

## Reviews

HANS-DIETER EVERS/TILMAN SCHIEL, *Strategische Gruppen. Vergleichende Studien zu Staat, Bürokratie und Klassenbildung in der Dritten Welt*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1988. 279 pages, DM 29.80

The concept of strategic groups as elaborated by Hans-Dieter Evers for more than 20 years is here represented in a comprehensive manner and, for the first time ever, in German. The book is comprehensibly written, logical and systematic in its composition, defining the meaning of the concept, discussing the idea of social classes and providing illustrations based on facts and examples, mostly taken from the region of Southeast Asia. A few repetitions and a certain lack of conformity result from the inclusion of some older papers (also by Rüdiger Korff). The authors' purpose, however, is clearly demonstrated by concise introductions preceding each of the main chapters (Part I: What are strategic groups? Part II: Strategic groups and social classes; Part III: From divine kingship to administrative authority).

It is a book written by sociologists for sociologists, but undoubtedly with wider implications than sociology alone, in so far as the paradigm of strategic group relations seems to be applicable to other historical periods too. From the point of view of a historian and a social anthropologist there are some remarkable and constructive features, inter alia, the critical discussion of the dogmatic and non-creative idea of social class structure in Marxism-Leninism, which, according to the authors, is unable to comprehend the unstable and not fully integrated political systems of many societies of the Third World both past and present. These can be better described by strategic group relations. The book is particularly useful for all social scientists who are torn between the applicability of Marxist models on the one hand and the realities of life on the other. The study is, however, not anti-Marxist in general but follows successfully, in my opinion, the traditions of Marxist and Weberian sociology in a quite original sense.

The book operates with a theoretically based working equipment, which opens some possibilities to qualify and to verify social processes by empirical structure analysis. It cannot, and will not, create a new philosophy of development applicable to such problems as, for instance, the different courses of Europe and Asia in history. Nevertheless, there are some reflections on

history and sequential patterns, but it seems difficult in some cases to make a clear distinction between strategic groups and social classes. Strategic groups are characterized by competition for a share of surplus from increased production, the mode of appropriation of which may be personal, corporate, or collective, in order to create the most favourable strategies and conditions towards that end. Therefore, strategic groups show different orientations in their strategic behaviour and action. Social classes, on the contrary, arise from alliances between various strategic groups or from the so-called hybridization of only one strategic group.

The advantage of this concept stems, in our opinion, from an improved method for analysing social strata, the consideration of the subjective factor, the abolition of the one-sided principle of dominating relations of production, and the close connection between theory and empirical data. Ownership of the means of production and the appropriation of the surplus product are to be understood as factors of importance within the scope of other structural elements. The dynamics of social processes can thereby be better registered and documented than by preconceived models of unilinear development or fixed socio-economic laws because of the possible alternatives depending on both internal and external factors.

The book under review is a remarkable contribution to the discussion and analysis of social as well as historical developments especially in respect of comparisons of Europe with the rest of the world. This theory helps to prevent the danger of putting modern (and early) Asiatic institutions and political systems into a preconceived European model with its corresponding terminology.

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KLAUS SEELAND, *Gegenseitiges Verständnis als Entwicklungsprozeß. Beiträge zur Theorie und Praxis der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit.* (Konkrete Fremde 6). Grösch: Verlag Ruegger, 1989, 286 p., SFr. 38.- (ISBN 3-7253-0340-1)

This is a *Festschrift* in honour of Professor Martin Menzi on his 60th birthday. He does indeed seem to be a remarkable man, combining agricultural practice (chicken breeding seems to be one of his favourite activities) and academic management (he is director of the post-graduate course in development studies at the Technical University of Zürich). As no list of his publica-