

# CRISIS OF COMMUNISM, FUTURE OF SOCIALISM

Dayan Jayatilleka in conversation with  
Jayantha Somasundaram & Tisarane Gunasekara

Dayan Jayatilleka, one of our few original political thinkers, was indicted in the Colombo High Court a few years ago on 14 counts including conspiracy to overthrow the State through violence. Briefly Minister of Planning in the North Eastern Provincial Council, he resigned due to policy differences including the presence of the IPKF. Currently he is the Director, Conflict Studies, at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS). He is also a Polit-Bureau member and an Assistant Secretary of Sri Lanka Mahajana Party, as well as the Associate Editor of the 'Lanka Guardian'

## Economic Review:

Could you give us your views on the global economic situation as it has developed in the 80's, and also tell us what are the prospects for the 90's?

## Dayan Jayatilleka:

I am not an economist by training or even by self training, but I am appalled at the lack of comment on the fundamental changes in the political economy of the world system that are taking place. Let me clarify; there has been a lot of comment on the politics of the 1980's and projections into the future. There have been also comments on the global economic trends, I find that these comments have two characteristics. (1) the comments on the political changes and the comments on the economic changes have remained segmented, separate.

(2) the analysis of the economic trends has remained economic and developmen-

talist. Here I refer to not only the remarks of Western economists, but also to some of our own progressive oriented and internationally better known economic thinkers. Both Marxist and classical Western thinking always understood the nexus between the political and the economic. After all political economy existed prior to Marx. Therefore, I am disappointed at the inability or unwillingness to understand the changes in the world economy against the backdrop of the political changes, and also to understand the implications for the world economy of the fundamental

The recrudescence of nationalism, ethnic consciousness, ethnic clashes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe brings home to us very powerfully that nationalism or these primordial forms of consciousness, is a systemic or trans-systemic.

changes that are taking place at the level of world politics. I think that the whole global system is being reordered. The whole map of the post war world has been redrawn in the last year and will be redrawn still

further. The whole structure of international relations is undergoing a change. Then are new global power patterns. I venture to suggest that we have entered a new stage as it were, of world history.

## Changes in Political Economy

The changes at the level of the structure of world politics are bound to mould the economy as well. I think that we have been conscious of the link between the political structure and what has been unsatisfactorily called the economic sub structure in the writings of intellectual traditions to which we belong. Certainly, the link between political colonialism and economic imperialism is well known.

Coming to Sri Lanka, the link between the political reforms of 1833 and the building of colonial capitalism has also been remarked upon by more perceptive Lankan Marxists. But here, we have such a massive re-ordering of the world polity and it is not understood what that means in

fact, both a reflection at one level and a precursor of tremendous changes at the level of the world economy. The changing power balance on the global scale is bound to be reflected at the level of the

world economy in terms of the flows of capital, in terms of the various relationships between the metropolitan capitalist powers, the relationships between metropolitan capitalism and peripheral capitalism and between the centre and, the so called semi periphery.

**ER :** Where do the East European reforms fit in?

**DJ :** I do not believe that all the East European countries are going in the same way. I do not believe that capitalism is being restored in all these countries. In some countries, it will be a reformed and renovated socialism that emerges from this. In certain other countries, there will be perhaps some synthesis of a sort that we have not seen before. Still other countries may see a reversion to capitalism, and I am afraid, I must sound heretical here, still other countries might see an advance towards capitalism.

### **New Patterns of Imperialism**

What we are talking about are new patterns of imperialism or world capitalism and the actual working out of the Law of Uneven Development. Because the Law of Uneven Development that has pushed Europe back into the centre of world politics, is going to have its effect, its manifestation at the level of the global economy.

Now this cannot but have tremendous implications for strategies of change and for Marxian theory as a whole. We know that the high points of Marxian theory have been linked to two inter-related

phenomena. On the one hand, a new stage in world capitalism, the rise of imperialism. This phenomenon was apprehended and grappled with intellectually by social democrats like Hilferding progressive liberals like Hobsen, and Bukharin - I

overtaken our models and our theories, or are there other reasons for a lack of even speculation as regards the fundamentals.

**DJ :** Certainly events have

**It's precisely the periods of re-alignment, of re-adjustment, of redivisions which are also the periods of war and conflicts. A few years ago we used to talk about the Balkanisation of Sri Lanka. Now I'm worried about the Lankanisation of Eastern Europe.**

would say, Bukharin's work on imperialism and the world economy probably stands the test of time, even better than Lenin's imperialism. So these changes at the level of the world economy has always had an impact on social scientific and radical theory. The second was the crisis in socialism at that time, the crisis in the international social democratic movement - Lenin's comments on the collapse of the second international, on imperialism and socialism. I think Leninism proper saw a certain qualitative development with this crisis. We see a recurrence of this dual phenomena today. A fundamental change in the world economy, in world politics, in post war capitalism, a change that entails a change in the division of labour at a global level, and therefore, in the class alliances transnationally. Now these two should in fact, generate certain theoretical, intellectual, analytical responses at a macro level, at the level of totalisation. Such a total vision, such a total conceptualisation, has been sadly lacking not only in Sri Lanka, but from what I read, in Marxist literature as a whole. All the perceptions have been partial, where the global totality is changing and we are badly in need of total perceptions.

### **Crisis of Marxism**

**ER :** Is this because events have

overtaken us. Certainly theory the Owl of Minerva - is taking flight after the shades of dusk has fallen. But unfortunately for us, the Owl of Minerva seem to be flapping its wings much later than ever before. I would put this down to the working of the Law of Uneven Development.

Uneven Development has met a very painfully dialectical paradox. On the one hand, there has been the increasing trend towards internationalisation or transnationalisation or integration at a global level. More than ever before, we are affected, influenced, impacted upon, governed by global processes. But on the otherhand, we have also seen a crisis of hegemony; of the hegemonies of the US and the Soviet Union over the postwar world, the crisis of the hegemony of the USSR over the Communist Movement, the crisis of the hegemony of Communists, Marxists over Anti Systemic movements in their own countries. And this crisis of hegemony has been the consequence and the cause of the tendency for the reassertion or the assertion, if you like, of autonomous, autochthonous nativistic, nationalistic phenomena and sentiments. So, there has been a trend towards globalisation and a simultaneous

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