

METHODS AND INSTITUTIONS USED TO FORECAST THE  
EFFECTS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

C o o r d i n a t o r :

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## *Deliberate Social Change is the Only Way Towards Development*

It is obvious that no society is static; on the contrary, every social conglomeration finds itself in permanent transformation as a result of the forces which are generated within it, or of external factors. However, there exist great difference, between "natural" evolutionary change, in which the agents that produce it originate and take shape disjointedly and whose union is realized in an almost spontaneous fashion, and directed, deliberate change, arranged to achieve pre-established objectives, which further implies a rational effort and a high level of consistency.

In the heavily industrialized countries, change does not appear as a pressing necessity, since they seem to have resolved the most urgent problems of society. The alteration of social relations is conceived of predominantly as an evolutionary process. Nevertheless, development gives rise to new types of social disparities which it is necessary to correct in order to maintain the prevailing kind of society.

The situation proves to be very different in the underdeveloped countries, where the greater scarcity of resources and the increase in demand press for an accelerated rhythm to be imposed on the change required for their development. On the other hand, the social, economic and political conditioning for our countries prevents the gestation of the spontaneous processes which characterized, in their initial stages, the now developed countries, so that at present, social change, if it is to be oriented to the satisfying of the expectations of the population, must inescapably be provoked in a deliberately fashion.

### *A Model of Society: Inevitable Frame of Reference to Regulate Social Change*

In both cases contemporary governments find themselves obliged to intervene, to orient, accelerate or correct the change which in-

exorably takes place within societies. Consequently, a political decision as to where to direct this change is necessary. On the other hand, the greater scale and speed of social phenomena and the scientific and technological advance of our era have extended and prolonged the effects of political decisions, which makes it more urgent to adopt a position with respect to the type of change desired. In this way, the need for a model of society to serve as a frame of reference for government action in guiding social change extends to all countries, becomes universalized, until it constitutes an "issue of our time".

The formulation of the model, of the social plan towards which the change is to be oriented, supposes that it is possible to foresee the trajectory of this transformation, and that it is likewise possible to modify its direction through government measures; in both cases forecasting becomes inevitable.

#### *The Formulation of the Forecast is Conditioned by Ideological Considerations*

For some time, the elaboration of forecasts did not present itself as a necessity to underdeveloped countries, as circumscribed by their cultural dependence, they started from two premises: firstly, to regard as optimal the situation of the countries which consider themselves developed, and secondly, the certainty of attaining such a situation at some stage. Nevertheless, the consequences of the evolution of the model of industrialization, such as pollution, the irrational use of natural resources, etc., have favoured the questioning of its intrinsic worth. On the other hand, the failures of attempts to achieve development have provoked a revision of the theories, making it clear that they were not suited to the conditions in our countries, uncovering their ahistorical character, along with the inadequate treatment of the conditioning factors that result from their relationship with the hegemonies of the world. These discoveries have revealed that forecasting does not have a purely scientific character, but that it obeys a framework of values which is fundamentally manifested in the indication of limited choices within a determined concept of development.

Hence it is imperative that our countries carry out their own forecasting, which should lead them to consider new concepts and ways of development based on theories, both interpretative and prescriptive, closer to our situation and historical context, since the forecasts elaborated in other countries, even in the cases where they consider the situa-

tion and their relationship with the underdeveloped countries, imply concepts limited by their ideologies and by the preservation of their interests.

In conclusion, the task of forecasting is ethnical, militant and political and implies a favouring of the type of change which is expressed in the social plan.

*The Function of Forecasting in the Field of Underdevelopment is the Search for a National Future of Our Own*

In the developed countries the social plan is an instrument to conserve and reinforce the achievements obtained and also to carry out the adjustments that the fundamental socioeconomic structures require, in accordance with the new necessities that the evolutionary development of those same structures gives rise to. In this case, the function of forecasting remains restricted to that of prediction of the future.

In contrast, in the face of discontent with the prevailing situation in our countries, the social plan would represent a switch to patterns different from the model of society in the developed world, and therefore, forecasting would have as its aim the formulation and construction of a future with original characteristics derived from its own reality; the viable alternatives would imply essentially different situations. It is precisely here that the ideological factor takes on momentous importance, since on it depends the breadth of the range of possible futures.

However, the possession of a social plan does not in itself assure the attainment of the objectives established. The planning constitutes the means which allows the action to be rationalized to achieve said objectives.

The forecasting within the planning represents the instrument which allows the investigation of the effects of decisions, with the aim of keeping the direction of change within the established social plan. The agglomeration of values and the displacement of institutions and social structures, a result of the reaction of our countries to the impact of Western culture, determine that the changes which it is necessary to predict and plan do not occur in a single dimension, for example, the economic, but in an interrelated way among all those factors which intervene in that complex unit which is society in the process of developing.

*Public Administration Is Not Neutral but Committed to Change*

Liberalism's model of public administration was imported or imitated by the countries on the road to development, and it tried to bestow on public administration the role of executor of political decisions, and to demand neutrality from the bureaucracy in its action within a pluralist society.

The coming of industrial society caused liberalism to decline, required a greater intervention of the state in different areas of society, weakened parliamentarianism, transformed the classical division of powers with the notable strengthening of the executive, and hence of public administration, by stimulating the increase of its regulation-making function and by imposing sanctions of an administrative type.

With the growing intervention of the state and the predominance of the executive, public administration has acquired new dimensions which have overtaken the theory and practice of the discipline directed ment. This disparity between theory and reality brought about the towards its study and originating within the liberal model of government. This disparity between theory and reality brought about the revision of the earlier concepts: the separation of politics and administration was seen to be schematic and formal; the hypothesis of the possibility and desirability of a nonpolitical bureaucracy showed itself to be a mere compromise of political parties or an occupational monopoly of the middle class; the political game of the bureaucracy was uncovered.

In reality, the participation of public administration in the formulation of policies increases in proportion as within the government organization an unusual amount of knowledge, ability and dexterity accumulates, as in other organizations of the contemporary world; and as it grows, it monopolizes and manages information, while conserving its intermediate position between the rulers and the ruled; and its extensive discretionary power in the implementation of policies, the interpretation of objectives and assigning of costs and social benefits grows, at a rhythm in which the executive is strengthened as a result of the greater intervention of the state in society. In this way, in the same degree that political problems have acquired greater breadth in industrial society, there has been an increase in the need for the participation of public administration in their solution and consequently, in political intervention by public administration through the increasingly less neutral bureaucracy.

The above clarifies the importance of public administration in the formulation and attainment of social objectives, which it can shape,

In our countries, given the conditions of underdevelopment, public administration should not limit itself to ensuring the suitability of the change and to anticipating its effects to avoid splits, nor should it limit itself to diagnosing the future and forecasting the effects of an evolutionary, economic and social change. On the contrary, the same context in which the administrative apparatus of the state acts places it in the situation of having to face splits, even violent ones, due to spontaneous evolution, on pain of never overcoming the backwardness of the country, and on occasions it finds itself obliged to contribute to some extent to these splits, and to bring to bear its technical skill and its capacity for forecasting to shape the society glimpsed in the democratically adopted social plan.

This approach, it is true, seems, to openly contradict the tradition of the neutrality of public administration favoured by liberalism, recommended as a preventive measure against despotism, and originating as a solution to the fragmentation of society and to the search for the rationality and efficiency necessary for the growth of industrial organizations subject to an increasingly complex technology. But it is also true that all these circumstances which lie at the root of this tradition have never existed in the field of underdevelopment, though they certainly form a part of the Western social plan.

This dominant tradition accepts as an historical "necessity" the rational character of socioeconomic relations, which are lived like something "natural". Its task consists, then, in reinforcing that order and in correcting its disparities; in contemplating history and change as an evolution, not as an abrupt break and changeover, not as a deep and qualitative transformation. The bureaucratization of the most developed countries, in the last decades, seems to confirm the legitimacy of this vision.

The history and present reality of the underdeveloped countries point to a social vacuum: the lack of modern organizations and frequently a state still in the process of consolidation. Western public administration was able to aspire to be the executor of decisions formulated by coherent political institutions; public administration in underdevelopment plays a very different role: that of collaborating in the formation of the state and other institutions, as well as impelling radical transformation to fashion a future which will not be the product of extrapolations of lines and past tendencies, but the formulation of a social plan to lead us to new desired situations; its function is thus both qualitative and quantitative.

It is not a question of public administration designing a finished

“model” of the society of the future in our countries. It is being proposed that the function of formulation of policies that it carries out in one way or another, should lead it to the exploration of new ways to develop, more real, liberating and in keeping with its historical cultural baggage, and that this exploration should lead to new possibilities for enriching the taking of political decision through democratic mechanisms.

In short, the model of our future societies depends on a political decision determined by innumerable variables: the relations and political struggles which are fought within our societies, the class conflicts and even the decisive variables of the actions of other states and more developed societies. Nevertheless, and in spite of all these limitations, faced with the absence of institutions and mechanisms which tend to maintain its desired neutrality, public administration in our countries is necessarily obliged to participate in the acute conflicts that occur within societies on the road to development. Its position in the conflict is a militant one, despite itself, in favour of the existing order or of a new one. The installation or preservation of democracy demands that this participation be manifest, legitimate and committed.

### *The Methods and Techniques of Forecasting Must Be in Keeping with the Type of Change*

In the same way that forecasting in the present day constitutes an indispensable condition for the formulation of objectives and policies, the complexity of the problem determines that the task of forecasting can no longer be carried out with common sense alone. Consequently, a collection of methods and techniques has arisen which attempts to make the elaboration of forecasts more scientific. However, any technology represents only one way — among several — of handling a problem. Thus, in a situation where the principal objective consists of carrying out adjustments to achieve new situations of balance or to raise the level of efficiency of some processes, techniques are used which depend and are based on given relations and concepts such as extrapolation, some models of economic growth and improvement, etc.

On the other hand, when the objective that is being pursued involves breaks with the past and a new structuring of social relations, the methods and techniques have to be in keeping with the dynamism, complexity and interdependence of social phenomena. Such would be the case with, for example, the method of simulation.

However, the methods and techniques have a supremely interdependent character; their isolated application leads with difficulty to satisfactory results, and in fact, the use of one technique often involves the necessary use of another. This is to say that more than separate methods and techniques, it is combinations of them which produce greater benefits. But in underdeveloped societies, the general level of technology is extremely low, which hinders the effective operation of the technologies originating from the industrialized countries, and they become mere symbols of modernization.

It is necessary, in conclusion, for our countries to carry out important efforts of investigation destined to develop the methods and techniques of forecasting suitable for bringing about the type of change desired, and adopting only those which strictly fulfill this last requisite. This will help considerably towards the establishment and improvement of a technology of our own, and at the same time there will be created the criteria for the evaluation of the utility and applicability of the technology that we are importing.

### *The Integral and Continuous Nature of Forecasting Gives Rise to the Need to Institutionalize*

The complexity of the process of development demands that forecasting be based on an integral conception of society. Forecasting carried out within a partial vision of the social phenomenon may give rise to incongruous and even contradictory political decisions, in as far as they suppose different ethical premises. In practice, the application of this type of decision hinders or dulls the capacity of government action to give direction to the change.

In a country subject to accelerated social transformation, the situations which are generated lack precedent, and consequently government decisions have to be formulated for each new situation. Hence the necessity of forecasting as an essential basis for a rational decision in the measure that it constitutes the principal source of information about conditions in the future. Therefore, the broad field of planned government decisions which prevails in the developed countries would be smaller in our countries and consequently the formulation of forecasts becomes a continuous task, given the novelty and concatenation of the problems presented by the orientation of social change.

The constant confrontation — through forecasting — of the model of development with the change generated in the society will suggest



the reassessment of the theories of change implicit in government action and the permanent revision of the suitability of the forecast. Hence this latter must also have a function of reassessment, both of government actions and of the conception of society which the activity of the government supposes.

From the above it can be seen that to assure both the global vision on which forecasting must be based and the continuity of its elaboration it is necessary to institutionalize it. To avoid the frustrating experiences which have been suffered by underdeveloped countries when they have tried to establish novel instruments imported from the developed countries, it is necessary to observe some of the conditions which can make the operation of forecasting possible, as for example: the acceptance of the importance of forecasting and its use in centres where government decisions are taken; the definition of values shaped by a social pact on the fundamentals indicated by the formulation of forecasts, and the adoption of a definite way of conceiving social change which would serve as a point of departure for conducting policies and which could be successively reassessed in accordance with with practical results.

With regard to the creation of institutions to serve as a basis for the elaboration of forecasting, it would be indispensable: to determine the extent to which existing institutions could be made use of as sources of knowledge or perhaps with complementary functions within a national system of forecasting; to carry out the reforms in public administration that would allow the operation of this system; to form a national system of information specialized in forecasting, and to centralize in some organization close to the decision-making centre the formulation and reassessment of forecasts.