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Review of: The New International Economy by Harry Makler, Alberto Martinelli, and Neil Smelser

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the implications of changing ecological conditions on the conduct of world politics. At times, however, the essay is weakened by its superficial treatment of the various factors that influence the validity of the basic proposition. For example, in chapter 8 Levi begins by offering the obligatory explanations about how use of the term interdependence has become a cliche, how it misrepresents the condition of many states, and how it obscures unequal national capabilities. From this kind of introduction, the reader is led to believe that a detailed analytical investigation is forthcoming of how the sensitivity and vulnerability of states can condition decisions to employ military force. One of the obvious concerns to be considered in such a discussion is how the magnitude and essentiality of a particular interest or transaction can provoke a variety of responses. This would have provided additional support for the basic proposition. Instead, the discussion is kept at such a general level that little new ground is broken to further our understanding of how ecological pressures might negate the decision to employ military force.

Another aspect of Levi’s work deserves comment. Although his primary purpose is to demonstrate the worth of the proposition that emerging ecological conditions make nuclear war between the superpowers unlikely, he implies that as developing states become enmeshed in this network of interests they, too, will be less likely to war with one another or developed states. An exception to this scenario would be the developing state that acquires nuclear weapons before becoming subject to the expanding array of interests generated by ecological change. Such a state might be tempted to resolve its energy or food problems by threatening a developed state with a nuclear device. Levi’s discussion of this intriguing possibility is so sketchy, however, that the reader is left wondering about the plausibility of the original proposition. Is it possible that the Soviet Union, although militarily superior, has not developed enough or established sufficient linkages to be caught in the web of interests so important to the original proposition? Might the autonomy derived from the sheer size of the Soviet Union, its one-dimensional economy, and its vast expanses of undeveloped territory override more rational considerations about nuclear war, especially if the U.S. decided to deploy intermediate-range missiles in Europe? Again, Levi’s cursory treatment of the possible extension of the basic proposition to the developing world raises additional questions that need to be addressed.

Despite these shortcomings, however, Levi’s work is likely to gain recognition for its systematic examination of one of the most thought-provoking propositions in the international relations field. The book is a useful and welcome contribution.

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This book is the product of a 1979 conference organized by the Research Committee on Economy and Society of the International Sociological Association and held in Bellagio, Italy. The collection of 11 essays and a brief epilogue seek to explore and analyze the threat posed by a “new and distinctive world economic situation” (p. 3), which the authors label the “new international economy.”

For the purposes of this review I will divide the essays into those that have a theoretical bent and those that are more empirical. The best of the theoretical pieces is the one by Alberto Martinelli. The essay is a masterly and succinct review of the major problem areas associated with the rise of transnational corporations (TNCs). Among the major propositions that Martinelli derives from his review of the field are the following: “TNCs profit from the diversity of an interdependent world economy and a fragmented world polity” (p. 83); “TNCs need strong states and stable societies but cannot help undermining them to some extent” (p. 86). The essay by Charles Albert Michaelet attempts to both critique the neoclassical paradigm and to raise the possibility of a new paradigm. Unfortunately, Michaelet spends too much time beating a dead horse (the neoclassical paradigm is ignored by virtually all scholars, with differing perspectives, in the field of international political economy), and too little developing his thesis that the extension of capitalism on a worldwide scale can best be studied within the classical Marxist paradigm. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, in his essay, provides an informed but brief critique of the various Latin American development theories. One of the interesting issues Cardoso raises, but unfortunately does not tackle, concerns what he calls the “Achilles heel” of dependency theories, namely that they do not specify the historical agency that will make the transformation from dependency to some other kind of society (p. 155).

Four essays in the book deal explicitly with the situation of less developed countries (LDCs) in this new international economy. Volker Bornschier summarizes the findings of cross-national
studies on the effects of TNC penetration in LDCs. The findings indicate that a fresh infusion of direct investments does give an impetus to economic growth in LDCs (in that it adds to the stock of investment), but that in the long run this TNC penetration tends to retard growth (in that it produces structural imbalances in the political economy). Christopher Chase-Dunn, in his essay, defends this kind of large-scale cross-national study against attacks from those who work with a more historical-structural mode of analysis. Such arguments always seem rather pointless, and Chase-Dunn is quite right to insist that there should be room in the dependency school for all kinds of methodological tools.

More gloom is predicted for the LDCs from the consideration of two relatively new phenomena in the essays by Constantine Vaitos and Barbara Stallings. Vaitos focuses on the rise of Western Europe in the new international economy and proposes the rather controversial thesis that it may well be Western Europe rather than the U.S. that will present “one of the main stumbling blocks to a number of developmental needs of LDCs” (p. 167). Stallings, in one of the clearest essays in the book, does not see much optimism for LDCs in the “increasingly dominant role of private banks as a source of finance for Third World governments” (p. 194). In particular, she finds that privatization reinforces uneven development internationally and nationally by channeling loans to core states, rich peripheral countries (a manifestation of sub-imperialism), and elite classes.

The last 3 chapters are case studies of uneven quality (Makler on credit allocation and marginalization in the Brazilian northeast; Martins on the Joint Venture phenomenon in Brazil; and Sales on the Quebec national movement in this era of globalization). Of the three, Martins’s is the most solid piece of work in that he carefully links his conclusions to the evidence. 

The New International Economy is a suggestive but not pathbreaking book. The authors raise many crucial questions but rarely advance to the point of grappling with these questions in sufficient detail. In particular, they do not adequately explore the consequences of the recent intensification of international economic competition for intra-capitalist rivalry, workers’ interests, and LDCs.

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In the last few decades a considerable literature on conflict in the international system has come into existence. Mebar’s book deals exclusively with the phenomena of the emergence and development of conflict in international politics. He claims that research has been unbalanced in concentrating on conflict resolution and conflict prevention, a situation he thinks needs remediying.

Using a constellation of conflicts generated by issues relating to Palestine, the major unit of analysis is what he calls the “Palestine Area Conflict System” (PACS). These actually are the state actors in the Middle East. Mebar’s major goal is to develop a conceptual framework for the study of the dynamics of political conflict. Four of the 11 chapters are devoted to outlining his framework. Chapter 1 outlines the major assumptions: “that human groups are delineated by their choices, which are defined by their perception of the desirable”; “that only a miniscule proportion of any population . . . elites . . . participates in the creative synthesis of ideas and beliefs”; “that belief systems are composed of elements that are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence” (p. 12); and so on. Whether or not one agrees with the set of hypotheses and generalizations that Mebar later develops will depend on the acceptance of his basic assumptions and the epistemological framework from which he proceeds. Chapter 2 deals with the conceptual framework for “Political Culture”; chapter 3 with that of “Foreign Policy”; chapter 4 explores the definition, types, strategies, and processes of “Conflict.”

Mebar’s strategy of research is guided by two hypotheses and one postulate. “Hypothesis I: If a constituency has belief system X, then it will have a foreign policy preferences Y” (p. 14), since functionally interdependent beliefs should lead to functionally interdependent preferences. The postulate that follows from this is: “If a constituency has foreign policy preferences Y, then it will have a foreign policy behavior Z” (p. 15). This hypothesis is explored in chapters 5 and 6 through an analysis of its implication in the context of Arab political culture. The data that Mebar uses indicates that there was a significant discrepancy between Arab political culture and that of the more typically Western orientation. The Islamic world view shapes the Arab political culture in many ways. Notions such as the state, nationalism, socialism, social justice, and most other concepts used by social scientists and

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