

BOOK REVIEW

George Thomas Kurian, Encyclopaedia of the Third World, Revised Edition, Volume 1: Afghanistan - Guinea-Bissau, Volume 2: Guyana - Qatar, Volume 3: Rwanda - Zimbabwe. Mansell Publishing Limited, London, 1982. £67.50 the set.

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These three volumes constitute the second edition of this major work, which according to the author and the publisher is the largest single database on the Third World currently in print. The encyclopaedia aims to present a compact and balanced description of the main political, economic and social aspects of life in 122 Third World countries. The countries are described in alphabetical order. The topics, ranging from the independence and integrity of the judiciary to the incidence and types of crime (to take two legal examples), are presented according to a clearly defined, uniform hierarchical structure and in a consistent sequence within each country section. The result of this massive and impressive undertaking is a superb reference work, which will be invaluable to anyone concerned with the Third World.

The Third World, according to the author, may be defined as "the politically non-aligned and economically developing and less industrialized nations of the world" (p.ix). Exactly which countries are embraced by this definition, which appears to hark back to an earlier, Cold War era when international relations seemed more simple than they are today, is obviously open to debate. The major criteria used in this work are economic position and cultural orientation (p.x); neither of these is defined precisely, but at least the author makes it clear that his intention is to rely, so far as possible, on generally accepted, 'objective' factors rather than, for example, a country's own self-classification. Of the countries which one might expect to be included within the rubric, only China and Taiwan are excluded. Yet the author does not consider Third World countries to be uniform. Instead, he distinguishes at least four different groups: the OPEC countries; the Advanced Developing Countries (ADC); the Middle Developing Countries (MDC); and the Less Developing Countries (LDC) (see p.xi). His criteria are economic factors such as per capita GNP and annual rates of growth. In these respects the 122 coun-

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tries discussed in these volumes vary significantly. In the author's view, however, all of them share a common colonial experience and cultural and economic features which distinguish them clearly from western countries.

Information concerning each country, in principle current as of 1 January 1981, is presented according to a standard pattern. The major headings within this format are the following: basic facts; location and area; weather; population; ethnic composition; languages; religions; colonial experience; constitution and government; freedom and human rights; civil service; local government; foreign policy; parliament; political parties; economy; budget; finance; agriculture; industry; energy; labour; foreign commerce; transportation and communications; mining; defence; education; legal system; law enforcement; health, food; media and culture; and social welfare. Each of these headings is further subdivided: 'Economy' has 31 subheads, while 'Legal System' includes nine (basis of jurisprudence; judicial system, including constitutional provisions; supreme court or equivalent; courts of appeal and subordinate courts; special courts; independence and integrity of the judiciary; penal system; unusual punishment; prison population). In each country section, important vernacular terms are defined in a glossary; significant political events since 1945 or the year of independence, whichever is later, are summarised in chronological order; and selected books, including official publications, are listed in a bibliography. The section on each country therefore includes a wealth of detailed information, covering, within limits, almost all aspects of national life.

In addition to the country descriptions, Volume 1 includes information concerning international and Third World organisations. It gives the abbreviation, address, list of members, background information, purpose, organisational structure, principal activities, and associated agencies and bodies of each organisation, such as the UN Development Programme or the Economic Community of West African States. A number of useful statistical appendices are presented in Volume 3. They include special sections on multinational companies in the Third World, commodity cartels and producers' associations, and women in selected countries. The third volume also includes a general bibliography on the Third World since 1970.

An encyclopaedia is limited both by the general requirements of the genre and the particular sources of information available concerning specific topics. The utility of the concept of 'Third World' as an organising category is not really questioned. Complex political and social issues are, of necessity, often reduced

to laconic formulae. Moreover, information concerning many aspects of life in Africa, Asia and Latin America (or elsewhere) is unreliable or simply unavailable. Statistical data in particular, in many instances, is only an approximation or an estimate, at best useful only for suggesting general trends. Information concerning some subjects which are likely to be of special interest to readers of this Journal - the actual operation of legal systems, the relationship of non-state to state law, and forms of popular justice - is difficult to obtain, especially through official and other public sources. Rarely, therefore, is such information presented here in any detail, though sufficient other data is often given to provide a basis for extrapolation concerning particular countries. Despite these inevitable shortcomings, this revised edition is an indispensable source of detailed information concerning an enormous range of topics. The information is logically organised and clearly presented; each country section comprises an extended, relatively thorough essay. This encyclopaedia should certainly find a place in all libraries concerned with African, Asian or Latin American countries. It can also be highly recommended as a basic research tool for both the novice and the specialist in law and other social sciences.