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POLITICS AND THE STAGES OF GROWTH

W. W. ROSTOW

*Professor of Economics and History
The University of Texas at Austin*

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To Elspeth

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PREFACE

This book is the outcome of a course taught for three successive semesters at The University of Texas at Austin from February 1969 to May 1970. And my first acknowledgment is to the students who shared in elaborating this set of ideas.

They represent at least interim conclusions to a line of inquiry begun as an undergraduate at Yale in the mid-1930s. Two aspects of Marx' analysis interested me. First, his historical sequence from feudalism through capitalism and socialism to communism. *The Stages of Economic Growth* was, in part, an alternative to that sequence, done with the advantage of another century's knowledge of history. Second, there were Marx' propositions linking the economy and the technical relationships within it to politics. I found these challenging, while reacting against his underlying view that politics was essentially a super-structure to economic life.

The bulk of my subsequent professional work was in the field of economic history, more narrowly defined; but I continued to explore this relationship, assuming from the beginning that societies were interacting organisms and economic factors did not enjoy a peculiar priority. Later I introduced the additional dimension of war and its playback effects on economic, social, and political life.

At M.I.T., in the 1950s, studies on the Soviet Union, Communist China, and the United States forced me to explore more deeply the determinants of politics; and I concluded upon finishing *The Stages of Economic Growth* that I would next turn to formulate, in a systematic way, what I thought I had learned over the years about politics. I worked at this task in 1959-61, stimulated by the parallel efforts of my colleagues, notably, Daniel Lerner, Ithiel Pool, and Lucian Pye.

I then turned for a period to work as a public servant.

In the Policy Planning Council at the Department of State (1961-6) a number of my associates were equally interested in this range of problems. We exchanged views, kept in touch with those at work in the universities, and sought to crystallize for policy purposes our ideas on political development. Three of that group now hold distinguished positions in academic

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life: Robert Johnson, William Polk, and Howard Wriggins. I am in their debt and that of other government colleagues who were willing and able to draw back from the flow of day-to-day work and speculate on its shape and larger meaning.

I also had the privilege of sitting in on many meetings between chiefs of government – something like a hundred of them. Chiefs of government do their business together in a manner quite different from foreign ministers. The latter approach professionally, in a fine-grained way, the exact formulae which might resolve specific issues on their technical agenda. Chiefs of government – when meeting in relative privacy – usually expound to each other with candor their domestic political setting and problems; isolate, within those limits, how and where they can move together in military and foreign affairs; where they will have to live with differences of view; and how inevitable differences can best be kept from becoming enflamed.

I was coming by a longer academic route to the notion of politics as an eternal triangle of competing imperatives – the imperatives of security, welfare, and the constitutional order. But the succession of encounters I was privileged to observe – in fact, all I learned about the political process as a public servant – confirmed me in the judgment that this breakdown was useful and right.

Those experiences also confirmed the judgment that it was useful, in politics as in economics, to view the contemporary world as made up of nations at different stages of growth, whose problems bore a family relationship to those of nations at similar stages in the past as well as the present.

On several occasions while in government, I talked about aspects of politics and political development in terms similar to those used here; e.g. in Venezuela, on ‘The Challenge of Democracy in Developing Nations’ (Department of State *Bulletin*, 17 February 1964); in Argentina, ‘The Chapter That Keynes Never Wrote’ (Department of State *Bulletin*, 29 March 1965); in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, on ‘Sharing the Good Life’ (Department of State *Bulletin*, 23 May 1966); in Leeds, England, on ‘The Great Transition: Tasks of the First and Second Post-War Generations’ (Leeds University Press, 1967).

It was while working in Washington that the basic structure which informs this book fell into place; and, on the morning of 20 January 1969, as I awaited in my office in the White House West Basement the departure of the President and the President-elect for the Capitol, I was outlining my first lecture for my seminar at Austin.

In writing this book, I acquired many debts.

Alan Kent and Gerald Sewell were first students, then teaching assistants – and friends. Their comments of substance – and pedagogical guidance in

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teaching a new body of ideas stretching over time and the conventional disciplines in a somewhat unusual way – were exceedingly helpful.

A good many colleagues made important suggestions about aspects of this analysis or took valuable time to read and criticize drafts of the chapters. I am particularly grateful to George Arnakis, Henry Bullock, William Goetzmann, Thomas Gould, Robert Johnson, William Jordan, Doris Kearns, Albert Kervyn, Frank Kierman, William Langer, William Livingston, Elliott Morss, Richard Musgrave, Ithiel Pool, Lucian Pye, E. V. Rostow, P. N. Rosenstein-Rodan, Howard Wriggins, and Whitney Young, Jr.

I benefited, also, from seminars on this approach to politics at M.I.T., Columbia, the University of Hong Kong, the University of Ottawa, The University of Oklahoma at Norman, the East Texas State University at Commerce, the North Texas State University at Denton, in the Government Department at The University of Texas at Austin, and at The School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, at Washington, D.C.

Miss Lois Nivens, who shared with extraordinary devotion eight years of bureaucratic life in Washington, contributed greatly in many ways to this academic enterprise as well. Mrs Sheryl Patterson typed and retyped the text with good cheer. Mr Joseph Pluta helped develop the data which underlie table 40.

E. D. Yoes, and his crew of technicians at The University of Texas Communication Center, responded with memorable competence to the adventure of taping a graduate seminar, presenting a new set of ideas, warts and all, the first time round.

A grant from the Government Department at The University of Texas, financed by The Ford Foundation, permitted me to check directly certain hypotheses incorporated in this book, in some fourteen countries during the summer of 1969 – an exercise which enriched and strengthened it at many points.

My greatest debt is to my wife, Elspeth Davies Rostow. There is no aspect of this book which we have not discussed over the many years it has been germinating; and she read and criticized the text in draft. It is a vastly better book than it would have been without her insight and knowledge. My only regret is that she has not written a book of her own on the politics she has studied, taught, and observed.

I should, finally, acknowledge a debt owed my parents. Products of the pre-1914 social-democratic tradition, they encouraged their sons to find their own way and form their own judgments. But they impressed upon us one rule which every experience of politics – vicarious and direct – subsequently confirmed: one cannot in politics separate ends and means; the

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results actually achieved are determined as much by the means used as by the objectives sought. As the reader will perceive, this assessment suffuses what follows from beginning to end.

W. W. ROSTOW

Austin, Texas
October 1970