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A. F. Robertson

Excerpt

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Introduction

People plan. To do so is little more than the exercise of human rationality. It is a means by which we try to exert control over our daily lives, making decisions about how we should behave. Insofar as we are dealing with a future which is always uncertain, planning is a hazardous activity. Although much of it concerns matters of routine, it still requires a good deal of imagination. We plan for immediate tasks like providing a meal, but we are also engaged in longer-term enterprises, like building a house or choosing a career. Some of our planning is personal and some of it is concerned with collective activities. If the former is a matter of 'making up our own minds', the latter involves groups of people in decision-making, and is very much a political activity.

Although we all plan, we are not all engaged in planning 'development', if by this we mean the organisation of our collective progress and welfare. Still fewer of us are involved in national development planning, a recent and very specialised variant of the broader human activity which, nevertheless, has a pervasive influence on the daily lives of most people in most countries. In the 1980s, national planning has the appearance of a sprawling and amorphous mass of schemes and projects, competing doctrines and policies, ramifying national and international bureaucracies, occasional successes and many failures. We might conclude that all this is just a messy accident of history, but such an apology cannot disguise the fact that planned development has been a very determined act of human will. At some time during the course of this century almost every country in the world has sought to take this authoritative grip on its own future; in many ways it is as interesting to enquire why a handful of states have *not* had national plans, as why the great majority have.

Although development planning could now be regarded as mankind's most ambitious collective enterprise, our understanding of it remains debilitatingly vague. This may be because the phenomenon is simultaneously so new, so complex and so widespread that we have not yet been able to form a coherent, generalised understanding of it. Moreover,

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the failures and frustrations of recent years have discouraged ambitious overviews. Today, the call is for less grandiose schemes, for small-scale and short-term projects which are more immediately responsive to 'basic needs', and for analyses which are appropriately microscopic. While planners are pinning their hopes on attention to detail, it may seem perverse for an anthropologist to insist on the necessity of a global interpretation. We are, after all, identified as students of the social microcosm, specialists in families and villages rather than national and international affairs. What possible illumination could an anthropological perspective afford?

Some time ago, Roger Bastide urged that we should analyse development plans and activities 'as the old anthropology analysed kinship systems, economic and political institutions, spontaneous processes of change, and with exactly the same techniques of approach' (1973: 180–1). This is an interesting challenge to which anthropologists have not responded directly, probably because we have found it more convenient to work with the analytical categories of other disciplines in dealing with 'development'. The notion that anthropology itself is somehow analytically incapacitated is very strange, and will become a specific object of enquiry in later chapters. If political scale has been a deterrent, we should remind ourselves that some of the most important descriptive and analytical ideas in anthropology are highly aggregative, expressing a concern to interpret society and culture 'in the round'.

In this book we shall identify national development planning as a major *institution* of the twentieth-century world. *Institution* is a familiar anthropological device for assembling recurrent ideas and activities into a single category (marriage, chiefship, religion) for purposes of description, analysis and comparison. We shall argue that such a 'rounded' view of planning is now urgently required: to interpret it as a distinctive *variant* of a more generalised human activity may help us to understand how and why it has become such a potent force in the world today and, more important, how it might serve human interests more humanely and efficiently.

To put it very simply, we shall portray planning as a body of customs which are expressed in particular kinds of social process. How and why these customs have emerged and become so widespread, is the starting point for our enquiry. Why we should have *these* customs rather than some other, is the concluding point. In the first chapter we shall review the history of planning, tracing the origins of the modern institution to the growth of industrialism and the nation state during the last two centuries. National planning has become one of the principal means by which modern states bring political power to bear on the organisation of resources, to achieve more rapid growth by the pursuit of industrialisation. Today,

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‘Forms of planning and budgeting in poor countries are essentially alike, partly because they are copied from Soviet, European and (in a few instances) American models and partly because they have evolved in response to similar environmental forces’ (Caiden & Wildavsky 1974: xvii). Following the Second World War, national planning received much impetus from the process of decolonisation, the boom in the western economies, international concern for economic growth in the newly independent states, the proliferation of aid, trade and communications, competition among the superpowers, and the rise of international organisations.

Especially among the newer states, national planning has become a political credential, a device for doing business in the international arena as well as the accepted instrument for transforming economy and society within each state. The structures and processes of the institution are described and analysed in Chapter 2. Persisting with the anthropological perspective we shall argue that planning, in coming to grips with an uncertain future, depends on various techniques and symbolic systems, which are used to manipulate time, people, resources and activities. We shall point out that application of this limited range of devices requires a degree of optimism and confidence, and that there are dangers in regarding development techniques and categories as absolute or neutral, or allowing them to become unquestioned orthodoxies in the study and practice of development.

It is here that the idea of national planning as an ‘institution’ has particular force. To some anthropologists the term will seem quaint, even disreputable, mainly because of its association with normative aspects of behaviour within structural-functional traditions of analysis. However, planning is by its very nature a normative activity – the formulation of ideas about what people ought to do, and how they ought to set about it. It is also ‘conservative’ as well as ‘progressive’ – a fact which the twentieth-century enthusiasm for ‘development’ seems to have obscured. It is a means of organising social continuity, part of the taxing business of maintaining existing social and political structures, and present levels of welfare. *National* planning, once so novel, has become increasingly concerned with matters of routine, and at the same time planning itself has become routinised.

The essential purpose of this book should be understood: it is *not* about the diversity of development policy, it is about the unity of development planning. While we have attempted to illustrate our argument extensively, the purpose is not to explain how and why development in, say, Poland differs from development in Peru, although our perspective may contribute to such an explanation. Plainly, our dogged search for the institutional common factors of planning will offend those who prefer to

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insist on the diversity of development experience. It is not our purpose to deny this diversity; instead we shall try by selective illustration to indicate how the generalities of planning relate to, and find expression in, the multifarious geographical, political, economic and historical contexts of the states which plan. More than this, in Chapter 5 we shall discuss in detail the case of Malaysia, tracing the ways in which the global institution of planning, as we have defined it in the earlier chapters, has found expression in the experience of a particular state. Although it has a stoutly asserted liberal creed, Malaysia has planned with great vigour and determination, and has in turn made its own contributions to the general lore of planning. We shall explain how and why Malaysia has come to depend on planning and, by tracing the development process through to particular projects, show how mundane details of social organisation may be interpreted within the very broad framework advocated.

Planned development involves translating ideas into concrete activities, and this clearly depends on the resources at the disposal of particular states. Malaysia has been more fortunate, but also better organised, than many. In Chapter 3 we shall review the forms of social, political and economic organisation which are habitually used in planned development. Looking at administrative systems, cooperatives and communes, committees and councils, and means of communication, we shall argue that development organisations are in fact variations on a surprisingly narrow range of basic themes. They are premised on the need of the state to turn an 'unreliable citizenry into a structured, readily accessible public' (Selznick 1949: 220). In fact, they become the site of a contest between people and officials in which two styles of organisation, 'community' and 'bureaucracy', merge in complex patterns of idea and activity.

It is at this level that we are reminded forcibly that planning is politics. National planning both expresses and reinforces the power of the state, but it makes an issue of public participation. This in turn generates conflicts of interest as well as of understanding. One of the contradictions of planning is that it must presume, and build upon, public consensus about the purposes and processes of development: that ordinary people will share the opinions of national leaders about the virtues and necessity of economic growth and will be prepared to share the costs as well as the benefits. A state must insist authoritatively that there is only one path to progress, but this may well be at odds with the multifarious notions of planning and progress which continually well up from within subject populations. The conflict, actual or potential, is between one dominant view of what development is about, and a plurality of popular opinions. The difference is not simply one of political interest, it is epistemological: divergent views of the meaning of planning itself and of the ideal worlds

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which 'development' proposes. Accordingly, officials complain of public inertia, apathy and stupidity, while people complain that they are the victims of bureaucratic force and folly.

We explore these issues in Chapter 4, comparing the premises of national planning with that more general human propensity of which it has become a peculiar twentieth-century variant. We shall examine the relationships between popular movements for change and the reformist interests of the state, an encounter which reaches its most profound crisis in social revolution. Planned development may be a consequence or a precursor of revolution, but it is antithetical to it: no state plans its own downfall. Instead, states plan ameliorative change – or else stagnate, and expose themselves to political upheaval. It is powerful states which plan development and (if only in rhetoric) guarantee its success. They also take out a monopoly on reformist ideas and ideals: hence the pervasive ideological assertion that it is states, not people, that plan progress.

In their pursuit of national development, regimes profess to be guided by various ideologies – this or that brand of socialism or liberalism. If we are to understand the purposes and processes of planned development we must ask some very blunt questions about the kind of vision which these ideologies do or do not have about the future. What sort of ideal world are we labouring towards, and what will it *really* be like to inhabit? Such a line of enquiry affords little encouragement. We are forced to the conclusion that modern ideologies of progress are sustained by political competition within and between states; they are preoccupied with immediate and short-term gains, but as guides to our collective future they are vacuous.

The vigour of this ideological competition has helped to divide and fragment our view of human progress, and has obscured the uniformity of national development planning in the world today. In the earlier chapters of this book we shall draw attention to striking similarities in policy and practice in states of very different ideological persuasion, and explain how this uniformity has increased during the course of the twentieth century. This is strangely at odds with the increasing divergence of national ideologies. In Chapter 4 we shall argue that, in reality, the political encounter between people and the state which is very much at the heart of planned development is not greatly influenced by overt ideologies, but is characterised by a much more eclectic, pragmatic, short-range pattern of interests, issues and activities, which may be identified as *populist*.

Most planners, and most social scientists (particularly anthropologists) who are practically involved in development efforts, are populists of one sort or another. This often puts them in an uncomfortable relationship with national ideology and with their own intellectual beliefs. In Chapter 4 we shall make an issue of the ideological complicity of social scientists, and the dilemmas they confront in attempting to construe and manipulate

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the future. While we would insist that social science has had a more pervasive influence in world affairs than many professional planners would be prepared to admit, we must acknowledge that doctrinal conflict between liberals and marxists has left us with a social science which is a source of heat rather than illumination and which, as an intellectual resource for coming to grips with an unpromising future, is morally inert and dispiritingly unimaginative.

In this book we have sought to use the familiar apparatus of social anthropology, the comparative study of social structure and process, to enhance our understanding of what planned development *is*. There can be no doubt that we have, in the process, also adopted the essentially populist attitude of anthropology – indeed, this finds expression in the political disjunction which gives the book its title. However, this does not prevent us from recognising the inadequacies of such a perspective, particularly if we have ambitions to use anthropology to enhance our understanding of what planned development *should be*.

If it is possible for social science to redeem itself, it must return, we shall argue, to some very old and unfashionable interests. Only then may we find the more humane, rational and realisable images of our collective future which we now so urgently require.

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History

In this chapter we trace the history of national development planning, explaining how and why it has emerged as a global institution during the course of this century. Ideological and other differences have disguised the increasing similarities of planning: it has grown up amid international competition and conflict, yet it has common origins in both the socialist and capitalist states. We discuss the diffusion of the organisation and techniques of planning to the poor countries of the Third World, and consider how social science has helped to shape – and how it has been shaped by – changing ideas about the organisation of development.

Introduction

The theory of development planning as applied to the poor countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America derived from Soviet centralized planning procedures reinterpreted, via Keynesian macroeconomics, to fit the circumstances of the mixed economy. Theories of development converged and crystallized into a single model – national comprehensive planning – which despite setbacks, varying degrees of sophistication, reinterpretation, modification, and doubt, still remains the model of choice.

(Caiden & Wildavsky 1974: 169)

Since the Second World War almost every country in the world, from Britain and Bolivia to Finland and Fiji, has had a national development plan. Why this should be so is one of the intriguing questions of the twentieth century. Indeed, it may be no less interesting to ask why a curious handful of countries (Hong Kong, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, the USA) have *not* had national plans. For reasons which are largely ideological it is customary to stress differences in the ideals, procedures and achievements of development planning in one country and another. It would of course be absurd to deny that there are salient distinctions in the way development is organised in the USSR and France, or in the USSR and Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, in these countries, and most noticeably in the

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countries of the Third World, the ideas and procedures of national planning show striking similarities, and it is these which warrant historical and structural explanation. As we shall see when we explore the experience of Malaysia, an understanding of the global common factors in planning is a necessary preliminary to an explanation of the particular uses which one state has made of them.

National planning is surely mankind's most ambitious effort at improving material and social welfare. This twentieth-century enterprise has been made possible by two earlier, interrelated historical endowments, the development of industrial processes and the formation of nation states: 'The diffusion of industrialism, carried out by national units, is the dominant event of our time' (Gellner 1964: 40). The planning of economic growth has become something of an imperative for nation states, particularly those which are relatively poor and backward. There is no doubt that national planning, although ostensibly benign and altruistic, has been moulded by inter-state competition, and particularly by warfare. Kitching has observed that the main aim of 'politicians and statesmen', from the nineteenth century onwards, has been to organise industrial development 'to protect or enhance the power and independence of the nation states over which they ruled. In particular, without an advanced and efficient industrial structure it was not possible to produce the new armaments required for defence or conquest, and thus one was more likely to fall prey to more powerful industrial powers' (1982: 3–4). As we shall see, the great wars of this century required a degree of concerted national organisation hitherto unknown, which established paradigms for ostensibly more pacific development endeavours. When, in the 1950s, the temperature of war changed, and the Third World became a new arena of competition for the industrialised states, aid and trade became the main strategic devices, exercising a powerful effect on the means and purposes of planning throughout the world.

In 1937 Lionel Robbins asserted that 'in the world we live in, planning is done by states . . . National planning takes place in an international *milieu*' (1937: 8). It is because development planning is so emphatically an international affair that it has so many structural and procedural similarities in so many different countries today. However, modern planning institutions incorporate two quite different patterns which emerged earlier this century. Up to the Second War, the dominant influence was the reorganisation of Russia after the 1917 revolution, the draconian process of planned economic growth presided over by Stalin. The second pattern was initiated by the Depression of the 1930s, which prompted the western capitalist countries to ensure economic recovery, stability and growth by state intervention in the economy at large. This experience was extensively applied in the colonial, and subsequently independent states,

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after the war. Competition among the ‘superpowers’ ensured that the purposes of planning were ideologically distinguished, but by the 1960s it was increasingly evident that the structure, organisation and procedures of planning in countries like India or Indonesia owed as much to the experience of Russia as to the experience of America and the western European countries.

National development planning has become an international institution by a process of diffusion, through colonial rule, the international expansion of markets and industrial capitalism, through direct intervention in the name of aid, trade or technical assistance by one state in the affairs of another, and through the massive expansion of the international agencies. Inevitably this has brought the rise of the professional planner, and a tendency to reduce what are inescapably political problems of development to technicalities, to routines, and to ‘neutral policy tools’ which can conveniently be detached from the social and economic ambitions of particular regimes. The techniques of planning in the soviet ‘command’ economy have influenced, explicitly and directly, the techniques of ‘indicative’ planning in France, and vice versa; the experience of *both* has influenced other countries throughout the world. It is around this technical core that the institutions of development planning – including many of its ideas and ideals – have converged. As we shall see, ‘good planning’ has become very generally equated with the practice of democracy and, as John Dunn has shrewdly observed, ‘we are all democrats today’ (1979: 1). States which do not plan either do not need to because they are already sufficiently well-off without it, or else cannot do so because they are politically and economically incapacitated. As Lipton has remarked, ‘central planning centrally financed’ is the only remedy available to states threatened by stagnation, a course of action which is neither specifically ‘socialist’ nor ‘capitalist’ – particularly in the context of poor Third World countries where such distinctions do not in any case count for much (1971: 239–40). As world recession deepens, the problem for many states is that national planning becomes simultaneously more urgent and more intractable.

1917–39: Foundations

State intervention in national economies has a long history, but national development planning is undoubtedly an invention of the twentieth century. During the last sixty years, two quite distinct traditions of planning have converged in the so-called ‘mixed’ economies of the Third World. The first of these emerged with the development of a socialist state in Russia after the 1917 Revolution; the second was the consequence of efforts in the western capitalist countries to deal with the disturbing

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effects of the 1932–3 Depression. Both traditions have thus been born of social, economic and political crisis, but have sought remedies in different kinds of economic intervention. In Russia, the imperative was the restructuring of the social relations of production; in the west, the imperative was the control of markets. For both, the immediate task was the same: the pursuit of economic growth through industrial expansion. The same task confronts the developing countries of the world today, and the debates about how this should be done, efficiently and equitably, linger on.

One of these debates is about whether development is properly an evolutionary process or a revolutionary consequence. Gellner has asserted that ‘development is characteristically post-revolutionary, not *pre*; collective, deliberate, and imitative, and not individualist, unconscious and endogenous’ (1964: 136). This implies that orderly, planned growth must be a consequence of some drastic social reorganisation, and that the ambition of most poor countries today to develop without major social upheaval is unrealistic. However, Nove (1969) has pointed out that development – in the form of rapid increases in agricultural and industrial output between the years 1890 and 1913 – could as well be regarded as a *cause* of the Revolution and of socialist planning in Russia.

Certainly, after the First World War, Revolution and civil war, the Bolsheviks were obliged to find effective solutions to pressing economic and political problems. Planning was a means of declaring forcefully their intention to realise the socialist dream, and to provide a programme which would serve to improve their grip on the small industrial proletariat and the vast, diverse peasantry. Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, the most conspicuous ideologues of the period, insisted that ‘society will be transformed into a huge working organization for cooperative production . . . It is obvious that so comprehensive an organization presupposes a general plan of production . . . Without a general plan, without a directive system, and without careful calculation and book-keeping, there can be no organization’ (1966: 114–15).

The pursuit of socialism in Marxist-Leninist terms meant an outright denial of the merits of a free market economy, and a determined effort to reorganise the social structures of production. The New Economic Policy propounded in 1921 and the First Soviet Five-Year Plan of 1928 thus established profoundly influential paradigms for economic growth and social transformation, by mobilising the resources of the state within a boldly drawn and rigorously pursued framework of ideology and policy. As is well known, this was not achieved without bitter and protracted struggle. At an early stage there was an important debate between the ‘genetic’ planners who were more enthusiastic about releasing and