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The Economic Review completes its 15th year at a time of unforeseen and unprecedented changes both locally and globally. In fact, some of these global changes are so momentous, so radical that comparisons have been made variously with the events of 1789, 1917 and the 1930's.

For Sri Lanka too the past 15 years have been the most crucial period of her modern history. These years witnessed a change of government, the establishment of an open economy of sorts, the further erosion of the liberal democratic process, an ethnic war and the de facto partition of the country, the presence of foreign troops on our soil, a Polpolist insurgency which nearly destroyed the state and the civil society - just to mention a few.

Today we are in the midst of an uneasy peace; the economy and the civil society are taking the first tentative steps towards normality and recovery.

The refusal to face reality (especially when it doesn't correspond to our pre-conceived theories and long held beliefs) and an extreme irrationality have been two of the main reasons which led to the impasse, we found ourselves in. Thanks to these we got ourselves first into an unwinnable ethnic war and then into a violent brutal insurgency and counter-insurgency.

But not even tens of thousands of deaths and damage of property worth millions could make the majority of our politicians, academics, journalists and other opinion makers take a self critical and fresh look at

OUT OF THE RUBBLE, THE TASKS AHEAD

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their stands on various issues ranging from the still unsolved ethnic problem to solutions offered to the current economic crisis. Parrot-like, these people keep on repeating the same old dogmas and formulas. They make no attempt to free themselves from the shallow populism which proved to be extremely dangerous and destructive. In fact their populism (specially the economic variety) has become more shrill in the hope of achieving their narrow, opportunistic, sectarian ambitions.

If we are to prevent a replay of the events of last one-and-a-half decades and are to save our country and our people from another series of bloody and violent conflicts, we should, at least now, make an attempt to

face reality (however unpleasant and unpalatable that may be) and think and act rationally. This is specially necessary in our economic thinking. After all most of the world (including the land of Lenin) is engaged in the task of rethinking decades old economic concepts and policies (hitherto regarded as sacrosanct). Unfortunately the majority of our left and progressive politicians and intellectuals not only refuse to do so and regard any such attempts as acts of sacrilege and a part of a devious conspiracy à la the CIA; they also seem to take a great pride in their adherence to the very same economic theories and concepts rejected by socialist countries as unrealistic, wrong, impractical or irrational.

As Neville Jayaweera points out elsewhere in this magazine, we need a massive education campaign at all levels to cure this deep rooted malaise before it does any more harm. This is a gigantic task which will need the dedicated efforts of politicians (both government and opposition), academics, intellectuals, journalists and all right thinking people of the country if it is to succeed. Not that we have much of a choice. What is at stake is nothing less than the survival of the country.

On its 15th anniversary, the Economic Review dedicates itself to this task; to contribute in our own small way to the creation of a body of new economic thinking which is rational, realistic, humane and to popularise it. It is only by doing this that we will be able to overcome our current economic crisis and greet the advent of the 21st century with confidence. ●