Dependency Theory and the Political Economy of Sub-Saharan Africa's Crisis

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The fact of sub-Saharan Africa's crisis is now universally acknowledged. However, although one might think that with the wisdom of hindsight it would be easy to agree on 'what went wrong', this would be to underestimate the complexity and the ideological flexibility of the social sciences. In fact, virtually every major analytical (and ideological) position in the debate now claims that its propositions have been vindicated by Africa's post independence experience. Hence, those who have faith in the market lay the blame on state intervention and argue that markets must be allowed to operate more freely; those who take a dependency view and who, therefore, see effective state intervention as a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for development search for more effective forms of state intervention and deplore the effects of pressures emanating from the international market; and those who have faith in 'real' (or non-statist) socialism, either wish for an efficient and stable world without a need for co-ordination or coercion by either states or markets, or embrace a form of historical determinism that accepts capitalism, even in its present African form, on the grounds that it is the only road to 'true' socialism. Where Joe Hill once sang of 'Pie in the Sky', we now hear the strains of 'Socialism Bye and Bye'.

This paper will examine the ways in which the right and a large part of the left have converged in their assessment of the African problem, united both in their denigration of dependency theory and in their belief that state intervention lies at the root of Africa's problem and that market forces represent a powerful and historically progressive force in Africa today. In this context it will consider the assumptions, the evidence and the arguments that support both the right's 'new orthodoxy' and the left's ironic rediscovery of 'the acceptable face of capitalism' in the smoldering ruins of Africa's economies.

The New Orthodoxy: The Return of Market Fetishism

The currently dominant view of Africa's crisis reflects the relatively recent global reassertion of a fundamentalist 'laissez-faire' ideology. Its position is remarkably clear and simple: Africa is in such an extraordinary mess because its states have intervened excessively in their economies in accordance with false development models, applied by self-seeking, venal elites that were using state power for the sole purpose of furthering their own short-run, personal interests. In its most extreme form this view can lead ostensibly serious academic observers to look back nostalgically to a mythical colonial era of rationality, peace and prosperity; a world where contented and happy natives were guided by enlightened, paternalistic and selfless colonial servants, towards a more 'modern' and a more civilized way of life. Peter Kilby evokes the scene so well one can almost hear the laughter of the carefree forced laborers:
'From 1957 to 1963 when the colonial overlords departed Africa, the leaders of the new states took possession of a not inconsiderable endowment of social and economic assets to apply to the task of development. Thousands of economically non-viable communities had been welded into relatively strong national economies which had been enjoying continuous growth in per capita income over the preceding fifteen years. Population densities were low and the countries were self-sufficient in food production, indeed enjoyed rapidly growing agricultural exports. Society was characterized by an absence of violence, by functioning parliamentary democracy and by a high degree of equality in the distribution of income.' (Kilby 1983:246)

Such was the colonial legacy, as imagined by Kilby. Alas, the dream has since been shattered. 'Two decades of political and economic mismanagement has seen the squandering of these assets, and in the process transformed a blest future into a purgatorial present'. Kilby holds 'the African decision-makers - political leaders, their economic advisers, (and) civil servants' squarely responsible. Moreover, he answers his own rhetorical question whether they were 'unaware of what they were doing or the consequences therefrom?'; with a resounding 'No!' (Kilby 1983:246). It is not easy to take seriously the proposition that the 'African decision-makers' knowingly and wilfully destroyed Africa's wonderful colonial legacy, but Kilby does not have his tongue in cheek; he is, alas, relentlessly serious.

To avoid any confusion regarding who is responsible for the present debacle, Kilby is at pains to point out that neo-conservative economists like Peter Bauer (and Kilby!) are not to blame. Indeed, Kilby sees that 'in the writings of P.T. Bauer' the whole sad story had been foreseen 30 years ago (Kilby 1983:250) only to be wilfully ignored. Why people should have behaved so perversely is a matter of concern for Kilby, but must remain a mystery, and someone else's responsibility, since 'whatever the well-springs of observed behaviour are, they are beyond the competence of the economist'! (Kilby 1983:251).

If Kilby has gone a little over the top in his enthusiasm, his basic analysis is quite consistent with a wide range of more solemn and measured pronouncements, as epitomised by the World Bank's major reviews of the African crisis. (IBRD 1982; 1984) Although these are not so foolish as to charge the African elites with the wilful and intentional destruction of their economies, they are entirely in agreement with the view that the chief cause of Africa's problems lies in the 'market distortions' that have been generated by internal political forces using state policies to serve their own short-term interests. According to this view, if the African governments would only learn to adopt allocatively efficient, market oriented policies they could, even now, regain socially desirable and politically defensible growth paths. In light of this 'fact', the Bank urges aid donors to use larger sticks and juicier carrots to enforce the universally beneficial discipline of the international market.

This argument has received widespread support even though the evidence on which it is based is quite incapable of supporting its sweeping conclusions and in spite of the fact that its own political analysis is not reconcilable with the 'solution' that it proposes. Unfortunately such fatal flaws are all too easily overlooked when apparently thorough empirical studies reach conclusions that are not only convenient, in that they place the primary blame on 'them', but that also appear to confirm
'common sense'. Thus, most 'old Africa hands' know enough stories of 'bureaucratic bungling' or of 'corruption in high places' to nod almost involuntarily in agreement and to dismiss skeptics as ideologues seeking to deny the obvious in the face of the evidence. Partly as a result, the evidence on which these conclusions are based has received remarkably little critical attention, the more so since the state has also become the main enemy in the opinion of many radical observers of Africa, so that even in these quarters the Bank's evidence has been accepted with more enthusiasm and less care than one might have expected.

The 'new orthodoxy', that is enshrined in the Bank's reports rests on three main pillars: (1) theoretical assertions drawn from a resurgent neo-classical theory emphasizing 'old truths' that rely heavily on the static theory of comparative advantage; (2) historical/empirical evidence drawn from the global development debate, and summarized in the alleged 'lessons' to be learned from the 'Newly Industrializing Countries' (NICs); and (3) detailed African evidence relating to specific projects and sectors (Bienefeld 1982; 1985). Unfortunately, these three pillars cannot support the weight of the edifice that has been erected upon them.

The Theoretical Foundations of the New Orthodoxy

There have, in fact, been no major theoretical breakthroughs. The logical validity of earlier well established objections to the relatively unqualified application of market principles to developing countries remains largely unchallenged. However, these objections have been temporarily swept aside on the grounds that the empirical evidence from the developing world has allegedly shown them to be insignificant, or even irrelevant, in actual practice. This is the basis on which the dissenting opinions of the development economists have been comprehensively beaten into retreat - or so the orthodoxy contends.

In reality the conclusions that can be drawn from the empirical evidence are highly contentious. However, as global economic conditions deteriorated and as the international economy became more politicised, the 'orthodox' interpretation of that evidence has come to dominate. It has done so, not because it is intellectually superior, but because the international financial institutions and the monetarist governments that came to power in the main industrial countries, saw a radical reassertion of market principles as an essential means of protecting the value of their accumulated assets. Accordingly, they used their power over research funding, over publications and especially over credit to propel their interpretation of the facts to a dominant position. In a volatile, highly politicised world where those who had power over credit effectively had power over life and death this was not so difficult. Practical people and struggling governments were gradually induced, or forced, to accept their story and the policy prescriptions that followed from it.

This was no victory of reason or logic, however. Some leading neo-classical theorists have been scathing in their judgment of this neo-conservative dogma. Speaking of its application to Britain, Professor Frank Hahn concluded bitterly that:
'In Britain, where politicians now follow gurus rather than arguments we are all set to rely on the invisible hand doing a job which, in practice, it will not and cannot do.' (Hahn 1982:12)

'In this country it is very likely that the non-fulfillment of the vastly exaggerated claims for the invisible hand will lead to a reaction in which the hand, to our great loss, will be amputated forever. The age of the prophets and witches is upon us and such an age is not friendly to reason.' (Hahn 1982:21)

If this was true for a relatively sophisticated economy like Britain's, it was doubly true of most of the developing world. Indeed, for many countries reliance on the 'magic of the market' has already turned into a slow-motion nightmare as Chile, Jamaica, Sri Lanka and the Sudan can attest. In all cases, a few good years have been followed by ever more intractable problems.

There has thus been no revolution in the realm of theory. Infant industry and even infant economy arguments continue to provide theoretically legitimate grounds in many less developed countries for extensive and extended state management of their economic links with the outside world; the theory of capital markets still recognizes that the long term structural changes implied by the process of economic development often provide legitimate grounds for intervention in capital markets; and in areas like education, technology, marketing, land reform and incomes policy it remains true that most developing countries could reap large potential benefits from effective state involvement. The change has come because the orthodoxy argues that, in practice, such intervention has not actually reaped those hypothetical benefits, while the market has actually 'delivered the goods'. That claim rests first and foremost on the orthodox interpretation of the miraculous growth achieved by the Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) of East Asia, but also on a long list of sector and project specific examples that are used to reinforce the same conclusion.

The Global Evidence: NIC 'Miracles' and Socialist 'Disasters'

As regards the story of the NICs, these were portrayed as living proof of the proposition that, even in the latter half of the twentieth century, market forces could and would produce rapid and egalitarian development if only they were allowed to do so by states with the courage and the wisdom to pursue 'appropriate' market oriented policies, including: a neutral policy vis-a-vis the international economy, thus allowing international prices to shape internal prices and patterns of resource allocation; a minimum of state intervention in the domestic economy; and a policy that allowed wages to find their international competitive level (Bienefeld 1986). These long established theoretical propositions were now revived as the basis for practical policy recommendations for Africa, on the strength of the claim that the NICs had demonstrated their validity in the modern world.

However, accumulating detailed evidence has called this interpretation of the NICs into question. In fact, the two most successful and most enduring NICs, Taiwan and South Korea, have been shown to have been highly interventionist in production (heavy, technologically advanced and/or strategic industries); in capital markets (ownership of commercial and investment banking;
extensive use of discretionary credit subsidies; extensive direction and control of domestic and foreign investment); in trade (highly variable tariffs, quotas and discretionary licensing); in marketing (highly integrated marketing conglomerates on the Japanese model); and in research and development (direct and indirect financing) (White and Wade 1985; Bienefeld 1986).

This new evidence tells a rather different story, namely that a few NICs have been able to achieve a remarkable economic success because they were able to achieve and sustain a high degree of national coherence in their economic policies, at a time when international economic pressures were intensifying and when growing unemployment, falling real wages, falling commodity prices and rising debt burdens were forcing most economies to abandon long term structural objectives in favour of short term crisis management. In this setting these economies were able to maintain an investment climate that was relatively favorable and capable of supporting long term strategic objectives that aimed to sustain a very ambitious and technologically oriented process of industrialization. Moreover, this allowed them to use their access to foreign loan capital to finance that process and to strengthen a process of accumulation that has raised their general technological capability and their productivity, while also increasing their economic flexibility and improving the pattern of their comparative advantage. Moreover, this extremely rapid industrial growth was, in each case, combined with a highly state directed agricultural development policy that raised agricultural productivity and rural incomes while retaining enough labour on the land to allow quasi full employment conditions to raise real wages steadily in spite of the continued suppression of independent trade unions.

Within this context, their relative economic success has allowed them gradually to liberalise their economies at the margins, so that this liberalization should be seen more as the consequence than as the cause of their success. Throughout the past twenty years, both of these NICs have consciously followed a 'Japanese strategy', just as Japan once consciously followed a 'German strategy' that was rooted in the nationalist economic theories of List. From this perspective, these economies actually illustrate the vital importance for successful development of strong, coherent nationally determined and controlled policies that allow resource allocation and the links with the outside world to be managed in the national interest.

Of course this does not mean that any form of intervention, by any type of state, is either desirable or justifiable. The national economic spheres that were created by these economies were used to mount a massive, even ruthless, drive for economic growth, with scant explicit regard for social or political considerations. 'Trickle down' was seen as the only legitimate and sustainable means of dispersing welfare and even its degree was managed by the state by means of its labour market policies. Moreover, demands for political liberalization continue to be largely repressed, which is why their economic success has not been mirrored in a similar political success; it is also why their performance is not easy to compare with that of other economies, since much depends on the weights that the observer attaches to material, social or political benefits.

Indeed, the most disturbing aspect of the NIC experience may be the possibility that a high degree of 'national coherence', centrally defined, may be both essential for rapid development and incompatible with a liberal political regime. This could be so because any liberal regime would inevitably encourage those individuals (or interest groups) who are best placed to take advantage of
the opportunities offered by the international economy to use the political process to assert their right to do just that. As this would usually include the most articulate and most powerful groups in society, this would inevitably undermine support for any coherent national policy that asked people to forego such individual advantages and to accept the burden of membership of a poor and backward society; a burden that would dramatically reduce their personal opportunities and income prospects. Moreover, it would demand these sacrifices in return for benefits that are highly diffuse, uncertain and long delayed.

What this means it that an economy that has no such national policy, but integrates itself freely into the world economy, is not an 'economic unit' in any significant sense. Its citizens become a collection of individuals, each of whom effectively operates as a member of the international economy with no meaningful responsibilities towards his or her compatriots. Economically this evokes the neo-classical economist's dream of a world of perfect factor mobility, while politically it becomes the slogan of the international bourgeoisie, demanding to be given the 'right' to make optimum use of its skills and its assets. Moreover, these same forces are also at work within the world's socialist countries. We shall now turn briefly to the 'failure' of these 'statist' economies, which should logically be the mirror image of the success of the market driven NICs, according to the orthodox analysis.

It is an interesting feature of the orthodox argument that the 'failure' of the socialist countries has been much less systematically documented and less widely asserted by the international institutions than has the success of the NICs. The reason for this is likely to be linked to the fact that the available empirical evidence would not allow such a general claim to be sustained. This lack of systematic treatment, does not prevent frequent more informal, less rigorous references to 'socialist failure' in the Bank's Africa Reports. However, it does not use its own empirical data to make this claim more precise or persuasive because that data does not support such a claim, except for very carefully selected time periods.

In fact, the global post war economic record of the socialist countries world wide has been a relatively strong one, even though it is also true that the more prosperous among them have begun to experience new difficulties as their economies have become more complex and sophisticated. Even so, it remains a rather remarkable fact that between the beginning of the 1950s and 1972, when the developing country share of global manufacturing output only increased from 6.2% to 6.9%, in spite of the miraculous growth of the NICs, that of the socialist countries rose from 10% to 28% (UNIDO 1974), and this despite the fact that this period witnessed the capitalist world's most rapid and sustained growth in history. This shift is so massive that the essential point would remain even after one took account of the fact that 'eastern' and 'western' economic statistics are not strictly comparable. For all its problems and short-comings, the economic experience of the socialist bloc cannot be used to support the general case of the new orthodoxy.

Within the developing world the picture is similar. Indeed, the success of the Chinese economy has been such that it is not uncommon to see its data excluded from IMF/World Bank data tables on the grounds that its size, combined with its relatively rapid growth, would completely alter overall trends; in the same vein, a recent issue of the "Amex Bank Review" concludes that China's growth record compared very favorably with that of other developing countries over the whole of the post
1949 period, even including the 'disastrous' years of the cultural revolution (Amex 1987). It adds that if one looks beyond growth to poverty eradication its record is even more impressive, a conclusion that has also been reached for the socialist countries more generally (Horvat 1972). Indeed, almost all of the real 'failures' have been cases like Vietnam, Angola, Nicaragua or Mozambique, whose 'failure' is directly linked to imperialist military intervention.

This might serve as a reminder that in the current world simple growth comparisons can be highly misleading. In so far as countries that accept the IMF's 'medicine' do appear to do better in terms of growth during this period, it is important to remember that this will in part be a direct reflection of the obvious fact that under current international circumstances, access to credit will inevitably have a significant, positive impact on short term growth. Conversely, the fact that countries that do not 'play ball', will frequently be the victims, not only of benign neglect, but of punitive sanctions and even of active subversion, will evidently reduce their economic performance.

Analytically, the more successful socialist countries, like the NICs, provide further support for the thesis that "national coherence" is vitally important for achieving rapid and sustained development, especially during its early stages. Moreover, as in the case of the NICs, the maintenance of this coherence involves both benefits and costs. On the one hand, it may be vitally important in allowing a technologically backward society to overcome its underdevelopment in a fiercely competitive world; on the other hand, it again appears as an inevitable source of political friction because, even in a socialist setting, it requires individual citizens to accept that their incomes, their opportunities and their welfare are inextricably bound up with the accident of their birth in a relatively poor society.

As in the NICs, so in the socialist countries, this generates political tension. In both cases one might expect that pressure to be directly proportional to: the size of the material sacrifice that membership of the nation is thought to involve; the number of people who feel that they should - and could - have access to a superior "international" standard of living; and, finally, the strength (or weakness) of the belief that there are significant "national advantages" to be gained from a "nationally coherent" economic strategy. Together these factors are likely to produce a tendency for such pressures to increase as development proceeds. Moreover they will ensure that the apparently "technical" question of whether there are potential benefits to be gained from a nationally coherent strategy, will always remain a highly "political" one because different social groups or class fractions will differ in their willingness to accept any argument that suggests that certain nationalist policies might be beneficial to their society's development.

In conclusion it seems safe to say that neither the development experience of the NICs, nor that of the socialist countries can provide a sound empirical basis for the new orthodoxy's assertions regarding the generalized virtues of market oriented policies. This leaves only the micro level evidence drawn from individual projects or sectors to justify the orthodoxy's theoretical assertions?

**The Micro Economic Evidence**
This third pillar of the new orthodoxy's argument is easily the least satisfactory. It consists of a seemingly endless catalogue of "failed" projects or sectoral "disasters", in which the state is said to have played a significant role. However, although this catalogue contains many deplorable cases, it cannot be used to support the orthodoxy's general conclusions. In fact this evidence only serves to knock down a quite absurd straw man who allegedly argues that any type of economic intervention by any sort of state is desirable. It does not challenge the argument that rapid and sustained development may require - or benefit from - the implementation of a coherent national strategy involving systematic intervention by a state representing a nation's long term interests. Indeed, that argument would actually lead one to expect little benefit from state intervention in a world such as that of Africa where: most states primarily represented certain specific sectional interests; some of those sectional interests were closely linked to powerful international interests; the administrative capacity of state institutions was relatively weak; the economy's technological base was extremely weak; and the external world was economically and politically volatile.

In practice this means that each "failure" at the project or sectoral level has to be analyzed in the context of a particular set of national and international circumstances. When this is done, the reasons for failure and the lessons to be drawn are found to vary from case to case. Moreover, the lessons that are drawn from individual case studies will generally depend less on the facts of the case than on the chosen analytical "model" that is used to answer the 'counterfactual' question of what would have happened if something had been done differently. However, the plausibility of these models must rest on the strength of the results of systematic studies of "similar" problems. The number and reliability of such studies, the unanimity of their results and the nature and the range of the causal relationships that they were prepared to consider thus becomes critically important.

Put this way, it becomes evident that if such sets of studies are to yield lessons about the optimal mix of states and markets, they must somehow exclude, or control for, the effects of other significant variables. This might mean looking separately at various areas of the economy such as agriculture, education, transport, or, more narrowly, small-holder agriculture, large scale agriculture, or agricultural marketing. In fact, the two most comprehensive World Bank Reports on Africa break down their discussion of micro cases in this way and, in doing so, acknowledge that in virtually every case the results of existing micro studies are quite incompatible with any crude states versus markets view. In fact, the Bank's 1983 World Development Report concluded that "the key factor determining the efficiency of an enterprise is not whether it is publicly or privately owned, but how it is managed". (IBRD 1983:20)

However, the fact that the Bank's conclusions may be so heavily qualified when it is directly discussing its detailed micro level evidence, does not prevent it from making endless references to specific micro level 'failures' to buttress its general pro-market argument. This would be less serious, had the validity of these general conclusions been established on theoretical or macro empirical grounds since, in that case, specific micro level 'failures' would be being used, quite legitimately, as mere corroborative evidence. However, since the Bank's general conclusions have not been established, this micro level evidence must carry the main burden of those general conclusions. This it simply cannot do. In fact, the only general conclusion that it could support is
that it is always important to adjust policy choices regarding the choice between state and market to reflect specific national and international circumstances.

The Policy Prescriptions of the New Orthodoxy

Since the basic arguments and the evidence on which the new orthodoxy is based are deeply flawed it will come as no surprise to learn that its policy prescriptions do not inspire confidence. Not only are the policies that are now proposed as "solutions" for Africa essentially the same policies that have led to the present debacle, but they also contain internal contradictions which undermine their plausibility and reveal fatal flaws in the underlying analysis.

The main contradiction emerges in the Bank's discussion of the problem of political agency. Who is to implement the "new and better" market oriented policies? The answer turns out to be a more efficient and better supported technocratic elite, but this is never reconciled with the simultaneous argument that the "misuse" of state power by a self-serving urban elite has been the major cause of Africa's current crisis. There is simply no explanation of why the Bank believes that those same corrupt, self-seeking elites should suddenly be transformed politically into the modernizing elites on which the Bank had pinned such high hopes not so long ago.

This contradiction is never resolved but it is implicitly recognised in the Bank's heavy emphasis on the need for a more effective and co-ordinated "aid consortium" whose "advice" is backed by bigger sticks (tougher credit/aid conditions) and juicier carrots (additional funds in the special facility). Its main purpose appears to be to strengthen the 'political will' of governments that might otherwise be diverted from the pursuit of "efficiency" by domestic social or political considerations. It is easy to see that this approach essentially reflects Kilby's nostalgia for the firm but gentle hand of colonialism. Moreover, like Kilby's imaginary benign colonialism, the new orthodoxy's implicit paternalism is such that it never examines or even entertains the possibility that the interests of the aid agencies and of international capital could conflict with Africa's national development objectives. The sources of this myopia lie deep in the ideological premises of the orthodox view.

In fact, the more effective international supervision of Africa's economies can be proposed as a solution to Africa's problems only because the rational pursuit of efficiency, defined in terms of international opportunity cost as measured in international prices, is held to serve individual, regional, national and international interests simultaneously. Clearly such a perspective excludes, by definition, the possibility that pressures emanating from the competitive international market may have been responsible for the problems or "irrationalities" of Africa's post-independence development. If market outcomes define "efficiency", and if that "efficiency" is in everyone's interests, then any problems must be due to "distortions" emanating from outside the market, notably from "politics". This convenient tautology allows the Bank to exclude from discussion the otherwise rather obvious fact that the pernicious urban elites, who are made to carry such a disproportionate share of the blame for Africa's current troubles, were and are generally strongly encouraged and supported by forces emanating directly from the international economy. This is a serious problem, because although it would be wrong to present these domestic political forces as
mere appendages of these international forces, it is much more indefensible to portray them as independent "local" phenomena.

The 1984 World Bank Report (IBRD 1984) reveals this contradiction more clearly than its predecessor (IBRD 1981) because it combines a heavy emphasis on the need for a strong, unified "aid consortium" insisting on "appropriate adjustment policies", with periodic acknowledgments that it is essential for a country first to establish its national "strategic development objectives" before it can reap the benefits of the technical expertise made available through such an "aid consortium". The problem is obvious. In effect countries are to define their national development objectives, while a co-ordinated "aid consortium" is to ensure that they only receive aid and credit so long as that choice is compatible with the "appropriate adjustment policies", as defined by the agencies. Effectively this leaves virtually no scope for genuine strategic choice by sovereign states. First, because the definition of strategic development objectives is neither chronologically nor technically separable from the day to day process of policy formulation and implementation. Second, because the technical expertise offered here as a solution to Africa's problems strongly implies acceptance of an open, market dominated development strategy. Thus, any country that actually sought to pursue a coherent national strategy, on the South Korean model, would find itself constantly at odds with the strong internationalist premises underpinning that expertise.

In effect the adoption of the market oriented policies offered by the new orthodoxy would tend to reinforce the status of the African economies as relatively passive appendages of the international economy. In some cases this could be beneficial, reducing the damage that could otherwise be inflicted by certain internal interest groups. However, it would also probably undermine Africa's ability to build those political coalitions that will ultimately have to develop their capacity to sustain coherent national development strategies that are both economically dynamic and sensitive to that particular society's long term social and political needs. For most of Africa today, the central problem for analysis is to understand better what policies would assist in preparing the ground for the emergence of such coalitions. It is not to prescribe in detail, how such nationalist governments should behave, since there will never be a single specifiable optimum, especially not for all of Africa's countries. In this context it is likely that there will be cases in which an integrationist, liberal policy may be better than any others that are actually available. But where that is so such economies must resign themselves to an intensified dependence on an increasingly difficult international market in which their position will long remain extremely precarious and their chances of genuine development slim.

Against this, the new orthodoxy argues that the African countries should accept that they are appendages of the international market and should ride that market's coat-tails to prosperity. As it tells the story, the signals emanating from that market should be given a dominant role in the determination of resource allocation, since that would induce the most appropriate structural changes, would raise technological capabilities, would foster efficiency and would fairly reward effort. Moreover, if this were done generally, everyone could expect to move steadily up a global technological ladder, either occupying niches vacated by others or leap-frogging directly into more advanced areas. This is a plausible story in a full employment world; in the real world of today it is more akin to a fairy tale.
In the real world of the 1980s Africa's relatively marginal economies are more likely to find themselves trapped in a buyer's market for cheap labour embodied in a restricted range of primary commodities or, optimistically, in a narrow range of skill intensive manufactured goods. Deeply in debt, the African economies will have little choice but to give a high priority to these export activities, even though their populations may be starving and export prices may be collapsing. Meanwhile the resulting financial squeeze and import famine will destroy local markets, decimate infrastructure, undermine social welfare, destabilise currencies and provoke political instability. The resulting deterioration in the investment climate will make a mockery of the Bank's promise of greater efficiency and increased inflows of foreign capital.

Most countries in Africa have now fallen (or been enticed) into a trap from which there is no easy escape. Moreover, there should be no doubt that the same international agencies and the same international market forces that are now being portrayed as the "solution" to their problems, were instrumental in encouraging and financing them along the road to ruin. Today's African countries are literally trapped within economic structures that were almost entirely built with "expert" approval and with international finance between 1960 and 1980. Most of these structures became unviable because under the international conditions prevailing after the mid 1970s, these countries could no longer earn nearly enough foreign exchange to meet the minimum import levels required to keep them functioning effectively. The consequent import shortages reduce rates of capacity utilization, increase corruption and destroy infrastructure which raises costs of production and further undermines economic viability. Once confronted with this "new" situation, most African governments faced an impossible choice: they could either allow their earlier investments to collapse, because in retrospect, many of these now appeared as costly "mistakes"; or they could squeeze more foreign exchange out of agriculture in a desperate effort to avert such a collapse. Unfortunately, although both of these options are extremely painful, neither is likely to be viable.

The option of "writing off" their earlier non-agricultural investments is effectively blocked: first, because it would be almost impossible to reverse the associated social and physical changes embodied in patterns of urbanization, communication, education, occupation, land use and land ownership; second, because those who financed (and approved) the projects in question took care to "socialise" the risk of failure, so that in most cases governments would continue to be liable for debts incurred by projects even after they were closed down. (IBRD 1985:114) One should not underestimate the impact of this strait-jacket which has sharply impaired market flexibility by reducing the otherwise normal possibility of transforming a "failed" project into a profitable, productive and successful one, by revaluing its assets through sale by a receiver. This possibility is now generally blocked in Africa, because those who financed and approved the projects in question now refuse to accept the consequences of their miscalculations in the form of a capital loss. One suspects that this is not unrelated to their present anxiety to place the blame for failure on the African governments and elites.

Under these circumstances most governments have progressively tightened the squeeze on agriculture (or mining), in a desperate attempt to minimise the damage done by, what they could only hope were, temporary international economic difficulties; a hope that was and continues to be, even today, systematically reinforced by the international agencies who has treated each phase of the international crisis as an exogenously induced aberration from a stable growth path to which the
world about to return, if only people would allow the market to work. While it is true, of course, that the situations that most of the African governments are seeking to defend by means of this intense surplus extraction from agriculture does include the maintenance of the import intensive, western lifestyles of their urban elites and the running of large, technologically dependent and relatively inefficient industries. But these are not some 'local' aberration; they are an integral part of the "neo-colonial" development patterns long espoused by the Bank and still at the centre of the "new orthodoxy". The Bank's recent awakening to the problems that dependency theory has been has anticipating for decades has come only because the peasantry has finally asserted its independence by withdrawing from the market, thereby leaving the African governments and their creditors with even less foreign exchange and an even more unmanageable economic problem.

In this context the denunciation of the anti-agrarian bias of African governments has become an intellectual growth industry, spanning the ideological spectrum. Unfortunately, most of the resulting discussion ignores the above macro-economic and historical context and treats the matter as if it was simply a matter of making perverse and "economically irrational" choices. For the orthodox view, which assumes that market tend towards 'efficient' outcomes, the mere existence of such irrationality leaves only two tasks: that of identifying the political interest groups responsible for such distortions; and that of asserting that the market - and the international agencies that enforce its rationality - represent a solution to the problem.

These conclusions become wholly untenable the moment one drops the indefensible assumptions on which the argument is based. Quite different conclusions follow, once it is recognised: that the choices made by the African governments were made under conditions of considerable uncertainty; that their choices were heavily influenced by foreign investors and by those who control international finance; and that these latter actors often have interests that conflict with a national economy's desire to improve its relative pattern of comparative advantage and to capture the external economies derivable from certain patterns of investment, trade and growth. In a volatile and intensely competitive world economy, in which unemployment is an endemic problem, these conflicts are likely to be particularly acute.

It is ironic that the new orthodoxy's paean of praise to the virtues of the market are being delivered to African governments caught in the situation described above. If a neo-classical theorist of Frank Hahn's standing can express the fear that in Britain "the vastly exaggerated claims for the invisible hand will lead to a reaction in which the hand, to our great loss, will be amputated forever", then one may confidently assert that this applies a fortiori to today's Africa. It is even more ironic that large sections of the left have chosen this period to discover the 'historically progressive market'.

The Radical Left's View of the African Crisis

In the leftist debate on Africa there has also been a dramatic shift of emphasis, away from the problems created for poor societies by their insertion into a difficult international market and towards the problems created by attempts to use the power of the state to influence the development process. Ironically, the two most widespread positions to have emerged from this debate share most of the central conclusions of the neo-classical orthodoxy, draw on the same evidence, and even
share some of the same assumptions and contradictions. These two positions are epitomized by the 'Chicago Marxism' of Bill Warren and the 'peasantism' of Gavin Williams.

Bill Warren develops a highly teleological version of Marxism, arguing that capitalism in the developing world is historically progressive and is now passing through its early, brutalising phase in much the same way as it once did in the industrialized countries. Attempts to build socialism during this phase are denounced as "premature", reflecting a petit bourgeois populism that will leave the people worse off in the long run (Warren 1982). Paradoxically Warren nevertheless calls on the proletariat in the developing countries to struggle for socialism, presumably on the grounds that "the world's a stage" on which everyone should play their allotted parts. In fact the only political position that is consistent with Warren's analysis is one that supports capitalism in the developing world. The resulting "Chicago Marxism" essentially reproduces the arguments of the new orthodoxy, differing only in that it has 'socialism' waiting in the wings, waiting to enter ready-made when capitalism has ceased to be historically progressive.

The peasantist position shrinks from this terrifying determinism and seeks refuge in a libertarian socialism in which popular grass-roots movements combine, without extensive state intervention, to produce a superior, more dynamic, more socially desirable pattern of development than that associated with capitalism. With its philosophical roots in anarchism, this position is as vociferous as the new orthodoxy in its denunciation of the state, of bureaucracy and of the evils of "from the top down" socialism. However it also refuses to embrace the market and rails bitterly against the evils of most existing large, oligopolistic markets. Instead it extols the virtues of small decentralised markets that encourage participation and enhance flexibility, thus echoing the conclusions of the most fundamentalist defenders of the market, the literal reactionaries, who wish to turn the clock back to a Victorian world of atomized competition. Unfortunately it is hard to see who but a strong and coherent state could create and defend the conditions needed for realising that dream in the modern world.

**The Theoretical Debate on the Left**

As in the case of the new orthodoxy, the shift in the left's conclusions is not based on some major theoretical breakthrough, but is due to a shift of emphasis induced by newly emerging empirical and historical evidence. The underlying issues are as old as the theory of socialism. They include: the potential conflict between the individual and the state; the problem of the commensuration of labour and effort; the reconciliation of group interests and the general interest; the simultaneous need for economic flexibility and for macro-economic co-ordination; and the need to deal more generally with the contradictions of socialism. These issues will be a focus of debate wherever socialism is taken seriously and peoples' conclusions will always shift to reflect their changing circumstances. Such changes thus do not signal a move towards ultimate truth, since there are no definitive or universal answers to these problems. At least, not so long as one acknowledges that the paradise of communism, in which history ends because the absence of scarcity resolves all problems, is not a real time or place, but a heuristic device, an ideal type, constructed to illustrate the logical implications of an argument.
This means that this most recent shift in the leftist debate about Africa does not bring us nearer the 'ultimate truth' even if the arguments are backed by exhaustive quotations from *Das Kapital*. It merely indicates the changing relative preferences of those currently confronting the perennial contradictions of socialism. Moreover, to begin to understand these changes one must consider the material and political circumstances of the protagonists in this debate.

Recent changes in emphasis have espoused more individualistic resolutions of these issues. Thus, the now dominant positions: reveal a reduced tolerance of the degree to which a state can legitimately 'coerce' sections of society in the name of a general interest; discount the relative dangers and inflate the expected benefits of deepening an economy's entanglement with the international market and of increasing reliance on internal markets; tend to see individuals more as autonomous, not as socially defined, entities; and attach relatively greater value to the ability of these individuals to make sovereign choices than to the material or social outcomes of those choices.

Although the links are complex and indirect, it is possible to see the changing circumstances of the participants in this debate reflected in these changes in emphasis. Thus, among the intellectuals and workers of the developed world, thirty years of relative peace, prosperity and liberal democracy have weakened the belief in the need for painful choices, with the result that support for a socialist alternative has waned and is largely restricted to a utopian socialism that simultaneously delivers greater individual freedom, more leisure, better ecological balance, improved material welfare, together with greater safety, less boredom and reduced pressure at work. In these circles, any evidence that a state is seeking to intensify labour or to increase the physical efficiency of production is taken as evidence of 'state capitalism', while the absence of sufficient material affluence to resolve all serious contradictions is taken to define 'premature socialism'.

In the case of third world intellectuals a similar shift reflects rather different circumstances. These include: a growing despair at the apparent inability of state policies to protect people from the growing turmoil in the international economy; a rapid increase in the costs imposed on many middle class individuals by crisis dominated nationalist policies that widen the disparity between local conditions and those thought to be available in the international market; the greatly increased power to influence policy choices that the debt crisis has given those metropolitan centres that control access to vital foreign exchange resources; and, finally, the widely disseminated perception that those who have 'followed the market' have avoided the problems of the past decade and have, instead, experienced the miraculous growth of the NICs.

Thus the leftist debate has also changed in response to certain interpretations of the recent historical record. In the metropolitan countries that history was, until recently, dominated by a stable, democratic and widely diffused prosperity and these characteristics were widely perceived as the natural features of a mature capitalism. In the developing world, the phenomenal growth of the NICs was also widely accepted on the left as evidence that capitalism had lost none of its power to act in a 'historically progressive' manner. In this context a concern with capitalist crisis was easily reduced to a concern with the 'ultimate crisis' when a fully mature capitalism would give birth to its socialist offspring. Emphasis shifted to the 'historically progressive' aspect of capitalism and away from its current contradictions. In some of the developing world (and in parts of the socialist world)
the idea of a historically progressive capitalism, moving more or less steadily and inexorably towards the stable and desirable conditions associated with 'mature capitalism', also exerted a powerful influence. Intervening crises were trivialized and their consequences all too readily accepted as the 'price of historical progress'.

**The Global Evidence as seen by the Left**

The two dominant strands of leftist analysis thus essentially emphasise the same global trends as the defenders of the new orthodoxy. Ironically their interpretation of that evidence is often more extreme in asserting the historically progressive and economically efficient nature of recent capitalist development in the developing world. Moreover, they are generally quite happy with highly 'optimistic' interpretations of the NICs and Warren, in particular, extrapolates various statistical series to support his case that capitalism is developing rapidly, with a casual bravado that would be hard to find in a World Bank document (compare Warren 1980 and Morawetz 1980).

It is the Warrenite school that has had the widest impact on the left's view of development. It asserts that 'the market' has been a generally powerful and positive force in the developing world, inducing a 'capitalist development' that is essentially the same as that experienced in the presently industrialised countries. That capitalist development is treated as a historically and geographically undifferentiated process, always recognizable by certain structural changes, most notably the proletarianization of labour. Since the statistics show a proliferation of wage relations in the developing world, Warren concludes that capitalist development is progressing rapidly.

Warren ridicules those who oppose this 'historically progressive' process on the grounds that it involves suffering, unemployment or insecurity, because these are the inevitable characteristics of early capitalist development. Only utopian fools would think otherwise. However, his rhetoric removes some vitally important questions entirely from view. These include among others: How much suffering should one expect? Over what period? What assurance is there that, at the end of the road, lies the more acceptable form of capitalism generally associated with the industrialised countries, much less 'socialism'? Since these questions lie at the heart of the dependency debate, those who tread in Warren's footsteps should not be surprised that they find difficulty in making sense of that debate.

Surprisingly, the importance of a 'nationally coherent strategy' for development is actually acknowledged by Warren but, instead of becoming a matter for analysis or for political struggle, it is automatically resolved by the universal and undifferentiated process of capitalist development that will inevitably generate both a revolutionary proletariat and a national bourgeoisie. Moreover, from this perspective, that national bourgeoisie is the only foundation on which an effective national development policy could be built. While this may be true in some cases, the conclusion is neither self-evident nor universal. Moreover, even if accepted, it would still leave many questions regarding the policies and the political coalitions that could accelerate or modify the effects of this historical process.
As regards the experience of the socialist countries, this leftist literature is again more extreme in its assertions that these have generally been failures. In the African context, Tanzania has been singled out for particular attention in this respect. Indeed, its widely announced 'failure' has led many to lose faith in 'socialist' or 'statist' solutions for Africa. Brett summarises the position clearly:

"On the other hand, perhaps the greatest structural problems have emerged in countries like Tanzania, where the commitment to state intervention involved, in addition, the forcible repression of a wide range of capitalist interests. Here state failure has meant that production has fallen significantly over the past decade (Coulson 1982). In the longer term, this failure of state planning has discredited the confident predictions of the 'left' at the end of the 1960s when it asserted that it was to be the state-controlled economies like Tanzania as opposed to the capitalist dominated ones like Kenya, which were going to be the most likely to succeed. (Brett 1986:28)

However the empirical basis for this frequently cited conclusion is more than a little ambiguous. Although Tanzania's situation is now a desperately difficult one, and although it has fallen far short of the hopes once invested in it, available statistics simply do not support Brett's premise. (Bienefeld 1982) Thus the World Bank's 1984 Report on Africa shows Tanzania as ranking among the top 20% of African countries in terms of growth, and among the top 10% in terms of almost every social indicator available. (IBRD 1984; Stat. Appendix) Elsewhere (IBRD 1982:112) Tanzania's GDP growth rate is shown to rank third among thirty low income countries, between 1960 and 1980. Even Tanzania's agricultural performance, which has come in for persistent and severe criticism, appears as rather better than average in these statistics. Moreover, it is highly significant that until the early 1980s this outcome was achieved without undermining the country's political stability or the leadership's popular support and without widespread repression (ILO/JASPA 1978; 1982).

Unfortunately little macro level empirical evidence enters these critical discussions on the left. Most evidence consists of long lists of project or sectoral 'failures', or of declining trends that provide no basis for comparative judgment. In a few cases, such as that of a study purporting to show a pervasive and serious decline in Tanzania's 'overall productivity' after 1967 (Jedruszek 1978), the conclusions continue to be quoted and reproduced even though they are pure artifacts of the author's statistical procedures (Bienefeld 1982).

The Project Specific Evidence of the Disillusioned Left

As regards the project level evidence these sections of the left rely upon many of the same 'disaster stories' used by the new orthodoxy to support similarly extreme anti-statist conclusions. Naturally the same objections apply. This evidence can no more support such conclusions when used by the left than it could when it was used by those defending the new orthodoxy. Moreover, this is true, even though many of the cases thus cited deserve attention because their closer analysis will undoubtedly improve our understanding of the limits of effective state intervention in today's Africa. However, before any lessons can be drawn from such studies, equally detailed studies must be undertaken to explore the difficulties standing in the way of the effective operation of markets in Africa today.
Ultimately, on the left, as on the right, the protagonists must recognise more clearly that serious debate must focus on defining that combination of states and markets that is most likely to achieve specific sets of objectives. This implies that in assessing experience at the project and sectoral levels, the link to wider development issues must always be explicitly considered and any critical assessment must show that the implied preferable alternative is and was both economically and politically feasible.

Unfortunately these rules are rarely observed in the discussion of Africa's micro level failures. Macro-economic constraints are frequently either ignored or caricatured; the problems of market failure are rarely investigated; and neither the economics nor the politics of 'the alternative' is usually established as either historically feasible or politically plausible. In fact, this part of the argument is generally given rather short shrift. Detailed case studies are quickly reduced to mere examples of state failure, to be lumped together with general assertions about socialist macro-economic failure (Tanzania, Mozambique) and market success (Kenya, the NICs). Having thus 'established' the 'problem', all that remains is to explain it politically, which is where this part of the left spends most of its effort.

**The Politics and Policies of the Disillusioned Left**

Given their mechanistic and teleological view of the global development process, these sections of the left are caught on the horns of a dilemma when they come to address the political implications of their argument. Either they remain socialists, concerned with the defence of the interests of the working class in its struggle with capital, or they draw the only logical conclusion consistent with their analysis, which is that, until the distant day when capitalism has ceased to be historically progressive, there is no conflict between the interests of capital and labour because historically progressive capital serves not only its own interests but also the long term interests of labour - just as the bourgeois economists have always argued. Faced with this stark choice, Warren and most of his disciples have chosen to deny the contradiction by asserting both sides of the argument with that special vehemence and acrimony often reserved for the defense of the indefensible.

Warren pioneered a particular form of doublespeak for this purpose. Thus, while militantly asserting his Marxism, his socialism and his radicalism, he heaps effusive praise on the ultra conservative analyses of Peter Bauer (Warren 1980:84,191,217,255) and arrives at identical conclusions; conclusions which he presents modestly as the logical implications of the empirical data' and which are summarized in the following passages:

"Far from curtailing growth to improve income distribution (the 'basic needs' approach), policy ought to (emphasis added - MB) accelerate growth to bring more rapidly into play the economic and institutional forces that tend to ensure that the more advanced societies are also the more egalitarian, and at higher absolute standards of living." (Warren 1980:206)

"Changing, and probably rising, income differentials are therefore likely to contribute to economic growth in various ways .... Such processes, although they aggravate income
inequality, are likely eventually, and perhaps immediately, to enhance material welfare for the majority." (Warren 1980:208)

"Moreover, the pursuit of income equality for its own sake is both unjust and undemocratic. It is unjust in that it would tend to equally reward different groups and individuals with different value judgments about consumption, leisure, intensity of work, acquisition of new skills, and the desirability of altering long-held customs and beliefs. It is undemocratic in that it is exceedingly unlikely that the current preoccupation of development economists with equality reflects the value judgments of the majority of the inhabitants of the Third World currently emerging into or adapting to the exchange economy." (Warren 1980:210)

"In sum, such increasing income inequalities as are manifest in the Third World .. cannot be assumed to be detrimental to the poorest sections of the community .. since there are strong grounds for arguing that these inequalities are as much a cause as a consequence of economic growth and therefore of an eventual absolute improvement in the living standards of the majority." (Warren 1980:211)

The problem is not that Warren reaches these conclusions, since he is hardly alone or original in that regard. The problem is that he reaches them as a self-avowed radical and Marxist, without appearing to realise that his conclusions effectively suspend and marginalise the contradiction between capital and labour on which his frequently asserted radicalism depends. Analytically this is a major problem. Politically it is the main reason why the book was received with such breathless enthusiasm in so many quarters. Had this same book been written by a mainstream economist it would undoubtedly have been treated as a rather crude and superficial restatement of a familiar argument.

In the Africa debate Gavin Kitching has recently chosen to follow in Warren's footsteps using a similar arguments stated in rather offensive manner to defend his own indefensible position. (Kitching 1985) At the centre of his discussion lies the lengthy dispute concerning the proper analytical assessment of Kenya's recent pattern of development.

Kitching begins his survey of that debate by pointing out that Leys had shifted from a rather pessimistic (Leys 1975) to a more undecided and potentially optimistic position (Leys 1978,1980) largely as a result of work that had documented the emergence of an indigenous capitalist class within Kenya (Cowen 1979,1980; Swainson 1980). According to Kitching, this work showed that "a proper historically-based political economy of Kenya, and of Africa in general must result in a much less deterministic conception of historical process" (Kitching 1985:121). On this basis he concluded that peripheral capitalism could potentially overcome its initial weaknesses, but explicitly denied the inevitability of such an outcome. This represents an eminently defensible position, but Kitching soon abandons the qualifications implicit in this rather careful conclusion and moves on to the bald assertion that "he is 'happy' to see capitalism developing in Kenya" apparently irrespective of whether it is able to overcome its initial weaknesses.

A closer look at his arguments reveals that Kitching's problem arises from two misconceptions. First, he wrongly assumes that all critics of capitalist development in Kenya necessarily deny the
very possibility of peripheral capitalist development; and second, he assumes a priori that there is no conceivable alternative to "capitalist" development in Kenya. Both of these misconceptions are ultimately derived from the problems of conceiving of these strategic choices in the dichotomous either/or terms discussed previously.

The problem appears clearly when Kitching turns to deal with two contributions which challenge Leys' new found optimism (Langdon 1977,1980; Kaplisky 1978,1980). He takes these severely to task for challenging Leys on the basis of empirical evidence pertaining to the detailed nature of Kenya's current capitalism. He calls the use of this evidence an "epistemological error" and then adds the gratuitous insult that this might possibly be due to the fact that "Langdon and Kaplinsky .. were perhaps not best placed, given their own professional backgrounds, to really understand either the thrust or the force of this revision (of Leys' views)" (Kitching 1985:122). He then repeats his claim that the empirical evidence offered by these critics is quite irrelevant to Kitching's lofty purpose, which is to consider the historically progressive mission of capitalism. Indeed, according to Kitching, even Leys himself seems not quite to understand these momentous matters, as his response to his critics is described as "an ambiguous mixture of assertion that (they) were not seeing the central point, with a willingness to challenge some of their empirical data". This, says Kitching, "has not helped clarity" (Kitching 1985:122).

Clarity is all but abolished, however, when Kitching goes on to argue that Leys' reconceptualisation was "not a product of some Althusserian 'theoretical practice" but was "derived from Leys's appropriation of the theoretical implications of Cowen's detailed empirical work, especially concerning the agricultural sector" (Kitching 1985:141).

After this heavy critique, Kitching's own conclusion comes as rather a shock, especially in view of the relatively nuanced and defensible position with which he began. Thus he declares:

>'that a socialist alternative to capitalism in Africa can be constructed by a sophisticated socialist movement created among the working classes of Africa as they slowly expand through time ... I believe, however, that the formation of a sophisticated socialist working class in Africa will take a long time and that a prolonged period of struggle against a developing capitalism there is one of the prerequisites of its creation. To that extent I am 'happy' to see continued capitalist development in black Africa (though this may or may not occur).' (Kitching 1985:147/148)

The arrogance of this position is only rivalled by its political emptiness. The reader is left to sympathise with Africa's oppressed people as they are called upon to 'struggle against capitalism .. for a long time', in order to become 'sophisticated socialists' (like Kitching one presumes), who understand that during this 'prolonged period' this struggle is almost certainly futile and should in any case not be allowed to succeed since victory would be contrary to their interests. And what, one wonders, of the degree of socialist sophistication that has developed in the working class of the of the U.S.A. by the 1980s? Is this what Kitching has in mind? Or does 'a long time' really mean 'a very, very long time, if ever'? This finale is the more ironic since Kitching set out explicitly to deal with the "crisis" of radicalism that has arisen because 'there is now a widespread loss of faith and belief that any alternative to capitalism in Africa is practically available.' (Kitching 1985:144)
The problem of this part of the leftist debate can only be understood if one asks how an otherwise sensible person can reach such a hopeless and meaningless conclusion. The answer lies in the pervasive tendency of this debate to polarise issues into 'either/or' propositions, which obscures a large part of the most important political terrain. By insisting that Kenya is 'capitalist' and by implying that this means that class forces will, therefore, necessarily develop in a particular and a predictable way, these formulations eliminate a range of critically important issues; by further insisting that the only desirable and feasible alternative is a 'real' socialism based on a 'sophisticated working class' the problem is compounded. While one can understand the threat that is posed for a revolutionary movement by a non-polarised, 'revisionist' approach to political analysis, it is folly to compress the struggle for social and political change into an 'all or nothing' mould, especially in today's black Africa.

That this problem lies at the heart of this aspect of the debate, is further illustrated by the fact that Kitching actually follows the above conclusion with a dire warning against dependency theory which, in a fit of Hegelian idealism, he incredibily identifies as the main obstacle to progressive change in Africa, in that:

"Before all this (development of sophisticated socialism! MB), there is a block in the road of socialist construction in Africa which must be removed and removed entirely - this is dependency theory." (Kitching 1985:148)

Dependency theory appears such a threat to this type of analysis because it addresses precisely those questions that are otherwise obscured by it, at such great cost. It poses the question whether capitalism, as it develops in the modern 'periphery', may have characteristics that are both sufficiently different from those envisaged by Marx, or from those of capitalism in the metropolitan economies, and sufficiently significant: to warrant specific analytical attention; to open up new political possibilities; and/or to justify different tactics and different policies. Marxist analyses that refuse to address such questions must expect to continue to exist in that special limbo of political irrelevance and analytical sterility of which Kitching and Warren are such sad examples.

In the final analysis, Kitching's review of the Kenya debate is as unhelpful as it is unpleasant. Because Kitching appears to believe that the entire dependency debate, and all the critics of Kenyan capitalism, assert the ultimate impossibility of peripheral capitalist development, he is unable to distinguish between the more modest objectives of the debate between Leys and his critics and his own concern to assess the long term historical possibility of capitalist development in Kenya. In actual fact the Kenya debate was concerned with the much narrower and more limited question of whether capitalist development was presently strengthening Kenya's embryonic national bourgeoisie as against international capital and its Kenyan compradors. Once this is recognised it is clear that there was no "epistemological error" at all. In fact the evidence used by Langdon and Kaplinsky was quite appropriate to this task and quite similar to that which had induced Leys to reach his rather more optimistic conclusion. Of course it is true that this same evidence could not resolve Kitching's question regarding the long term, historical potential for capitalist development in Kenya. But then no empirical evidence could accomplish that herculean task, as Kitching indirectly
acknowledges when he eventually concludes that "no theory of the state is possible for contemporary Kenya" since "that requires that we know what we cannot know".

The second source of Kitching's problems stems from his implicit denial that there could be any alternatives to capitalist development in Kenya. Only thus is it possible to understand how he can declare himself 'happy' to see capitalism developing in Kenya, even though he recognizes that this capitalist development 'may or may not happen'. In the final analysis his position would have been more persuasive and defensible had he confined himself to his earlier conclusion that national capitalist development in Kenya was possible, but not inevitable, and had then added the warning "that the state is not the agency of any single force in Kenya" but is a "continual site of struggle ..whose outcome is not foreclosed". (Kitching 1985:132)

Had Kitching reached this conclusion more clearly and quickly, he would have had more time to discuss some of the important issues that it raises and that are also the concern of many dependency theorists, including: the forms of state intervention or policy that might influence the speed of this process; the nature of the political coalition that might accelerate the speed and direction of accumulation in Kenya; and the influence of international forces on these various economic and political possibilities. As it is, these issues are entirely ignored.

Moreover, in spite of the fact that 'the state is not the agency of any single force in Kenya', no alternatives to capitalism are seriously discussed. The socialist alternative is summarily dismissed on the rather vague grounds that 'the various "socialist" experiments and regimes in black Africa have at best had ambigious results for the welfare of the peasants and workers who live under them, and at worst have been unambiguous disasters' (Kitching 1985: 144,145). Even though much the same could be said of capitalist regimes in Africa, Kitching concludes bravely that he is 'happy' with Africa's uncertain capitalist development. It is a shame that he does so without ever asking whether there have been any 'unambiguous disasters' among Africa's capitalist countries; and without considering the implications of the rather obvious fact that in Africa's 'socialist' countries the state is also 'a continual site of struggle' capable of yielding differing outcomes.

Ultimately, the problems encountered in this Kitching paper reflect the general problems with much of the left's current Africa debate. It is high time, in view of the continent's deepening crisis, that this debate abandon its teleological concerns with ultimate outcomes and address the task of defining strategies and policies that are worth struggling for because they allow the present crisis to be better managed. Whether the particular degrees or forms of state intervention that this involves constitutes 'state capitalism' or 'socialism', can be left to be debated by those with the leisure to do so. For the moment it is certainly unhelpful to suggest that Africa must simply choose between 'capitalism' or 'socialism'. Moreover, the suggestion that capitalism, as it presently operates in Africa, is 'the best practically and politically available option' is an excessive generalization that is neither historically, nor theoretically, definable. Politically it is either irrelevant or destructive.

If these are the analytical tasks that have to be addressed then both those on the right and the left would do well to remember that the present African crisis was most clearly foreseen by those looking at Africa from a dependency perspective in the 1960s. After all it was their contention that a continuation of a 'neo-colonial' pattern of development would lead to disaster because: it would
produce a highly import and skill dependent economic structure that would depend critically on external markets and external investors and decision makers; that dependence would eventually become disastrous in its implications because the long term prospects for Africa's terms of trade were almost certainly poor; moreover, that dependence would be further reinforced because it would also create within the African countries a degree of social and political polarization that would lay the foundations for an increasingly repressive response once those contradictions became critical. Finally, that view was always very clear as to the fact that this entire edifice was essentially constructed on the backs of the peasantry, who would have to pay for it eventually. This describes exactly the present circumstances of Africa. Moreover, the new orthodoxy of the Bank, as well as the Chicago Marxism of the Warrenite school, both represent the ideological rationale for a 'solution' of this problem that puts the interest of capital first and leaves the human consequences of this process as an unfortunate 'problem' to be solved by some token assistance and a lot of hand wringing.__

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