but are treated with a certain reluctance or evasiveness, suggesting compromises between different ideological positions. The proposals assume that the dominant forces in the existing order can "help" the critically poor if they really want to, or if the threat to political stability presented by the frustrated poor alarms them sufficiently 8/ and if sufficient international aid with the right kind of strings attached is forthcoming.9/ While the proposals commonly recognize that power structures and vested interests may be incompatible with improvement of the lot of the poor, they leave the impression that these hindrances are mainly local, rural and traditional. The possibility that national (or international) power structures are also stumbling blocks may be admitted, but with the implication that these are remediable cases of political shortsightedness.10/ The documents in question

8/ "The real issue is whether indefinite procrastination is politically prudent. An increasingly inequitable situation will pose a growing threat to political stability." (Address by Robert S. McNamara to Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the World Bank, Nairobi, Kenya, 24 September 1973, excerpted in The Assault on World Poverty, p. 94.)

9/ International resource transfers to the Third World "should be concentrated on countries whose efforts are or will be directed towards the priority goal of satisfying the needs of the majority poor and which are carrying out or will carry out the necessary structural transformations ..." (Another Development, The 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Report on International Development and Cooperation, p. 18.)

10/ "In some developing countries, present policies and institutional structures are so far from favorable to rural development that a policy shift could only follow a major political change. ... Whatever the reason, unless more governments commit themselves firmly to devising strategies and policies to raise the standards of living of the rural poor, the lot of millions of people will not improve significantly." (The Assault on World Poverty, p. 29.)

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refer repeatedly to the "providing" of aid from above, the stimulation of participation from above, and the curbing of selfish local interests by benevolent restraints from above. If the political will at the national centre cannot be counted on to carry out any of these functions, nothing can be done other than pilot projects and conventional programmes from which the locally dominant forces might permit a little to trickle down to the critically poor.^{11/} The documents - with a few exceptions such as the 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Report - present the possibility that the neglected poor will eventually upset the applecart partly as a warning to shortsighted governments and partly as a disaster equivalent to the collapse of "civilization" - this last in spite of the high marks given to the People's Republic of China by practically all the documents arguing for a policy focus on critical poverty. The expectation of a developmental solution generated precisely by the contradiction between the target group and the unsatisfactory existing order, associated with use of the terms "proletariat" and "subproletariat" is absent or slips in as an incongruous element in compromise formulations.

One can conclude that the international focus on the "critically poor" as target group is part of an ongoing revolution in thinking about development and responds to a persistent intolerable contradiction between universally accepted human values and real processes of economic and social change. However, the nature of international discourse produces inhibitions, evasions, and substitutions of promotional devices for objective analyses, to which the focus on the "critically poor" lends itself better than alternative ways

^{11/} "In many countries, avoiding opposition from powerful and influential sections of the rural community is essential if the program is not to be subverted from within ... in cases where economic and social inequality is initially great, it is normally optimistic to expect that more than 50% of the project benefits can be directed toward the target group; often, the percentage will be considerably less." (The Assault on World Poverty, p. 40.)

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of identifying the groups whose needs are least served by the existing order. In the discussions by "experts" of how to eliminate critical poverty without confronting the problems of power, exploitation, and inequality one sometimes catches an echo of the mice discussing how to bell the cat - but also, in meetings at a higher level, of cats discussing how to promote the wellbeing of mice.

B. Some problems of a policy focus on critical poverty in stratified societies

Whatever the shortcomings of the term and the ideological ambiguities of its users the question of "critical poverty" is inescapable in any society whose dominant forces profess human welfare values with a reasonable degree of sincerity and must try to reconcile multiple objectives within political and economic settings that give them only limited room to manoeuvre. In stratified societies whose economies respond to a mixture of market incentives and government intervention, with processes of "modernization" changing the traits and visibility of the critically poor, one can expect a gradual and intermittent expansion of conventional social measures expected to alleviate the plight of the poor, more or less in the spirit summed up by Georg Simmel, a continual experimentation with participatory, self-help and job-creation mechanisms that promise to help the poor help themselves at reduced cost to the state, consequent changes in the levels of living, spatial distribution, and relations to society and the state of the poor, and also the appearance of various unexpected and unwanted byproducts of the measures and mechanisms. The objective of "eliminating" critical poverty is likely to remain elusive. The realities that stand in the way include the following:

1. Power. The critically poor, almost by definition, have less access to power compelling a hearing for their needs than has any other stratum of society. They are unimportant as suppliers of labour power that they might withhold or as markets for consumer goods. They are too heterogeneous in everything except their poverty, and for the most part too isolated and submerged at the bottom of rural power structures to be able to unite other

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than locally and ephemerally to improve their lot. The main forms of protest accessible to them are demonstrations, riots, land seizures and votes for populist candidates, and these expedients are most of the time in most local settings too ineffective or too dangerous to be resorted to. ^{12/} The critically poor are likely to have an all too realistic appreciation of their lack of power and of the probable consequences to themselves of militant protest, and this leads them to seek dependent clientelistic relations with the state or with local power holders. One can find no evidence in history or in recent development experience that the state, except in period of fundamental revolutionary change, can acquire either the capacity or the will to give the critically poor a share in power or encourage systematically their "conscientization". Even when the critically poor enter into a victorious revolutionary class alliance their access to autonomous power to advance their own interests is invariably shortlived; other priorities must be served. Mobilization of the poor, leading to conflicts between public agencies and between different levels of government, did enter into the United States "war on poverty" of the 1960's, for reasons too complex to be explained here, but its incompatibility with national and local power structures insured its eventual curtailing or sterilization; only small minorities among the poor were directly mobilized and these were unable to maintain their impetus.

^{12/} "...do categories like 'landless', 'jobless', 'sharecropper', and so forth define groups in ways which are consistent with existing or plausible political alignments? A simple class structure has considerable merit: feudal landlords, rich peasants, tenants and landless in the countryside; national bourgeoisie, lower middle class, proletariat, and unemployed marginals in the towns; and perhaps foreign capital in both. Yet, although those at the bottom of the pile thus defined should match closely the poverty 'target groups', they do not form a single class having a clear perception of its common interests and of how to act in order to secure them. Of course there may be a strong economic basis for a class alliance among small farmers, tenants, landless, jobless and urban marginals. But working alliances of this kind tend to be rare, which is one major reason why the poor remain poor." (C.L.G. Bell, "The political framework", in Redistribution with Growth, op. cit.

once official backing dwindled.^{13/}

The argument that critical poverty constitutes a threat to the existing order so serious that the dominant forces must eliminate it for their own self-preservation is thus, in most national settings unconvincing, although, as will be seen below, its disruptive potential does call for some combination of control and relief. The critically poor, whatever their numbers, become a serious threat only when a political system enters into crisis for reasons other than their poverty.^{14/} Even major famines do not necessarily goad the critically poor into anything more than easily repressed local disorders, as long as the national power structure remains intact, as events in parts of Africa and Asia have demonstrated. In the world today, one finds countries with a predatory elite ruling over a majority at the lowest levels of subsistence that are relatively stable to outward appearance, while other societies in which the dimensions of critical poverty are small, are chronically disrupted by conflicts over the distribution of income.

^{13/} See Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare, (Pantheon Books, New York, 1971).

^{14/} The conclusions of a recent discussion of policy alternatives in Kenya seem widely applicable: "The fact that a pattern of development generates intractable social problems is not sufficient to stimulate redress of the situation; this will occur only if the politically powerful see their interests being served as well in some alternative arrangement as in the existing one, or if the problems deepen into a crisis which fundamentally alters the balance of power. The latter, which implies revolutionary change, is historically unusual, and the former unlikely if, as has been suggested here, a solution to the social problems requires an effective redistribution of income and wealth. ... The beneficiaries of the present pattern of growth in Kenya would not take kindly to a policy which denied them in future their disproportionate share of gains, even if such a policy were possible to carry out. The authors of the ILO Mission recognize this and counter by the observation that a policy of directing growth towards the poor would not lack the support of the poor themselves. This obviously is intended to suggest that while the State may be creating enemies on the one hand, it will be creating a much more numerous set of friends on the other. The important question for governments, however, is not whether friends are being created, but whether or not this can lead to effective political support. ...this seems highly unlikely. ...the information channels...are in the control of and administered by precisely those interests in the private and public sectors which are opposed to the redistributive policies. Second, if the poor were aware of the power struggle within the elite to change the pattern of development, they would have to somehow be mobilized into effective political action". (John Weeks, "Imbalance between the centre and the periphery and the 'employment crisis' in Kenya", in Ivar Oxaal, Tony Barnett, David Booth, Ed. Beyond the Sociology of Development: Economy and Society in Latin America and Africa (Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., London, 1975).)

2. Relative vs. critical poverty. The supposition that the "critically poor" can be distinguished from the "relatively poor" by means of quantitative indicators and priorities for public action set accordingly seems hardly tenable, even if one leaves aside for the moment the practical problems, as yet unsolved, of accurate measurement of the levels of living of enormous numbers of people with widely varying patterns of consumption and felt needs. (It can be taken for granted that, for present purposes, per capita incomes expressed in monetary terms are a poor makeshift.)

First, with the apparent exception of minimum levels of intake of nutrients, poverty is inescapably relative:

"When all is said and done, poverty has nothing to do with... absolute standards; it is entirely a relative concept that can be defined only within a specific context of time and space.

... A household's poverty, for example, does not exist independently of the welfare of other 'reference groups', be they neighbouring households, peoples of other regions or linguistic groups, members of other classes or, indeed, other countries. Thus the notion of poverty is intimately connected with the idea of inequality, and our views on welfare are closely associated with our perception of equality." 15/

Second, the poorest of the poor generally represent the worst-off elements of several quite different social groups participating in some kind of gainful activity, separable by their means of livelihood and the measures relevant to their needs, along with a residue of social groups with special disabilities that restrict them to the most marginal activities and place the entire group in "critical poverty": families without male breadwinners, vagrant children, aged persons without resources, unemployable derelicts and alcoholics. Except in countries with relatively high income levels the "fully employed poor" are generally in the majority, but policies relevant to the needs of low-income occupational groups cannot be restricted to the part of each group that falls below a "critical poverty" line.

Third, the extent to which the state can in practice use a poverty line to set priorities in allocation of resources is usually limited to

15/ Keith Griffin, op.cit., p. 14-15.

certain kinds of assistential action or doles. The "relatively poor" within a specific social setting - that is, all the groups whose felt needs exceed their capacity to satisfy them - are invariably better able to act effectively, to organize to raise their incomes, and to take advantage of whatever services the state offers than are the "critically poor". They are understandably unwilling to step aside in favour of the latter.

One can distinguish conceptually several strata that would be adversely affected by any significant reallocation of resources for the benefit of the critically poor: 16/

a) The relatively poor in a restricted sense - the families of workers, artisans, vendors and peasants with incomes well below the national average but above a subsistence minimum, contributing more to production, somewhat more secure in their sources of livelihood, with somewhat more capacity for organization, and with somewhat better educational, health and nutritional levels.

b) The "relatively poor" lower-middle strata (including most of the public functionaries with whom the "critically poor" come into contact), chronically unable to stretch their incomes to cover the "modern" standards of consumption they consider their due.

c) The "relatively well-off" professionals, technicians, managers, and small business men at higher rungs of the same ladder of "modern" consumption, convinced that they deserve differential rewards for their scarce talents, aware that their incomes are modest compared to those of the elites above them, disposed to seek a market elsewhere if local income incentives are insufficient, and disposed to blame the plight of the critically poor on their own laziness and improvidence.

16/ In terms of the perceived interests of the different strata a redistribution of increments to future national income would be nearly as unwelcome as a redistribution of present income to the critically poor. Each stratum has unsatisfied needs or wants, continually raised by the dependent modernization of consumption. Moreover, within class-differentiated societies the maintenance of differentials in consumption is by itself a major source of satisfaction to the groups having any advantage over others. (For an attack on the illusion of painless redistribution of increments to income, see Weeks, op.cit.)

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d) The owners of land and capital and managers of the largest (frequently foreign-owned) enterprises, who may in practice be able to determine their own share of the national income and conceal or export as much of this participation as they see fit. These last groups generally have a symbiotic, if sporadically conflictive, relationship with political, military and technobureaucratic elites - which, however, in some national societies have managed to replace or subordinate them as recipients of the lion's share of the national income.

All of the above strata have more power to defend their interests than do the critically poor; their support or at least acquiescence is more needed for political stability and economic growth within capitalist or even within most purportedly socialist styles of development. To the extent that the dominant forces in the state, for whatever reason, set out to redistribute resources to the "critically poor" they may be able to make some headway by squeezing components of stratum d) that have been excluded from the ruling political alliance (e.g., traditional landowners, foreign-owned enterprises). In most national settings, however, they find it least difficult to divert some resources from stratum a), and possibly from b) and c), by means, for example, of tapping social security revenues to provide benefits for groups too poor or too irregularly employed to contribute to social security, ^{17/} or by using for anti-poverty programmes the proceeds of taxes withheld from earned incomes or regressive indirect taxes. This latter tactic is not likely to offset fully the advantages of strata a), b) and c) in the struggle for a larger share of income and of public services, but it may divert part of their attention from the conflict of interests with stratum d) to the conflict of interests with the "critically poor", who can be stigmatized as a parasitic and underserving lumpenproletariat. It is significant that conservative regimes that resist wage increases as harmful to development commonly argue that such increases do not help the critically poor, since the latter are self-employed, unemployed, or working in

^{17/} A forthcoming book by Carmelo Mesa-Lago, Social Security in Latin America: Pressure Groups, Stratification and Inequality, documents this kind of redistribution in several Latin American countries.

/activities that

activities that are neither organized nor controlable by minimum wage legislation. To the extent that popular pressures influence government policy, the "relatively poor" are likely to gain at the expense of the "critically poor". To the extent that a technobureaucratic elite determines policy, the "critically poor", or some groups among them, may gain at the expense of the "relatively poor", in both cases without much impact on the higher income strata or the overall pattern of inequality.^{18/}

The difficulties in the way of policy concentration on the needs of the "critically poor" are thus not limited to the claims of the "powerful and influential" elements of the community mentioned in The Assault on World Poverty. In urban areas where jobs are scarce the groups with access to them will defend this access from intruders and will resist initiatives, undertaken in the name of employment creation for the critically poor, to dilute their legal protection of wage levels and job security. The relatively educated will struggle to preserve and extend the income advantages now associated with differential educational qualifications. In the countryside, a widening gap between critically poor and relatively poor is visible in most of the Third World, whether the dominant local trend is

^{18/} "A análise da evolução da estrutura de repartição da renda no Brasil, entre 1960 e 1970, bem revela o que se chamou mais acima de 'niveleção por baixo'; durante esta década, a renda média aumentou 36.9%, a dos 5% mais ricos aumentou ~~12.3%~~ ao passo que a dos 40% mais pobres aumentou 18.3% e a dos 20% intermediários aumentou apenas 7.7%. Acontece que são estes 20% intermediários os que possuem renda média próxima do salário mínimo. Isto significa que num período de intenso desenvolvimento no Brasil, as camadas com renda inferior ao salário mínimo, grande parte das quais pertencentes ao que se chamou de subproletariado, tiveram uma melhoria algo maior do que as camadas pior remuneradas do proletariado urbano. Deste modo, reduziu-se a desigualdade por baixo ao mesmo tempo que se alargou o abismo entre estas camadas e a minoria privilegiada." (Paul Israel Singer, "Implicações Economicas e Sociais da Dinamica Populacional Brasileira", Caderno 20, Estudos sobre a População Brasileira, CEBRAP, Sao Paulo, 1975).

/toward capitalist

toward capitalist modernization of agriculture in medium and large holdings, co-operative organization of producers, or land redistribution to smallholders. In the first case, a minority of permanent wage workers, more or less skilled, may gain a status equivalent to the urban workers in "modern" activities. In the latter cases, part of the rural population collectively or individually gains access to land and capital permitting commercial farming, while another part enters into intermediary or specialized managerial and technical functions previously monopolized by the landlords or not carried out at all. In all cases the demand for unskilled labour remains stationary or declines. A residue of minifundio cultivators and landless labourers is left relatively or absolutely worse off than before. Co-operative members and landholding peasants, to the extent that they need additional seasonal labour, exploit this residue in much the same way as did the landlords. The disillusionment now being expressed over the so-called "green revolution" derives in part from the increasing visibility of this problem. The conversion of part of the rural population into the kind of progressive small farmers and technicians at which agrarian reform programmes have aimed can mean at the same time the emergence of a more broadly based resistance to the claims of the residue.

3. Consumption and public assistance. The documents identifying the critically poor as a target group for development policy invariably emphasize the objective of introducing them to means of livelihood sufficiently productive to afford them satisfactory incomes. However, the definition of the target group in terms of insufficient consumption and the enormous difficulties in the way of a transformation from above of their relations to production, their access to earned incomes and their access to "qualifying" services such as education above the elementary level, point to the probability that assistential components of anti-poverty policy will predominate in practice. The assessment of measures practicable within existing political systems that one finds in studies such as Redistribution with Growth contrasts sharply with the immediatist and universalist tone of many human-rights-oriented pronouncements on "another development".

/They suggest

They suggest that all of the really practicable measures are likely to evade the structural aspects of the plight of the "critically poor" and that their extension to the whole of the target group in the near future is not in the cards.^{19/}

To the extent that a government can mobilize resources or obtain them from external sources, it is easier for it to distribute free or subsidized food and possibly housing to the poor than to change the structures of employment and land tenure to the extent needed to provide an adequate livelihood to the groups most in need. The valid argument that better nutrition and health are prerequisites for advances toward the latter objectives helps to justify assistentialism. Assistential and social service programmes have other practical advantages for political leaders that directly contradict the overt purposes: they provide

^{19/} For example: "It must be recognized that the implementation of the various measures suggested here, while improving their condition, will leave many in poverty in rural areas for some decades in many countries in Africa and Asia. The alternatives are a policy of inaction or forms of labour utilization which have been adopted with apparent success, but at largely unknown cost, in China. Neither of these alternatives seems to be acceptable in the light of the political framework..." (C.L.G. Bell and John H. Duloy, "Rural Target Groups", Redistribution with Growth, p.135). "The prognosis for a satisfactory land policy within the existing legal framework in most cities has to be gloomy. The fact remains, however, that without such a land policy, there is no possibility of a comprehensive solution to the housing problem of the urban poor. Nevertheless, a variety of second-best solutions should be pursued with vigor." "Implementation of these recommendations will no doubt be stoutly resisted by large industrialists who will resent encroachment on the private right to own land; and by the middle-class groups who are probably the principal beneficiaries today of public utility, transport, health, and education facilities. An attempt to provide more services to the poor without reducing services to the not-so-poor will only accentuate the existing urban/rural imbalance in the provision of the services and is probably beyond the fiscal capacity of most governments. Even if all these recommendations are successfully implemented, the urban poverty problem will be far from fully solved in most countries. We have noted that the increased employment resulting from these measures can be of significant magnitude only in those countries that have a major portion of the labour force employed in the modern manufacturing or construction sector. Second, fiscal and political constraints will restrict the extent to which the poor can be provided with better housing or other facilities. Finally, success in ameliorating the condition of the urban poor may well result in a growth in their numbers resulting from in-migration." (D.C.Rao, "Urban Target Groups", Redistribution with Growth, p.153, 156-7).

considerable numbers of jobs for the educated middle strata, thus relieving one of the most insistent pressures on the state.^{20/} In their early stages, they can attract external aid meeting a major part of the cost, particularly in the case of food distribution programmes. They can win political support in the form of votes from the "critically poor" themselves, or at least reduce the incidence of rioting and crimes against property, while meeting less opposition from other strata of population than would alternative measures.^{21/}

Assistential and social service programmes aimed at the "critically poor" have emerged in most countries, at least in token form, but they can probably reach major importance only in countries in which: a) the per capita national income is well above the Third World average and the state is able to capture an important part of it; b) the "critically poor" constitute a relatively small minority of the total population; c) a significant part of the critically poor are concentrated in cities and have some political importance, if only as a potential counterweight to the better-organized "relatively poor".

^{20/} "What [the programmes] have most conspicuously improved is the salary level of the people who work there; whatever it may do for the poor, the war on poverty is the best thing that's happened to social workers since the New Deal was established. For there is now a gigantic sellers' market for social workers, welfare administrators, and 'consultants' on welfare problems." (Charles E. Silberman, "The Mixed-up War on Poverty", in Poverty: Power and Politics, p. 92). In Latin America, in view of the practically unabsorbable present output of "social scientists" by the universities, this factor may become of considerable practical importance.

^{21/} "... the poor may see doles as a device to prevent them from gaining independence, self-respect, and a stake in the society at large. Alternately, and this is a more plausible response in countries where the poor's awareness has not been aroused so acutely, consumption transfers may be strongly preferred. Not only are the immediate effects larger (the poor's discount rate is high), but the poor are bound to see major uncertainties surrounding the productivity of such assets as they do receive. ... The heavy administrative demands made by a comprehensive dole system should not be forgotten either. For this reason, it is probably an impractical form of intervention except in urbanized, semideveloped economies." (C.L.G. Bell, "The political framework", in Redistribution with Growth).

Under the above conditions, it is not improbable that the more extreme consumption deficiencies of the "critically poor" -- or at least the urban "critically poor" - will be alleviated and their formal access to basic educational and health services improved, at increasingly burdensome cost to the state, without any significant impact on their access to productive employment or their place at the bottom of the income ladder. The urban bias of such an assistential anti-poverty policy would further stimulate the movement that has been under way for some time of the "critically poor" from the countryside to the cities while, as was suggested above, the agricultural modernization as well as agrarian reform policies capable of helping part of the rural "relatively poor" would at the same time contribute to the expulsion of the "critically poor".

For semi-developed dependent capitalist countries in which anti-poverty efforts are particularly likely to follow the line of least resistance the experience of the United States "War on Poverty" of the 1960's and the expansion of public assistance that accompanied and followed it may be instructive. In this case, a series of measures responding to real needs and legitimate preoccupations (as well as, of course, to calculations of political advantage) able to draw on more reliable information of many kinds and on a more efficient administrative structure than can any semi-developed country, grew by accretion into something no one intended: an enormously costly machinery resented equally by taxpayers and recipients of benefits, convincingly accused of promoting marginalization and disintegration of the family.^{22/} The main differences between this "assistential" system and a system of guaranteed minimum incomes (since advocated unsuccessfully in the United States as an alternative) lie in the paternalistic administration, in complex and humiliating criteria for assistance, and in the importance of assistance in kind, particularly food aid.

^{22/} Piven and Cloward, op.cit., stress the obstacles placed by local urban power structures to other tactics of the "War on Poverty" (equal access to employment and housing, etc., for the predominantly black urban poor) as main reasons for the eventual concentration on public assistance.

In the United States from the 1940's through the 1960's agricultural modernization and declining demand for agricultural labour converted rural poverty into urban poverty as rapidly and dramatically as in the semi-developed countries. In the United States at present only 10-12 per cent of the population falls below a poverty line considerably higher in terms of income and consumption norms than any semi-developed country can envisage for policy purposes. However, the various programmes designed to eliminate this residue of poverty by up-grading job qualifications and prohibiting discrimination in hiring have not done so, and it can be assumed that recent increases in unemployment have intensified the marginalization of the urban poor. It is well-known that resistance on the part of the upper and middle income strata to further redistribution in favour of the poor through public welfare is growing, under the spur of inadequacy of post-tax incomes to meet consumption standards, widening insecurity of employment, inflation, and public awareness of the anomalies of the welfare system. Here too, the "relatively poor" are not convinced by arguments that they should curtail their consumption and dilute their job security in favour of the "critically poor". For the future of the semi-developed dependent capitalist countries, it is significant to note that assistential policies, once embarked on, can expand their claims on public sector resources from a negligible share to a very large one, in spite of their demonstrated incapacity to "solve" the problem of poverty, their unwanted side-effects on the life of the poor, and their unpopularity with very diverse sectors of opinion, for lack of any politically and economically practicable alternative within the existing patterns of society. 23/

23/ The following comment on the evolution of U.S. anti-poverty programmes also seems relevant to the present international focus on "critical poverty": "Each measure was presented at the outset as a politically neutral 'scientific cure' for a disturbing social malady. Each concrete program that evolved was couched in the murky, esoteric terminology customarily used by professionals, a terminology that obscured the class and racial interests at stake, so that few groups could be certain who would gain from the new programs or who would lose, or what they would gain or lose. Finally, the professionals and social scientists lent an aura of scientific authority to what might otherwise have been perceived as political rhetoric." (Piven and Cloward, *op.cit.* p.277-8). The militant organizers that emerged from among the poor eventually labelled the professionals and functionaries of the programmes "poverty pimps."

It should also be noted that many of the mixed-capitalist national societies of Europe have been able to distribute higher proportions of the national income through the state toward the lower strata by means of such measures as family allowances, low-cost housing, and free medical services without comparable strains, not conditioning entitlement on a means test and keeping public assistance in a subordinate role within social policy. Two main factors seem to have made this possible: i) the relative homogeneity of the national populations, so that most of the "critically poor" have not been identifiable by race or culture and thus subject to discrimination, nor displaced from rural settings that have given them no preparation for urban living and urban job requirements. ii) The countries have experienced shortages of labour since the 1940's, so that even the least qualified nationals have been able to find jobs, and public measures to raise their employability have responded to the real conditions of the labour market. In particular, marginalization from the labour force of youths and women belonging to disadvantaged minorities, leaving them no alternative to public assistance or anti-social sources of livelihood, could not reach significant dimensions.

4. Fertility and family planning. The families of the poorer strata generally have more children than do families in other social strata. Thus, either the adult breadwinners must sustain an inordinate number of dependants with their scanty incomes or child labour must remain an essential part of the family economy. In either case, the probability that neither the present family nor its descendants will emerge from poverty increases. The conclusion can readily be drawn that, all other things remaining equal, the poor family would be better off if it had fewer children and that persuading and helping it to limit reproduction should be an essential component of an anti-poverty policy. This proposition, advanced with crusading zeal by the family planning movement a few years ago, ran into a hornet's nest of ideological controversy and attributions of impure motives that need not be returned to here. The upshot has been that family planning programmes directed to the poor have continued to expand, responding to very

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real demands among women of urban low-income groups, but the claims for their decisive role have fallen into discredit for various reasons. For one thing, family planning programmes had no significant impact on fertility in the mainly rural populations suffering most from extreme poverty. For another, the polemic reaction against the implication that the poor should reduce their fertility to make things easier for the well-to-do became so insistent that bodies proposing new development strategies with a focus on critical poverty are now inclined to concede the ground or avoid the topic altogether.^{24/} The more recent international population policy declarations - which also constitute concrete utopias devised by committees - assert that the raising of the levels of living of the critically poor must precede or accompany rather than follow upon changes in their fertility levels. Some attempts to quantify possible futures - in particular the Bariloche model for Latin America - assume that higher levels of living will in fact be reflected in a determined rate of decline in fertility, while in the absence of improvement in levels of living fertility will not decline.

This supposition is plausible if the improvements in the lot of the poor are to consist in higher and more secure incomes from productive work, more equitable access to educational and health services relevant to their needs, and enhanced capacity for organization and participation in decisions affecting their own lives. To the extent that assistentialism comes in practice to predominate in anti-poverty efforts, however, the effect of improved consumption on the planning of family size and child spacing seems more questionable, since the conditions of subsidized consumption, doles in kind based on availability of food aid, etc., would not enhance the capacity of the family to plan for a predictable future, and benefits might increase with the number of dependents.

^{24/} In view of the World Bank's vigorous support of family planning in recent years, it is significant that the 1975 Assault on World Poverty devotes only 2 out of 425 pages to "demographic factors".

In such a case, one might expect a revival in official quarters of the hope that some combination of incentives and pressures directed to the families or women receiving public assistance, such as payments for persons undergoing sterilization, would help reduce the burden of public assistance, and a corresponding revival of controversy over the legitimacy of measures that penalize families for reproducing "irresponsibly". Such measures, of course, become relevant to the critically poor only to the extent that they receive benefits that might be withdrawn.

5. Quantification and poverty lines. However much one might prefer quality of life and degree of satisfaction with life as central criteria, any attempt to determine the size and location of a "critically poor" target group must fall back on measurement of the quantity of goods and services consumed. Some policy-oriented studies attribute an almost magical significance to the quest for an adequate combination of consumption indicators, as if the shortcomings of gross national product as a yardstick were responsible for the failure of current development strategies to contribute more unequivocally to human welfare.

Quantitative information on levels of consumption remains notoriously incomplete and unreliable in most of the world; the rising concern over poverty has been backed up by figures that are plausible but that hardly bear close scrutiny.^{25/} The main current methods of collecting and tabulating

^{25/} The following statement on income distribution data would apply even more strongly to consumption data: "Unfortunately, the increase in data availability has not been accompanied by an adequate improvement in statistical quality. In many cases the growing interest in the subject has simply led to the proliferation of crude estimates of income distribution for various countries, based on data sources which may be 'the best available' but are simply not good enough". (Montek S. Ahluwalia, "Income inequality: some dimensions of the problem", in Redistribution with Growth).

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statistical information throw only a dim light on distribution, and for well-known reasons the unreliability of information increases both at the top and at the bottom of the income and consumption scales. The deciles or percentages in which the information is usually expressed cannot inform about the patterns of income utilization and consumption in families belonging to real social groups. Nor would information on overall family consumption be sufficient, since it is probable that in many social settings women, children, the disabled and the aged bear the brunt of "critical poverty" - whether or not they are incorporated in families. Information on the distribution of consumption within families and the consumption of individuals without families, however, is particularly scanty.

Alternative methods of information-gathering and analysis, capable of throwing more light on the real patterns and meaning of consumption in specific settings are expensive and time-consuming. The anxiety to have better quantitative information about the poor, natural to the economists, sociologists and demographers engaged in discussion of the reorientation of development policy, confronts questions of costs and benefits and of linkages between information and action.^{26/} If the information that enters into national policy-making consists of separate quantifications of deficiencies in food consumption, housing, sanitation, schooling, etc. the probability increases that the response will be both assistential and compartmentalized in separate programmes with quantitative targets for subsidized distribution of food, construction of dwelling units, etc. Experience with measures of this kind has been disappointing, and the likelihood that the "relatively poor" and the "relatively well-off" will

^{26/} "... it is of the utmost importance to identify, locate (socially and geographically) and enumerate the poorest groups, on the basis of family budgets, wages, incomes, unemployment and underemployment, access to essential goods and services, whether direct or through the market, and ownership or control over the means of production." (Another Development. The 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Report on Development and International Co-operation, p.41).

/benefit more

benefit more than the "critically poor" is high. Yet both the information and the action may be governed by political calculations responding adequately to the rationality of the forces controlling the state. If, on the other hand, the policy-making organs confront exhaustive information on the conditions of each impoverished hamlet and shantytown, each marginal occupational group, and each type of family in the national territory, it is inconceivable that they will be able to digest the information and reconcile it with the kinds of standardized action that the state can in practice carry out. It is also quite certain that the groups urging different priorities on them will use their own versions of the information to strengthen their own claims. However much quantitative information may be amassed, it will never demonstrate "objectively" what can and should be done.

An information-gathering strategy is called for that converts the "critically poor" from a statistical abstraction to groups of people with diverse reasons for under-consumption, exposed to diverse forms of exploitation and discrimination, with diverse potentialities for emerging from poverty. The purposes of such a strategy, however, cannot be reduced to the provision of information to the state on the supposition that the state will use it for the more efficient and equitable relief of poverty. Information and the ways in which it is gathered and analyzed convey more complex and ambiguous advantages and dangers to all the actors in the drama of "development". Notoriously, the state can use the information-gathering process for purposes of evasion of action or delay, or of control, identifying potential sources of unrest that it may repress or relieve just enough to render them harmless. (This latter possibility has generated in recent years among anti-establishment social scientists a strong suspicion of officially-sponsored empirical investigation.) For the poor, participation in the gathering of information can be a means of concientization, of presenting their claims more vigorously, and of entering on diversified local action to meet their own needs. Lastly, from the viewpoint of the present paper, an information-gathering strategy designed to contribute to the elimination of poverty, cannot confine itself

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to the problems of the part of the population that falls below a "poverty line", however defined, but must include the interactions between the social classes and groups making up the "critically poor", the "relatively poor", the "relatively well-off", the dominant forces in the national society, and the whole range of administrative-service-rendering-repressive mechanisms of the state.

C. "Critical poverty" in settings of semi-development: Latin America

If one accepts provisionally the practicability of separating "critical poverty" from "relative poverty" for policy purposes, and if one rules out the possibility of a revolutionary-egalitarian transformation of social relationships, one can reason that: a) The material and organizational capacity of the state to relieve "critical poverty" will vary inversely to the percentage of critically poor in the national population and directly to the level of per capita national income. b) Perception by the forces dominating the state of the "critically poor" as a threat to "development" or political stability will vary directly to their percentage of national population and their degree of concentration in large cities. c) The smaller the percentage of the "critically" poor in the national population the higher will be the proportion among them who will constitute "special cases" rather than "human resources" potentially usable within the prevailing style of development - e.g., families consisting of mothers with dependent children, children without families, destitute aged persons, and subsistence cultivators in the remoter and more depressed rural zones.

At one end of the range of possibilities - where the critically poor constitute 10 per cent or less of the national population - it seems reasonable to expect that a well-devised combination of special programmes can raise most of them above the critical level, without an unmanageable drain on the resources available to the state, but that the priority the state gives to such programmes will depend on the values really dominant in the society more than on a judgement of political or economic necessity. If the remainder of the national society is progressing, critical poverty of

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these dimensions can remain nearly invisible to it. At the other end of the range - where the critically poor in terms of inability to satisfy minimum physiological needs are in the majority - the state might seem to face the alternatives of permanent repression 27/ or the achievement of an austere and egalitarian style of development giving priority to mobilization of human resources for production and co-operative self-help. In intermediate situations, in which the critically poor are a large minority, one can expect that the pressures on the state, the motivations for action directed to the poor, and the range of alternatives apparently practicable, will be particularly heterogeneous and self-contradictory.

According to the admittedly crude "absolute poverty" line adopted in The Assault of World Poverty - US \$50 per capita income - the developing countries of the Americas account for only 5 per cent of the world population in absolute poverty, while between 11 and 12 per cent of the regional population falls below the absolute poverty line. About two-thirds of the population below this line in Latin America is rural, against more than 90 per cent in Africa and more than 80 per cent in Asia. The inadequacy for subsistence of a \$50 per capita income is presumably more extreme in the relatively urbanized and monetarized societies of Latin America than in Africa and Asia, but even if one raises the line for the Americas to \$75, while holding it at \$50 for Africa and Asia, the Latin American target group remains less than 10 per cent of the world total and less than 20 per cent of the regional population. 28/

27/ "Such societies would probably be ruled by dictatorial governments serving the interests of a small economic and military upper class and presiding over the rotting countryside with mixed resignation, indifference, and despair." (Robert L. Heilbroner, An Inquiry into the Human Prospect, New York, W.W.Norton & Company, 1975).

28/ The Assault on World Poverty, pp.79-80. A recent report by Oscar Altimir, "Estimaciones de la distribución del ingreso en América Latina por medio de encuestas de hogares y censos de población: Una evaluación de confiabilidad" (CEPAL - BIRF, agosto 1975) demonstrates that the statistical basis for highly aggregated income distribution estimates of this kind remains extremely weak.

In Latin America, if one excludes Cuba with its radically different patterns of distribution and consumption, Argentina falls at one end of the range, having a minority of "absolutely" or "critically" poor probably below 10 per cent and consisting of the kinds of special cases mentioned above. Haiti is at the other end, with a probable majority of the population, representative of its small cultivators, in "absolute" poverty. The larger and medium-sized countries other than Argentina are somewhere in the middle, with "absolute" poverty, in the terms envisaged in The Assault on World Poverty, probably affecting from 15 to 30 per cent of the population.

While any dividing line between the "absolutely" and the "relatively" poor must be partly arbitrary,^{29/} the strata corresponding roughly to the above percentages do seem to have certain definable characteristics aside from low incomes and consumption. They correspond to the "marginalized", the "subproletariat", the "underemployed", the "oppressed", according to various ways of interpreting their problems. The category is, however, considerably smaller than the part of the population able to participate only meagrely in the market for manufactured consumer goods and "modern"

^{29/} The percentages can, of course, be set much higher, depending on the yardstick adopted. Estimates of "one-third" for the group in critical poverty are current, possibly as a distant echo of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "one-third of a nation" "ill-fed, ill-clothed and ill-housed" for the United States of the 1930's. It is probable that in Latin America much more than a third of the population is ill-fed (qualitatively if not quantitatively) and ill-housed (in relation to modern standards for housing) but it seems desirable for present purposes to use a more restrictive poverty line. In particular, attempts to quantify the critically poor in terms of deficiencies of housing and lack of access to potable water, because information on these components of the level of living are more easily measured than food consumption, may be measuring a lag in modernization in rural areas or a crisis of over-rapid urban growth in the cities rather than critical poverty.

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housing. In the more representative Latin American countries the dimensions of "critical poverty" (to return to the adjective used hitherto in this paper) are much too large for it to be relegated to "special measures", assistential or otherwise, but it remains a plight of heterogeneous minorities mostly participating in the labour force but relatively marginal to the more urgent concerns of political stability and economic growth as viewed by the forces dominating the state. The critically poor cannot be ignored, but the case for priority meeting of their needs hovers uneasily between the ethical, the politically pragmatic, and the economically pragmatic.

The contribution to production of the "critically poor" is small, but the securing of a significantly larger contribution would call both for different structures of production and demand, and for a prior raising of their working capacity through better nutrition, health care and education. The possibilities seem to be limited for the short term with which governments are most concerned, compared with other means of raising production. Moreover, exploitation of the critically poor is functional though hardly central to the existing order. They provide cheap domestic and artisanal services and a reserve of cheap seasonal agricultural labour; the expectations and life-styles of other social strata would have to be modified if their earnings and means of livelihood were to improve to a significant degree. Their presence as a labour reserve helps to keep down wage levels in industry, although their relatively low employability in modern industry and the capacity for organized self-defense of the better-off strata of the urban labour force limit the importance of this function except where workers' organizations have been suppressed by the state. The critically poor are excluded from the market for manufactured consumer goods, but if the state is determined to broaden the internal market for such goods, it will find it more profitable economically as well as politically to increase the income share of the "relatively well-to-do", or of the "relatively poor" who are now on the margin of this market. The needs of the urban critically poor for cheap staple foods, cheap public transport, and cheap shelter do generate

/pressures that

pressures that the state cannot safely ignore, and that may produce contradictions in its economic policies. These pressures, however, can be relieved by measures of relatively low direct cost to the state although they may be inconvenient in other respects - distribution of food aid from abroad, price controls on staple foods and urban transport fares, distribution of building lots and minimum infrastructural services, toleration of peripheral squatter settlements on public lands. The critically poor can constitute a source of troublesome political unrest, but mainly in situations in which other dissatisfied groups enlist them as allies. It is easier to repress or placate their demands than those of the other groups - the organized workers, the educated youth - and since they are made up of several different rural and urban minorities with little in common except poverty their challenges are localized and sporadic. The prospect of their autonomous political mobilization arouses chronic alarm in the better-off strata and in the state apparatus, but this alarm might be attributed as much to a bad conscience as to real symptoms of unrest among the critically poor.

The outcome, to the extent that the state turns its attention to the critically poor, is sure to be some combination of three lines of policy: assistentialism, control and aided self-help.

The implications of assistentialism were discussed above. In national settings in which the critically poor are numerous, doles and subsidized services (including public employment designed mainly to provide minimum incomes for the otherwise unemployed) must either be confined to certain groups among the critically poor or must be spread very thin. As awareness of the possibility of assistance spreads, demands are bound to rise faster than benefits and to become increasingly organized, although usually remaining localized. Therefore, as long as the state is unable to move beyond assistential measures, the very expansion of these measures forces it to develop mechanisms of control and repression in order to keep the demands from getting out of hand. The following quotations sum up urban and rural variants of this process:

"El México marginal también está sujeto a control político. Si se piensa en las llamadas colonias proletarias, habitadas por desempleados o subempleados, se puede imaginar ciertas condiciones para organizarse y solicitar los servicios mínimos como agua potable, localización de terrenos, etc. Estas demandas son neutralizadas por el México organizado, al tratarse de planes tendientes a su satisfacción originados en los organismos burocráticos municipales o mediados por la C.N.O.P., o a través de prestaciones alimenticias por organismos como la Comisión Nacional de Subsistencias Populares. Se trataría de un tipo de control expresado a través de una política asistencial. ...nos inclinamos a pensar que una redefinición del sistema político en donde hubiera más cabida a las demandas populares es poco factible. La satisfacción de demandas se ha hecho - y se hará - en tanto no afectan ni la estabilidad ni los intereses de la clase económica. Multiplicar las demandas sin satisfacer a dicha clase, acarrearía elementos que contribuirían a la inestabilidad. La inestabilidad, a su vez, perjudicaría el crecimiento económico del país. ... Al no ser posible la redefinición del sistema, queda entonces como alternativa la intensificación del autoritarismo." 30/

"When the problems of rural poverty and underemployment associated with this bi-modal development path become particularly acute, governments are often forced to resort to large public works projects in order to maintain large parts of the rural population above starvation levels. These projects are often makeshift ones with little long term productive value. Moreover, they may be used as a source of political patronage, by both government officials and the local élites. The rural poor employed in them frequently become a sort of sub-proletariat with no stake in the existing society or the future as traditional caste and class differences are eroded. Pressures grow to institutionalize the rural relief and public works programmes as a permanent part of the social structure. This is almost inevitably accompanied by increased police control as tensions and dangers of outbursts mount. All this contributes to the trend towards the custodial state. ... Even without the particular dynamics associated with massive public works, the pressures for a repressive custodial state mount as unemployment, poverty and other pressures on the existing social structure grow and the property-owning élites strive to maintain their historical privileges as well as to benefit from economic growth." 31/

30/ José Luis Reyna, Control Político, estabilidad y desarrollo en México (Cuadernos del CES, 3, Centro de Estudios Sociológicos, El Colegio de México, 1974).

31/ Andrew Pearse, "The Social and Economic Implications of Large-scale Introduction of New Varieties of Foodgrain: An Overview Report" (UNRISD, Geneva, July 1975, Ch. XII, pp. 22-23 (draft)).

Policy proposals incorporating aided self-help are diverse both in content and in terminology, and are by no means aimed exclusively at the "critically poor". In the view of many of their proponents, however, they represent a potential means by which the bulk of the "critically poor" can raise their levels of living without burdening the state with the very high costs of systems of assistentialism-cum-repression, and also without requiring an egalitarian revolutionary transformation - judged unattainable or unacceptable - in social and economic relationships. The state, with the assistance of voluntary agencies, is to raise the employability of the critically poor through training and guidance; help them produce enough to meet their basic needs as cultivators or artisans; and help them organize co-operatively to exchange goods and services among themselves, provide their own housing and community services, and obtain fair returns in their dealings with the rest of the society. If there is no immediate prospect that the existing economic system can absorb even the more employable critically poor into "modern" productive activities, as seems to be case in most of Latin America, the aided self-help approach must fall back on a kind of parallel economy of the poor, insulated from the dominant "modern" economy and subjected to different controls and incentives from those applied to "modern" enterprises. The poor would then, hopefully, achieve levels of productivity and consumption above the present "critical poverty line", but the question of their full incorporation into the more dynamic sectors of the economy could be postponed to the relatively distant future. Meanwhile, the latter sectors would be able to advance more vigorously, freed of the greater part of the costs and dangers now associated with "critical poverty".

Such schemes suppose an unlikely capacity to insulate the target group from the remainder of national societies in the throes of uneven modernization. The required willingness to accept modest improvements in living conditions in exchange for unremitting toil with primitive tools, and to support out of their poverty basic services that the state provides for better-off strata in the society, would be likely to break down

/precisely when

precisely when and if initial progress had generated hope and organizational capacity, unless accompanied by controls even more rigorous than those complementing assistentialism. Within present Latin American realities, the aided self-help schemes seem destined to continue offering as comprehensive solutions measures that can at best result in secondary improvements in the conditions of minorities among the critically poor.

D. Conclusions

The present paper, like a good many other treatments of poverty as a focus for development policy, has been unable to emerge from the contradictions evident in the Latin American variants of the human condition. At most, it has made explicit some of the difficulties that emerge from intellectual attempts to shift the development policy focus from helping those best able to help themselves - the entrepreneurs, the modernizers, the strivers - to helping those least able to help themselves - the marginals, the oppressed, the poor - without explicitly rejecting previous suppositions on the nature of the development process.

On the one side, the weight of evidence indicates that Latin America as a whole, in contrast to other major Third World regions, has the material capacity to enable all its people to achieve, within one or two decades, an adequate livelihood in settings of social equality and freedom. The countries that are farthest from this capacity account for a small fraction of the regional population and genuine regional solidarity could offset their disadvantages. In a good many countries the "social" allocations made by the state, and the regulative and servicing powers held by the state would already be sufficient to eliminate the extremes of poverty if equitably and efficiently utilized.^{32/} If the resources

^{32/} A presentation by Miguel Kast (Subdirector, ODEPLAN) at a University of Chile Seminar, "Estrategia de Desarrollo Económico para Chile", asserts that the resources allocated to social programmes in Chile would be sufficient to satisfy the basic needs of the population, but in practice "han extraído recursos de los sectores medios y bajos, para darles a los sectores medios y altos". (El Mercurio, 10 December 1975.)

now devoted to the superfluous consumption of minorities, to armaments, and to the infrastructural requirements of humanly indefensible patterns of urbanization, or drained out of the region altogether, could be redirected, and if the human potential now wasted or worse could be mobilized, they would be more than ample for the legitimate requirements of "another development". The perpetuation of poverty alleviated by doles, minimal services and self-help schemes cannot be justified in terms of overall insufficiency of resources or the priority requirements for investment in productive capital.

On the other side, the character of social relations and motivations; the ties of Latin America with the world order; the sources of dynamism of the systems of production and distribution; and the capacities of the state deriving from the given distribution of power in the societies do not point to any convincing path to equality, freedom, and priority allocation of resources to meeting of basic needs. The initiatives supposedly directed to such ends range from innocuous declarations of governmental good intentions, that can be subscribed to by forces acting in direct contradiction to them, and from the continual creation of bureaucratic mechanisms substituting ritual for relevant action, to violent attempts to demolish the existing order to clear the ground for the Good Society - attempts which generally end in a strengthening of the repressive traits of the former.

The contradiction between potential and reality can plausibly be attributed to historically determined systems of exploitation and conditioned motivations in different social classes. In any case, the functioning of the present national systems of dependent semi-development is so complex and at the same time so precarious, so far outside the control of national governments or the social forces dominating these governments, and the identifiable potential agents of societal transformation are so fragmented, that it remains to be demonstrated whether, when all relevant factors are taken into account, there is any politically viable alternative to a continuation of the precarious, conflictive, ambiguous processes of economic growth and social change that are now identifiable.

The "critically" and "relatively" poor, and the "relatively well-off" who are poor in relation to their own standards, will then continue to be actors in these processes, each with its own sporadically effective tactics to get attention to its wants, gaining in some contexts and losing in others, but with the "critically poor" remaining at the bottom of highly stratified societies.

The identification of a disadvantaged target group invariably comes from outside the group itself, from ideologists, political leaders and social scientists, and with instrumental as well as ethical or scientific objectives presents a simplified model of a complex reality. In the alternative identifications that were presented at the beginning of this paper, two main instrumental-ethical orientations can be distinguished. According to the one orientation, the main purpose of the identification is to help the target group become conscious of its own situation and its own interests so that it can acquire a realistic strategy for transforming its situation and thus transforming the social order as a whole. Different versions lead to quite different strategies, but they agree that the target group must free itself through solidarity informed by its own vision of the existing society and of the kind of future society that will meet its needs.

According to the second orientation, the main purpose of the identification is to make other elements in the national society and the international order aware that the situation of the target group is unacceptable in terms of their own professed values and incompatible with secure perpetuation of their own preferred life styles. Different versions of this orientation also lead to quite different strategies, but these are strategies for the state, for the international order made up of states, for the wealthy and powerful, or for all educated men of good will, only secondarily for the target group itself. The orientation assumes that the deficiencies of the target group can be overcome only if guidance, policy-oriented research and material support are forthcoming. Such an orientation must be basically more congenial than the first to external identifiers

of the target group, since it enables them to address their natural educated audiences and gives them legitimate leading roles in the strategy to be adopted. Attempted adherence to the first orientation requires the identifiers either to create the target group in their own image, attributing to it purposes and capacities that it can acquire only under their tutelage, or to discipline themselves, under continual temptations to self-deception and manipulation, to the difficult subordinate roles of "learning from the people" and "serving the people".

Naturally, the two orientations manifest themselves in "pure" forms only in certain extreme ideological positions within the worldwide debate on what is to be done. Most of the proponents of self-liberation by the target group would admit the legitimacy or even necessity of some forms of help or guidance from other elements in the societies. Most of the proponents of salvation through research, planning, services, and material aid would affirm that the target group must also help itself. International studies addressing themselves to national governments are probably best advised to seek a defensible middle position, envisaging the necessity of interaction between the target group's struggles to raise its level of consciousness and advance its own interests, on the one hand, and the disposition of the state and the dominant social forces to help, however ambivalently, and make concessions that will enhance its confidence in its own ability to gain from the struggle.

SUMMARY

The identification of the "critically poor" as target group for development policy implies a shift of attention from groups expected to take the lead in development and to reap differential rewards for doing so to the groups most disadvantaged by present processes of growth and change. The disadvantaged groups can be identified, alternatively, as proletariat and subproletariat, marginal population, the oppressed, the people, and the underemployed and unemployed. Each identification conveys a different interpretation of development and the potential role of the disadvantaged target group. The identification of the target group as the "critically poor" lends itself more than the other terms to compromise formulae blurring ideological-theoretical distinctions. In general, however, its use implies that the target group is not in irreconcilable contradiction with the existing order; that the target group can be distinguished from the rest of the population by very low consumption levels rather than by its relation to production; that it can be helped by the state to overcome its deficiencies, through measures involving some redistribution of resources from better-off elements in the society. The main purpose of its identification is not to enhance its own self-awareness and capacity to act but to make other elements in the national society and the international order aware that its situation is unacceptable in terms of their own professed values and incompatible with secure perpetuation of their own preferred life-styles.

"Semi-developed" national societies such as those of Latin America, in which the critically poor constitute minorities, although large minorities, have the material capacity to eliminate critical poverty if the resources now allocated by the state to "social" measures could be equitably and efficiently used, and if the resources now devoted to luxury consumption, armaments, and other non-productive purposes could be mobilized for this purpose.

The factors that stand in the way include the lack of power of the critically poor, their fragmentation among several minorities with differing problems, are the more vigorous claims on resources of several categories

/of "relatively

of "relatively poor" and "relatively well-todo". Within existing structures of dependent capitalist semi-development, it seems probable that the current international concern over poverty will exert some real impact on national policies, but that the national authorities will find it extremely difficult to apply measures redressing the structural disadvantages of the critically poor, reducing the degree of social and economic inequality, and thus will fall back on assistential policies that will excite less resistance from the rest of the societies, and that will raise levels of consumption and access to services to some extent while leaving the critically poor at the bottom of highly stratified societies. Assistentialism will be accompanied by controls of various kinds to keep demands from getting out of hand and by aided self-help measures inspired by continually frustrated hopes that the poor can be enabled to meet their own basic needs at minimum cost to the state.