

PERESTROIKA AND THE FUTURE OF SOCIALISM

Dayan Jayatilaka

Dayan Jayatilaka is the Director - Conflict Studies, at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS). A Politbureau member and an Assistant Secretary of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party (SLMP) as well as the associate editor of the Lanka Guardian, he was briefly Minister of Planning of the North-Eastern Provincial Council from which he resigned due to policy differences including the prolonged presence of the IPKF. A few years ago, he was the first accused in a political trial in the Colombo High Courts and was indicted on fourteen counts including conspiracy to overthrow the State through violence. This article is the slightly revised text of a speech recently delivered by him at the Perestroika Study Circle of the Information Division of the USSR embassy.

Socialism in all its meanings cannot but undergo the most profound rethinking and reordering precisely because human history has entered a qualitatively new stage. Because all the relationships are changing or have changed or are being subject to question. Therefore almost all of our ideas deserve the most deep and scientific re-examination. I do not think that we in Sri Lanka have understood the depths and extent of the changes and the implications of these changes. I do not think that our progressive movement and even the progressive movement globally has kept pace with these changes.

This has not always been the case in the world Socialist Movement. Socialists throughout the world in the last 1 1/2 centuries have been extremely sensitive to international change. If we take the writings and the correspondence of Marx and Engels, they have been very responsive to changes, to the various political developments, not only in Europe but also as far as India. And they always took these into consideration in their theorizing. I would mention the Paris Commune as an example i.e. their postulate concerning the state - that the ready made state machinery cannot be

taken over by the proletariat, that it'll have to be smashed. There's a direct connection between their understanding of a major political event and the strategic conclusion they derived. And this has been the case if you take not just Lenin but also his contemporaries. We, for our part, have either been stupefied by the velocity of the changes or the period of stagnation has had such a terrible effect on us intellectuals that the world Socialist Movement has not really caught up with the changes that are taking place. The responses have been very adhoc, quite superficial. O.K, so we put 'democratic' in front of 'socialism'. It's basically an exercise of minting adjectives. We do not seem to understand that it's a whole new world, a new period which we'll have to try to comprehend and conceptualize. In understanding these changes we have of necessity to mint new concepts and forge new analytical tools. Philosophical and conceptual debates have been very much part of Marxist history.

'What is Marxism? What is Socialism?'

Now, I would like to throw out a few questions. Firstly about Perestroika itself. It has been said by Gorbachev that Perestroika is

a revolution and that when he assumed office in 1985 Gorbachev's own idea of reform was somewhat different from this present notion.

I remember what Deng Hsiao Peng said "What is Marxism? What is Socialism?. It's only now that we are beginning to understand these questions." Because I believe that even our notion of who is a socialist needs re-examining. Is Hungary socialist? Is Poland socialist? If the propositions proposed by certain 'radical' Soviet economists were implemented, in what sense would the Soviet Union be socialist? And therefore what is socialism? Then a whole series of very profound, fundamental, basic question... is being thrown up about the role of the bourgeoisie and the role of the proletariat.

Does the role of somebody like Havel in Czechoslovakia mean that the bourgeoisie is once again a revolutionary class capable of leading a bourgeoisie democratic revolution? Consider the question of the proletariat - For decades our notion of the revolution was that a section of the bourgeoisie may lead the bourgeois democratic revolution, but after that, the proletariat must take over, because it's the proletariat that is interested in the growing over of the bourgeois democratic revolution into socialism. There were the Trotskyites who said that it'll be done 'in permanence' without an intermediary stage and there were the Leninists who said it would happen in stages but that the stages are linked.

WHITHER SOCIALISM ?

Now, there's no country in the world where the proletariat has played a more important role in recent years than in Poland. There's also no country in which fully fledged capitalisation and marketisation has taken place as much as in Poland! So in Poland you have the proletariat leading a very much bourgeois revolution! This is the first time I think this has happened. It shakes a fundament of our thinking – not just a concept born in the period of stagnation – the Breshnevite period even of the Stalinist period. This goes way back to the classics, to the giants. But what does Poland say of the correlation between a certain socio-economic project and a class? And therefore what are the implications for all of us? I wouldn't go into that here.

But certainly when we make our analysis and draw up our strategies and tactics and programmes and try modes of intervention, you have to take into account, as **Marx took account of the Paris Commune**, of questions such as these.

Then what about the nature of the State? Now we were told that the state is the guarantor of the dominant relations of production. So you threaten the relations of production, in the last instance there's the state which backs it up – coercively. The capitalist state protects the capitalist system. The socialist state protects the socialist system. And at the heart of the state is its repressive apparatus – the military, the police. Now in Rumania what is the role that the armed forces played? Were they the guarantors of the dominant relations of production? In Rumania how come the secret police wanted to guarantee the relations of production and the military didn't? What does it say about the articulation of relations within various arms of the State? To me all these are very important questions. What is the role and the function of the State vis-a-vis the dominant mode of production? Is it the guarantor of dominant

relations of production or is it the **role of the State to act in consonance with the needs of the development of the forces of production?** If so, I can make the sense of Rumania and the Rumanian military. Because certainly what existed was not in the interests of the development of the forces of production. So also in the Soviet Union and the rest of Eastern Europe. In that sense it acted in a way that cleared the fetters. The more archaic and obvious the fetters were, the more violent the role of the military in the interest of the clearing of those fetters. Then this makes a nonsense of what we have been taught earlier. Let me go further. Is it

are two of the kinds of questions which arise from the experiences of Eastern Europe. These are very fundamental questions, because these involve the basic building blocks of our theory – classes, state, relations of production and forces of production and the articulation between these.

We were told earlier that the dictatorship of the proletariat is several times stronger than the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Therefore in Eastern Europe with such fundamental changes taking place, I would have expected that there would be a hell of a lot greater resistance. But the dictatorship, the dictatorial State dis-



A meeting 'in defence of Lenin' in Moscow to mark the 120th birth ceremony of Lenin.

that the question is irrelevant? Should we persist in trying to find some kind of relationship between the state and the relations of production or even the forces of production! Maybe there's no such nexus between the state and the so called sub structure. Or is it one set of relationship **within capitalism** where the state is the guarantor in the last instance of the dominant relations of production, but a whole different ball game in non capitalist or post capitalist (or socialist or socialist oriented) formations? Does the State have different characteristics, different laws and dynamics? If so this is something new and we'd better think and talk about it. These then

solved. Now what does this mean for strategies of change in **other** parts of the world? Does it mean that armed revolution is not really necessary, provided–

- (a) that there has been a very profound kind of interweaving of our politics with civil society, and
- (b) a certain conjuncture obtaining, a certain situation, a certain balance of forces. What is that situation? Is it that there should be a lot of interest on the part of US and that the Church should be very powerful in society? What are the conditions in which fundamental change can be effected without armed

WHITHER SOCIALISM ?

economies and the limited capacities of world capitalism. So you may probably be having these countries joining the semi periphery of world capitalism, not really the core and you'll have intense competition between these countries to ascend world capitalism's hierarchy. Just as Gramsci had to grapple with Italy's Southern Question, the question of hierarchical relations between that country's Northern and less developed Southern region, with consequences for the formation of 'social' and 'historical' blocs, so too will European Marxists have to face an **Eastern Question**, with the same facets and implications. This will lead to competition not only between the countries, but within the country, between regions. Together with marketisation, you will have increased regional disparities. You will have ethnic confrontation - this is already happening. So Europe can once again be a cockpit of conflict. Not a world war, but there could be very very violent conflicts because of the uneven development that will assert itself within the context of European integration. And since ethnicity is also a 'cross border' phenomenon - they are not neatly limited within the borders of the existing state - you will find great instability in Europe in future. So therefore, you may not have smooth transition, because you'll have chauvinism, you'll have nationalism, which can play havoc with the whole socialist perspective.

El Salvador not Poland or Afghanistan

There are those who trace the turning point in the new Cold War to Poland; and the others to Afghanistan. Timothy Gaston-Ash for instance identifies the Papal visit to Poland in 1979 as a turning point, which is followed in 1980 by the founding of solidarity. Others focus on the Soviet losses in Afghanistan. Now while these two events certainly had a very profound perhaps even decisive

impact on the processes within the Soviet Union and the Soviet Communist Party. I myself think that neither of these were the decisive turning points in the change in the correlation of world forces. When and how did the revolutionary offensive of the late 70's come to an end? Where and when were we defeated? It is my view that the turning point came not in Poland or in Afghanistan, but in El Salvador. One might say it came in Managua when the fanatical young FPL supporters of Cayetano Carpio assassinated Ana Maria, stabbing her 81 times. The murder of Ana Maria, the discovery that it was carried out by combatants of the FPL and above all the Salvador Cayetano Carpio the Ho Chi Ming of Central America had sanctioned the killing (this discovery led to Carpio's suicide in Managua) - all this meant a tremendous moral collapse for the Salvadorean Revolution from which it never recovered. Once this happened the Salvadorean Revolution was pushed on to the defensive. It affected the fortunes of the revolutionary struggle in Guatemala and in the final analysis meant the isolation of the revolutions in Nicaragua and of Cuba. Had the Salvadorean Revolution succeeded Nicaragua would have broken out of its isolation, the United States would have been forced either to retreat totally from its own back yard or intervene militarily. Either way it would have suffered perhaps an irretrievable blow in its super power status. But instead of which the turn around in El Salvador permitted the United States to proceed with its counter offensive against Nicaragua and the Central American Revolution. What had happened in El Salvador was a louder, larger echo of the collapse of the Thai revolution, as a result of the Sino-Vietnamese, Vietnamese-Kampuchean splits after 1975. In 1975 it seemed only a matter of time before the Indo Chinese revolutions were followed up by the revolution in Thailand.

In 1979 it looked just a matter of time before Nicaraguan victory was followed up by the victories in El Salvador and Guatemala.

I would source the killing of Ana Maria in the crisis of the FMLN following the failure of the final offensive of 1981/82. In the aftermath of the final offensive, there was a lot of mutual recrimination within the FMLN, which after all was a umbrella organisation and not a single politico-military vanguard like the Sandinistas. The FPL was accused of not throwing its full weight into the battle. The FMLN in turn replied that the failure of the offensive proved the validity of its own preferred strategy of "Guerra Popular Prolongada" (protracted peoples' War.) There were fissures within the FMLN and interestingly enough Ana Maria began to articulate an alternate point of view within the FPL, having just returned from a tour of socialist countries including Vietnam. She had certain criticisms about existing socialism, criticisms which pre-figured the Gorbachevian Perestroika. Furthermore she advocated the exploring of the option of negotiations. This was bitterly opposed by Carpio and the Caetanistas. This led to her assassination. With the assassination of Ana Maria and the suicide of Carpio, the FPL was decapitated.

Now I think that the failure of the final offensive is in turn not unrelated to the strategic debate within the Salvadorean revolution. I believe that the insurrectionary moment came and went with the killing of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero in 1980. The FMLN did not use the occasion to trigger off an armed popular insurrection. This is ironic because the urban mass organisations of the Salvadorean revolution were perhaps the strongest in all of Central America. In 1975, for instance the Salvadoreans were far stronger than the

Contd on page 32

WHITHER SOCIALISM ?

Contd from page 14

Nicaraguans and the mass organisations such as the BPR, FAPU, LP28 were legendary in Central America. But the FPL strategy of prolonged people's war acted as a break on its willingness and capacity of utilise the moment of 1980. Therefore though there were powerful mass demonstrations, there was no attempt to throw the full weight of the politico military vanguard into the balance as it were. Those held in reserve for the 'real thing', so called real thing, the protracted People's War. The insurrectionary moment therefore passed. When the 'final offensive' was launched in 1981/82 the situation in the urban areas had already changed for the worse.

The inaction was related to the FPL critique of the Guevarist-focista strategy of armed struggle. Cayetano Carpio, while he was still General Secretary of the Salvadorean Communist Party, had published (I believe it was in 1969) an edition of Che's Bolivian Diaries with a dissenting critical introduction authored by himself. He and his colleagues' study of the experience of the focus in El Salvador itself and also throughout Latin America in both its rural and urban variants, had led them to adopt the Vietnamese model of protracted peoples' war. This is understandable given the victorious advances made by the Vietnamese revolution at that time. I personally think that the FPL leaders seem to have under rated the whole experience of the Tet offensive and understanding of the Vietnamese communist leaders conjuncture. But perhaps the Salvadoreans thought that, that was something the Vietnamese could afford because of the existence of the North Vietnam. Whatever the case may be, I believe that it was their dogmatic adherence to a certain strategy - itself understandable in the context of the failure of foquismo - that led them to under-rate the revolutionary potentiality of the moment of 1980. This in turn led to the failure, of the 'final offensive' of 1981/82 and, in the context of that failure, to

the assassination of Ana Maria and the suicide of Carpio. This decapitation of the most experienced and advanced organisation of Central America, and perhaps in the whole world at that time, meant an almost irreversible moral loss for the Salvadorean Revolution. This I believe was the crucial turning point in the correlation of forces between imperialism and revolution in the Third World. And it was there in El Salvador, as a result of a self inflicted wound, that the new Cold War was lost by the forces of socialism.

But leave that aside. Our oldest Socialist revolution is 72 years old. That is merely a twinkling of an eye if you take the history of systems and of movements. So this kind of retrenchment, reversed and counter revolution can be dealt with, and may even have positive consequences. Because it is the weakest link of the chain that drops in periods of profound crisis. It's all so in crisis that there is restructuring, reorganisation; rearming and re-armouring - though not necessarily militarily. This is what the bourgeoisie did. It was after 1979, that you have the Jimmy Carter Human Rights Campaign and then the Reagan offensive. I'm not saying we will or should go the same route or that it's possible for the Soviet Union to do that. But all is not necessarily lost if you take the long historical

Imperial Rome, having survived several modes of production and having also revived and embarked on a counter offensive in most parts of the world recently. So we must be inspired by an understanding of history and prove capable of real searching, of real re-thinking. If socialists can do that, then Perestroika and Socialism will have a future.

The long historical view

I don't think that socialism is necessarily finished. why? I use my words carefully - not necessarily finished. I say this because I take a long historical view. Academic Marxists would call this Braudellian, but I say it is Mao's perspective. And if we take a long historical view, we will find that other forces and movements have been here before - where we are.

If we were pro bourgeois, capitalist ideologists and policy makers in 1918 we would have really felt very bad with the socialist revolution having taken place on the world's largest land mass. The bourgeoisie has been 'here' again in the 30's, when they were threatened not only with wars and revolutions some of which actually broke out in Europe, but also with very powerful socialist movements even in the U.S. And then to come closer to history - just 10 years ago, in

Neither of these were the decisive turning points in the change in the correlation of world forces. When and how did the revolutionary offensive of the late 70's come to an end?

view: if you take the history of other movements. Regis Debray said that Marxism was the third great religion on earth - the first and second being Christianity and Islam. I don't know whether he meant it as a compliment. But certainly in the light of recent developments it would be a tremendous compliment if it were true. We know how successful Christianity has been - having made it from total marginality and suppression to leadership in

1980 the US had just had been defeated by the Vietnamese; a victory, followed very rapidly by revolutionary changes in places as diverse as Ethiopia, Portugal, Angola and in 1979 Nicaragua. That year witnessed the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the Vietnamese move into Kampuchea. By 1980 it looked like the US was in headlong retreat. There had been a great retrenchment of US global power. Every time this has

Contd on page 33

Contd from page 32

happened in the history of World capitalism we Marxists have been triumphalistic. Capitalism is doomed, we've thought. But systems show greater resistance than that. Our system unfortunately has not been that resistant. Because in terms of handling information, feedback mechanisms, and communication, capitalism has been much more superior and sophisticated. Gramsci was the first person who really understood the complexity (and thus the superiority?) of the bourgeoisie organisation of civil society ■