

NEW Democracy

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- ☞ **LET US FORGE AHEAD IN THE NEW CENTURY!**
- ☞ **IMPORTANT EVENTS**
- ☞ **IN MEMORY OF COMRADE SHAN**
- ☞ **RELIGION AS A TOOL IN STATE OPPRESSION : SOME CONCERNS FOR SRI LANKA**
- ☞ **SRI LANKAN MARXISTS AND THE ELECTIONS**
- ☞ **POSTMODERNISM : A MODERN ADHVAITA**
- ☞ **THE NEED FOR A THIRD FORCE**
- ☞ **COMMENTS ON GLOBAL EVENTS**

QUATERLY THEORETICAL ORGAN OF N.D.P, SRI LANKA

New Democracy

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

LET US FORGE AHEAD IN THE NEW CENTURY!

The New Century has arrived.

We stand shoulder to shoulder with the working class and all the oppressed people and nationalities of the world to express our revolutionary solidarity and to welcome the new century.

The century that passed was a century of Marxism and socialism. It was the century in which the success of the great October Socialist Revolution, the magnificent Chinese Revolution and the glorious revolutions of several other countries carried forward the socialist cause.

In the century that preceded it, the outstanding thinkers, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels and their colleagues developed with great genius the ideology for the emancipation of the working class. It was the victorious century in which Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh and other leaders adopted that ideology and creatively applied it to deliver one severe blow after another to capitalism and imperialism to achieve socialist success. It was also the century in which people struggled against colonialism and fascism to defeat them to win the independence of their respective countries.

At the same time, Marxism and socialism suffered a temporary setback due to the errors committed by the leadership of the socialist countries and communist parties and the ceaseless acts of conspiracy and sabotage by the imperialists. But the new century has dawned amid renewed confidence that the working class and the oppressed people will carry forward a variety of movements and struggles against their oppressors.

Imperialism led by the US and its European and Japanese allies is trying hard to expand and establish monopoly capitalism through its scheme of globalisation. Possibilities for plundering the natural and labour resources of the Third World by multi-national companies have been created through the implementation of privatisation using the Open Economic Policy. Pressure is being applied through the IMF and the World Bank and other agencies on the Third World countries to make them consent to this. And many Third World countries have succumbed to this imperialist conspiracy.

When the blatantly dictatorial nature of bourgeois democracy got exposed internationally, it was propped up with the name of 'social democracy'. Now an illusion has been created about 'neo-democratic liberalism' and 'the third path'. NGOs and the intellectual elite who have been bought over act as their ideological agents, and work against Marxism, socialism and working class parties.

Under these conditions a great responsibility lies ahead of the Marxist-Leninists of each country of the world. They need to analyse today's condition of imperialist globalisation in accordance with the specific conditions of their respective countries and progress in the appropriate direction. This applies to Sri Lanka as well.

Let us, by properly assessing the achievements and deficiencies of the past century and using its rich experiences, make

this century the Century of Marxism, Socialism and Liberation struggles!

Dark Clouds Over the Political Skies

The treatment of political opponents by the two parties of the ruling classes has not at all been kind over the past two decades or so. Electoral violence with active involvement by the forces of law and order has become the norm. The use of violence and the threat of violence has been blatant and unashamed. The government and the main opposition party seem to be heavily dependent on criminal elements. The concept of the free media has been made a farce by the government's handling of the media and equally by the abuse of the media by the main opposition party. It is really the masses who have been denied their right of free expression in the tussle between the state controlled media on the one hand and the pro-UNP media on the other. Much of the talk about democracy and freedom of the media by the mainstream political parties and the various NGOs lacks substance and does not really concern the rights of the broad masses.

The address to the nation by the President of Republic following her re-election in December 1999 was not reassuring to the minority nationalities. This was followed early this year by a three-hour long programme on the life of the President in which various statements were made that were seen as blatant threats against all critics of the government. The repeated references to the search for peace in fact failed to reflect a desire for peace.

The series of political assassinations and attempted assassinations in recent months makes the picture even more grim. We disapprove of political assassinations, since they do more harm than good to any just struggle, and denounce the cultivation and sustenance of a political climate that enables and, in fact,

encourages such killings. In particular, the conduct of the forces of law and order and the state media in the matter of the cold blooded murders of N. Ramesh, the editor of the popular Tamil weekly *Thinamurasu*, and G.G. (Kumar) Ponnambalam (Jr.), President of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress do not auger well for law and order in the country. The murder of the latter has aroused a very strong feeling of sorrow among the masses, and even fear among sections of the Tamil community living in the South.

The people have lost faith in the ability of the parliamentary system and the mainstream political parties to solve their problems. The fast developing mood of apathy has been exploited by the two major political parties to abuse the electoral system. This cynicism combined with the proven inability of either political party to solve any of the pressing issues can create a climate that helps the establishment of a dictatorial regime in the pretext of safeguarding the nation. What are at stake are the most basic rights of the ordinary masses. The champions of democracy in the West will not lift a little finger against a dictatorial regime as long as it poses no threat to neo-colonialist plunder of Sri Lanka. It is thus left to the leftist, progressive and patriotic forces and, above all, the toiling masses of the country to safeguard democratic and human rights in this country.

“We are confronted by two types of contradictions - those between ourselves and the enemy and those among people. These two are totally different in their nature.”

Mao Zedong

27. 02. 1957

On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People

IMPORTANT EVENTS

The New Democratic Party and the Presidential Election 1999

The crisis created within the New Left Front (NLF) by the attempts of the Nava Samasamaja Party (NSSP) to establish its hegemony there in order to pursue its opportunistic policies made it difficult for the NLF to come to an agreement on a common candidate.

The NDP supported Vasudeva Nanayakkara, a leftist who was an MP of the PA and the candidate of the Left & Democratic Alliance (LDA) with a Political Minimum Programme as an alternative to the present Programme of the PA. Although his programme did not explicitly take a position on the question of self determination, it demanded an immediate end to the war and the initiation of unconditional talks with the LTTE. It also recommended regional autonomy for the Tamils in the North-East and autonomy for the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils. The decision of the NDP to support Vasudeva Nanayakkara was mainly based on the fact that the LDA programme was the closest to the NDP's position on the national question.

It should be noted that the NSSP supported the JVP, despite the lack of a clear stand by the JVP on the genocidal war against the Tamil Nationality and on a political solution to the problem, its interpretation of the struggle of the Tamil nationality as the armed struggle of the LTTE, and its denial of the right of self determination to the Tamil nationality until the establishment of a socialist state in Sri Lanka. It should also be

noted that the opposition of the JVP to any political solution to the problem under the present political set-up has only helped the elements of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism.

Founding of the Sanmugathan Centre for Marxist Studies

The Sanmugathan Centre for Marxist Studies was founded by a group of Marxist-Leninists, with Comrades E. Thambiah, S. Sivagnanam and V. Thanabalasingam as convenors to advance the study of Marxism, and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought in particular, in Sri Lanka. The centre was founded on the long felt need for an organisation to promote a thorough and systematic study of Marxism-Leninism, as opposed to right opportunism and left adventurism, in view of the need to equip the new generation of Marxist-Leninists with sound theory. It was named after the late Comrade N. Sanmugathan, in view of his great contribution to the development of Marxist theory and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, and to the Marxist-Leninist movement from the early days of the Ceylon Communist Party, especially since the split caused by the revisionists within the Party.

An enthusiastic and well attended seminar chaired by Professor S. Sivasegaram was held on 13.02.2000 in Colombo to mark the Seventh Death Anniversary which fell on 08.02.2000, and was addressed by Comrade Patrick Fernando of the New Democratic Movement, Professor S. Chandrasekaram and T. Satchithanandan, Attorney-at-Law who spoke on the contributions of the late Comrade Sanmugathan. Translation facilities were provided from Sinhala to Tamil and Tamil to Sinhala for the benefit of those fluent in only one of these languages.

An appeal was made on behalf by the Centre to those in possession of the works of Sanmugathan to provide access or to

make available to the Centre any publication of Comrade Sanmugathan that they have so that his works may be compiled as complete works and in order to enable the Centre to publish selections of his works for Marxist study and mass reading.

“... there must be no separation between theory and practice. Those who exaggerate the importance of theory while neglecting to study the concrete practice in each country are called dogmatists, or as we call them in Ceylon 'Pothe Guru'. Those who are interested only in practice and neglect the importance of theory are empiricists.

“Both are wrong. Theory without practice and practice without theory are both useless. There must be a unity of both”

- N. Sanmugathan

10.6.1969

from the Introduction,

The Bright Red Banner of Mao Tsetung Thought

“The intellectuals often tend to be subjective and individualistic, impractical in their thinking and irresolute in action until they have thrown themselves heart and soul into mass revolutionary struggles, or made up their minds to serve the interests of the masses and become one with them.... The intellectuals can overcome their shortcomings only in mass struggle over a long period.”

- Mao Zedong

December 1939

The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party

Selected Works, Vol. II

IN MEMORY OF COMRADE SHAN



Comrade N. Sanmugathasan, passed away on 8th February 1993, having served the revolutionary cause throughout his adult life. Comrade Shan was attracted to Marxism as a university student during the formative years of the Communist Party and joined it as a full-time cadre on completion of his degree. He chose a life of simplicity and sacrifice to serve the oppressed masses of the country and his organisational skills enabled him to build a strong trade union movement (the CTUF) allied to the Party. He was also a diligent student of Marxism and contributed immensely to the Marxist-Leninist side of the debate between Marxism-Leninism and Trotskyism during the early years of the left movement, and defended Comrade J.V. Stalin against vicious attacks in the late 1950's and after by Nikita Khrushchov and his revisionist followers here.

Comrade Shan used his position in the trade union movement to strengthen Marxism-Leninism and, as a result, when the inevitable spilt with the revisionists took place in the Communist Party, the bulk of the membership of the CTUF aligned with the Marxist-Leninists. The spread of Marxism-Leninism among the plantation workers, who were at one time politically backward, owes it mainly to Comrade Shan. He also led several important mass struggles, and the leading role played by him in the struggle against caste oppression in the North is among his most important contributions.

His grasp of Marxist-Leninism and deep commitment to the revolutionary path, along with his relentless campaign against revisionism, place him among the most ardent defenders of Marxism-Leninism to this day. As a Marxist-Leninist he unconditionally rejected the parliamentary path and correctly exposed as opportunistic compromise of the revisionist Communist Party led by Pieter Keuneman and the LSSP with the national bourgeoisie. It is no exaggeration to say that the source of all serious Marxist-Leninists in Sri Lanka today can be found in Comrade Shan. His contributions to the advancement of Marxist-Leninist theory include his exploration of the international significance of the Cultural Revolution and the development of the mass line put forward by Comrade Mao Zedong.

Despite his outstanding contributions to Marxism-Leninism and to the Marxist political movement in the country, he made errors, some of them serious and led to the weakening of the Marxist Leninist movement. To blame Comrade Shan entirely for these errors will be incorrect, and the entire leadership of the Ceylon Communist Party needs to take responsibility for them. It is only through a process of serious and honest criticism and self criticism that the Marxist-Leninists can learn from the past and transform bad things into good things.

Marxist-Leninists, especially the younger generation, have much to learn from Comrade Shan. For one to reject the role of Comrade Shan is to reject the history of the Marxist-Leninist movement and to endorse him uncritically is to be blind and subjective.

We have no doubt that his positive contributions outshine his errors and that he will for many long years to come will be remembered as a great Marxist Leninist and a fighter for the oppressed masses of this country.

RELIGION AS A TOOL IN STATE OPPRESSION : SOME CONCERNS FOR SRI LANKA

by **Imayavaramban**

The power of the media is so great that even today the terms religious extremism and fundamentalism are readily associated by many of us with Islamic fanatics, which means Shia Muslims to most of the Western media. What is interesting is that many critics of the so-called Islamic fanatics are themselves in some way patrons of some form of religious fanaticism. There is a tendency to see certain religions as largely militant and aggressive and others as essentially tolerant and passive. This may be why the bombs exploded by a handful of Muslim extremists in Coimbotore (Tamilnadu, India) in 1997 seemed to be a more serious threat to peace and harmony than the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Madhya Pradesh, India by an army of Hindutva thugs a decade ago and the concessions made to Hindutva goons by the present Indian government. Strangely, many liberals in the west seem surprised by the aggressive approach of the Sinhala Buddhist ideologues.

Religion, like nationalism, has to be viewed historically and is far more political than any advocate of religion as the path to human salvation would acknowledge. Religion has been associated with politics and political power for millennia and continues to do so, although less explicitly in some situations than in others. The spiritual and ethical dimensions of religion are emphasised by religious leaders when they speak of religious harmony and tolerance towards other faiths. But the ideology and politics of institutionalised religions and the social

and political roles played by the religious institutions do not tell us a story of harmony or tolerance, and it is dangerous to see the one side of religion and fail to see the other.

A Marxist should take an objective view of religion. While a Marxist readily recognises the historical role of religion, the shortcomings of religious philosophical systems and the inadequacy of religion to deal with the real issues of society, a Marxist also respects the right of people as individuals to their religious faith. These rights include, besides the right to believe, to worship and to practice, the right not to believe or worship or practice any religion. This is clearly a far more tolerant approach towards any religion than what any institutionalised religion has shown towards any other religion in the history of mankind. Upholding religious freedom means to uphold the right of individuals and communities to the practice of religion, subject to the exercise of that right without violating the more fundamental rights of individuals and communities. Thus such rights are not ends in themselves and are subordinate to the greater welfare of society and of mankind as a whole.

Very nearly all the major religions and religious factions arose from socio-historical needs and have in general been historically progressive in the context of those needs, and sometimes even beyond. There have been several instances where the corruption of the religious establishment has been challenged on the basis of the true faith or its essence. Such challenges have at times been progressive and at times reactionary. There are many instances where such movements have alternated between a progressive and a reactionary role. Thus it is neither easy nor straightforward to identify a religious movement as progressive or reactionary without fully taking into account the socio-historical and political context, and the class nature of the movement.

The content and identity of religions have changed with time and place and the desire for survival as an institution has

forced religions to adapt, to compromise and to even betray the most sacred tenets. Religions which had great appeal to the masses because of their progressive content and promise of liberation have subsequently become partners in power with the most oppressive regimes. Links between the state and religion was more explicit in feudal society than in post-feudal society. But that has not prevented religion being used as a means of capturing and holding on to political power. The role of religious ideology although seemingly central to matters of religious politics, is in reality a means to an end. The real issues concern class and class interests, and religion, more as an identity than as a faith, has been instrumental in many of the major conflicts of recent times. The conflict in Northern Ireland between non-practising Roman Catholics and Protestants has little to do with religious belief. The conflict of the past few decades there concerns British imperialist interests in Ireland. The Muslim identity in former Yugoslavia has been, and is very much still, more ethnic or social than religious. The war that was fought between Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics and Muslims had little to do with religion or religious rights. Issues of nationalism came to the fore as a consequence of the surge in Serb chauvinism and were aggravated by imperialist meddling. The Jewish religion provided Zionism with its historical and ideological justification, but not all those who are instrumental in Zionist acts of aggression in the Middle East are believers.

Religion, again like nationalism, resorts to the invention and distortion of history. Among books of historical importance, the Bible is perhaps the most tampered with. Bits of mythology were moulded into history in the name of Hinduism, not quite a religion but an identity for a whole host of religions of the Indian sub-continent, in order to justify the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and this process continues with even greater vehemence today to prepare the masses for more to come. The Mahavansa, written many centuries after the arrival

of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and a selective mixture of myth, legend and events of history designed to serve Theravaada Buddhist interests, has found new use in the hands of the proponents of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. Claims are made concerning Buddhist values, way of life and thinking with minimum concern for the greater reality of the historical changes that every aspect of religious identity has undergone in Buddhism and in other religions of this country.

Despite the circumstances under which Christianity established itself in this country and the sources of Islam and the kind of relationship that Buddhism in this country has had with the Brahminist religions of South India, the coexistence of these religions has enriched not only the culture of the Sri Lankan society as a whole but also each of these religions. But Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism, like the Hindu high caste bigotry in India, uses anti-colonialist slogans today to conceal its own oppressive nature. It portrays minority religious communities as successors to the old colonial masters and aggressors and as the perpetrators of neo-colonial values, if not neo-colonialism itself.

Ultra nationalism, racism and religious extremism are often attributed to a small minority of rabble rousers by the mainstream political parties in bourgeois democracies so as to allay the fears of the minorities. Are such aggressive postures mere freak phenomena? Are they not capable of dominating the thinking of the vast majority? To deny this possibility is to deny the reality of fascism and every other sectarian evil that has haunted and continues to haunt human society. Shrugging it off as a freak phenomenon is like ignoring a poisonous weed because it has not taken over the entire garden. Thus progressive forces everywhere need to recognise this reality, refuse to surrender to it and struggle to overcome it for the greater good of mankind.

Let us now turn to the rise of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism and the threat it poses to the welfare of the people of Sri

Lanka and to the anti-imperialist struggle. The chauvinists of today like to link themselves historically and ideologically to the Buddhism and the Sinhala society of ancient times. But the chauvinism of today has its roots in the negative aspects of the national movement of the late British period. It is not the true successor to the anti-colonial struggle but to the more parochial and sectarian attitudes which constituted the negative aspects the anti-colonial movement of Sri Lanka. Although parallels exist in several national liberation movements for the degeneration of the national movement into a chauvinist monster, we need to be conscious of differences as much as of similarities in order to deal with the problem. We also need to be aware of the cynical imperialist manipulation of the traditional values of the nationalities of the Third World and sentiments about their 'glorious' past.

The new interest in oriental religions in the west may at first sight seem to be an innocent escapist answer of individuals who are disillusioned with capitalist values and the failure of the Christian religions to provide an acceptable alternative. While Islam, which was adapted by the oppressed American Negroes essentially as a a statement of independent identity and as an act of rebellion against centuries of oppression presided over by white racism in collaboration with the Christian establishment, is still seen with hostility by the ruling classes, Buddhism and various forms of Hinduism have had a better reception, despite initial suspicion and some hostility from the established religions. These religions proved valuable to the US establishment in its attack on communism. The US authorities who cracked down on the 'Moonies' (followers of the cult of Rev. Moon from South Korea) when their activities were seen by the American public as evil and on certain Christian cults and organisations of Hindu 'gurus' for similar reasons treat the Falun Gong cult more kindly since it is a source of trouble for China. The Dalai Lama has been put to good use by imperialism for over four decades and this year the Karmapa Lama, the four-

teen year old religious figurehead, has been smuggled out of Tibet into India. In this sense religion has not altogether lost its value to imperialism.

The crusaders of the undeclared imperialist war against Islamic fundamentalism, by implication Islam, turned a blind eye to the oppression of Christians in Indonesia and East Timor by the Indonesian state which used Islam to maintain itself in power. The US which once viewed the nominally secular governments of India with suspicion is now very accommodating towards a government led by Hindu fundamentalists. The BJP-led government of India for its part, despite its loud noises about Indian national pride and sovereignty, is compromising the interests of the people of India in its dealings with imperialism.

Although there are no exact parallels between the situations in Sri Lanka and in India, important similarities exist nevertheless. Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism, whether it be the Jathika Chintanaya with its intellectually dishonest interpretation of history and society, the cruder Veera Vidhana or the nominally apolitical bodies such as the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, target minority nationalities and religious groups but do precious little against the evils of the open economic policy, globalisation and the cultural decay imposed on the country by the forces of imperialism. Opportunists, including certain vociferous members of the Buddhist clergy, who preach communal hatred in the name of upholding Buddhist values hardly notice imperialist exploitation and plunder.

All this is a far cry from the role played by the anti-colonial forces of the early twentieth century. These successors to the Sinhala Buddhist ideology that developed in the context of the upsurge in anti-colonial feeling in the country have inherited and developed only the negative and reactionary aspects of their source. Anagarika Dharmapala, the most prominent symbol of anti-imperialist Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, despite his if at all poorly disguised hostility towards other reli-

gions and minority nationalities, was an anti-imperialist and to that extent was progressive. His class interests and his use of his position as a champion of Buddhism to further the interests of a small group, although no secret, are conveniently ignored by those who use his name to win over the economically deprived sections of the Sinhala Buddhist population. Chauvinism also continues to exploit the myths of ethnic and cultural purity to keep apart the oppressed people of different nationalities.

Many historians, with the exception of some Marxists or those with Marxist influence and occasionally some liberals, have glossed over the misdeeds of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism, even when it mattered. Thus there is a tendency to rationalise or to erase from memory events that identify Sinhala Buddhist nationalism as historically the main divisive force in this country during the past century or so. The fact that at least two former prime ministers of the country reconverted to Buddhism to ensure political success tells us something, and it is not an accident that neither of the two major Sinhala nationalist parties has been led by a non-Buddhist. It is, however, worth noting that, with the exception of R. Premadasa, whom grave political circumstances forced on the country as President, the governments since independence have not been headed by anyone outside the Govigama caste, despite the strength of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism among other caste groups.

What is clear is that, like any other nationalism or chauvinism, Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism is also manipulated by the propertied and exploiting classes to divide the oppressed masses. It is no surprise that the UNP and the SLFP used the question of language and religion in the most cynical fashion to come to and to hold on to power. The assassination of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike by a Buddhist priest and the involvement of at least one other influential priest in the conspiracy perhaps slowed down for a while the growing influence of the Buddhist hierar-

chy in national affairs. The influence of the Mahanayakes of the high caste Sinhala Buddhist establishment remained very much unaffected nevertheless, and to this day the overall contribution of the Buddhist establishment, if one excludes that of some progressive Buddhist clergymen in their individual capacity, to finding a just and lasting solution to the national question is negative.

The SLFP and the pro-imperialist UNP have acted covertly and overtly to elevate the status of Buddhism as an unofficial state religion. Reservation of seats for the clergy in buses and trains, where no such consideration exists for women carrying children, the elderly and the sick, was designed and is implemented in the interest of the Buddhist clergy. The adoption of the lunar calendar by the UNP-led government (1965-1970), in which the Tamil nationalists were partners, was another concession to the chauvinists. The seven-day week was restored by the SLFP-led government in 1972 in view of the administrative chaos and confusion and the losses suffered by the business community, but at the price that every full moon day remained a public holiday, as they do even today.

The SLFP-led government in its constitution of 1972 provided for the first time constitutional status for Buddhism, a position further enhanced by the new constitution of 1978 following the landslide victory of the UNP in 1977. What is important is that the constitution was redrafted on both occasions so as to emphasise the dominance of Buddhism and to undermine the rights of the minority nationalities and religious minorities. The rise of Sinhala Buddhism as a political ideology in the country was facilitated by the conscious actions of the two Sinhala bourgeois nationalist parties aided by other forces of chauvinism, and the progressive forces failed to arrest this trend.

Chauvinists and narrow nationalists cannot be expected to think and to act in the interests of the broad masses. To use every parochial sentiment to advance their class interests comes

naturally to them. They cannot be expected to become enlightened on their own and reform themselves, and it is through struggle, class struggle and struggle for the rights of oppressed nationalities and other social groups, that things can be changed. It is the duty of all progressive forces, Marxists in particular, to expose thoroughly the unpatriotic nature of chauvinism and its willingness to betray the masses by making deals with imperialism.

It is in the above context that the certain acts of the parliamentary left parties deserve to be unreservedly condemned. The deal made by the VLSSP led by Philip Gunawardana with the SLFP in 1956 when it joined the SLFP-led Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) coalition was possible only after its leadership succumbed to Sinhala nationalism. The LSSP led by N.M. Perera and Colvin R. de Silva was not much better than the VLSSP when it rushed into partnership with the SLFP in 1964. The pro-Soviet CP, misguided by Pieter Keuneman, chose the parliamentary road to socialism in 1963 and has degenerated steadily. There have been some individuals in these parties, and for that matter in the SLFP and the UNP, who refused to surrender to the chauvinists and dared to oppose them. But what mattered ultimately was the role played by the political organisation as a whole.

It was an irony of history that Dr Colvin R de Silva, once a hardened atheist, was the architect of the constitution of 1972 which gave Buddhism a special status and removed the only constitutional safeguard in the earlier constitution against legislation affecting the interests of the minorities. It was again this so-called Marxist leader, accompanied by his 'Marxist' colleagues, who carried flowers to the Dalada Maligawa in Kandy, much to the ridicule of his UNP opponents. Since then, and particularly since 1977, the deterioration of the parliamentary left politicians is so complete that they are among the keenest to practice religious observances in what are state functions

and ceremonies. It is not a bad thing for a Marxist to show respect towards any religion or religious belief in society, but to pose as a religious person for political gain is chicanery.

The left played an active role in the secularisation of government funded schools in 1961, when the SLFP government decided to 'take over' government assisted schools. Only the UNP opposed the take over of schools as an 'undemocratic' act. These schools were given the option to go private if they chose, and existing private schools were allowed to remain the way they were. This was a correct step since the assisted schools were used by certain religious establishments in ways offensive to the national sensibilities. The Catholic Church was then an ally of the UNP and the sworn enemy of communism. It used schools as a means of converting children to Christianity and as seedbeds of reactionary thought.

An important distinction had to be made here between the religious establishment and the people of a religious faith. The abuse of its privileged position by a religious establishment is a serious offence against civil society and has to be seen and dealt with in that light. When religious organisations are actively involved in politics they are politically answerable and cannot seek protection behind the guise of religion. Thus, while it was correct to rectify the abuse of educational institutions in the colonial era, it is wrong to use educational organisations for the benefit of any other religion. The number of instances in which a section of school going children have been denied the opportunity to be taught their religion has been on the increase in recent years. Such discrimination is not acceptable.

When the words and deeds of individuals presenting themselves as religious leaders or preachers go beyond matters concerning the moral and spiritual well being of their followers, it is the duty of all progressive and patriotic forces to challenge every abuse of the faith of a people in a religion in a way detrimental to social interests. Failure to do so, especially by a Marxist,

deserves the strongest criticism, and it is unfortunate that the parliamentary left has been guilty of pandering to the whims and fancies of the forces of linguistic and religious chauvinism.

Defying chauvinism cannot be passive or negative. It demands an active role that goes beyond preaching religious tolerance and secularism. There is, for instance, a tendency among certain Indian Marxist parties to portray the Congress as more progressive than the Hindu chauvinist BJP because the Congress is 'secular'. But we know that the secularism of a political party which failed to act against acts of Hindutva vandalism when it was in power is bogus. Secularism cannot be an end in itself since it fails to address the real issues of religious oppression, and nominal secularism is of no use. Secularism can play a useful role only when it is accompanied by active political and agitation work against the forces of religious and caste based chauvinism, sexism and every form of oppression in the name of god and religion. This requires guidance by a political ideology based on equality, justice and elimination of exploitation of man by man.

Chauvinism operates through its own political agencies including pressure groups and the so called 'independent' and the state-controlled media. But it is most effective in its ability to force liberal and social democratic parties and governments to adopt parts of its agenda in the name of combating chauvinism. Immigration policies adopted in recent years by centre-left European governments in the pretext of silencing the racists should illustrate the point. Chauvinist pressure groups also provide reluctant governments with the necessary excuses to jettison any plans to deal fairly with the question of national oppression.

Any visible political role of the religious establishment can bring material and other benefits to the religious hierarchy. But there is a price to pay. Rivalry within the religious establishment brings to the fore issues concerning the true faith, corrup-

tion and abuse of power. The Buddhist 'fundamentalist' criticism of the Buddhist establishment and a large section of the clergy as traitors to the Buddha Dhamma is not much different from the criticism voiced by Islamic fundamentalists against Islamic political leaders in predominantly Muslim countries, or for that matter the Christian fundamentalist condemnation of the Christian establishment, including the Roman Catholic Church. The name of the 'true faith' has considerable mass appeal in countries which undergo political and economic turmoil. But the fact remains that religion has no answer for the political problems of the imperialist era. This has been exposed by history, and the disaster that befell Iran under the mullahs is a valuable lesson.

Serious contradictions already exist among the chauvinists. Many of the strongest advocates of the Sinhala Buddhist identity today are not really committed to the traditional values. Many of them are westernised in their ways and have interests in the US and Europe. They are really adherents of what Philip Gunawardana derided as 'thuppahi' culture. They are resented by their less sophisticated 'native' counterparts. It is partly this resentment to which the 'fundamentalism' appeals. What the 'fundamentalists' refuse to admit is that they are not addressing the real issues that affect the interests of the Sinhala masses but are instead contributing to hatred towards other nationalities and religious minorities. But a Marxist cannot rely on the contradictions among the chauvinists to deal with the question of chauvinism.

A Marxist has to be clear about his attitude towards religion. While the Marxist approach to religion is not confrontational, there can be no room for compromise with chauvinism. It is in this light that the opportunism of not only the old left that took the parliamentary path but also that of the JVP has to be seen. It is not by chance but by choice that the JVP has refrained from criticising Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. There

is also a Buddhist revivalist campaign among intellectuals to present Buddhism as the true alternative to the Sri Lankan society. Marxists appreciate the advanced thinking once represented by Buddhism and the progressive role played by Buddhism in a Brahminist dominated society. The relevance of Buddhism in that way was exploited by B.R. Ambedkar when he converted dalits to Buddhism in the middle of the 20th century. But Buddhism in Buddhist dominated societies including Sri Lanka has failed to be a challenge to the caste system or any form of social oppression. The Buddhist establishment found accommodation with the ruling classes, and more often than not ideological struggles within Buddhism and between Buddhism and other faiths have been about gaining state patronage. It was only during the colonial era that such accommodation was not possible and a section of the Buddhist leadership aligned itself with the struggle against colonial authority.

The strongest advocates of Buddhist (really Sinhala Buddhist) and traditional values mouth anti-colonial slogans and such slogans come in handy to attack secular and democratic values that emphasise equality among nationalities and social justice to all. In reality they target the minority nationalities and other religious groups. Even the meekest voice of moderation pleading for the rights of a minority nationality or religious rights is portrayed as an enemy of Sri Lankan identity, which to them is Sinhala Buddhist identity. They purposely gloss over the fact that the Sinhalese are mainly descendants of immigrants from South India and that the religion practised by the Buddhists in Sri Lanka is not Theravaada Buddhism. The strength of cross cultural influences is rejected in the common Buddhist identity imposed on the population. It is in this context that some Buddhist fundamentalists are making their case for Buddhism in its pure form, devoid of Hindu gods and god men. But one should be aware that such movements are characterised by intolerance, that their motivation is more political than theological,

and that the interests served are those of a section of the chauvinist bourgeois elements.

It is important at this juncture to draw attention to trends within the 'Hindu' religious leadership which seeks common cause with Buddhism in opposing Muslims and to a less extent Christians. These champions of Hinduism, following in the footsteps of their Hindutva mentors in India, are hell-bent on portraying the Muslims as the enemy. The 'Hinduism' that is projected by them as the religion of the Tamils of Sri Lanka is based on a Brahminist model and emphasises religious identity at the expense of the socially more meaningful and secular Tamil identity. The advocates of this 'Hindu' identity try to serve the interests of the upper caste Tamil elite by currying favour with the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists. They are bound to fail in the same way that the 'vellaala' gentry who curried favour with Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism in the early 20th century and the Sinhala Christian and Catholic establishments which hoped to safeguard their interests by taking advantage of the 'Sinhala' identity in later years. Chauvinism like colonialism is clever at the art of 'divide-and-rule', and history has taught us that everyone who makes deals with it will only burn his fingers in the end.

Nothing other than a principled stand against chauvinism of any description can ensure the welfare of all the people of this country. Any demand for the surrender or subjugation of an ethnic identity is reactionary and should be ruthlessly opposed. The struggle should take into account the fact that the enemy is not the masses of people of any social group but the reactionary forces supported by the forces of imperialist mischief. Marxists need to be on the vigil in this matter and there can be no room for compromise with chauvinism under any circumstances.

SRI LANKAN MARXISTS AND THE ELECTIONS

by **E. Kumar.**

The Westminster system of parliamentary government was introduced in this country as well as in many others during colonial rule by the British colonialists. We have got so used to the system that when we talk about elections we imagine the parliament to be an independent institution and not as an instrument of decision making for capitalism. In 1978, the capitalist classes of Sri Lanka led by JR Jayawardane, the leader of the United National Party (UNP), elected Prime Minister in 1977, introduced an Executive Presidency as an advanced ruling system to safeguard capitalist interests here, and declared himself the First President of Sri Lanka. The Executive Presidential System concentrated all the executive authority in the hands of an individual, thus conveniently legitimising the repressive and oppressive measures that were to be carried out before long against the masses, especially the sections who were most vehemently opposed to exploitation and plunder by capitalism.

JR Jayawardane, by concentrating all power in his hands through the constitution of 1978, placed himself above Parliament and exerted control over the MPs of his party by having obtained undated letters of resignation from each of them well in time so that they may not use Parliament to terminate his rule or pass any legislation against his wishes. He then proceeded to manipulate the judiciary to deprive the former Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike of her civic rights for a period

of seven years so that his strongest political opponent was politically disabled, and with the help of the state machinery won the next Presidential Election with relative ease in 1982. Then he held a referendum that allowed him to prolong the life of Parliament by 6 years and thus his control over Parliament for that period. The events of 1987 made it impossible for him to go on for a further term and he stepped down in 1988 to make way for R Premadasa, his Prime Minister, to become President in 1988, only to be killed in 1993 by a bomb blast. Premadasa was followed by DB Wijetunge, the then Prime Minister, who completed the remainder of the 6-year term until 1994.

The co-operation of all the anti-UNP forces, including the Marxists and other leftists, in 1994 enabled the People's Alliance to first win the Parliamentary Elections and then the Presidential Election with an unprecedented majority (with 67 % of the total polled in favour of its candidate Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge). Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge who pledged to get rid of the Executive Presidency within an year and to find a peaceful solution to the national question did nothing of that sort and the genocidal war against the Tamil nationality proceeded unabated.

In 1999, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge held the Presidential Election one year before it was due and ran once more for Presidency, putting forward the very same promises that she failed to fulfil during her five years in power. She secured 51 % of the total polled, and it is expected that the Parliamentary Elections will be held in the near future.

In Sri Lanka today both the Presidency and the Parliament have become extremely important institutions for the ruling capitalist class. The United National Party has clearly been identified as a tool of the multinational corporate bosses. The People's Alliance leaders administer the capitalist system in this country in the interests of the capitalist ruling class, with the PA playing the role of the national bourgeoisie in coalition with

certain leaders cloaked in red representing the Lanka Samasamaja Party, the Communist Party etc. There has hitherto been some illusion about its role as a party for the workers and peasants. But the PA has proved beyond any reasonable doubt that it is really for the big business and the multi-national companies, and that it is also for the genocidal war. The behaviour of the PA has caused much frustration among the people.

Although the PA's presidential candidate has won the election in 1999, it is not correct to interpret the results purely on the basis of the poll statistics. Marxists study the objective reality with a view to transforming it, and do everything in their power to push forward the development of the people's struggle and of organisations that shunt out the dead ends of Parliament and Presidency and call directly to the people to carry forward the struggle.

In Sri Lanka today, there is no Marxist-Leninist party of sufficient strength to transform the capitalist system, and no leftist force of sufficient strength to displace the UNP and the PA. Hence the capitalist democracy can drag on and drag the people along with it through the electoral process even when they have no faith in it. This may be a bitter pill for some to swallow, but it is nevertheless the truth.

In this context, some of the so-called leftists are only interested in speaking about reforming the system and about hoping to capture state power through elections. It is well known that their interest in electoral politics arises from their inability to struggle and from their actual class consciousness. They oppose the Marxist line of taking power by destroying the existing capitalist state machinery.

Some 'leftists' do not speak concretely about elections but allow it to be a matter for the people to decide. Such people who will not take concrete decisions on any issue are only fit to

be politicians who confuse the people further. There are others who claim themselves to be revolutionary and demand that the people should reject elections and boycott them where possible.

Is it then correct to reject and to boycott elections? Boycotting is not an end in itself. It cannot be a negative gesture. To boycott is a well considered and positive decision. But before arriving at that decision through a phase of democratic mass movements, the people should be made to understand that their need is not to win elections but to capture power. A campaign to boycott is thus organised on the basis of mass consciousness, and is therefore not a call for inaction but an organised struggle alongside other mass movements and struggles. Unless and until the people are ready and organised to boycott elections, a call to boycott elections will prove to an exercise in narrow political Puritanism.

In the current situation, the Marxists in Sri Lanka, to work among people, cannot ignore the elections. On the other hand, their participation cannot be in the same fashion as that of bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie make bogus promises knowing very well that each will be broken and do not miss a single trick in the book to secure power and to perpetuate the existing capitalist system. A Marxist who genuinely believes that revolution is the transformation of the capitalist system cannot take that approach. A Marxist has to be absolutely clear that participation and victory in elections are for organising the people, and fighting the elections is on the basis of a revolutionary mass political line. Such participation is only one in a chain of mass movements.

When Marxists contest elections, it is most important not to mislead people into thinking that it is possible to achieve a revolutionary transformation by winning the capitalist elections. The people must be made to realise that changing the government by replacing the person in power with another

person or a party in power with another party will not change the character of the capitalist system. One should always remember that even governments of the leftists could only be substitutes and not alternatives.

Those who uphold rejection and boycotting of elections often raise the question as to whether, if we cannot change the system by winning elections and if the elections cannot be won in any event, our contesting elections will not cause confusion among the people. That is not the case. Marxists contest elections to enable the people to safeguard themselves from the confusion created by the election campaign by the bourgeoisie and to make the people aware of the illusion of bourgeois electoral politics so that they may gain political strength to win their political objective, i.e. change the political system.

Unlike in the case of pre-revolutionary Russia or China, we live in a situation where we need to go through the phase of capitalist democracy, and outright rejection of the capitalist elections is not a viable option. Marxists need to use the elections and participation in it to educate the people about revolutionary consciousness, on the basis of a short term political programme. In fact, all forms of mass struggle, including participation in the elections, are complementary to each other and constitute the chain of struggles for the overthrow of the capitalist system.

Since the Marxists in Sri Lanka are not strong enough to bring about a revolutionary change in the immediate future, they need to use every available means of strengthening themselves. They need to align with democratic leftist forces to strengthen mass struggles in order to add strength to the revolutionary proletariat. Thus they cannot ignore elections in the face of the immediate task of mobilising the masses under a minimum political programme including campaigns to oppose the genocidal war waged on the Tamil nationality and to oppose imperialist globalisation.



POSTMODERNISM : A MODERN ADHVAITA *

by Venugopal

[This article is a retranslation of the Tamil translation of Venugopal's talk by Nirmulyaa for the Tamilnadu journal 'Kaalakkuri'. The present translator accepts responsibility for errors that may have occurred in the process of the retranslation.]

Although I am an opponent of imperialism and cultural hegemony, I am forced to address you in English because I do not know Tamil. Please accept my sincere apologies for my inability to address you in Tamil. Those who talk about postmodernism use difficult words that even those who are fluent in English struggle to understand. Hence I choose express myself in a very simple non-technical language.

I have for the past 10 to 15 years been studying postmodernist writings. But the need to face or to confront postmodernism occurred only during the past two years. Postmodernist writings appear to be an intellectual fad to me. I think that they suit only the US and western Europe. They do not seem useful in or capable of explaining the situation in India. I have not come across a single Indian postmodernist until around 1991-92. It was only after that they started to write about western postmodernists. In 1996 there was a debate in the Telugu journals in which issues concerning dalits, women and other sections of society were taken up. I participated in this debate on behalf of the Revolutionary Writers As-

sociation, and said that while the *dalit* and women's organisations have put forward some interesting and acceptable situations, experiences and facts, the underlying ideas and understanding run counter to class struggle. Another writer who participated in the debate promptly responded with the claim that "Venugopal agrees to the study of *dalit* and women's issues. He agrees with the views and experiences of those organisations. Therefore he is now a postmodernist". Having realised the degree of confusion in this matter, I wrote another article to explain that I was not a postmodernist.

I explained that Western postmodernism put forward modern ideas in France and in the US, all of which were opposed to class struggle and, in my opinion, against society and were opposed to the way that I understand, explain and contribute to society, and that I cannot therefore be called a postmodernist. This happened in October - November 1996. Since then, right up to now, there have been debates in Telugu dailies and weeklies concerning what postmodernism was and whether it was a desirable thing. Further, the question arose as to whether *dalit* and feminist movements could be referred to as postmodernist. This confused debate is still continuing. I disagree with postmodernism, and I oppose and expose it. While as a result of that I am considered an important writer on postmodernism, I am also considered to play an important role in exposing and opposing it.

Those who claim to be *dalit* intellectuals who moved away from Marxism after 1989, opponents of Marxism and some feminist intellectuals participated in the debate. Each explained postmodernism in a different way and as he or she chose to. Thus in Andhra we have at least a dozen meanings attributed to postmodernism. But the 'Dictionary of Acquired Meanings' gives the following explanation for postmodernism: "It is a concept frequently used in contemporary speech. It has

no meaning. It can be used in as many ways as possible". Some Telugu magazines drew my attention to this.

Another complicated and confusing interpretation was also given to this word game called postmodernism. Professor Allen Sogel works at University of York. A native of Nicaragua, he was educated in the US and lives there. He is a mathematical scientist and an opponent of postmodernism. He wrote an article with the title "Transgressing boundaries towards transformative hermeneutics of one quantum gravity", characteristic of the language of postmodernism and sent it to "Social Text". A month after its publication he wrote another article to "Lingua Franca", which he said subsequently was a 'nonsense article' with no meaning and was written to demonstrate that all postmodernists were hostile to science. "In other words, to use words as one chooses, to write in the fashion of Humpty Dumpty in Alice in Wonderland so as to confuse people, and to argue that words have only the meaning that the user has in mind is to oppose, to insult and to negate the existence of language. Hence, writing sentences which were correct in syntax and grammar but had no meaning posed a big problem to me. But I was able to demonstrate that an article opposed to postmodernism if written in the language of postmodernism can be published in a 'first class' postmodernist journal like "Social Text". Thus postmodernists deny to words meanings that they have inherited as a result of many years of civilisation and deliberately use words in ways that confuse people.

Let us now look at the origins of postmodernism. The first book to appear on the subject was Jean Francois Lyotard's "Postmodern Condition". Its roots can be traced to the years following the Second World War, the 1950's in particular. It has three important aspects: (1) cultural theory, (2) literary criticism and (3) philosophy. It is in these three sectors that we can see postmodernism to be active. But its tap root emerged from within architecture. In the 1950's the architect Venturi claimed

that 'from the 18th century to date, architecture has use, simplicity and harmony as its basic elements. But buildings need not have these three elements alone and can be for decorative purposes. Function alone cannot be the basis. A 50 square foot building is sufficient for use, while a building could be 1000 square feet to be decorative. Thirdly, buildings need not be similar. Variety can be pleasing to the eye'.

At 3.30 p.m. on a day in 1953, several identical blocks of flats were blasted with explosives. This moment is known as the moment of the birth of postmodernism. A good thing and a bad thing happened at the moment of its birth: the good thing was that ugly identical blocks of buildings were replaced by decorative buildings, and the bad thing was that these buildings led to the emergence of real estate as a profession. Buildings in a variety of forms including commercial premises and commercial centres emerged. More money was spent on beautifying and decorating the buildings than on their function. Such buildings came to be for the rich and mighty and not for the ordinary people. Function was abandoned for the sake of decoration and usefulness for the sake of pleasant appearance.

Following this, in 1960-65, a group of philosophers in Paris started to express its views. Among important members of this group were Jaques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Ideas expressed by them in 1965-66 started to get established in the 1970's. The basic elements of their thought was hostile to structuralism. Structuralism claims that the entire world and the society or social structure are intelligible and that we can understand, absorb and analyse this objective reality. But, in contrast to this, these philosophers declared that there was no total reality that could be understood and hence there was no way to understand it to analyse it. To them no truth could be understood by an objective view and there was no total reality but only some components and some differences. They argued that, since man could understand them only subjectively and not

objectively, and even then only a part of the objective reality, we should celebrate its smaller components. Through this they acknowledged only the multi-faceted nature of the objective reality, and claimed that it is not possible to see the world as one with a single identity and hence to understand the world using human knowledge. They also held that objective reality is varied and not unique and thus it was not possible to define the entire world with a single statement.

Reality is science, reality is logic, and realism claims that the entire world can be unified under a simple reality. But these postmodernists say that a multi-faceted world cannot be unified by a theory. Besides, they go to another extreme. They argue that philosophically all things have been understood as binary opposites (thesis v. antithesis, idealism v. materialism, east v. west, positive v. negative, symmetry v. asymmetry, plus v. minus etc.) and the human mind seeks to understand and absorb the reality of these opposed concepts. But to see this world as a unity of binary opposites is to see it as a whole and the world cannot be understood by viewing it as binary opposites.

If one were to sum up the arguments of the postmodernists in a single sentence, one may say that they deny objective reality. It is this that Sankara has stated as '*jagan nithya*' in his *adhvaita* philosophy. Their content is the same. The postmodernists, besides conveniently fitting together all their theories, also argue that there is support for this in Marx, Hegel and others. But what is fundamental is that the sum total of their arguments echoes Sankara's concept of '*jagan nithya*', i.e. that the objective reality cannot be understood but, perhaps, some aspects of it may be.

The third section of this emerged in France. Daniel Bell, an American intellectual, published his book "The Post Industrial Society" in the 1960's. Some French intellectuals accepted the thesis contained in it. Their argument was essentially as

follows: 'Thus far the basis of society was production, but it is not anymore. The basis of the society after the industrial revolution is consumption. Consumption, knowledge and information have taken the place of production, i.e. the 19th century has been identified the century of information and henceforth there is no purpose for political economy, and production has no meaning in society'. Their target was Marxism, since it is Marxism that considers production as the basis of the society. Is it not true that if they could only make production worthless the foundation of Marxism would be shattered? Bell further argued that "society as a concept has lost its meaning". Thus he sought to create a society free of philosophy. His argument was that the post-industrial society needed no philosophy with production as its basis. This is the sum of their arguments.

Of the three schools one had its impact on architecture, another on philosophy and the third on social thought. The three strands of thought that existed in isolation came together in 1979. The French philosopher Lyotard brought them together in his book "The Postmodern Condition". He added several other features to develop the arguments further. He claimed that all philosophers of the 19th century, including Hegel and Marx, attempted to put forward some "grand narratives" or an imaginary world and that all the "grand narratives" are now outdated. What he did was to present as or to transform into "grand narratives" not only the communism and classless society of Marx but also concepts such as reason, rationalism, justice and humanity developed by the thinkers of the 19th century. According to him there can be no room in the postmodern society for such "grand narratives" and that they have to be set aside. Thus, Lyotard, known as the father of postmodernism, dismissed all the universal ideas put forward by all the philosophers to date as "grand narratives".

The postmodernism that is debated about in India started only after 1992, but it was really something that arose in 1979

and perished in 1992 in Europe and America. In 1992 Rosenthal authored a book entitled "What was Postmodernism?" and we notice that already in 1992 it has been referred to as a thing of the past. But we learnt and debated about postmodernism only after 1992.

The book "The Postmodern Condition" by Lyotard gave rise to major debates in the US and in Europe. Liberal democrats participated in it and some supported Marxism. In the course of this debate, Jurgen Habermas pointed out that the modernist transformation is not completed and is being obstructed and that is why wisdom, rationality, feminism and justice are called into question today, and that hence the main task ahead of society today is to carry forward the modernist task with greater vigour. All liberal democrats emphasised this view. At the same time another line of argument emerged from among a section which abandoned Marxism in countries such as Britain and the US and referred to themselves as "post-Marxists". The post-Marxists claimed that classical and orthodox Marxism were spent forces, and that, while orthodox Marxism emphasised the working class, class struggle and the proletarian party, the events of the 1960's, especially the students' struggle in France and the struggles of the various sections of American society, have proven that it is not only the working class that is revolutionary but that the students, environmentalists, women, homosexuals are also revolutionary, and demanded that we should think and act on the basis that they have the potential to be a militant force and will participate in the revolution. This was the main argument of the post-Marxists and from this position they supported the postmodernists and on this basis the post-Marxists closed ranks with the postmodernists.

There was yet another faction, referred to as the failed or frustrated Marxists, that participated in this debate. The French students' struggle took place in 1968. Since the students struggled for their rights, it created the impression among

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the people of the world that the students too were a revolutionary force. But that struggle was defeated in 3 to 4 months and those who claimed that the students were a revolutionary force were also defeated. Having lost faith, they spoke of their disillusion and abandoned the students' movement. After around 1970-71 they called themselves "the children of '68". They were dejected and disheartened when they participated in the debate, pleading that they could neither achieve anything nor transform society nor understand society and that they had no plans for transforming society. They argued that it is postmodernism rather than Marxism that can show the way and identified women, environmentalists, students and homosexuals as "New Social Movements", whose roots were in postmodernism. From this debate that lasted 10 to 12 years we can identify four major postmodernist trends:

- 1) an anti-historic trend,
- 2) opposition to class struggle,
- 3) opposition to modern values, and
- 4) inaction.

(1) The anti-historic trend

Postmodernism has no past and has no concern for the future. Postmodernists reject all thoughts and assessments concerning the future by branding them as "grand narratives". Their interest is only in the present and they see no structure or essence in society but merely parts of it. Any reference to essence or social essence is seen as reference to "grand narratives". To them there are hierarchical relationships among societies, people and various identities but no common and fundamental relationship. Thus by negating the relationship between the past the future they negate history and historical continuity and remain opposed to the discussion of history. Even Foucault who wrote

on matters such as the history of sexuality, argues that one should not talk of history and that history is used only to confuse and subjugate the people, and claims that it is only the present that can be and needs to be understood.

It is true that one can see only one dimension and one part of a problem at a time, but it is also true that this part is related to another whole, and this part has a history that is linked with the histories of other parts. This is the main case for history. The postmodernist position, on the other hand, is that a part has an identity in itself and that it has no past nor history nor essence. But the whole and its part have a dialectical relationship, and what do the postmodernists achieve by negating this relationship?

Postmodernism does not even attempt to answer the question. Its failure to answer only makes clear that it wants inaction. This is referred to as *nishkriyaa* (non-action) in Sanskrit. How can one understand the present without understanding the past, and without understanding the whole and the present? How does one find the source of exploitation? If one looks at only the *dalit* how does one understand the relationship between the *dalit* and the landlord and how the *dalit* is exploited in this relationship? How can one oppose the landlords without understanding the relationship of power between the landlord and the *dalit* and how the wealth, power, caste and religion of the landlord give the landlord the right to control the means of production? If one fails to look at the whole, one could only lament that the *dalit*'s life is misery. The *dalit* is a part of the totality of society, and when we struggle for each part in isolation, the feeling that we are struggling for the whole is averted and thus when we say that we will put an end to the exploitation of the *dalit* we ignore social exploitation. The question is abandoned as to how exploitation as a whole can be eliminated by emphasising the exploitation of the *dalit* part. Eventually the inability to analyse the reasons for this exploita-

tion drifts in a direction opposed to history or a state of inaction.

But the European and American postmodernists were professors living in their ivory towers in major universities. They do little more than to write and to speak. None of them came forward to place their signatures on statements of united fronts. (Fortunately in India the postmodernists have not degenerated that far. But it can happen one day). They were firm about not participating in any demonstration for unity.

We Marxists oppose this postmodernism that drives thinkers towards inaction. A condition of inaction will permit only verbal sympathy for *dalit*, women's, and environmental movements, but not help to achieve anything. Without understanding the relationship between those in power and those oppressed by them we cannot transform the existing state of inequality. No movement can function or succeed without the participation of intellectuals.

(2) Opposition to class struggle

This trend originated with Daniel Bell's "Post-Industrial Society". It holds that production has no significance in today's society and hence the working class and class struggle. This view is expressed mainly by American and European intellectuals. The contribution of agriculture and mining production to the US economy is 6 to 8 % and that of industry 14 to 20%, and the bulk of the economy derives from the information sector. It is on this basis that they argue that consumption is more important than production. But where does the production for this consumption come from? Do they live without consuming food and industrial products? All the goods and food that they consume come from the Third World countries. In America, where the exploitation of the Third World countries permits life in luxury, production has declined to 6%. This may be appli-

cable to France and to Germany too. That is why they dare to say production is unimportant.

For consumption to continue, production should continue. In this respect, postmodernists have either shut their eyes to remain blind to the reality of the world or are ignoramuses who cannot understand reality. Why do they say that it is not production but consumption that is important and that research and information are important? It is not because they are blind or unable to understand reality. They are not unaware of the fact that production continues in the countries of Africa and Asia, including India. What they need is to negate class struggle, to negate the existence of a class called the working class, and, to sum up, to negate the very existence of class.

If there is no working class but only a service sector and a communications sector in America, there can be no proletariat, and hence there is no room for the proletariat in the world and there is no room for class struggle. The question is bound to arise as to how society could function in the absence of production or class struggle. That is why they reject as outdated the Marxist ideology which upholds production, the working class that makes it possible and class struggle that carries forward social struggle and announce that it is information, consumption and research that take the world forward.

Yes, then what constitutes this world without classes? They say that it is mere divisions, separate identities, homosexuals, women, ethnic identities and such things that exist and hence it is these things that matter and not the working class. They further argue that each of these struggles for its own advancement without a common root or a link and hence there is no aspect that unifies them, no aspect that places one another in opposition and no aspect that can be overthrown by struggle. But really all these identities are related to and depend on each other. Every man has at least a hundred identities. Which of

these should be considered important? It is true that each society comprises a variety of sections and a variety of identities. It is these identities that bring individuals together. If Marxism claimed that class is the only identity or the only important identity, that would have been incorrect. But postmodernists say that Marxism holds class as the only important identity. Admittedly, a few Marxists have said so. But the actual Marxist position is that each identity and each individuality swarms with contradictions and any one of them can become the primary contradiction. But the mistake that we made in practice was to go after just one identity and remain blind to the others. Postmodernists accuse the Marxists of failing to see other identities, but are they not guilty of upholding only the identity of a particular section?

One of the most creative and practical concepts of Marxism is the Theory of Contradiction. When it is applied creatively to isolate the principal contradiction one recognises that there are several contradictions within one and the same thing. The resolution of a principal contradiction leads to the emergence of another principal contradiction. Thus the activity of resolving contradictions goes on as an endless series. It is wrong to think that if a given contradiction is resolved today there will be none tomorrow.

If postmodernists really believed that Marxism was deficient in this respect, they should have persuaded Marxists to renew and apply correctly the Theory of Contradiction and at the same time not to ignore other contradictions. But instead they seek to negate and get rid of Marxism. They want to isolate the masses from Marxist ideology and render them effete, and that is why they claim that Marxist ideology is outdated, insist that individual groups should struggle to ensure their existence and declare that there is no organisation or logical reality to challenge any form of oppression.

Under the circumstances, let us for a moment assume that we have set aside class contradictions and ended *dalit* oppression. What happens next? Will it resolve the question of women? Will it transform the male dominant society? Will it resolve the hundreds of other problems that remain in society? That is why we Marxists approach problems by getting to the centre of the contradictions, to the logical, objective social condition, namely class. We relate problems to production which is the main aspect of society. We look at classes on the basis of the ownership of the means of production. Whichever section we consider, the most rational and ultimate fundamental element is production: production for survival, for the daily needs of food and shelter. Whatever the identity we have and whatever identity that may emerge tomorrow, what will remain as fundamental needs are food, clothing and shelter. How are they produced? With the means of production. Who owns them? Who uses them?

Thus, in every debate what come first are classes and the struggle between them. That is why we say that class is the basis of society and that is the principal contradiction. But in India we Marxists have made the mistake of ignoring the other contradictions. This is something that we should admit to. When postmodernists carry forward their argument on this basis, they argue that since the *dalit* who is oppressed by the landlord in turn oppresses his wife and the oppressed *dalit* woman in turn oppresses her children there is a power relationship between any two individuals. Thus they claim that the problem which is universal has no main root, and hence there is no way to struggle against it. By saying that the enemy is within you and therefore you cannot fight it, they ultimately insist on a state of inaction. They say that hierarchy cannot be opposed. But if the basis of oppression is hierarchy, we will oppose it and also all the opponents of class within and outside us. But postmoderenists reject struggle even against the enemy outside.

(3) Opposition to modern values

Another mistake that the postmodernists make is to reject modernism totally. They place progressive thought, wisdom, progress, humanity, justice, realism, internationalism and other such things within what they call modernism and reject all of them. Baudrillard claimed that the 1991 Gulf war was not a real war, because the world cannot be understood and, since only a part of it is understood through media of information, reality cannot be found in them, and that the Gulf War was something that was only brought to us through the media of communication by CNN. This implies that if there was no CNN there could not have been a Gulf War. Baudrillard claimed that the Gulf War took place only in the CNN information network and not in reality. Does this not mean that the postmodernists reject modern values, reason and rationality. It is true that these values have imposed upon the minds of people some unwanted information, but it is the truths as they are perceived through this information that leads to the understanding of the world. Without their help one could not have understood anything. Man cannot function without knowing the truths about the world through the various aspects such as modernism, wisdom, reason, internationalism and justice. Thus in postmodern society there will be no room for such political knowledge, ideological knowledge and the frame of mind to react.

What can we do under the circumstances? Habermas has already pointed out that in the postmodern society there is no room for modernist elements like wisdom, rationality, progress and justice. What we need to ensure is that progress reaches all sections and there should be justice for all, and of what use will it be to say that there is nothing called progress or justice? He argued that modernism has two parts, one cultural and the other productive or social, and that cultural modernism has in fact not reached all sections, but it is being confused with social modernism and it is argued that there is no such thing as

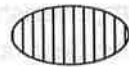
social modernism. There has definitely been progress in production and technology. Hence what we need to struggle for now is to make the results, advances and gains of these advances available to all. Thus he pleads that to abandon and to reject modernism will be to throw the baby with the bath water, and argues that the task of today is to eliminate the defects of modernism and to continue with modernism and that it is wrong to reject modernism for its defects. Such rejection is escapism.

It is Marxism that has been at the forefront of combating the defects of modernism. Modernism has good and bad in it. Unlike the postmodernists who reject modernism outright, we, while struggling to rid modernism of its defects, should continue the struggle to make everyone receive the benefits of modernism.

(4) Inaction

Postmodernists reject wisdom and rationalism. Hegel put forward the theory of reason and one may therefore reject it, but how can one reject justice? Has not the struggle of mankind, millennium after millennium, been for justice for all? How can we reject it? Independence, equality and fraternity are not only for the capitalist classes. Our goal is justice for all. The aims of modernism are not all to be rejected. On the other hand, we should accept the call to unite in the struggle against the very wealthy and the landlords and participate in it. We should accept the slogans of the struggle, recognise their true meaning and essence and act so that they do not remain empty slogans, and unitedly carry forward the struggle.

[* Refers to the *Adhvaita* school of Hindu Vedanta philosophy, and the analogy is self explanatory in the text.]



THE NEED FOR A THIRD FORCE

by James Janendran

The past presidential election witnessed a fierce contest between two political organisations of the ruling classes, namely the United National Party and the People's Alliance led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. Each used their various resources including vast sums of money amounting to millions of rupees and devious short-cuts to come to power. The PA through its use of state power and electoral violence on a large scale ensured electoral success. If we set aside for a moment the electoral performances of the two forces and look at their election manifestos in some depth we will be able to see clearly their class bases and the positions taken by them as a result.

The economy of the country has deteriorated as never before. The national economic policy has been swept aside as a result of the liberal, open economic policy which has been in force for the past two decades. All the national resources are being sucked out by the foreign multinational corporations. It is noteworthy that the plantation sector which provides main source of national income has been given out on a fifty year lease to private companies. And privatisation is progressing unhindered. Opening the doors to unlimited imports has led to the ruin of agriculture and peasants are becoming increasingly impoverished. All small industries that had been developed in the past, including cottage industries, have been destroyed.

Further, the multinational companies have been permitted unreservedly to plunder all our resources including human resources. While all state funded social welfare activities have been abandoned one after the other, all over the country various non-government organisations are busy infiltrating our society in the name of social service and ruining the lives of our people. Equally harmful is the proliferation of poisonous cultural infiltration. This infiltration through cinema, glossy magazines and various audio-visual media is effectively deflecting the minds of the younger generation from thinking clearly. The surge in tourism and the uncontrolled movement of tourists has led to an increase in drug abuse, sexual abuse of children, prostitution, the spread of AIDS etc. The increase in the use of narcotic drugs has led to the expansion of the market for these drugs and the growth of the criminal underworld.

The failure to find a just solution for the national question continues amid the social crisis. This failure has led to the intensification of the war to reach new heights. The sale of arms and the income generated through such sales is the target of the warmongers. And Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism is being mobilised organisationally to justify their thirst for war.

Organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF led by US imperialism are serving as the principal advisers in the background of the development of the economic, socio-cultural and war conditions entirely to the detriment of the people. The two parties of the ruling classes have demonstrated during their rule in the past two decades that one is no less willing than the other in implementing without protest the advice and guidance of the World Bank and the IMF. The presidential election manifesto of neither has said anything about the losses and harm caused to the people by these developments. On the other hand, it was noticeable that the manifestos emphasised that the economic, political, and socio-cultural lines that have been pursued so far will in essence continue to be pursued. The manifestos

put forward as promises mostly things that are superficial and devoid of substance. The difference was only in the matter of personalities while there was no difference in substance between the fundamental positions of the two.

The UNP founded in the late 'forties has been the party that defended and secured the social and class interests of the capitalist and landlord elite. It has at the same time been loyal to the imperialists and acted as the guardian of their interests in Sri Lanka. For well over the past half century, the UNP has been the representative of comprador and big capitalism. It has in the mean time, in order to serve its class interests and to serve the forces of imperialism, nurtured narrow nationalism to develop into chauvinism and reach its peak point of military oppression.

Thus the UNP has from its inception been an alliance of anti-working-class, anti-people and unpatriotic forces. That party and the elite among the Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils have up to now acted in collaboration. Hence opposition to the UNP is something that has rooted deeply among the masses of Sri Lanka, and the UNP has been identified as the main political foe by the masses.

It was when the UNP became well entrenched in its anti-people stance that the SLFP appeared on the political scene. This party had populist policies that represented national interests. While it gave pride of place to nationalist features in matters of national economy and in the fields of politics and culture, it also, within limits, dared to oppose imperialism and foreign infiltration. This position which was warmly welcomed by the masses enabled this national bourgeois party to come to power. The national bourgeois leadership, nevertheless, had in its midst families of the dominant feudal elements of Sri Lanka and representatives of the highest levels of the national bourgeoisie. While that party displayed certain progressive features

and willingness to work alongside the working class and the forces of the left, it also played a significant role in encouraging narrow nationalism. At times it tended to vacillate and retreat from its anti-imperialist position. But it cannot be denied that it has, as far as parliamentary politics was concerned, been the alternative to the UNP. The national bourgeois SLFP had always been in coalition government with the parliamentary left parties as its partners. The masses who were accustomed to an anti-UNP position saw the SLFP and its allies of the left as an anti-UNP force. This enabled the SLFP and its allies to come to power from time to time.

In 1994 the people brought to an end the seventeen dark years of UNP rule by bringing the PA to power in the belief that it was a genuine alternative. But in the past five years the PA government led by Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge dashed all the expectations of the masses and continued along the path traversed by the UNP in the preceding seventeen years.

An examination of the performance of the PA government in the past five years will show that the government has been unwilling to carry forward any of the national bourgeois policies of earlier SLFP-led governments. This government has actively participated in thrusting the economy of this country into the grip of neo-colonialism, escalating war without finding ways to solve the national question, denying democratic and human rights, widening the extent of social and cultural degeneration, and making the educational system serve the needs of neo-colonialism. The support of the American imperialists has strengthened the prospects of extending in effect the era of the last UNP regime.

Under these conditions it is not anymore possible to see, as in the past, the PA government led by the SLFP as a national bourgeois government or as an anti-UNP, anti-imperi-

alist force. The leadership has now descended to a level of total surrender to big capital and American imperialism. The forces that represent the national bourgeois and national interests have been pushed to the rear within the PA government and are in a state of utter frustration, while the so-called leftists who have drowned themselves in opportunistic parliamentary politics have lost their left identity and degenerated into social democrats.

The oldest political movement in Sri Lanka is the left movement which comprised the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party and is sixty-five years old today. It is incontestable that it was the leftists who were at the forefront of a number of struggles in Sri Lanka against feudalism, capitalism and imperialism. They were the foremost opponents of the UNP and should have been the ones who should have grown in strength to become the alternative to the UNP. Had only the correct policies been put forward through a strong organisation and political work carried out among workers, peasants and intellectuals, the national bourgeois class that emerged in the country would have rallied behind the left movement. But what happened in reality was that the left movement that completely lost its identity went behind the national bourgeoisie. The national bourgeoisie by linking itself with the left movement, succeeded in destroying the individuality and future development of the left movement.

There is little sense in the anti-UNP claims of the so-called leftists who have joined the PA government. They may make anti-UNP utterances to secure positions and concessions, but they cannot say these things on behalf the working class or from the point of view of the oppressed masses. Not even a fool will believe the anti-UNP credentials of this government after hidebound reactionaries from the UNP who crossed over to the government have been welcomed with open arms and rewarded with ministerial posts. The SLFP-led PA has demonstrated its anti-people stance during the past five years. It has as

its aim the continuation of its journey along the same path. The UNP has already secured for itself the identity that it is the common enemy of the masses. The UNP cannot alter that identity. But the PA has during its rule during the past five years created a situation where it too has propelled itself towards the position of being a common enemy of the masses.

It is in these circumstances that there is a need for a Third Political Force that could salvage the country and its people. The objective situation in Sri Lanka does not permit any single political party to take this place on its own. Although the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna claims that it is the Third Force, it has no policies to qualify for that status. Although the JVP's mass propaganda claims that it is a force of the left that can set up a leftist government, this claim is impractical. The JVP has still not recovered from the serious errors in its policies through a process of criticism and self-criticism. It is struggling between a parliamentary opportunistic path on the one hand and an erroneous stand regarding armed struggle on the other.

The JVP still seems to be a constrained movement limited to the youth of this country. The position taken by the JVP on the national question, which is the most important problem facing the country today, is founded on a most reactionary and chauvinistic basis. It claims itself to be the only left force, rejects all other left, progressive and democratic forces, and shows no willingness towards a common programme or a united front. Thus the masses quite rightly believe that the JVP is not qualified for the status of a Third Force.

At the same time there are left, progressive and democratic forces throughout the country who can be mobilised as a Third Political Force. But to unite them under a common program seems a difficult task. Thus far the united fronts of the left and alliances of democratic and progressive forces were mainly oriented towards the parliament. They have failed to go be-

yond that to become united fronts with a common programme to carry forward the aspirations of the workers, peasants and the nationalities through broad based struggles. As a result they have repeatedly fallen into the mire of parliamentary opportunism.

It is correct to consider how the parliament and elections to it can be used to the benefit of mass struggles and to build up powerful mass movements, and to participate in them. But to become complaisant with the securing of a handful of seats in parliament or in lesser bodies or to become greedy for more seats and to abandon the correct political stance is a big mistake and an even bigger betrayal of the masses. The Third Political Force has to be built outside this domain and on the basis of the lessons from the mistakes of the past. And the need has arisen for all the left, progressive and democratic forces to recognise the importance of such a third force and act towards its realisation.

The Third Force should have a programme that reflects the fundamental aspirations of the all the working people including the working class and the peasantry, and the oppressed nationalities. The initiative and the decisions for this have to start at the lowest levels. Mass struggles need to be developed from small-scale struggles leading to large-scale struggles. Political parties that desire to join the Third Force should act with the interest of the country and the masses first, and with accommodation, understanding and dedication. A united front cannot be an obstacle to any party putting forward its own programme and policies, but no party should attempt to use the united front for purposes beyond those of the agreed common programme.

It is necessary to emphasise the importance of a Third Political Force on the above basis because the masses have now started to realise and to talk about the need for a Third

Political Force. They are disgusted by the destructive approaches of the two political parties of the ruling classes, but because of the absence of a third force are compelled to align themselves behind one or the other of the two. The people do not want to suffer this plight. If a Third Political Force would emerge, the masses will transform themselves into its motive force and be at its forefront.

It is only mass movements and initiatives for struggle under the leadership of such a force that can generate faith in the revolutionary struggles and social transformation in the future. It is they that can give people the faith in their ability to achieve political power for themselves. This is precisely why it is important that the path and the journey of the Third Political Force to be founded should be in the correct direction. It will only then be possible for it to smash the very reactionary policies and practices of the two ruling class parties and advance as an alternative force. The left, democratic and progressive forces need to take honest and constructive steps towards that purpose. This is today's most pressing course of political action.



***“Our mountains will always be,
our rivers will always be,
our people will always be;***

***The American invaders defeated,
we will rebuild our land
ten times more beautiful.”***

Ho Chi Minh

10.5.1969

from the Testament,

Ho Chi Minh, Selected Writings

COMMENTS ON GLOBAL EVENTS

THE LAST STRAW

Jack Straw, the British Home Secretary thought that he found the easy way out of the Pinochet problem. He had been most willing to accept the view of the 'medical experts' who examined General Pinochet, the former military ruler and ally of the US and British imperialists for well over twenty years, that the man whom Spain wants extradited for trial in Spain for his part in the murder and torture of Spanish citizens is unfit to stand trial. The arrest of Pinochet was a source of joy to the relatives of the victims of the Pinochet regime and to all those who are committed to social justice. It was, not surprisingly, a cause for anger among the right wing politicians of Chile and the British Conservatives. It was a cause for embarrassment for the New Labour government of UK and to the 'Centre-Left' coalition government of Chile. The position taken by each section clearly showed where each section stood on the question of social justice.

The decision by the Home Secretary was received with anger by the friends and families of victims and their supporters. Demands were made for second medical opinion on the state of health of Pinochet, and a string of legal actions were initiated to prevent Pinochet from being returned to Chile where he will probably be released without or with an eyewash of a trial. The Chilean aircraft waiting in the Bahamas to come to London to take Pinochet home had to return empty handed as

a result of the new legal complications. A Belgian lawsuit has since ensured that Pinochet's 'holiday' in London will be extended. It is likely that Pinochet will never be punished by a court of law for his crimes. The only punishment that he has received and will perhaps continue to receive for some time is the feeling of uncertainty and despondency, which is fraction of what many of his victims and their families suffered in the early days of his regime.

DISARMING THE IRA

The New Labour government has seldom failed to show its true colours as a party of the ruling classes of the UK. Its continued insistence on the decommissioning of the IRA weapons before even taking the first little step towards social justice in Northern Ireland has proven that the only thing that matters to the British establishment is depriving the Irish people of the only means that they have to demand fair treatment. The IRA of today is the product of renewed British and British sponsored Unionist oppression. It was against heavy odds that the IRA developed into the fighting force of the oppressed Irish Catholic community that it is today. To abandon the struggle on the strength of the promises of the British imperialists will be a betrayal of the cause.

It is readily forgotten by those who oppose 'terrorism' that the British armed forces are an army of occupation in Northern Ireland. The Royal Ulster Constabulary has been always a police force that acted in the interests of the Unionist agents of British imperialism. For IRA to disarm while the enemy is fully armed is to surrender. The IRA has demonstrated its goodwill by continuing with its cease-fire. The failure of the British Government to respect this sincere gesture and its taking full control of Northern Ireland once again to pressurise the

Sinn Fein and the IRA is likely to backfire in its own face. The people of all Ireland want peace. But peace achieved by deception and denial of justice cannot last. To use the posturing of Unionist leaders as an excuse to delay justice will not work. The ball of Northern Ireland peace is very much in the court of the British imperialists and their Unionist allies.

[Since this comment, the IRA has withdrawn from negotiations on decommissioning, in protest to the British Government's move. - Eds.]

THE KIDNAPPER STATE

The US imperialists claim to be waging war against terrorist acts including hijacking and kidnapping. One does not really know how many such acts of crime have been carried out under the patronage of the US state apparatus and its agencies. But today, the US government stands exposed of the offence of encouraging an act of kidnapping of a seven year old Cuban child Elian Gonzalez and using the issue to harass Cuba.

The boy lost his mother at sea during her effort to illegally enter the US. The US which would normally have repatriated any illegal immigrant, chose to let the so-called relatives of the boy in Florida have him. Despite the father of the boy and all four grandparents wanting him to be returned to Cuba, the US is using the boy as a bargaining chip in its dealings with Cuba. Its treatment of the two grandmothers who went to visit the boy was disgusting.

Is it strange that in a country where there is so much said about the emotional needs of children, a boy who has not recovered from the loss of his mother is not allowed to return to his father and family? Only one who does not know the true nature of US imperialism will say 'yes'.

A RARE AFFINITY FOR MAO ZEDONG THOUGHT

The Chinese ambassador to Cuba while addressing the Cuban people on the occasion of the commemoration of the Chinese Revolution has reportedly claimed that the Chinese nation is being built according to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and that it has been highly commended by President Fiedel Castro. This is a remarkable event as it has been many years since the phrase 'Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought' crossed the lips of any official of the Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka. 'Socialist' China is now in the process of succeeding in its 'socialist' goal of joining the World Trade Organisation, the main instrument of 'globalisation'. China has also accorded a warm welcome to the new military ruler of Pakistan, even before the military regime has established its credentials internationally. So much for 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics'.



Has the JVP Changed its Spots?

It has for some time been claimed by Dr. V.B. Karunaratne, the leader of the NSSP that the JVP has now changed its chauvinistic line on the national question. In fact he claims that he has exorcised the JVP of its chauvinistic elements. I wonder how the good doctor can explain the sustained hostility of the JVP, in the letter to him dated 26.10.99, towards any form of devolution of power until socialism is attained.

One thing is certain. The JVP has not budged a millimetre on the national question. If the doctor claims that the positions taken by him and the JVP are the same, then it is he who has moved.

"All my life, I have served the Fatherland, the revolution and the people with all my heart and strength. If I should now depart from this world, I would have nothing to regret, except for not being able to serve longer and more.

"When I am gone, a grand funeral should be avoided in order not to waste people's time and money."

Ho Chi Minh

10.5.1969

from the Testament,

Ho Chi Minh, Selected Writings

"Leninism broadened the conception of self-determination, interpreting it as the right of the oppressed peoples of the dependent countries and colonies to complete secession, as the right of nations to independent existence as states. This precluded the possibility of justifying annexations by interpreting the right to self-determination as the right to autonomy. Thus the principle of self-determination was transformed from an instrument for deceiving the masses, which it undoubtedly was in the hands of the social-chauvinists during the imperialist wars, into an instrument for exposing all imperialist aspirations and chauvinist machinations, into an instrument for the political education of the masses in the spirit of internationalism."

J.V. Stalin

April-May, 1924

The Foundations of Leninism

"Money forces the commodity form even on the objects that have hitherto been produced for self-consumption. As a result the commodity form and money penetrate the internal economy of communities which are directly associated for production, they break one communal tie after another and dissolve the community into a mass of private producers."

F. Engels

September 1876 - June 1878

Anti-Dühring

(Translated by Rewi Alley, Courtesy: Travels in China, New World Press, Beijing, 1972)

Two Poems by Lu Xun

Often when I spent
 a long spring night restlessly
 I would feel how good it would be
 to return home, taking the family;
 now with greying temples
 I see hazily through my dreams
 my old mother with tears on her face,
 and the city wall, where now
 flags have changed; then
 coming back to reality knowing
 one must go despite the fact
 that so many dear friends
 have been killed; I, burning
 with anger, would be in the thick
 of the fight, writing these lines
 then dropping my head knowing
 that now there is no place
 they might be published;
 like shining water moonlight
 spreads over my dark clothing

Now that my life has all gone wrong
 what can I ask for? It could
 be said, do nothing
 when action brings trouble, but
 I simply wear a broken hat
 pulling it down over my face
 when I walk through busy streets;
 middle age, with some little comfort
 like a man with a pot of wine on a leaky boat
 in the middle of the river; yet
 determined that even though
 the enemy in their thousands
 point threateningly at me
 I will not heed them
 only bending my head and giving myself
 to be as a walking buffalo
 led by a boy, ever in the service
 of good common folk; now only when
 I shut myself in my small attic room
 do I become ruler of all I survey
 with no care for change of season
 of heat or of cold

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