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## *Developmental States and African Agriculture: An Editorial Postscript*

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Africa's economic crisis is too important, and too deep-seated, to be understood and coped with by economic analysis alone. Such a crisis, and the resources to overcome it, are rooted in the workings of all aspects of a society. It is the workings of the state in Africa that initially raised expectations of developmental progress; and the failure of those expectations lie at the centre of the debate about the agrarian problem that has struck Africa with such devastating effect in the last two years. It is not sufficient to formulate economic policies to resolve these problems and expect states to act accordingly, for two reasons. Firstly, the activities of states have their own determinants, which may or may not produce the appropriate policy outputs. Secondly, it should not be assumed that change of policies, as opposed to profound changes in the institutional and organisational framework of economic life, private as well as public, are an adequate response to the present situation in Africa.

Although the Berg Report of 1981 is written in the language of economic analysis it can also be read as a statement of what a developmental state, a state making the greatest possible contribution to the social and economic development of a society, will look like. It will be, on this account, a state that elevates to the central principle of public policy the objective of increasing production by the efficient use of available resources. Its strategy in this task should be that of putting economic resources in the hands of those who have the appropriate motivation to use them productively. In the contemporary African context that involves the transfer of control over economic resources from public organisations into private hands whenever this is feasible. In carrying out its remaining economic activities the state should subject itself to a new discipline: insofar as this continues to involve public organisations these should be subjected to expenditure involved in their tasks; insofar as it involves attracting the cooperation of private agents it will require offering appropriate incentives and rewards.

This doctrine of the ideal developmental state will seem excessively unrealistic to most students of politics in Africa, indeed of politics anywhere. Economists tend to see the issue as one of the potential distortion of rational economic mechanisms by political ones and hence seek solutions that impose restrictions which prevent such distorting outcomes. This is not a good way of thinking through the issues that are involved in the relationship between politics and economics. Self-limitation of governmental power must make good political sense if it is to have a firm basis: just as political feasibility is an essential component of economic rationality seen in its context. Continuous and fundamental divergence between the two does neither any good.

The relation between the two is inherently problematic and difficult to manage: there is no point in refusing to face that fact by focusing on the economically irrational conduct of government or, indeed, the politically irrational conduct of say, the economic actors who destroy the basis of established governmental arrangements by corruption and bribery. These are merely the symptoms of a more deep-seated problem.

That problem is perhaps better grasped in the study of politics than in economic analysis. It is the problem of the relation between the two spheres of public and private. This is not a distinction between government and non-government, but an analytic distinction between aspects of all social organisations and of the relations between them. The state, for example, is permeated from top to bottom by private interest and power; and the most private affairs of private institutions are such only because they are protected by public power in the public interest.

The articles in this issue of the *Bulletin* represent various ways of explaining what appear to be conflicts of political and economic rationality by subsuming both in a description of relationships in which the

public and the private character of organised relationships become manifest. Most attention is given to the modes of interaction between collectives and the relationship between public rules and private strategies which that involves. Such a relationship exists whether an activity is governmental or non-governmental: there are cases of successful and unsuccessful management of the fundamental problems to be found in both. It cannot be assumed that a public/private mode of interaction such as a 'free market' will establish a viable connection between public and private interest, public and private power, public and private morality; nor that it can never do so.

The problem of the state in Africa cannot be reduced, it seems to me, to the negative one of eliminating the economically irrational pursuit of political power. Economic as well as political actors struggle to make dominant those forms of interaction between them from which they benefit most. Competitive markets, as they actually work in reality, benefit some, disadvantage others. Some will struggle to avoid these forms of social inter-connection, which disadvantage and exploit them. People like playing games which they win and dislike those in which they always lose. It is this problem that lies at the roots of the fundamental political problems of any society; it is this that creates both the need for, and the inherently problematic existence of, institutionalised political authority.

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