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## Theory and Practice in the Career of Fernando Henrique Cardoso: Part I

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Title: Theory and Practice in the Career of Fernando Henrique Cardoso: Part I

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Abstract. Political psychologists often contemplate the significance of their research--theoretical, empirical--for the practice of politics. Too often, seemingly valuable research is ignored, discounted, misperceived, and misapplied by political practitioners. Yet occasionally researchers practice politics as well--not just the politics of everyday life--but the formal politics of local, regional, national, and international entities. In the United States, Woodrow Wilson, Eugene McCarthy, and even Newt Gingrich come immediately to mind. What will be the interaction of research and practice when both are developed and implemented by the same individual? Dr. Ted Goertzel of Rutgers University has written the following article concerning another researcher-practitioner--Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil. The paper will be published within IBPP in installments and was presented at the Third Conference on Political Behavior in Brazil and Latin America, Federal University of Santa Catarina, Florianopolis, Brazil, June 11-13, 1997. (It has previously been published in the magazine, Brazzil.) Dr. Goertzel can be reached at [goertzel@crab.rutgers.edu](mailto:goertzel@crab.rutgers.edu).

The gap between theory and practice has long been a problem for the social sciences. On a descriptive level, social scientists gather a great deal of information that decision makers use every day. Decision makers frequently cite poll results, census data, and the findings of evaluation studies. They much less frequently refer to the writings of social theorists. Perhaps we social scientists must be content with an honorable and useful role as suppliers of facts to the men and women who manage public affairs. Our theories may be simply incapable of capturing the complex, chaotic nature of the real world. But many of us are reluctant to acknowledge this limitation. We continue to advocate policy positions, although the relationship between our politics and our social science is nebulous.

The career of Fernando Henrique Cardoso provides an interesting case study in the relationship between theory and practice because of his prominence in both the academic and the political worlds. Cardoso is perhaps the most distinguished scholar ever to lead a nation, and certainly the most important Marxist intellectual to do so since V.I. Lenin. His background as a Marxist theorist is especially surprising, given his pro-capitalist economic policies. In many ways, Cardoso's politics seem quite divorced from his academic writings. His market-oriented economic policies would be easier to understand if he had traded in his worn edition of *Das Kapital* for the collected works of Milton Friedman. But he is proud of having mastered the Marxist opus a decade before Althusser made reading Marx fashionable, and he readily acknowledges the Marxist element that persists in his thinking. He unabashedly stands by everything he ever wrote and insists that, given the same circumstances, he would write it all the same way again. His critics--on both sides of the political spectrum--are troubled by his refusal to apologize for either his past or his present.

On the left, the Brazilian political scientist Jose Luiz Fiori (1995) argues that "though Cardoso achieved prominence as a Marxist sociologist in the 1960s and 1970s, it can be argued--even though his early works contain a vehement, well-reasoned indictment of the course he has come to take as president--that the trajectory of his intellectual career contains no major breaks." Fiori labels Cardoso a puppet of the neoliberal, new colonialist, multinational business elite. But he doesn't believe that Cardoso has

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abandoned Marxist theory. On the contrary, he makes the odd accusation that Cardoso is using his Marxism in the service of his new masters.

On the right, the American political scientist Robert Packenham calls Cardoso an ideologue who ignores empirical evidence. Yet, Packenham (1992, p. 216) observes that "no one exemplified the change in Marxist thinking in a more vivid and significant way than Cardoso." Packenham supports Cardoso politically and says he would have voted for him if he were a Brazilian, but he cannot forgive Cardoso his failure to repent his Marxist past.

Fiori and Packenham raise a puzzling question. Isn't Marxism a critique of capitalism and a harbinger of socialist revolution? If so, how can such a theory be used in defense of the new capitalist world order? What can it mean to be a Marxist in a post-Communist era when almost no one believes in a centrally administered socialist economy? Does Cardoso's academic background have anything to do with his political practice, or did he simply put his academic rhetoric aside when he moved into the political arena? More specifically, how can his Marxist past be reconciled with his pro-capitalist politics?

Cardoso explained his view of Marxism in an article published in France in 1969. At the time, he was teaching at the University of Paris campus in suburban Nanterre, a hotbed of student activism where many thought capitalism was on its death bed and socialist revolution was imminent. Cardoso disagreed. Unlike many Marxists who blamed political errors for the failure of Marx's predictions, Cardoso thought that Marx's economic theory had essential flaws. In his view, Marxist economics simply could not account for the success of the working class in Europe or for the division of the capitalist world into core and peripheral countries.

Why, then, didn't Cardoso simply abandon Marxism? He did discard Marxist economics as outdated. But he thought that Marx still had value, not as an economist, but as a sociologist and as an applied philosopher of knowledge. One thing which Cardoso retained from the Marxist opus was Marx's dialectical model of analysis which combined formal economic research with sensitive political and sociological analysis. In his thinking about the philosophy of science, Cardoso has been influenced by his close friend, the leading Brazilian philosopher Jose Arthur Gianotti. The two of them were leading members of the Marxist Study Group of their youth, a group which is now famous throughout Brazil for the distinguished scholars and leaders which it produced.

By emphasizing the dialectic as a key element in Marxist thinking, Cardoso infused his Marxism with a heavy dose of voluntarism. He denied that political outcomes were determined by social forces, insisting that they could be changed by strategic and tactical decisions made by leaders. Many Marxists, by contrast, thought of Marxism as a determinist philosophy that predicted inevitable changes made necessary by the functional requirements of the capitalist system. Cardoso is not the only Marxist to reject this functionalist interpretation of Marx, the debate between "crass materialist determinism" and more politically dynamic views goes back to the time of Marx and Engels. The English philosopher Jon Elster (1982) has developed this point in depth.

Cardoso explained his approach to sociological analysis in an interview with American sociologist Joseph Kahl (1976, pages 180, 178): "What I try to do is to illuminate with certain intellectual categories a particular historical situation. And I try to keep up with the newest techniques--I've done some game theory with the computer--but the available techniques are still weak. They are based on empirical generalizations, attempting to capture the constancies, the regularities of a situation, emphasizing the most stable aspects. One can in a given investigation develop instruments for detecting the current

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tensions and conflicts, the values of the actors. But there is no methodology for understanding the forces that are emerging, and yet change is always my main preoccupation, what in Hegelian-Marxist dialectic would be called the negation of the situation... It only makes sense if you can combine theory, research, the historical moment, and practice--but it is hard to play that game, to move among the levels, and it takes flexibility, both intellectual and emotional."

Cardoso's generation was decisively shaped by the Brazilian military coup d'etat in 1964. Many leftists of the time were tragically misled by the belief that the political crisis was caused by the failure of dependent capitalism. They thought that the only options were socialist revolution or socio-economic stagnation. In fact, there was a third option: continued capitalist development with social reforms. What kept this from happening was a political crisis, not an economic one. The moderate reformers, who had enough votes and popular support to impose a compromise, allowed themselves to be misled by extremists on the left and the right who opposed reconciliation.

In his analysis of the 1964 coup d'etat , Cardoso (1972, p.65) rejected the determinist interpretation: "I do not believe that 1964 was written inexorably in the economic logic of history. Instead, I believe that the political process plays an active role in the definition of the course of events. Or, better, if it is true that inflation, the sharpening of the class struggle, and the difficulty of maintaining the rhythm of capitalist expansion in the socio-economic conditions prevailing during the Goulart government, radicalized the political forces and moved the institutional bases of the regime, the insurrectional movement was one of the possible solutions, not the only one, as an economic view of history would claim." (Dr. Goertzel's paper continues in next week's Issue.) (See Cardoso, F. H. (1972.) *O Modelo Politico Brasileiro e Outros Ensaio*, So Paulo: Difuso Europa do Livro, p. 65; Elster, J. (1982.) *Marxism, functionalism, and game theory*. *Theory and Society*, 11; Fiori, J. L. (May 1995.) *NACLA Report on the Americas*; Kahl, J. (1976.) *Modernization, Exploitation and Dependency in Latin America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, pp. 178; 180; Packenham, R. (1992.) *The Dependency Movement: Scholarship and Politics in Development Studies* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p., 216.) (Keywords: Cardoso, Policy, Praxis.)