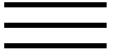


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Dependency: A Formal Theory of Underdevelopment or a Methodology for the Analysis of Concrete Situations of Underdevelopment?

GABRIEL PALMA*

*Institute of Latin American Studies,
University of London*

Para Magdalena

1. INTRODUCTION

May one talk of a 'theory of dependency'? If so, what general implications does it have for contemporary development strategy? Do we find under the 'dependency' label theories of such a diverse nature that it would be more appropriate to speak of a 'school of dependency'? Is it even correct to describe as theories the different approaches within that school? And if so, what general implications might each one have for contemporary development strategy?

Some writers within the dependency school argue that it is misleading to look at dependency as a formal theory, and that no general implications for development can be abstracted from its analyses. Some of those who argue that there is such a theory flatly assert that it leads inescapably to the conclusion that development is impossible within the world capitalist system, thus making development strategies irrelevant, at least within that system. Others, on the other hand, who speak in terms of a theory of dependency, argue that it can be operationalized into a practical development strategy for dependent countries.

If the problem of extracting direct lessons from the dependency analyses is a difficult one, it is no less difficult to survey what has been a diffuse and at times contradictory movement, inextricably a part of the recent history of Latin America itself, of individual nations, and of the post-war development of international capitalism, and drawing its inspiration from such diverse intellectual traditions as the long and involved Marxist debate concerning the development of capitalism in backward nations,

and the post-1948 ECLA critique of the conventional theory of international trade and economic development.

The complex roots of the dependency analyses and the variety of intellectual traditions on which they draw make any attempt at a comprehensive survey difficult. The difficulty is further compounded by the fact that in one way or another the dependency perspective has so dominated work in the social sciences in Latin America and elsewhere in recent years that it would be literally impossible to review the overwhelming mass of writing that has appeared, aimed at either supporting or refuting

*The initial stimulus for this paper came from a workshop on dependency organized in the Latin American Centre, St. Antony's College, Oxford, by my colleagues Rosemary Thorp and Sanjaya Lall, of the Institute of Economics and Statistics, and myself. I am extremely indebted to them both, and to the participants in that workshop, and particularly to Paul Cammack, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Ernesto Laclau and Philippe Reichsruel for discussing an earlier draft of the paper with me. I would also like to thank Alan Angell, Mariana Chudnovsky, Rafael Echeverria, Maria Alicia Ferrera, Luis Ortega, Cristobal Palma, Hilda Sabato, Elizabeth Spillius, Bob Sutchiffe and Margaret Weinmann for their help and support, and the World University Service and the Institute of Latin American Studies of London University for making it possible for me to devote myself fully to this research.

Finally, I would like to express gratitude greater than words can adequately convey to Paul Cammack, for transforming the original manuscript into polished English, for clarifying my own ideas on a number of points in so doing, and for editing the essay down to manageable proportions, despite my frequent protests. The responsibility for what is left is of course my own.

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