

Third wave of democracy

Samuel Huntington's thought-provoking book *The Third Wave* is a tour de horizon of the grand history of the last twenty years of democratic change all over the world.

Huntington starts from the premise that the world has witnessed three waves of democratisation during the last 150 years. The first wave of democratisation stretched from the mid 19th century to the 1920s, as France, Britain and other European countries became democratic by adopting universal suffrage. The second wave rode on allied victory in the Second World War (1939-1945), and, included among others, West Germany, Italy, Japan as well as several Latin American countries. The third wave, writes Huntington, began on April 25, 1974 with a military coup in Lisbon that would eventually bring democracy to Portugal.

Over the next 15 years some 30 countries moved from authoritarian to democratic regimes in a wave that swept through Latin America, Asia and finally the East European bloc. The first wave of democratisation generally occurred in industrialised countries with a *weltanschauung* shaped by Locke, Mill and the philosophers of Enlightenment. The second wave was a result of the Second World War which was fought to put an end to the scourge of fascism, the very anti-thesis of democracy.

The Allied victory established a democratic ethos. "Explicit argument against democracy as a concept almost disappeared from the public debate in most countries of the world," maintains Huntington. Even the authoritarian regimes had to argue that they were democratic or would bring democratic reform once they solved their countries' economic problems. An authoritarian regime's claim to legitimacy depended, in large part, on its economic performance.

The third wave democratic transition was produced by a combination of the economic growth of the 1960s and the economic crises of 1970s and 1980s. Economic growth created the conditions of democracy and the crises imparted the immediate impetus for it.

Huntington gives economic growth much of the credit for the third wave. The authoritarian regime which succeeds in promoting economic growth, Huntington argues, prepares the ground for democracy.

In Brazil the middle class supported the 1964 coup. By the mid 1970s the same middle class that had benefited from the almost miraculous economic growth was demanding democratic change. The Brazilian experience was paralleled by Pakistan almost during the



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same period.

Economic growth fosters the values and attitudes of democracy, promoting competence and willingness to compromise, with a rise in the educational level. It creates an urban middle class. This happened in South Korea when the burgeoning middle class demanded democracy. When the middle class meets the government tear-gas, Huntington writes, the tear-gas loses.

But the economic factor is not the only factor fostering democracy. Other factors make their own contribution. Until the mid-1960s, the Catholic church accommodated itself to authoritarian regimes. But, after Vatican II, and the reforms of Pope John XXIII, the Catholic church began to support or lead the opposition. Throughout the 1980s Pope John Paul visited authoritarian countries at important junctures in their transition to democracy. Once again the Pope is on the march, because Catholicism is faced with a deep crisis.

No charismatic religious personality has risen in the Islamic world to lead the ummah out of the predicament and give a position response to the challenge posed by the fast changing world. The historic trend, of course, is in favour of democracy; but, there is no inevitability in the trend especially in the Muslim countries.

One should never forget the importance of political leadership, having courage, vision and Promethean zeal to change the lot of the downtrodden masses. Huntington puts it most appropriately: "A democracy is installed not by trends but by people."

He advises reform through negotiation and compromise between the government and the opposition. It is important, he says, to maintain a "backwards legitimacy", validating today's changes in the light of historical practice.

One must always be on guard against the reverse wave. The first democratic wave ended with a number of government relapsing into fascism in the 1920s and 1930s. The second wave receded when between 1962 and 1975, the number of government toppled by coup d'etat increased from 13 to 38.

Huntington hedges the answer to the biggest question posed in the book: How enduring is the third wave? Hunt-

ington's answer is: "Whether democracy falters or is sustained will depend primarily on the extent to which political leaders wish to maintain it."

Endemic societal problems do not help. He includes Pakistan as one of the most troubled new democracies. It is truer to say that the price of democracy is eternal vigilance all over the world, especially in the countries of the Third World.

Huntington rejects the obnoxious idea that Islam does not support democracy. He says that the same was once said about Catholicism. Huntington is of the firm opinion that in the Middle East and North Africa economic development is reaching levels that will usher in democracy sooner or later.

Huntington concludes: Economic development should create the conditions for the progressive replacement of authoritarian political system by democratic ones. Leadership, then, can take advantage of these conditions.

But, he warns: "History does not move in a straight line." He ends on an optimistic note: "When skilled and determined leaders push, it does move forward."

The question is: Are political leaders in Pakistan skilled and determined? Pakistan is having a rendezvous with destiny. History is beckoning our leaders onto the road to genuine democracy i.e. democracy which solves the problems of the one-third of our population living below the poverty line. Our leaders can either swim on the crest of the third wave of democracy or sink with its reversal.

Since the French Revolution (1789), the masses have been playing an ever-increasing role in the making of history, climaxing in the October Revolution (1917) and the Chinese Revolution (1949). Indeed, the 20th century will go down in history as the period when the countless millions hewers of wood and drawers of water took the destiny into their calloused and bruised hands and moulded it according to their will. Any leaders who would like to leave a mark on history should not forget the role of the masses. These great, struggling, unknown masses are coming into own. Their effort will not be in vain.

*Say not, the struggle naught availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.
For while the tired waves vainly breaking
Seem no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through the creeks and inlets
breaking
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.*

— Arthur Hugh Clough