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Uganda's Bold Social Gamble:
Women and the Future of Uganda

BELL CHEVIGNY

Though the Western press on Africa seems afflicted with the despair, fatigue, and cynicism called "Afropessimism," Uganda is becoming, against all odds, a source of positive interest. A decade ago, after nearly 20 years of nightmare—dictatorship, civil war, and AIDS—Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) took power. International lenders are enthusiastic about Uganda's economic growth (estimated last year at 10%) and its recovery policies—privatization, industrial rehabilitation and compliance with IMF-designed structural adjustment programs. Despite rebellions in its north, the country's relative stability prompts Western leaders to study it as a model. It also merits the attention of progressive people. Uganda is at the crossroads of a hazardous and hotly-contested experiment in social reconstruction which includes the empowerment of women.

For affirmative action in politics, Uganda leads East Africa and (perhaps excepting South Africa) the continent. Thirty-nine parliamentary seats are reserved for women; a vice-president (who is also Agriculture Minister), another cabinet minister, three deputy ministers, and the Deputy Speaker are women; there is a Ministry of Gender and Community Development; the 1995 Constitution offers perhaps more provisions for women than any other. Makerere University in Kampala houses Africa's first Women's Studies Department and, by giving a 1.5 point "bonus" to the grade average of female applicants, has swelled women's admissions from 20% to 33%. In early summer I visited this beautiful, moving country to learn how these gains had come about and how solid and deep their effects might be.

In 1986, according to Ugandan feminist M.P. Miria Matembe, her country experienced the rare combination of "peaceful environment and political will" essential to fostering women's participation in public life. Before then, and since gaining independence in 1962, Ugandans had known little peace and had little positive experience of politics. Parties were built on religious and tribal divisions compounded by colonialism. In 1971, Idi Amin seized power from Milton Obote and began his reign of terror. His eventual defeat led to general elections in 1980.

When, in popular perception, victory was stolen from the Democratic Party (DP) candidate by Obote of the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), Museveni initiated what would become a five-year "bush," or guerrilla, war. Through systematic vengeance killing, Obote's second term saw more killing than in Amin's time, though the Western press paid less attention.

Women in Uganda's Liberation Struggle

Women supported Museveni's army, acting as couriers, spies, arms-runners, and even soldiers (some bore both weapons and babies on their backs). In its "liberated zones" the NRM introduced a unique political structure: all adults in each village or ward became a Resistance Council (RC) that elected an accountable nine-member Resistance Committee with guaranteed seats for women and youth. As political sci-
Is That All There Is?
American Politics and the “Evil of Two Lessers”

JOEL ROGERS

The draft Democratic National Program advertises itself as a “moderate, achievable, common-sense agenda that will improve people’s daily lives and not increase the size of government.” It’s certainly moderate enough, and it certainly won’t increase the “big government” in Washington that’s already shrunk to its smallest size in 30 years. But it will do very little to improve people’s daily lives—and what it doesn’t do virtually assures their further coarsening and disruption by an economy unconstrained by democratic will.

“Opportunity, Responsibility, Community” are the documents alleged organizing themes—worthy, old-fashioned, focus-group-approved words. Neoliberalism with a smirking face. Deregulation, and costless cultural signalling. Trade deals for the big boys at Commerce. Food out of the mouths of those babes with parents stupid enough to be poor. “Opportunity” is mostly about education, without the resources to make it possible. “Responsibility” is mostly about crime—which we’re all against—and defense, which we all want adequately supplied. “Community” is mostly about putting V-chips in TVs and taking cigarettes out of the mouths of the young. Cities are not mentioned. Women get choice and . . . well, what more could they possibly want? And on the topic of corporate violence and greed, get this precise and thundering condemnation: “Employers have a responsibility to do their part as well . . . We believe that values like loyalty, fairness, and responsibility are not inconsistent with the bottom line.”

Same old same old. But they’ll win in November, and we’ll be glad they did, given the alternative.

At some point, though—and now’s as good a time as any—we ought to start thinking about our alternative, about what a truly progressive program for American reconstruction might be. Assume for a moment the improbable, that we had a competent vehicle to put the message out—a vastly larger New Party, a truly reformed Democratic Party, or some other lowering beast still waiting to be born—what do we have to say? Properly suspicious of discussions that go nowhere, but improperly unprepared to say something if we’re ever going to go anywhere, progressives don’t answer this question enough.

Expressing Progressive Politics

Maybe that’s because there are no answers—something that an increasing number of progressives, in their hearts, seem to believe. To hear all the talk of internationalization of capital, for example, you might think there is really nothing to be done before we get world government, which we can’t get because we can’t even organize a national one. Or to hear all the talk of racial and other differences, or the decline of working class solidarity, you might think there could never be enough of us willing to do something together even if there was something to be done.

Or maybe it’s because there are too many answers—too many things that are screwed up, with too much interdependency in their solution—so that starting the “what is to be done” list is defeated by its having no clear end. Or, in a variant on this, there might be an impossible consensus constraint on getting started—that to act together on anything, we have to agree on everything.

Maybe, but I doubt it. It’s true that our world is not the world of our mothers. The basic structure of the economy and politics has changed in ways that defeat traditional New Deal/Great Society politics. But that doesn’t mean there is nothing to be done, or the best that we can hope for is triage in the rollback of that social democracy’s achievements. This society is disorganized, and “organic solidarities” cannot be counted on as fuel for social movements. But that doesn’t mean there’s not a mass public for a new progressive politics. Indeed, there’s probably a bigger public for such a politics now than at any time since the 1930s.

After all, a generation of economic decline and failed government response have not only made American politics ugly. They’ve also generated a huge potential base for the signature issues of progressives—greater social control of the economy, and a democracy strong enough to enforce it. There is vast implicit demand for imposing some standards on corporate behavior, for making values matter in how we run our economy and distribute opportunity and reward. And there is vast demand for a more responsive and effective “government”—competent public and social authorities accountable to popular aims. Satisfying these demands could be the basis for a new mass democratic politics—a politics that would get progressives out of their marginal ghetto and into the business of running the country.

And it’s not the case—it never has been—that we need to agree on everything before doing some good on some things.

Of course, a new progressive politics would need to take account of how the world has changed. It would recognize that the nation state can no longer be the only instrument of politics—the self-governing capacity of the society itself would need to be increased. Accepting the decline of “organic” solidarities—themselves often produced by completely oppressive practices we should be happy to be done with—it would take more explicit aim at creating
an agent of reform. While the achievements of the welfare state were considerable, it would need to be far less defensive about its defects. And while the politics of expression and charity are all well and good, it would indeed have to say something about how to “improve people’s daily lives” and offer some “common sense” solutions to real and urgent problems.

The Root of Most Evil

But that still leaves plenty to be said, and it need not be timid. A full program would require plans for urban redevelopment, the reform of education, more substantive equality of opportunity for people to exercise their capabilities, and developing and sustaining the social and political institutions that promote genuine democracy. All of these programs, however, first require restructuring the root of most evil in the U.S.—the economy.

The basic problem with the American economy is not that it’s subject to international competitive pressures, or that new technology is displacing the need for human labor. The problem is that we as a society have made it too easy to make a lot of money treating people as road kill and the earth like a sewer—the “low road” of industrial restructuring that most American firms are still on—and too hard to make money as a high-wage, low-waste, more democratically-minded producer—the “high road” response we should more systematically support.

Things to do here include dramatically raising the minimum wage—not just your $5.15 an hour nonsense, but something more like $10 an hour; ending public “subsidy abuse” to low-wage employers by abolishing all “corporate welfare” for firms paying less than that; and shortening the work week to provide a better distribution (“full”) of employment within the context of vastly improved jobs.

Of course, those jobs need to be offered by firms, and the firms need to survive under competitive conditions, and doing so as a high-end producer or service provider requires an environment not only hostile to the low-road alternative, but supportive of the high-­­road one. What is needed specifically are a range of quasi-public goods—from physical infrastructure to effective labor market and training institutions to more democratic industrial relations—that no individual firm has any incentive to provide on its own.

But that’s where “we the people” come in. Just as in the Keynesian age we showed the worth of democracy by using its institutions (the state, unions) to solve the problem of effective demand, so in this age we can show its worth by solving the problem of “effective supply”—creating that environment to support a more dynamic and satisfying capitalism.

Paying for Real Change with Real Money

Doing this will require some money. Where might it come from? Basically, all the obvious places. We finally arrange national accounts to separate capital accounts from services, and be quite willing to drive the first into deficit. We should in fact declare the “peace dividend” that we’ve paid for several times. We might usefully declare the “environmental dividend” as well—saving hundreds of billions on current waste merely through wholesale application of current conservation technologies. We should reform existing tax policy to reward those who invest here, not abroad. And we should finally liberate “labor’s capital”—the trillions in worker “owned” but not controlled pension and other assets—for socially-minded use.

On this last, where some real money is to be found, we can reasonably speculate that individual working-class and middle-class savers generally have more interest in “keeping up the neighborhood” than anonymous corporate investors simply looking for the highest rate of return. After all, they live in the neighborhood, so profitable investments that improve it give them a double return; and they are people, not legal fictions, with affective ties to others. Well, imagine a system in which workers actually had control over their savings, could combine them freely, and had tax or other incentives to do so in regional investment pools doing economically targeted investing.

With sufficiently large and diversified investment portfolios, there’s every reason to believe these funds could earn competitive rates of return. If there are transition costs, the Federal Reserve might be pressured to do what its charter purportedly required it to do—use its regional authority to promote economic development in those regions—in this case by helping secure their credit-worthiness during startup.

What would be the result? Distressed communities would get needed capital, capital in general would become more rooted and less prone to the depredations of international finance, savers would get greater security in their investment than that provided in casino capitalism, the economy could be moved more squarely toward the high-wage, low-waste path of sustainable development. Not heaven, to be sure, but a heck of a lot better than the current hell.

There’s probably a bigger public for progressive politics now than at any time since the 1930s.

Much more needs to be said on these issues, but this is at least the beginning of a program that could positively address the other evils currently plaguing the majority of the U.S. population. A program, in short, that dramatically raises living standards, attends to obvious unmet social needs in a way that is fiscally prudent and productivity-minded, builds the democracy needed to realize efficiencies in administration and make the high-wage low-waste path of restructuring possible, gets the middle class realigned with the poor, shows a real break with old liberal politics, sticks it only to those unwilling to make a fair contribution to the society feeding them, and contributes to world peace and happiness.

Our kind of program. A program that could plausibly find majority support in the general population. Not something likely to be offered anytime soon by either of the major parties, but something we might do well to refine, improve, and publicize together.

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Once Again, Elections in Nicaragua: Can Democracy Triumph?

JORGE R. ROGA CHEVSKY

The current electoral season in the United States coincides with a new round of electoral activity in one of the former so-called “trouble spots” in Central America. On October 20th, Nicaraguans will go to the polls to replace the incumbent, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. The two main contenders, both of whom present themselves as the main hope for the future, are also holdovers from Nicaragua’s political past.

The leading candidate, Arnoldo Alemán, Managua’s former mayor, is running under the banner of the Liberal Alliance, which includes the party over which he presides, the Liberal Constitutional Party, which in turn was the political platform that helped to legitimize the rule of Nicaragua’s most infamous political family, the Somozas.

His close contender, Daniel Ortega, was President under the Sandinistas, who were the main force behind the overthrow of the Somoza regime in 1979. The Sandinistas ruled for 11 years, until their 1990 electoral defeat.

Redrawing the Lines

It would appear as if Nicaraguans are on the brink of a momentous political decision. If Alemán wins, Nicaraguans would enter the twenty-first century under the leadership of a political formation that dates back to the nineteenth, and which was heavily involved in the political struggles that helped to define the characteristics of nationhood in the early days after liberation from Spain. Nicaraguan Liberals have carried the banner of free trade and open access to foreign investment ever since political unrest in the mother country afforded Central Americans the opportunity to claim the right to define their own political future.

It was these same Liberals who in 1927 agreed to accept political power under the watchful eyes of the U.S. Marines, and later in alliance with the U.S.-trained National Guard of Somoza. In an era of triumphant neo-Liberalism, the success of the Nicaraguan Liberals could confirm that there really is nothing new under the sun.

On the other side we find Ortega; if he wins the election, it would return to power one of the main opponents of the U.S. during the final decade of the Cold War. Daniel Ortega presided over a Sandinista government that allied itself with Communist Cuba and promoted revolutionary change in Central America. It was the anthem of the Sandinista movement that proudly proclaimed, “We struggle against the Yankee, the enemy of humanity.”

Violence Under the Electoral Surface

It would appear as if the stage is set in Nicaragua for a defining contest between two polarized ideological systems, and two antagonistic visions of social development. The fact that this struggle is being carried out through the venue of elections, rather than the more traditional Central American method of armed confrontation, may suggest to some that Nicaragua might have gained a level of political maturity which was ostensibly lacked until recently, and which could assure that this troubled nation, in the words of an Alemán campaign announcement, will “march forward into the future along the path of peace and democracy, striving to develop a new Nicaragua for all Nicaraguans.”

But both appearances are misleading. Taking the “peaceful” image first: so far this year 110 people have committed suicide in Nicaragua, 20% more than 1995, largely because of an economic crisis that has sunk 70% of Nicaraguans into poverty—with an unemployment rate only slightly lower. It is thus not unreasonable to speculate that the number of victims of Nicaragua’s economic crisis is many times the number of people who officially have been deemed to have committed suicide. To get a true accounting we would need to include the number of people who have died from diseases that could have been prevented with adequate medical care and nutrition. We also would need to add the number of people who have died from social violence in a society wrought to the extreme by a precipitous and disastrous unraveling of the social safety net after the 1990 defeat of the Sandinistas.

Following this line of inquiry, we cannot measure political violence just by the number of deaths attributable to overtly ideological confrontations. We might further speculate that the lack of a violent clash over what appears to be a polarized choice within the political spectrum in Nicaragua, rather than suggesting a sublimation of violence through the medium of elections, may instead indicate the suppression of a real search for a social system that is not based on the violent subjugation of the majority.

In the past, the ideological opposition of Alemán and Ortega might have occasioned the outbreak of a violent clash. In the current context, however, given the accommodations that the Sandinista’s have had to make since the dawning of the post-Cold War era, the struggle is, for all intents and purposes, between two approaches to manage the same structural integration of
ties, and in particular industrial properties, however, "he has emerged . . . as a moder­n and foreign investors" (9/13/96).

The truth of the matter is that the former Sandinista government under Ortega never had a chance to pursue the type of "mas­sive socialist transformation" suggested by the Reuter article. In fact, the Sandinistas never carried out a full-scale expropriation of private enterprises. Throughout the en­tire era of their rule the majority of proper­ties, and in particular industrial properties, remained in the hands of the private sec­tor. Moreover, the Sandinista government was extremely interested in attracting for­eign investment; the main reason foreign investment did not flow into Nicaragua was not the government's economic policies, but rather the political actions of the United States and the impact of the Contra War. However, despite the revisionist implic­ations of the Reuter quote, the change in appearance is actually a change in sub­stance. What has changed radically is the attitude of the Sandinistas towards the in­volvement of the U.S. in Nicaragua.

**Sandinista's Emerging Pragmatism?**

We can read, for example, in another Reuter release dated September 7, that "Nicaragua's left-wing Sandinista Front has dropped its controversial anthem and adopted Beethoven's Ode to Joy as the party song . . . ." The article goes on to indicate that "Ortega said that the U.S. government's attitude has changed since the end of the Cold War and the two pow­ers can now work together in a context of mutual respect." Far from any change in the attitude of the U.S. government, this new spirit of friendliness reflects the reali­ties faced by the Sandinistas, namely the necessity of finding an accommodation with U.S. capitalist interests in order to be a viable ruling force. The struggle waged by the Sandinistas against Republican ad­ministrations in the 1980s was not prima­rily a struggle between capitalism and so­cialism. Rather, it was a struggle waged by a Central American nation to find an av­enue of development that would not serve primarily the interests of the imperial rulers in Washington. This struggle was effect­ively lost, and therefore has led to a much more sober appreciation of the current po­litical context on the part of the Sandinistas.

**Déjà Vu All Over Again**

This situation is not new. In 1909, the United States first fomented, and then ac­tively backed with the presence of Marines, an Atlantic coast insurrection that led to the resignation of the then Liberal Presi­dent, José Santos Zelaya. In language that is highly reminiscent of the later attacks on the Sandinistas, the New York Times re­ported in its December 3, 1909, edition that: In effect, the Secretary of State declares that it is the intention of this Govern­ment to treat Zelaya as an outlaw. He recites Zelaya's crimes. He has violated the convention of the Central American States . . . . he has throttled public opinion and the press; he has imprisoned Nicaraguan citizens . . . . In conse­quence of these lawless procedures "a majority of the Central American re­publics" long since appealed to our Government to take action against Zelaya, and this appeal is now forti­fied by the uprising of a portion of the Nicaraguans . . . . The Secretary is con­vinced that the insurrection represents the will of the majority of the Nicaraguans. (I, 10)

If we discount the antiquated tone, and replace "Zelaya" with "Sandinistas," we might as well be reading an article from 1989 as opposed to 1909. Zelaya's main crime was that, as a nationalist leader, he was attempting to find a balanced set of inter­national political and economic relations that would be beneficial primarily for his own nation. In particular, he tried to keep alive the possibility of negotiating with another country the rights to use Nicara­guan territory to construct an alternative inter-isthmus canal which would have chal­lenged U.S. hegemony in the region.

Moreover, it was another nationalist leader who initially fought under the ban­ner of rebellious Liberal forces, namely Augusto César Sandino, who, due to his unwavering opposition to the presence of U.S. Marines on Nicaraguan soil, eventu­ally inspired the Sandinistas in their later struggle against "the Yankee."

**Following the Dictates of Pax Americana**

The sad reality of the current balance of forces in the Americas is that the defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990 marked the end of the latest in a long history of unsuccessful attempts by nationalist Latin American leaders of varying political stripes to strike an independent stance vis-à-vis the interests of the North American Goliath. The sole holdout up to this point is the media denominated "political dinosaur," Fidel Castro, and even he would probably ac­cept a necessary accommodation if the U.S. were not fixated on seeking his uncondi­tional demise.

Returning to the issue of the current Nicaraguan elections, the peaceful struggle between ostensible political enemies is pri­marily due to the need by all political forces seeking to establish a viable government to accept the rules of the game as dictated by Washington and Wall Street. Rather than demonstrating the maturing of a nation into a supposedly democratic political culture, the current circumstances reflect the total­izing impact on the Americas of the Pax Americana as an outgrowth of the post­Cold War international balance of forces.

This judgement is not meant to reflect negatively on the Sandinistas or Daniel Ortega for having abandoned an earlier stance which proved to be untenable, and substituting it with a pragmatic policy that better reflects the current context. Neither is it meant to suggest that it will make no difference to Nicaraguans whether Ortega or Aleman emerges victorious. What it is meant to indicate is that the cause of true rather than nominal democracy was se­verely set back by the defeat of the Sandinista government in 1990, and that the current electoral process is a further confirmation of this fact. True political ma­turity in the Americas will have been reached when an electoral confrontation between ideological antagonists can be waged within a context that is not mandated by the interests of an elite minority in the United States. A new effort to ac­complish this democratic transformation will probably have to wait for the advent of a new century.

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WHICH RIGHTS? WHOSE DEMOCRACY?

The United States vs. East & Southeast Asia

HENRY ROSEMONT, JR.

In international dialogues, human rights have been roughly placed in three categories: civil and political, social and economic, and solidarity rights. It is usually understood that each succeeding set of rights progresses from the preceding set, evidenced by the terms by which we refer to them: first, second and third generation rights. But are they compatible?

The civil and political rights, the U.S. insists all Asian governments observe—except for client states like the Philippines, and to a lesser extent, Indonesia—are grounded theoretically in the view that human beings are basically autonomous individuals. And if I am indeed essentially an autonomous individual, it is easy to appreciate my demands that neither the state nor anyone else abridge my freedom to choose my own ends and means, so long as I similarly respect the civil and political rights of all others. But on what grounds can autonomous individuals demand a job, or health care, or an education—the second generation rights—from other autonomous individuals? There is a logical gap here: from the mere premise of being an autonomous individual, no conclusion can follow that I have a right to employment.

Put another way, jobs, adequate housing, health care, and so on, do not fall from the sky. They are human creations, and no one has yet been able to show how I can demand from other human beings that they create these goods for me without them surrendering some significant portion of their first generation rights which accrue to them by virtue of their being autonomous individuals, free to pursue their own projects rather than being obliged to assist me with mine.

To see the logical gap between first and second generation rights in another way, consider the difference between them: 99% of the time I can fully respect your civil and political rights merely by ignoring you. (You certainly have the right to speak, but no right to make me listen.) If you have legitimate social and economic rights, on the other hand, then I have responsibilities to act on your behalf, and not ignore you. And what would it take for your social and economic rights claims to be legitimately binding on me? Basically what is required is that I see neither you nor myself as essentially autonomous individuals, but rather see both of us as co-members of a human community.

This gap between first and second generation rights throws light on many dimensions of U.S. foreign policy, for successive U.S. governments have been as vocal in demanding respect for civil and political rights in developing countries—again, client states excepted—as they have been silent on social and economic rights. The reason is straightforward. First generation rights are the legal basis for corporate lawyers to insist that their employers remain free of social responsibility; whatever else they may do, civil and political rights consistently serve to protect wealth, power, and privilege.

Whose Democracy?
The basic moral ideal that underlies our espousal of democracy is that all rational human beings should have a significant and equal voice in arriving at decisions that directly affect their own lives.

If this be granted, it follows that all ostensibly democracies are flawed, and consequently must be evaluated along a continuum of more or less. A basic criterion used in the evaluation will of course be how much freedom any government grants its citizens. By this criterion the so-called “democratic republics” of Vietnam and North Korea fare very poorly, and the United States ranks high.

But while a healthy measure of freedom is necessary for considering a state democratic, it cannot be sufficient. By most standards, the citizens of the U.S. enjoy a very large amount of freedom. But an increasing majority of those citizens have virtually no control over the impersonal forces—economic and otherwise—that directly affect their lives. They have a sense of powerlessness, with good reason: democracy has been pretty much reduced to the ritual of going to the “democracy” temples once every four years to pull a lever for Tweedledum or Tweedledee, cynically expressed in the saying “If voting could really change things, the government would make it illegal.”

The point here, however, is not simply to criticize the U.S. for the present sorry state of democracy within its borders. Rather is the criticism based on the slow evolution of the democratic ideal since 1789. The United States has always been a flawed democracy—slavery, institutionalized racism, lack of women’s suffrage, etc.—but it was a fledgling democracy at least; most white males had some voice in political decisions that directly affected their lives. And of course democracy developed: slavery was abolished, women got the vote, and institutional racism was dismantled. Most of these evolutionary changes did not, however, come about directly by voting. Slavery was effectively abolished on the battlefields of Shiloh, Antietam, and Gettysburg. The courts initiated the breakdown of the institutional racism it had earlier strengthened. And the rights of women, minorities, gays, and all working peoples (now being lost), were won by their own militant organizing efforts.

Given then that the U.S. form of democratic government has been in existence for more than 200 years, how much has been accomplished toward realizing the democratic ideal? That is to say, another criterion we must employ in evaluating nation-states with respect to democracy is the extent to which they enable their citizens to be self-governing, and sustain those institutions intermediate between the individual and the state—schools, local government, churches, unions, etc.—which are necessary for self-government to be effective, and hence for democracy to flourish. By these lights, the United States may well not be evaluated as at the higher end of the democratic scale.

Another Perspective
Malaysia’s Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, along with Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew, are usually portrayed in the West as advocating “Asian Authoritarianism” as against the liberal democratic tradition of the West. And Mahathir has been vocal in criticizing many Western social, economic, and political institutions, as has Lee. But
then what are we to make of Mahathir’s “Asian Authoritarianism” when he says: *When Malaya became independent in 1957, our per capita income was lower than that of Haiti. Haiti did not take the path of democracy. We did. Haiti today is the poorest country in all the Americas. We now have a standard of living higher than any major economy in the Americas, save only the United States and Canada. We could not have achieved what we have achieved without democracy.*

Moreover, Mahathir has publicly criticized China for its policies on Tibet, the Indonesian government for its atrocities in East Timor, and the Burmese generals for their ill-treatment of Muslims; and of course there are contested elections in Malaysia. What, then, might “Asian Authoritarianism” mean, other than as a shibboleth?

If we assume that Mahathir was at all sincere in his statement, then we might see the policies of his “national front” government as designed to foster self-government and human rights as well. Malaysia—like Singapore and many other nation-states rich and poor—is multi-ethnic, and the avowed goal of the government was to achieve a strong measure of economic equity between the ethnic groupings so as to minimize communalist ethnic strife. Further, to the extent Malaysia allows market forces to operate, the government requires major corporations to measure their success largely in terms of production and employment, rather than the way U.S. corporations measure their success in the market—consumption and return on investment. In other words, the citizens of such countries are perceived first and foremost as co-members of a community.

Malaysia remains a flawed democracy; its citizens are not as free as their U.S. counterparts. But the government tolerates criticism, as does Singapore, despite its caning practices, ban on gum-chewing, and much else; given how little a democratic base the Malaysian government had in 1957 (and Singapore in 1961), these countries have come a long way socially, politically, and economically by their focus on equity across ethnic and religious boundaries, and have equally been encouraging of self-government within and between those communalist groupings.

If this be so, and when it is realized how many young nation-states are multi-ethnic today, then an argument can be made for Asian authoritarianism perhaps being somewhat less authoritarian, but rather sensitive to cultural influences historically, yet supportive of a democratic ideal, perhaps a better one than is insisted upon by the United States. If this argument has merit, it will follow in turn that the fledgling democracies of East and Southeast Asia might provide a better model for the evolution of self-government than the U.S. model proffered by modern Western liberalism, and it may well fall to these Asian countries to be the true champions of democracy and human rights in the twenty-first century. This is precisely the claim—starting as it initially may appear—made by Edward Friedman in an incisive recent article which offers a similar analysis of many of these issues:

*Since it is difficult to long maintain a fledgling democracy without economic growth... dynamic Asian societies are seeking communalist equity... [I]f the economic pie does not expand, then the only way the previously excluded can get their fair share of the pie is to take a big bite out of what established elites already have... Lacking the benefits of East Asia’s more dynamic, statist and equitable path to growth, a polarizing democracy elsewhere, in neo-liberalist guise, can quickly seem the enemy of most of the people. This has been the case with numerous new democracies in both Latin American and Eastern Europe.*

*At the end of the twentieth century... pure market economics further polarizes a society... What is rewarded is creating a climate welcomed by free-floating capital. The concerns of the marginalized, the poor, and the unemployed are not high on this agenda... State intervention on behalf of equity—as with the way Singapore tries to make housing available to all, as with Malaysia’s success with state aid to rural dwellers—is far more likely to sustain democratic institutionalization.*

Without idealizing the governments of East and Southeast Asian fledgling democracies—some defenders of “Asian Authoritarianism” are indeed authoritarian and hostile to democracy—it remains that countries like Malaysia and, to a lesser extent, Singapore, have come a fair distance in nourishing self-government. Their record is especially impressive when compared to the U.S. They began with much less, both economically and politically, and they have achieved much, both economically and politically, in only one-fifth of the time the U.S. has been at it. And their governments know all too well that U.S. governmental pressures for them to focus on civil and political rights will serve the interests of major U.S. and multinational corporations much more than their own peoples.

In short, at least some Pacific Rim nation-states are far more authoritarian when dealing with even more authoritarian corporations than they are with their own citizens, but it is the latter, and not the former, that—unsurprisingly—receive the attention of the U.S. media. Of course no form of authoritarianism can ever be morally admirable; but when directed against the likes of Texaco, Bechtel, American Express and General Electric, there are at least some extenuating circumstances.

And finally, from the emphasis on social and economic rights in these countries, we can already ascertain the glimmering of the evolution of civil and political rights, whereas the U.S. government, Democrat or Republican, increasingly ignores the former as it champions the latter, as U.S. governments have always done except when its peoples were militant and organized enough to demand social and economic justice. Ultimately, then, are we autonomous individuals or co-members of human community—local and global?

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Vol. 5, #8  RESIST Newsletter  Page 7
Uganda at the Crossroads

This unorthodox approach to democracy excites hot debate. Multipartyists argue that the "no-party movement's" ban on political parties makes a mockery of the NRM's claim to democracy. Until this year, presidential elections were repeatedly put off. Though Museveni won 75% of the vote in May, his rivals, denied party organization and funding, had to run as individuals with only 39 days to campaign.

NRM supporters retort that parties never provided the broad-based representation that the movement offers. Women are particularly grateful for the peace and stability the NRM has brought. They sympathize, too, with the movement's non-sectarianism. As political scientist Aili Tripp remarked, "Women have made concerted efforts to build their own organizations along inclusive lines as a rejection of politics based on ethnic and religious differences which have torn the country apart."

The 1995 constitution calls for a referendum in five years on whether the movement should give way to a multi-party system. Thus the crossroads: will parties, even stronger. Fair parliamentary elections (both affirmative action and mainstream) were held, a parliament with new powers to check the executive was sworn in, and a cabinet representing a range of regions, religions, and tribes was chosen—all marks of the movement's democratic maturing.

Women's Movement's Edge

In 1985, when women proposed to demonstrate against government soldiers' unchecked raping of schoolgirls, the police vowed to rape the demonstrators. News of the UN Women's Decade Conference in Nairobi that year emboldened a small group to create an independent women's organization committed to raising consciousness and stimulating action on all fronts—Action for Development (ACFODE). With other women's organizations, ACFODE held a major conference with the new NRM leadership in 1986, demanded and gained a women's ministry and women's representation in all levels of government. To forestall objections, ACFODE prepared résumés of women qualified for high positions. Because this movement organized itself before Museveni took over and asserted itself as an autonomous movement, Tripp believes, it had leverage that women's wings of liberation movements in Mozambique and Zimbabwe lacked.

Ugandan women's political achievements took off with an extraordinary process of constitution-making. For four years a Constitutional Commission, including Miria Matembe and Mary Maitum, prepared a draft; the Ministry of Women and NGOs canvassed women nationwide and presented more memoranda than any other social group. Then a 286-delegate Constituent Assembly was elected, which included 51 women, 39 of them in seats reserved for women. Ugandan women are aware that affirmative action, to be reviewed in five years, will prove cosmetic and counter-productive if it brings forward women unprepared for the task. Because many newcomers had little political experience, a Women's Caucus was formed. Workshops on constituency-building, parliamentary procedure, and advocacy built confidence. ACFODE provided the Caucus with a ra-
Inviting selected male MPs to “Gender Dialogues,” the Caucus cultivated allies to further women’s rights in the final Constitution, which is written in gender-inclusive language. Women’s representation in local councils was increased to one-third; an Equal Opportunities Commission was promised; principles of gender equality and affirmative action were made explicit; laws, customs and traditions harmful to women’s dignity, welfare, and interest were prohibited.

**Electing Women**

Participation of strong women in parliamentary contests often excites hostility. The race of Matembe, Uganda’s most controversial feminist, to be Mbarara District’s Woman Representative, was intensely opposed. Some criticized her (and others) for seeking the Affirmative Action seat for a second term, arguing they should take their chances in mainstream races and let new women develop political skills. Others point out that women, like men, should be able to build on their experience. Despite her achievements in Constitution-making and twice as ACFODE chair, she is best known—by both outraged Ugandan men and feminists across Africa—for one remark. The prevalence of HIV and AIDS among women and girls has made women especially adamant about rape. In 1991, at a demonstration against prosecutors’ failure to take defilement of girls seriously, Matembe said, “Men are in possession of a potentially dangerous instrument which should be cut off unless it is properly used.”

“They criticize me for saying that,” Matembe told me after her victory, “but I stood by it. A woman in this seat should be a committed woman. And women stood by me.” So they do: one said, typically: “we would never have advanced without this firebrand.” And Tezira Jamwa, exhilarated by her mainstream Parliamentary victory over four men (“and they put up another woman to split my vote!”), said, “Miria’s made most of us into what we are today. She opened my eyes when I first met her in May, 1990.”

Miria Matembe was one of two Ugandas chosen to speak at the plenary sessions of the NGO Forum on Women in Beijing; the other was Winnie Byanyima. US women there, according to Joy Kwaresiga, current chair of ACFODE, marveled at the “dynamism” of Matembe and the articulate reasoning of Byanyima. Both come from Mbarara District to which I accompanied Kwaresiga to observe Byanyima’s race for the mainstream parliamentary seat.

Thousands gathered two days before election for the final rally of Doctor Asuman Lukwago and Engineer Winnie Byanyima, rivals for the Mbarara municipality seat. I asked 20-year-old Mwaresiga Aggrey why hesupported Byanyima: “She mobilizes people, she gives them projects to improve their income and she exposes embezzlers.” Later I learned that Byanyima and women working with her had encouraged widows and the poor thrown off their land by the town council to protest. Their success started a wave of protest against corruption that resulted in the town administration’s well-funded efforts to defeat her. Yet Byanyima carried 68.2% of the vote.

Byanyima’s father, Boniface, taught Winnie to question illogical authority, even in her Catholic school, and to challenge unfair tradition. National chair of the Democratic Party (DP), Boniface was at the center of the opposition, and Winnie told me: “I thought to resist a bad government was the greatest thing in the world!” A distant relative studying nearby, Moseveni visited and shared radical texts with her. Studying in England during Amin’s time, she became more radical.

With Amin’s defeat, Byanyima worked with her father for the DP candidate, who won in 1980. Back in England she learned that the election results had been overturned. “I couldn’t go to lectures, I felt paralyzed, ill. I thought if Museveni keeps his word—he’d said if the election was stolen, he’d go to the bush—I’ll go too. He phoned me in ’81—he’s gone.” Working as a flight engineer, she said, “I was able to relay messages between the people in the bus and supporters in exile.” She also argued the cause for war with opposition MPs and, as the struggle was ending, was part of a diplomatic team seeking support from other African leaders. Her father’s training her to reason independently had an ironic outcome. “He supported the war against Obote,” but he wanted the victorious NRM to share power with the DP. But the NRM’s goal was “to break party polarization along religious and tribal lines,” she said.

**Making Women’s Gains Stick**

Though Byanyima supports the NRM, she is unusually independent: “If we all sing one song, we become a one-party state.” She is anxious that women in affirmative action seats do not compromise women’s interests because they feel beholden to the NRM; as chair of the Women’s Caucus, “I worked hard to persuade members that they owed the people more.” When the Constituent Assembly disbanded, she organized the Forum for continued on page ten
Women in Democracy (FOWODE) to continue the Caucus’ work with new women Parliamentarians. Since some know no other countries, FOWODE will seek grants to send them to international conferences.

As elsewhere, feminists in Uganda do not always march together. But they unite where it counts. In the first parliament, they passed rape legislation and worked on a domestic violence bill. Now they are protesting Museveni’s naming only 2 women cabinet ministers and 4 ministers of state out of a total of 53 ministries.

Trying to read Uganda’s volatile society and what it portends for women, an outsider suffers cognitive dissonance. Ancient and futuristic moments of women’s experience seem to coexist. Radios pound into homes, sometimes 200 at a time. But they still prefer a horse to a motorbike. Radios pound out of a total of 53 ministries.

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Women value education more,” Byanyima says, “For men it’s a road to wealth and power; for women, a passport out of oppression.” There are no panaceas, but designers of a Women’s Studies T-shirt, took a stab at one: “EMPOWER AFRICA—KEEP GIRLS IN SCHOOL.” The 1995 Constitution commits the state to promoting primary education that is free and compulsory (both firsts) by 1999, but patriarchal values currently saturate education. Hence Ugandan feminists must take a long view.

Ugandan women have used this respite from disaster to identify their needs. In May, an umbrella group of organizations produced a Women’s Manifesto, listing seven issues they wanted candidates to address: peace, stability, unity in diversity; gender balance, equality, affirmative action; poverty, women’s economic empowerment; violence against women; protection of family rights, children, and the aged; people with disabilities; women and health. All these issues are interlocked, all dependent on women’s status changing radically. Whatever form of governance Uganda gets, they need time to move this massive change. That’s why they put peace first.

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Corrections:
The photograph on page four of Vol. 5#7 (September 1996) depicts members of the Coalition of Montanans Concerned with Disabilities demonstrating at the airport in Bozeman, MT.