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RETHINKING AFRICAN DEMOCRACY

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Issues of democratization and human rights are increasingly dominating the world's interest in Africa, overcoming a legacy of indifference to the fate of democracy on the continent. This legacy has its roots in the colonial era, when political discourse excluded not only democracy but even the idea of good government, and politics was reduced to the clash of one exclusive claim to power against another.

This attitude persisted even after Africa gained political independence. By deciding to take over the colonial system instead of transforming it in accord with popular nationalist aspirations, most African leaders found themselves on a collision course with their people. Faced with this challenge to their newly won power, they opted for "development," using it largely as an ideological blind. Resisting pressures for structural transformation and redistribution, they claimed that the overriding priority for Africa must be to seek development—the cake had to be baked before it could be shared. To discourage opposition and perpetuate their power, they argued that the problems of development demanded complete unity of purpose, justifying on these grounds the criminalization of political dissent and the inexorable march to political monolithism.

The rest of the world heartily encouraged these political tendencies. Africa's former colonial masters, anxious for leverage with the new leaders, embraced the idea of partnership in development and gave these regimes their indulgent support. The great powers ignored human rights

violations and sought clients wherever they could. All these factors helped crystallize a climate of opinion in the West hostile to democracy in Africa. From time to time (as during the Carter administration in the United States) human rights abuses in Africa became an issue, but never democracy. On the rare occasions when Western leaders did discuss democracy in Africa, it was mainly to raise doubts about its feasibility.

Why is the West now suddenly preoccupied with the prospect of democracy in Africa? The reforms in Eastern Europe have contributed to this change of heart by providing the West with a dramatic vindication of its own values and a sense of the historical inevitability of the triumph of democracy. The aggressive vacuity of the Cold War has been replaced by the mission of democratization, a mission which, it is widely believed, will firmly consolidate the hegemony of Western values all over the world. Thus the West has come to regard democracy as an important item on the African agenda. This change in attitude also reflects the fact that the long struggle for democracy in Africa is beginning to show results, results too impressive and too widespread to be ignored: the popular rejection of military rule in Nigeria; the demise of apartheid in South Africa; the downfall of Samuel Doe in Liberia and Kérékou in Benin; the gains for pluralism and multipartyism in Niger, Madagascar, Cameroon, Zambia, Algeria, Gabon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Zaire, Mozambique, Angola, the Congo, and São Tomé and Príncipe; and the growing pressures for democratization in Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe.

The West's changing attitude toward democracy in Africa draws additional impetus from Africa's economic marginalization. The world economy is now driven less by trade than by capital movements; there has been a massive shift from the production of goods to the provision of services, and from material-intensive to knowledge-intensive industries. At the same time, advances in science and technology have created an increasing number of synthetic products more flexible and more versatile than those that Africa has traditionally exported. These changes have made Africa's primary economies far less relevant to the current economic needs of the West. Now, with the winding down of the Cold War, Africa's strategic significance to the West has also greatly declined. As Europe draws closer to unification, even the former colonial powers—notably France—are finding it necessary to downgrade their special relationships with their former colonies, relations far less useful now than they have been in the past.

The marginalization of Africa has given the West more latitude to conduct its relations with Africa in a principled way. In the past, the West adopted a posture of indifference to issues of human rights and democracy in Africa in order to avoid jeopardizing its economic and strategic interests and to facilitate its obsessive search for allies against communism. Now that these concerns have diminished, the West finds

itself free to bring its African policies into greater harmony with its democratic principles.

The Desirability of Democracy

It is a striking fact that democracy is now on the agenda in Africa. But should it be? To answer this question, we must examine the traditional arguments against establishing democracies in Africa.

Africa, it has been claimed, has its own unique history and traditions and the introduction of democracy, an alien concept, would violate the integrity of African culture. This argument, premised on the misconception that democracy is solely a Western creation, stems from a confusion between the principles of democracy and their institutional manifestations. The principles of democracy include widespread participation, consent of the governed, and public accountability of those in power. These principles may prevail in a wide variety of political arrangements and practices, which naturally vary according to historical conditions. Traditional African political systems were infused with democratic values. They were invariably patrimonial, and consciousness was communal; everything was everybody's business, engendering a strong emphasis on participation. Standards of accountability were even stricter than in Western societies. Chiefs were answerable not only for their own actions but for natural catastrophes such as famine, epidemics, floods, and drought. In the event of such disasters, chiefs could be required to go into exile or "asked to die."

Another argument against democracy in Africa revolves around the social pluralism of African societies, particularly ethnic differences. Some contend that because African societies are replete with ethnic conflict, they must be firmly governed; the liberties of democracy would inflame ethnic rivalries and pose the danger of political disintegration. This argument has acquired credibility because of the high incidence of ethnic conflicts in Africa, some of which have been markedly destructive, most notably in Uganda, Equatorial Guinea, Burundi, Nigeria, and Rwanda.

Nonetheless, the problem is not ethnicity but bad leadership. There is nothing inherently conflictual about ethnic differences. They lead to strife only when they are politicized, and it is the elites who politicize ethnicity in their quest for power and political support. Leaders also gain a second advantage from exploiting ethnicity. Having incited ethnic-based conflict, they then use the threat of such conflict to justify political authoritarianism.

Even now, after 30 years of self-government, some African leaders still enlist this spurious defense to rationalize one-party rule. President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya, under increasing pressure to democratize, has repeatedly made this claim. So has Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda, who warned that the adoption of a multiparty system would bring

“chaos, bloodshed, and death.” President Paul Biya of Cameroon has defended the power monopoly of his Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement with similar language; he stresses the party’s vanguard role in creating “a united Cameroon devoid of ethnic, linguistic, and religious cleavages.” Somehow these leaders cannot see that repeating this argument after 30 years is precisely its refutation. A treatment applied for 30 years that continues to worsen the illness cannot be right.

A third argument ties the issue of democratization to economic development, asserting that the quest for democracy must be considered in the context of Africa’s most pressing needs, especially emancipation from “ignorance, poverty, and disease.” The pursuit of democracy will not, it is argued, feed the hungry or heal the sick. Nor will it give shelter to the homeless. People must be educated and fed before they can appreciate democracy, for there is no choice in ignorance and there are no possibilities for self-fulfillment in extreme poverty.

This claim is as seductive as it is misguided. Even if it were true that democracy is competitive with development, it does not follow that people must be more concerned with improving nutrition than casting votes, or more concerned with health than with political participation. The primary issue is not *whether* it is more important to eat well than to vote, but *who* is entitled to decide which is more important. Once this is understood, the argument that democracy must be sacrificed to development collapses into the arbitrary insistence that we ought to decide for the peasants of Botswana and Burkina Faso whether they should prefer better health or the right to vote.

In any case, Africa’s failed development experience suggests that postponing democracy does not promote development; during the past decades of authoritarianism, Africa’s standard of living has been falling steadily, and its share of world trade and industrial output has been declining. Poverty in both relative and absolute terms is worsening so rapidly that sub-Saharan Africa’s share of the developing world’s poor will have grown from 16 percent in 1985 to 30 percent by the end of the century. The average growth rate for the region between 1980 and 1989 was *minus* 2.2 percent.

Perhaps it is misleading to talk about the failure of development in Africa, for in a sense it has never really been tried. When African leaders chose to take over the colonial system instead of transforming it and thus became alienated from their own people, the genuine pursuit of development became all but impossible. Besieged by the hostile forces unleashed by their repression, they became totally absorbed in survival, and relegated everything else, including development, to a very low priority. What passed for development was usually a crudely fabricated plan that an embattled and distracted leadership put together for the sake of appearances, often with an eye to luring prospective donors.

Any chance that this externally driven development would contribute

significantly to material progress was doomed by authoritarianism. Development strategies, reflecting both the scientific dogmatism of development experts and the isolation of African leaders, worked from the top down and were imbued with attitudes hostile to the poor majority. The common people were seen as a major obstacle to development: their expectations were too high, they consumed too much of their meager incomes, they lacked ambition and self-reliance, they were too lazy and too superstitious. In short, the common people were inherent enemies of progress, even their own progress. This became a justification for disregarding their interests and for brutalizing them in the name of development. As a result, most Africans tend to view the state and its development agents as hostile forces to be evaded, cheated, or thwarted as opportunities permit. They conform as they must and get on with their struggle for survival. They are simply not available to be mobilized for development.

Apparently the lesson has been learned. At the April 1990 Bretton Woods Committee meeting in Washington, World Bank president Barber Conable listed better governance as the primary requirement for economic recovery in Africa. The World Bank's new African blueprint, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, highlights the need for accountability, participation, and consensus building in order to achieve successful development. The Bank's press clips on the report demonstrate that this view has won approval all over the world.

A conference of over 500 groups representing nongovernmental organizations, grassroots organizations, United Nations agencies, and governments, which convened in February 1990 in Arusha, Tanzania under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, adopted an "African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation." Its major point is that the absence of democracy is the primary cause of the chronic crisis in Africa. A speech by U.N. secretary general Javier Pérez de Cuéllar at the Arusha meeting identified an inescapable link between economic recovery in Africa and popular participation. In addition, a declaration entitled "The Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World," adopted by the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa, 9-11 July 1990, acknowledges that a political environment guaranteeing human rights and the rule of law would be more conducive to governmental accountability and probity and that "popular-based political processes would ensure the involvement of all . . . in development efforts." But how do we proceed with democratization?

Some Misconceptions

Several disturbing misconceptions persist about the process of democratization in Africa. One is the tendency to see democratization as

an offshoot of the survival strategies that the African crisis has engendered. Some Africanists emphasize that, although African states are tottering under a protracted fiscal crisis and national institutions are in danger of disintegrating under the stress of economic austerity, there is tremendous vitality at the grassroots. People are organizing themselves in order to limit their vulnerability to a predatory state, to improvise rudimentary social welfare networks through community efforts, and to improve their material well-being. We get a picture of a thriving associational life, of a turning away from the state, of ordinary people assuming greater control over their own destinies.

This is certainly happening. Its democratic potential is limited, however, as the case of Kenya illustrates. Kenya is one of the African countries in which rural grassroots organizations are the most advanced, and it has achieved immense success in grassroots economic development. For instance, grassroots self-help development projects ("Harambee" projects) account for about 70 percent of the 1,400 secondary schools in the country and for a substantial proportion of the rural water-supply facilities, clinics, cattle dips, and community centers. Yet Kenya is anything but democratic. These grassroots organizations do not appear to have brought about, as of now, any substantial decentralization of power, and they have not diminished the state's arbitrariness and coercion. Part of the problem is that they are isolated and are not usually aggregated at higher organizational levels where they could have some potential for influencing policy.

Except in a few countries, such as Senegal, grassroots organizations in Africa do not significantly contribute to democracy. In fact, in their political effects they are not markedly different from the local government systems that African regimes have been instituting in order to lower administrative costs and deflect participatory pressures. That is the kind of reform that President Rawlings is currently putting in place in Ghana under the pretext of democratization. People are given some local political space, not to integrate them into a democratic polity but to separate them from meaningful participation at the national level; the granting of local authority is not a liberty but a constraint. It underlines the confinement of local people and their disenfranchisement. Initiatives and directives flow from the central to the local government in a strictly one-way traffic.

Recently, yet another misconception about the process of democratization in Africa has begun to emerge—the view that democratization entails "destatization." This theory has been finding fertile ground in the West, particularly among international financial institutions (IFIs), because it meshes with the liberal commitment to the primacy of the market and the notion that democracy is associated with minimal government. Having agreed that authoritarianism presents a serious obstacle to development, the IFIs now recommend as a solution

reducing the expenditures, powers, and controls of the state. It is critical, however, to distinguish between the size of the state and its strength. The public sector in many African countries has grown too bloated. Indeed, the bloated state has become a strategy for massive corruption, and it makes sense to try to trim the state by reducing the extent of state economic ownership and control. But it is a very different matter to claim that democracy can be promoted in Africa by *weakening* the state. The state in Africa needs to become both leaner *and* stronger in order to carry out successfully its essential development tasks.

The coercive monolithism of most African political systems readily gives the impression of strong states with immense penetrative capacity, states which are everywhere doing everything. Yet African states are actually very weak. In Nigeria, for instance, the state has little influence on the lives of the rural people. Much of the development that has taken place in rural communities has occurred not because of the state but in spite of it. To many rural dwellers, the state exists primarily as a nuisance to be avoided in their daily struggle for survival. In most other African countries, state influence is even weaker. In Zaire, President Mobutu does not effectively control more than 40 percent of the nation's territory. The state delivers so few services that it is all but irrelevant to its citizens except when they encounter it on the rampage.

Only the violent arbitrariness of states like Zaire makes them seem so powerful. By contrast, in Western countries like the United States, the state is very strong and penetrates far more deeply into the lives of its citizens. The West has created societies that are very homogeneous, interdependent, cohesive, and amenable to control. The refinement of bureaucratic organization backed by modern science and technology has given these states extraordinary powers of intervention, penetration, and control. But their citizens do not find these powerful states threatening. Instead, they perceive a benign aloofness, an impression fostered by the use of state power according to law and, more importantly, by the virtual automation of conformity and control. Democracy is not, and can never be, a matter of weakening the state.

The Role of the West

What role, if any, should the West play in the democratization of Africa? Like development, democratization is not something that one people does for another. People must do it for themselves or it does not happen. The question of the role of the West in the democratization of Africa has arisen only because Africans have become more committed to the quest for democracy and are struggling determinedly to attain it. But the extent to which they will succeed depends in part on the international environment, in which the West currently plays a decisive role.

In recent months, Western leaders have articulately proclaimed their support for democracy in Africa, and news about Africa in the Western media is now dominated by issues of democratization. But what can the West do beyond verbal exhortations to democratize? The answer to this question must focus on the leverage available to the West in its relations with Africa. This leverage can be exerted in two ways: through bilateral relations and through Western influence over the IFIs, especially the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

In the realm of bilateral relations, the West has already agreed to use its leverage over development assistance, aid, and investment to encourage support for human rights and democracy. The U.S. Congress has indicated that its limited aid will be awarded to “newly forming democracies” and not be wasted on autocratic regimes. U.S. assistant secretary of state for African affairs Herman Cohen, speaking at the April 1990 Bretton Woods Committee meeting in Washington, announced that, in addition to previous requirements on economic policy reform and human rights, democratization would become a third condition for U.S. assistance. On 8 May 1990, the U.S. ambassador to Kenya stated that “there is a strong tide flowing in our Congress, which controls the purse strings, to concentrate our economic assistance on those of the world’s nations that nourish democratic institutions, defend human rights, and practice multiparty politics.” He went on to suggest that this would be a “fact of political life in other donor countries tomorrow.” Speaking at a meeting of the Overseas Development Council on 6 June 1990, British foreign secretary Douglas Hurd said that Britain’s assistance will favor “countries tending toward pluralism, public accountability, respect for the rule of law, human rights, and market principles.” President François Mitterand, addressing a French-African conference at La Baule in June 1990, stated that in the future French aid would flow “more enthusiastically” to countries moving toward democracy.

The West has already started using economic pressures to induce political change, a concept now referred to as political conditionality. A debate is currently raging about whether political conditionality is necessary or desirable. It is an odd debate because political conditionality has always been present, not only in bilateral relations but even in the relations of multilateral agencies with the Third World. I say this not to justify political conditionality by the fact that it has always existed; it is as unnecessary to justify it as it is useless to dispute its legitimacy. The very nature of relations between nations demands that political conditionality underlie economic relations. What appears to have started this debate over the obvious is the explicitness of political conditionality and its extension beyond the issues of friendly relations and human rights to democratization.

Democracy cannot be obtained by trying to convert undemocratic regimes through bribery and coercion. Democracy is not simply bestowed

upon a nation from above. It may prevail with minimal conflict in those rare instances in which the rulers, recognizing the inevitable, concede gracefully. More often than not, it is won amidst considerable turmoil against the determined opposition of those in power. There are no easy paths to democracy, and offering incentives to autocrats is not the way to democratize.

This is not to say that sanctions have no place in encouraging democratization in Africa. On the contrary, sanctions can play an important role. They can weaken an antidemocratic regime's capacity to oppress and block democratic forces. In Benin, for instance, sanctions weakened President Kérékou and emboldened the democratic forces, creating considerable room for a democratic transition. In Liberia, sanctions contributed to the overthrow of President Samuel Doe. They could have the same effect in Kenya, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Zambia, Somalia, Malawi, Ghana, and other African nations.

The question is whether the West can muster the political will to apply sanctions. While preaching the new line on political conditionality, the West confines its actions to relatively harmless gestures. Aid continues to flow to President arap Moi of Kenya despite his repulsive efforts to crush members of the democracy movement "like rats," and despite calls for sanctions by leaders of the democratic movement such as human rights lawyer Gibson Kamau Kuria. In May 1990, a thousand French troops intervened to protect Omar Bongo's 23-year-long rule in Gabon. Britain's support of political conditionality has yet to go beyond lectures on democracy, despite pressures from its media. An editorial in the influential *Times* of London on 11 July 1990, entitled "An Ignominious Silence," angrily reprimanded the government for neither condemning nor taking action against President arap Moi: "The British Government has had not one word to say about President Moi's savagery. This is a disgrace."

Western rationalizations for not imposing sanctions echo the old uncritical paternalism that has been such a comfort to Africa's autocrats in the past. One concern repeatedly expressed is that there may be no apparent alternative to the existing ruler. But this merely reflects the age-old policy of tyrants—namely ensuring that they have no competitors. To accept the absence of visible alternatives as an excuse for doing nothing is to reward the techniques of tyranny. Another standard argument asserts that withholding aid will hurt the economy and the people. But how can aid given to violently repressive leaders—rather than channeled through nongovernmental organizations—possibly help "the people," as opposed to helping these leaders themselves to remain in power? The plea that aid must continue in order not to impede national development overlooks the fact that most African leaders have been "underdeveloping" the continent for years in spite of aid—indeed, probably because of it. Between 1980 and 1988, sub-Saharan Africa received a total aid flow of

\$83 billion, yet during the same period the average annual growth rate was minus 2.2 percent. In Zaire, one of the largest aid recipients in Africa, the average annual income has fallen to a fraction of what it was when President Mobutu came to power 25 years ago.

Political conditionality can weaken antidemocratic forces, but any serious effort to promote democracy must go further and seek to identify and strengthen democratic forces. This will be a difficult, messy, and disagreeable task. It will entail working around the government and reaching into civil society to support those groups struggling for democracy. Dictatorial regimes will object to this approach, and if it is not abandoned, confrontations will ensue, raising awkward questions about circumventing another country's sovereignty. Faced with such difficulties, the will of Western governments to support democracy may well weaken.

The Politics of Structural Adjustment

The importance of the international financial institutions to the success of any policy of political conditionality is underscored by the fact that the World Bank alone controls \$12 billion of the \$15 billion in international aid to Africa. As for the IMF, its power far surpasses its lending capacity and the financial resources it directly controls, because Western governments take their cue from the IMF in their relations with Africa. Any African country that cannot obtain IMF certification of aid-worthiness will get no cooperation from the West. Professor Adebayo Adedeji, the executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, may well be right in saying that the IMF and the World Bank are now more powerful in Africa than the former colonial masters. These agencies, notorious in the past for presenting development as apolitical, today acknowledge that political factors have been a major stumbling block to the development effort in Africa. They are now calling for participation, the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and consensus building.

Yet despite their new recognition that political factors constrain development efforts, the IFIs still appear to believe that they are not in the business of politics. They think that political variables can simply be treated as an engineering problem and "factored in" to improve the effectiveness of their structural adjustment programs, and thus that they can avoid changing their overall approach to development. They argue that this does not mean turning their backs on democratization, because the cause of democracy is best served by pressing on with adjustment programs that strengthen the market relative to the state. They point out that privatization will enhance pluralism and that a freer market will decentralize decision making, multiply the centers of power, and strengthen civil society. This view is widely held in Western government

circles and among intellectuals. Writing in the *Washington Post* on 24 May 1990, Chester Crocker, former U.S. assistant secretary of state for African affairs, argued that structural adjustment programs “are vital to the liberation of market forces, which in turn, represent the building blocks of pluralist democracy.”

This is a dangerous error. In African countries, structural adjustment entails draconian measures that are unpalatable and often disastrous. Unemployment and inflation rise steeply, yet at the same time subsidies are removed and wages frozen. The combined effect of these measures can cause real incomes to fall as much as 50 percent. Given that 40 percent of the people in these countries already live below absolute poverty levels, structural adjustment does not entail minor inconvenience. These programs cause deep despair, widespread malnutrition, and premature death; as UNICEF reports indicate, much of the burden falls upon children.

As should be expected, adjustment policies generate a great deal of political opposition even in countries like Gabon, which implemented a relatively moderate version. Adjustment in that country meant cutting government spending by 50 percent, removing subsidies, freezing wages, dismissing public employees, and selling government-owned enterprises. Yet that was only the first phase. When the government announced the second wave of austerity measures in January 1990, there were protests and strikes in every government agency, including the postal, bus, rail, air traffic, and telephone services; even the police and the army went on strike. In all cases, adjustment programs have been vigorously resisted by the public. To implement them, governments have been forced to resort to a large dose of coercion. For this reason, African regimes have become more, not less, authoritarian over the past decade.

The IFIs have collaborated enthusiastically in this political authoritarianism. In *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, the World Bank argued quite correctly that “programs of action can be sustained only if they arise out of consensus built on dialogue within each country.” Yet not once has the Fund or the Bank encouraged discussion and consensus building before the introduction of structural adjustment programs. In every case, they were quite content to settle the issues with the president of the client country or his economics or finance minister. Having done so, they constantly urged the necessity of political will to carry out the program—a euphemism for its coercive imposition.

No Easy Road

The indications are that political conditionality will not be seriously pursued in Africa by Western governments or the IFIs. In the United States, although many key congressional leaders strongly support political

conditionality, the Bush administration has been circumspect. It remains preoccupied with keeping its options open, causing no offense to friendly governments, and avoiding conflicts in the pursuit of seemingly intangible objectives. Thus, despite considerable public and congressional pressure, the administration moved very slowly and reluctantly to impose sanctions on South Africa, Zaire, and Liberia. More recently, Congressional calls for sanctions against President arap Moi of Kenya elicited a visit to that country from assistant secretary of state Herman Cohen, after which a delighted arap Moi declared that relations between Kenya and the United States were back to normal. In Britain and France, the governments have been more reluctant still.

It is now beginning to look as though the economic and strategic marginalization of Africa may not, as has been assumed, encourage political conditionality by leaving the West freer to act on its democratic principles. This marginalization may instead make the West too indifferent to Africa to care even about democratization. In any case, Africa's marginalization has translated into reduced economic relations, investment, and trade and development assistance. External bank loans and credits to sub-Saharan Africa fell from \$4 billion in 1980 to \$1 billion in 1986, and private investment dropped from \$2.3 billion in 1982 to \$500 million in 1986. Africa's trade with Western Europe dropped by more than 25 percent between 1980 and 1987. Export credits from France to sub-Saharan Africa have fallen dramatically—investment is running at only \$50 million a year, down from \$1 billion a year in the early 1980s. U.S. bilateral aid to sub-Saharan Africa, at \$1 billion in 1990, is only half its 1985 level. Political conditionality presupposes economic leverage. If current economic trends continue, the question of political conditionality may become moot.

Even if economic leverage remains available, the IFIs are unlikely to support political conditionality in more than a nominal way. They have become so fixated on structural adjustment that they will accept and protect any regime that submits to it. Somalia is a case in point. It is virtually isolated because of President Siad Barre's brutal dictatorship; even Italy, traditionally considered Somalia's "mother" country, has severed its ties. After the July 9 massacres in Mogadishu, the Italian government announced that it was withdrawing its ambassador, its military advisers, and its professors at the National University of Somalia. Yet the World Bank is currently processing a new loan of \$18.5 million to Somalia; it approved \$26.1 million earlier this year and \$70 million last year.

By such actions, the IFIs give African leaders the chance to substitute structural adjustment for democratization. That is the preferred alternative for both sides, and it ensures their peaceful coexistence. The IFIs fear anything that will bring them into conflict with most African regimes and prevent them from doing business. In order to keep relations cordial and

funds flowing, they readily collude in circumventing the economic conditionality that they themselves impose. If they subvert their own economic rules to keep the peace, it is easy to imagine how they would deal with political conditionality.

Still, the IFIs may be contributing to democratization in spite of themselves. If one is a Leninist and believes that "the worse, the better," one may indeed welcome their tenacity in pursuit of adjustment, for the escalation of political repression associated with it has helped to spawn the democracy movement in Africa. However, seeking progress by the intensification of contradictions is both costly and risky. It will cause a great deal of suffering and may give rise to extremist ideologies and political forms that serve neither development nor democracy.

Africans who have been struggling to bring democracy to their societies are now finding themselves the beneficiaries of growing international sympathy and support. All too often, however, well-wishers of African democracy in the West have been led astray by insensitivity to local conditions and erroneous theories (like those underlying the imposition of structural adjustment programs). Misguided support, however sincere, is bound to prove counterproductive. The West must guard against this by recognizing that Africa's democrats know what they are doing, and that they should be helped to advance their own agenda.