

DEVELOPMENT AND THE PEOPLE

The spectre of recession is haunting the United States of America again and a shooting war in the Gulf seems ominously near. For the poor, developing countries in the Tricontinental World, these twin phenomena can turn out to be disastrous.

The situation is bad enough as it is. Inflation, unemployment, poverty, indebtedness, have become facts of every day life to millions of people in the underdeveloped world. The statistics are startling—nearly 60% of the economically active population in these countries are unemployed or underemployed; over 75% lack sufficiently remunerative jobs or a minimum of social security; over 950 million are living in conditions of absolute poverty; infant mortality rate on the average is ten times higher than in the developed world; 900 million adults are illiterate — yet the reality is many times worse. Underdevelopment is a sickness that is slowly destroying these countries and their populations — and so far it seems as if it is a sickness without a remedy. The decades long quest on the part of these countries for development had remained unsuccessful.

There have been many formulae and many models. State capitalism, state socialism, export promotion, import substitution, Keynesianism, monetarism — these have all resulted in the further "development of underdevelopment". Perhaps their only success had been that they destroyed many a myth and an illusion. After these bitter experiences we now know what doesn't work (at least in the current context) — closed economic policies, price controls, all encompassing planning, self reliance. If, as Lenin said, one should have 'clarity above all else', these discoveries, however painful, can be of some service.

It's not that there are no success stories. The 'dragons' of East Asia (the NIC's) have performed very well in the past decade and there are many things others can learn from them. But though a certain amount of euphoria is understandable, a note of caution is also necessary. We must

not forget the role geo-politics played in the success stories of these countries — specially in the context of the Cold War. But perhaps the more important point is that there have been large sections of people who have not benefited from the achievements of these countries and very little effort has been made to help these sections or to integrate them into the development process. But then this is so of almost all the developed countries — which despite all their riches have their share of poverty, homelessness, unemployment and many other social ills. When the Jeffrey Sachs of this world says that 10% unemployment is acceptable, what this means is that hundreds of thousands of human beings are prevented from becoming fully fledged members of the societies they live in — they become marginalised, the victims and not beneficiaries of their countries' development process. A society which thus condemns a section of its population to marginal status, to poverty and homelessness, however rich and prosperous it may be, is not a healthy society; it is a sick society — as the recent riots in Japan and the strikes in South Korea amply proves.

Development should be for the benefit of the people. It cannot be achieved at the expense of the people. Economic Growth is of paramount importance, but this growth should benefit all members of the given society. Development should not be a process which forever marginalises a section of society by condemning them to poverty and unemployment, homelessness and other social ills; it should not be a process which does not protect the more vulnerable members of a society i.e. children, the elderly, the poor; it should not be a process which leads to the destruction of the environment for the sake of quick fix profits.

In other words what is needed today is to go beyond the old dogmas, myths and certainties and to have a new perspective of development — which is realistic, rational, democratic, socially just and humane. This alone can help the developing countries today. ■

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