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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Legitimation Crisis by JURGEN HABERMAS

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*Research and India*, the author seems to be giving too great an importance to the effectiveness of the peace movement. It is naive to think that the concept of peace is being kept today in the background of *all* foreign policy formulations. The author also seems to be very much in favour of developing international relations into an autonomous discipline. He thinks it can be done by placing non-violence as its dominant value. Many scholars already believe international relations to be an autonomous discipline, but how has this led to the evolution of "a theory of non-violence in international relations"?

The only value of the book lies in the fact that the author has provided a select bibliography of 9 pages and several hundreds of references in his footnotes to contemporary literature in the field of international relations, which would make an excellent source of reference for all students of international relations, but he himself fails to evolve out of it clear-cut views on the problems discussed, and has certainly not succeeded in discovering even the first few steps which could lead one in the direction of a theory of non-violence in international relations.

Jaipur

S.P. VARMA

JURGEN HABERMAS: *Legitimation Crisis*. Beacon Press, Boston, Mass., 1975, xxvi, 166p. \$8.95

IN his Introduction, the translator (from German) of the book describes its author, Jurgen Habermas, as "the most influential thinker in Germany today." Habermas brings to bear in his thinking all that is important in German philosophical and sociological traditions, while at the same time absorbing Anglo-American empiricism into the corpus of his system. "To have brought Kant, Fichte, and Hegel into contact with Wittgenstein, Popper and Pierce, to have fashioned a language in which Marx, Dilthey and Freud as well as Dewey, Mead and Parsons can all have their say, is grounds enough for a claim to intellectual distinction" (p. vii).

The book under review justifies this appreciation. The title does not bring out fully the complex issues with which the book is concerned. It might have been more aptly called "Towards a Theory of Social Evolution." For indeed it is that which our author aims at. Social evolution is conceived in three dimensions: the development of the sources of production; the development of organizational forms; and the development of legitimating systems. It is an integrated approach, involving an analysis of the economic, political and socio-cultural relations in society. The author thus covers a vast area of knowledge, much of which is outside the competence of the present reviewer. I shall, therefore, in reviewing the book, concentrate on the central theme—legitimation.

The principal purpose of the book is to enquire into the possible

sustenance of the capitalist system of social organization. Marx, it will be recalled, predicted the downfall of the capitalist system more than a hundred years ago. Capitalism, he argued, contained in it germs of its own destruction. In the spontaneous development of the capitalist system, Marx saw an emanence of crisis conditions; while there is a tendency to a falling rate of profit resulting from accumulation and a consequent increase in the ratio of constant capital to variable capital (in other words, of capital to labour) and also from an over-expansion of output relative to the market (the "realisation" problem), there is at the same time a relative immiserization of the working class resulting from the capitalist's efforts at averting crises. The life of the capitalist system is thus tenuous. The verdict of history, however, seems to be otherwise. Capitalism is surviving. And it is surviving in just those centres where, according to Marx's prediction, it should have had an earlier doom.

Does this indicate a permanent solution of the problem of crisis? The book under review attempts an answer to this question. It is indeed an extension of the Marxian theory of capitalist crises—an extension which is necessitated by the fact that in its advanced stage, capitalism exhibits not only a struggle between capitalists and workers but also the involvement of the State. The spontaneous development which Marx envisaged—an economic crisis resulting from a tendency to a falling rate of profit and a relative immiserization of labour—is countered by the State assuming the role of a protector. On the one hand, a tendency to a falling rate of profits or the "realisation crisis" is averted by the State through fiscal and monetary measures and, if necessary, through direct investment; on the other hand, ameliorative measures are enforced in terms of wage adjustments, health schemes, social security measures, etc., so that workers may get a share of the benefits of progress.

Does the State succeed in its balancing effort? Will it in the future, if crises tend to be a continuing feature of capitalism? How far will it be possible for the State to maintain its bonafides, its *legitimacy*, as a balancing factor, in the face of recurrent crisis conditions that capitalism would tend to generate? If it fails, capitalism fails, too. This is the Legitimation Crisis.

The inherent weakness of capitalism is accepted not only by Marxists but, at least since the Keynesian revolution, also by the bourgeois economists. The tendency to monopolization on the part of capitalists, the growing importance of labour unions, the failure of the inducement to invest to keep up with the propensity to save—these are elements of advanced capitalism which are now generally recognized. The intervention of the State is also accepted as a part of the system—unlike in the early stage of capitalism when the function of the State apparatus was restricted to a minimum for the maintenance of the general conditions of production. The State apparatus which had come into disrepute earlier has thus to be rehabilitated or "legitimated".

As it is, this legitimation is attempted through the device of so-called

“democratic” institutions. But, of course, they have to be such as would not involve workers in active participation, for that would destroy the basis of capitalism. “The arrangement of formal democratic institutions and procedures permits administrative decisions to be made largely independent of specific motives of citizens. This takes place through a legitimation process that elicits generalized motives—that is diffuse mass loyalty—but avoids participation...Private autonomous investment decisions thus have their necessary complement in the civic privatism of the civil public” (pp. 36-37).

Legitimation is a delicate process. Strategies for legitimation have to be such as would not fall below the aspirations of the people concerned. On the other hand, these aspirations are not to be allowed to grow to a point which would jeopardize the basis of capitalism, i.e., the appropriation by a capitalist class of what Marx calls “surplus value.” They have thus to be chosen carefully to suit the culture and traditions of a society. In practice, they are found to take varied forms—from “advertisement” much on the lines of oligopolies, to the use of “symbols” to “exploit existing structures of prejudice”. In any event, substantive issues are suppressed and attention is directed to “topical areas”, so as to prevent “opinion-formation” on the former. “The political system takes over tasks of ideology planning.” (p. 70).

How far can such strategies succeed? Does not the level of demand tend to grow as legitimation claims are satisfied, so that in the end nothing short of participatory planning is accepted by the people? Further, supposing participatory planning is accepted by the people? Supposing it does, is it necessary that the process should culminate in a “crisis”? Can it not lead to a spontaneous self-transformation? The author does not offer a straightforward answer to such questions. He does emphasize the possibility of a “legitimation deficit”, given the class structure that characterizes the capitalist society. “Even if the State apparatus were to succeed in raising the productivity of labour and in distributing gains in productivity in such a way that an economic growth free of crises were guaranteed, growth would still be achieved in accord with priorities that take shape as a function, not of generalizable interests of the population, but of private goals of profit maximization” (p. 73). The author thus recognizes that a legitimation deficit is inherent in the class structure itself. Yet, he does not rule out the possibility of an understanding among the parties concerned which, while allowing to people a significant share of the benefits of progress, would yet preserve a “sufficient degree of civil privatism.” This is in sharp contrast to Marx’s philosophy. For here our author applies his theory of “communicative competence”—the power, that is, of argument to resolve conflict and to bring about a “consensus.”

Habermas apparently has the Western advanced-capitalistic societies in his mind while he enunciates his theory of legitimation crisis. However, his analysis is not entirely devoid of relevance to underdeveloped countries.

For there are areas in many of these countries which exhibit all the characteristics of advanced capitalism and which, though small in size, are powerful enough to shape events. The questions that our author raises are important questions, not only for the so-called advanced countries but also for those underdeveloped countries where, in spite of general underdevelopment, the society is dominated by an elitist minority.

*Legitimation Crisis* is an important book,—the result of the author's deep study and research. One would recommend the book to all students of social sciences. But the reader must be forewarned that it is by no means easy reading.

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ERIC P. ECKHOLM: *Losing Ground — Environmental Stress and World Food Prospects*. W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1976, 223p. \$3.95.

ECKHOLM'S informative book deals with a subject which is as old as mankind. Ever since man set foot on this earth, he has been confronted with his physical environment for his survival, sustenance and advancement. His role has been by no means a passive one. In fact, it has tended to increase as he learns from experience and gains in scientific knowledge. But whether, in the process, he is losing ground or gaining ground is debatable. What are the facts? Eckholm gives instances in which we have lost ground. He has also detailed the manner in which we *can* recover lost ground. In fact in many directions we have already made positive contributions almost giving the impression that we can do even better than nature. Thus, while, on the one hand, man has been over-exploiting, on the other, he has made "two blades of grass grow where only one grew before." We may, therefore, conclude that the relationship between man and his physical environment is one of pluses and minuses, but the secular trend is upward which is evident from the recorded increase in the world supply of agricultural and mineral products, both in the aggregate and in per capita forms. But let it not be forgotten that the demand too has been increasing and will continue to do so, not merely because of increases in population, but in view of the rising demand for better living on the part of the millions who had been denied decent standards so far. So, we should still need the warning sounded by Eckholm and others, but without despairing.

Apart from the technological measures required for restoring and maintaining ecological balance, Eckholm has rightly drawn attention to certain institutional aspects, the foremost of which relate to land-use pattern and system of land tenure. He cites concrete instances in which the perpetuation of large land holders has been responsible for the deterioration of the resource base of these countries.

The author has also drawn timely attention to the international