ASIAN
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Social Movements
in Asia

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Introduction

In this issue we look at various social movements in Asia, in an attempt to review the state of these movements and the kind of questions and problems that currently concern them. No doubt these movements have made much progress in bringing people's issues to the fore, in raising popular consciousness, as well as in altering the terms of discourse even of the state and the powerholders. But problems of poverty and social injustice continue, and the tasks before these groups are as monumental as ever.

The movements themselves have gone through changes and have had to deal with many obstacles, both without and within. These are examined in this volume as we look at the women's movement in India, the Malaysian workers' movement, and the Philippine communist movement. A critical look at NGOs is also included, not because these are themselves people's movements, but because they have generally been supportive of such, or at the very least, have justified their existence on the basis of such support. Perspectives on democracy and the search for democratic alternatives in China and Eastern Europe, are likewise presented.

The discussions on India, Malaysia and the Philippines have as their setting the particular socio-cultural, political and economic context of each country. To appreciate the impacts these various movements have made requires an understanding of this context and the historical conjuncture from which they have emerged and developed. The Malaysian workers movement, for example, which has its origins in the colonial era, has had to endure severe repression by both business and the state, and has had to resist persistent and pernicious efforts to corrupt its leaders as well as to divide it along industry, religious, racial and ethnic lines.

Still the experience of the young shop-floor workers who in 1972 took over the Transport Equipment and Allied Industries Employees' Union shows that Malaysia's workers are not necessarily corrupt, ignorant, docile, or powerless. The new leadership that emerged was not perfect, and admittedly made mistakes, some of them, serious. But what is of greater significance here is the way they have had to root their movement in the lives, day-to-day struggles, perceptions and aspirations of their co-workers, in that way, indigenising much of the "established" notions of working class struggles that came largely from the West.

The particular impact of the Indian women's movement can be seen in three phases. The first signalled an "unprecedented departure from a fatalist pessimist position" on Indian women's lives and status as daughters and wives whose very existence could only be tolerated through their husbands (living ones at that). The second phase saw women demanding from the state equal protection before the law, as well as special laws upholding civil and other rights of women. Consistent throughout this phase is the rejection by the movement of the societal (read, male-dominated) view that men and women were biologically unequal, hence the social inequities which have disadvantaged women. In virtually every facet of social and public life, the movement is adding a women's dimension to such needs and services as health, housing, education/literacy, public transport, law enforcement, economic planning and policy-making, among others.

The third phase is essentially a search for a deeper understanding of patriarchy as it is manifested in the unabated violence perpetrated against women; as women grapple with notions of sexuality, religion and communalism; as they question male- dominant views on ecology, development and democracy; and as they challenge patriarchy itself.

The Philippine communist movement undeniably has a place in the history of struggle of the Filipino people. Although it grew as an underground movement, its members therefore most vulnerable to repression by the state (which used communism as its rationale for repression), across the wide spectrum of the ideological left in the Philippines it enjoys the broadest mass base. All said, they were a force that everyone had to reckon with. This is no mean achievement, one that could only have been attained through unstinting efforts, countless sacrifices and the cost of many lives. For those members of the movement who have had to interact directly with the "masses", much rethinking and relearning from and on the ground have in fact taken place.

Now the movement is going through some upheavals of its own, in part because of the advances it has made which have rendered Party dogma inadequate if not irrelevant to the changing times and popular consciousness; and in part because of problems it created, in particular, human rights violations committed by its own members against other members and sympathizers, the military and the civilian population. Questions are increasingly being raised about adherence to principles of democracy and gender equality in the Party's own praxis.

As the discussions in this issue indicate, the Party has admittedly suffered a loss of its mass base. There is also an apparent rift between the thinking of the central leadership (which doesn't seem to have changed at all since the Communist Party of the Philippines was launched in 1968), and those who have

been at the forefront of the struggle. While the ongoing debates seem to narrowly focus on the question of strategy, that is, whether to "surround the cities from the countryside" or to wage "insurrection", the questions do go much deeper. These range from the analysis of the current social formation and stage of development of the Philippines, to the interplay of class, gender, ethnicity and ecology in social development (instead of the "orthodox" and sometimes rigid approach of historical materialism), the plurality of forms of struggle (as opposed to the centrality of armed struggle), and the plurality of the struggle itself (as against the communist movement singlehandedly waging revolution). These questions cannot simply be swept aside.

Clearly inroads have been made by these movements, but the way ahead is equally, if not more, complicated. There is a need to keep sharply attuned to the people's pulse, listening to them as they articulate (in their own language) their needs and hopes. Add to this a sense of urgency that prevails especially in light of recent world developments.

To be sure these are confusing and often exasperating times — what were previously generally accepted constructs of capitalism, socialism, North, South, East, West, left, right, are now being turned on their heads. Not too long ago it was difficult to imagine Yeltsin criticising Clinton's programme as "too socialist", Vietnam's government inviting US investors to its shores, McDonald's and Coca Cola in India, a Thai girl nurturing the ambition of one day becoming a prostitute. Alongside these are vestiges, institutions and practices of the old world order: a Nobel laureate detained by Burma's military regime which has continued to turn a blind eye to worldwide outrage; the Khmer Rouge rejecting peace in Cambodia; the US government maintaining its embargo on Vietnam; the World Bank and the IMF still imposing harsh policies on the third world.

Furthermore, and this is one thing for which the 1990's will surely be remembered, we have witnessed the disintegration of the world's largest socialist project, the Soviet Union. As Roger Burbach writes: "In modern history no major power has collapsed so rapidly without suffering from the ravages of an invasion or war." (*Monthly Review*, February 1993, p. 11) While this political and social upheaval has yet to be fully played out, it has created a major setback for socialists and communists throughout the world (though not all will concede this). As some of the contributions in this volume indicate, and as many, particularly in the women's, ecological and human rights movements will emphasize, socialism as it has emerged in contemporary history has not satisfactorily answered important questions with regard to democracy, gender equality, ethnicity and a sustainable environment.

Not that the developed capitalist North is without its own share of problems. The list reads like that of many a third world nation: slackening growth, growing

unemployment, unstable currencies, mounting debt (internal and external, personal, corporate and public), and rising poverty. Still despite the weakened economic base of individual nation-states of the North, capitalism presently enjoys an ideological advantage, one which is being exploited to the hilt by the forces of global capitalism — the multinational corporations, the G-7, the IMF, GATT, World Bank, etc. — and which is being unleashed with a vengeance on the third world and Eastern Europe.

In fact, one lesson that can be drawn from the rapid changes the world has recently undergone and the experiences and struggles of the different people's organizations across the region, is that the dichotomy posed by the Cold War era was not really the heart of the issue. Another important while painful lesson is that there are no general models, no pre-fabricated alternative models which we can readily adopt and apply to our own situations. This is not to say that there are no alternatives, on the contrary, some of them may already be looking us in the face. This is merely to say that finding and creating a real alternative to the world and societies we live in is something we will have to work out in the course of our respective struggles, even as we subject these to a sometimes painful re-examination. While this is easier said than done, it seems the only way forward.

Maitet Diokno

Rhythms of a movement

Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah

The women's movement has no 'beginning' or origin. We know from fables, folk stories, songs and humour that women in different ways have resisted their subordination. This insubordination has always existed as an emotion and anger deep within us and flowed like music in and out of our lives, consciousness and actions. Gradually through time, this resistance has moved into collective protest and schools of ideology. Yet, it bears a familiarity of earlier beats and notes in its new words, issues and methods as if they were different variations in a huge cycle of continuity.

What we today call the Indian women's movement emerged as a part of the Social Reform Movement in the 1800's. Initially men and later women reformers bore social ridicule, religious excommunication and loneliness to fight the injustices perpetrated against women especially widows who were so ill-treated that *sati* or prostitution seemed better options. The first *mahila mandals* (women's clubs) organised by the Arya and Brahmo Samajs, the Hindu revivalist and reformist organisations, provided the first space for socialising and education.

This was the first public propagation of the belief that it is not the destiny or fate of women to be oppressed, illiterate and ignorant. Society had played a part in retarding the development of women, and it had now to redress its ways, treat women as human beings and provide for their education and progress. Secondly, the Social Reform Movement set into motion forces which encouraged the emergence of a number of women — doctors, social workers, teachers and scholars, the first cadres of the women's movement — who gradually took over from men the cause and the organisation.

The second phase of the Indian Women's Movement (IWM) began with the mass participation of women in the Non Cooperation and Civil Disobedience

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Movements launched by the Nationalist Movement and Gandhi and the forging of strong links between the women and men leaders. During that period the IWM moved towards a different path away from its social work and parliamentary orientation. The All India Women's Conference which had been established in 1924 grew to become the single largest national voice of the divergent groups. Political tendencies within the IWM infused all its old and new demands with an equal rights perspective. The demand for education was broadened to a demand for coeducation; reform of law included those pertaining to marriage, divorce and inheritance; economic equality included a right to one's husband's income and pension for widows; and surprisingly the right to abortion. By 1955, the Constitution of India could boast of some of the most progressive laws for women.

Two decades after Independence, middle class and working class women once again participated in great numbers and with militancy in alternative development activities, mass struggles and agitations launched by students, activist groups, *dalits* and splinter political parties. These struggles helped women become aware of their militancy and collective strength and became the precursors to the third phase of the IWM.

The third phase of the IWM like the preceding two was also concerned with violence on women, not on the earlier issues of *sati* and ill-treatment of the widows but rape and wife battering; with marriage but not widow or child marriages, rather, divorce, maintenance and child custody; in legislative reforms, not the enactment of more laws but in amendments and implementation of the existing ones; with education, not only spreading educational facilities but attacking sexist and stereotyped textbooks, with equality; not only equal rights but equal opportunities to work and equal pay. This progressive evolutionary movement in women's struggles was a product of the changing social, economic and political climate in the country and a changing perception of women's oppression.

The newly formed youth and student groups raised the everyday realities of women's lives and the atrocities committed on them as political issues. For example, rape on tribal and *harijan* women (Mathura Rape Case, the Ramezabee Case and the 1980 Pipre, Bihar carnage); dowry/wife murders in Delhi and Bombay; sexual harassment in Hyderabad, etc. Violence on women which had been usually seen as symptoms of class oppression, a breakdown of law and order or given humanitarian concern was now perceived as a manifestation of the unequal relationships between men and women in society. Physical violence, sexual or otherwise, or even its threat was seen as one of the ways of maintaining and enforcing the subordination of all women. Their arguments were based on a revised understanding of the concept of patriarchy

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or the domination and exploitation by men of women's labour, fertility and sexuality.

Ideologically, if the first phase of the Indian Women's Movement made the unprecedented departure from a fatalist, pessimist position on women's life and status, the second phase decried the biologistic explanation of existing inequalities between the sexes and the third phase sought to understand the oppressive hierarchical relationship between men and women and societal systems in order to introduce changes and a new society.

The leadership of the women's movement now and earlier has remained predominantly middle class. This is not something unique to the women's movement but is also true for other movements and parties like the communist parties. Presently, given its strength, resources, the personal and public nature of its issues and the hostile obstacles before it, the IWM has chosen to influence and pressurise the State and its organs rather than oppose, fight and seize State power. It is no mean achievement to convince the State to create a department for women's affairs, change the national census criteria for inclusion of different aspects of women's work, influence development policies and five year plans, amend legislation, and have special cells within the police structure for distressed women. The women's movement also recognises the need to fight political cooptation by the State and build alliances with other movements without submerging or prioritising women's issues in favour of general ones.

The beat goes on

The women's movement in India has firmly established itself in the minds, actions and programmes of the people, parties and the State. With every passing decade, there are critiques and assessments, praise and recommendations. We need all of them because the movement has not ended. It waits for other performers and other renderings. Instead of a critique we then think it more relevant to present some of our insights and observations of the movement, the issues which remain to be taken up and dilemmas that need to be tackled.

Issues

Violence on women is an issue which most groups have taken up with emotion and consistency. This has both helped as well as proved an obstacle for the women's movement. The problem is no longer of groups, mixed, mass and others not taking up the issue but the manner in which they are doing so. There is the peculiar situation in which the wide political acceptance of an issue has actually restricted its scope and development.

Violence has been taken up mainly in the context of articulated politics or within an anti-class and anti-state framework. Most groups simply added the dimension of sexual violence, of landlord or police rapes, to their political practice. In many ways, it helped break the hold of feudal lords over women peasants and the landless and revealed the extent of police atrocities but it also took the form of 'mass base'. The victim of violence remained a symbol for political protest. These mass mobilisations seldom differed in their form and content nor did they empower local women or galvanise them into self activity. Theoretically and organisationally, violence as an issue still has a low priority. It was painful to watch the tussle of conflicting pulls and the cover up attempts by the women members of the Bombay Communist Party Marxist and Janwadi Mahila Sabha after their cadres had gangraped a woman member of the Kashtakari Sanghatana, a left wing organisation in Dahanu, Maharashtra, in October 1989.

Many groups are now attempting to step out of this familiar political practice and take up the unpopular issues of marital rape, sexual harassment, wife beating (without linking it to alcoholism) and pornography. The task before us now is to develop a different perspective and method which will bring out the patriarchal relations underlying violence on women. Perhaps we may have to sacrifice wider political acceptability and mass response for a slow, unexciting, more laborious process of introspection, building alternative structures and theory and in dialoguing with other groups.

There are two parallel opposite flows of issue based actions taking place in the movement. One, mass/political groups which had earlier excluded women's issues are now more prone to taking up "women's" issues. Two, women's groups primarily interested in specific women oriented or gender issues are now moving towards 'general' issues. What do these two flows signify? Is it that the two cannot be conceptually and organisationally compartmentalised?

Women's issues will sooner or later come to the fore as a result of women's political participation. The issues could be those of violence, dowry or other women oriented issues and struggles for basic amenities like water, land, against communalism, etc. We have to ask the question — how can these artificial boundaries between issues be understood and dissolved in a way that will promote women's interests and their movement? What are women's interests?

Maxine Molyneus (1985) differentiates between three conceptions of women's interests. Women's interests are both general and specific and at a class, caste, ethnic, etc., level. They are at the same time complex and conflicting. Practical gender interests are the result of concrete conditions or immediate needs and are based on women's existing roles, for example, civic amenities like water, housing, escalating prices. Strategic interests emerge from an analysis of

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women's oppression and a strategy for change. The demand for equality and sharing of housework come from the perceptions of sexual discrimination and division of labour. These challenge the prevailing forms of women's oppression.

Every issue whether women's or general has the potential to be taken in a way that will contribute to the strategic interests of women and it appears that women's groups are more conscious in their attempts at realising this potential.

Means and ends

We observed that many groups in the movement used similar methods in their struggle. Whether mass based, service oriented or involved in publications, most groups have staged demonstrations and dramas, lobbied amongst parliamentarians and grassroots people and made use of different media like posters, video and the printed word to carry their message. While it is true that some groups place an ideological preference on one method it has not made them indifferent to others. However, it would be impossible to methodologically characterise this phase of the women's movement, unlike the earlier one, as having perfected a particular method like representative and lobbying politics.

The process of struggle is extremely important for most women's groups because they believe that they can theorise from personal experiences and grassroots data i.e. from bottom upwards. In part this method has been widely accepted because the women's movement has received very little help from existing theories or academic studies. It entails a going back to the basics, challenging stereotypes and questioning concepts. The 'means' therefore are related to the 'ends' not only as efficient ways but moral justifications and reflections of the basic principles of political ideology.

Secondly, the experimentation with different methods exists also because women's groups have not restricted themselves to a single issue. Mass organisations like the Nari Mukti Samtha (Assam) with an agitational and mobilisation approach have had to take up work related issues and also rape. Trade unions like SEWA (Gujarat), in response to their women members, have had to go into developmental programmes like the setting up of labour or craft cooperatives. On the other hand, service organisations like Saheli (New Delhi), Women's Centre (Bombay) and Sakhi Kendra (Kanpur), basically interested in helping women in distress, are pushed into public agitational politics. Far from restricting itself to publication, *Manushi* has consciously taken to performing street theatre, holding public meetings and propagating a boycott of elections. Inevitably, this has led to a re-thinking on the use of different methods and their limitations.

Secondly, after a period of street demonstrations, women's groups found themselves being perceived as convenient marchers for everyone. When can *morchas* be called effective? Pamphleteering underwent a change with more visuals and simplified, less jargonised language. What are the limits of using cultural mediums? Some have combined such an evaluation with the ongoing debate on what is consciousness: How can it be 'raised', is it something that can be really transferred? Is there a revolutionary consciousness?

Lastly, the prolific use of different methods has thrown up a new culture of poster making, street theatre, drama, women's studies, prose, poetry and especially songs. It has drawn in numerous artists and musicians, politicians and social workers, academicians and concerned individuals to contribute to the movement.

Confronting ... *Communalism*

The women of the earlier phases of the movement skillfully challenged as well as used religion and religious symbols and sentiments. They could in the same breath, with conviction and persuasion, condemn sati and resurrect Sita, contest Hindu orthodoxy but function within its framework, in short follow Mahatma Gandhi's dictum, "It is good to swim in the waters of tradition but to sink in them is suicide." This political philosophy which quickly appealed and eased contradictions won them popular support.

The present women's movement seems to have broken away from this tradition and has largely refrained from using religious symbols (even for quick communication). It has at times condemned the politicisation of religion and criticised it as an oppressive patriarchal force, has also perceived it as a purely personal matter and has therefore maintained a discreet silence. We have not been able to come to grips with the issue of religion, fundamentalism and communalism except at a very superficial level. We have not understood our own feelings towards religion, the deep need women and men have for the spiritual, the sense of identity which they derive from it and their acceptance of religion as a way of life and world view.

Perhaps we are handicapped by the rationalist/secular foundation prepared by the pre-independence generation of nationalists; by an economistic application of Marxism; the criticisms made by the anti-Brahmin movements; and our own reactions to communal frenzy, and have wiped out religion from our minds and our political agenda. But there is no way we can escape it in everyday politics, electoral wrangling and in the lives of women. The demand for and against the Uniform Civil Code (which would replace the several existing personal laws based on religion) shows that the women's movement is caught in

a dilemma which threatens to divide or impede its momentum. If it adopts a gender based, religion neutral approach, it may deny women's deep affiliation for religion and religious identity, and thereby alienate them. On the other hand, if it were to appeal through religion and use its symbolism, it is bound to estrange many especially the minorities or perhaps be caught in an unending theological discourse with pandits, mullahs and priests.

These are some of the difficult choices for a movement as it encounters communal riots in Meerut, Bhivandi, Bhagalpur, the anti-reservation protests, the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy, etc. The National Federation of Indian Women, the women's wing of the Communist Party of India, held a successful peace rally of 7,000 women in Ayodhya in a bid to defuse the communal situation there. But can women as sufferers of men's wars come together to advocate sanity and reason? (*Indian Express*, 24 October 1989) Can it put forward a humanitarian appeal based on religious tolerance and secularism? However, the gradual sweeping rise of communalism shows that we have failed to transform personal lives and social relations in the 40 years of our nation state.

Should we then continue our efforts to develop a secular culture? There have been many attempts to replace mythological figures with those of Savitri Phule, the courageous social reformer, or Rani of Jhansi, the queen who stood up against British treachery and colonisation. At the inauguration ceremony of the Indian Association of Women's Studies meeting in Trivandrum (Kerala) some women objected to the use of Hindu oriented *diyas* (lamps) and coconuts. There is an ongoing debate on what sort of connotations the images of Kali and Shakti (Hindu goddesses) have for other religious groups. At the level of strategy should we forge alliances with progressive religious reformers and activists like Swami Agnivesh and Asghar Ali Engineer who may not have articulated anti-patriarchal positions?

Or should we as Paulos Gregorios argues participate in an evolution of an Indian spiritual secularism which does not exclude religion nor attempts to use religious dogmas for its axioms and which moves from our common-sense perceptions to a transcendent reality? (*Times of India*, 20 March 1990)

Sexuality

In a patriarchal and sex segregated society as India there is a certain encouragement and tolerance of friendships between members of the same sex. Besides kin relations, the *dost* or *sakhi* (friends) bonds are well known and socially recognised. However, homosexuality is seen as a perversion and Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code condemns those engaging in "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" with imprisonment for up to 10 years or for life with

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or without a fine. Paradoxically, homosexuality/lesbianism is also socially accepted as long as it does not affect existing social relations, marriage practices, etc. Lesbianism has drawn very little attention to itself. Society has been indifferent to it and there is no popular vernacular equivalent for the term lesbianism, nor does it feature in law.

The women's movement has treated the issue of lesbianism in more or less the same way. It took some time for women's groups to react to the story of Leela and Urmila, two women constables in the 23rd Battalion special armed force women's wing of the Madhya Pradesh police, their marriage and their unwarranted dismissal by their astonished superiors. (*Sunday Observer,* 25 February 1988) As this issue was never publicly and theoretically discussed, women's groups could only respond by demanding an immediate reinstatement of the two cops. A signature campaign started from Bombay brought in loads of responses. The news coverage though sensational and riddled with male curiosity and patronage created a sympathetic climate. But women's groups failed to go beyond treating it as a personal matter between two adults. In a joint meeting of all groups in Bombay, the topic was summarily dismissed without even a discussion.

Most groups refused to take a public position. They feared that the women's movement was too small and not yet strong enough to bear the backlash from men, political groups and even the majority of the women's groups. It was also felt that there were already too many differences and splits between groups on vital and survival issues. More importantly it would be extremely difficult to function in the absence of a lesbian grouping or movement. Lastly, by turning it into a political issue, women's groups felt that they would be drawing unnecessary suspicion and public attention to men and women who live with their friends.

Although there were no public debates, there were many intra-group discussions which raised a host of questions and analysis. If wife beating and dowry murders, so called family/personal matters, are political, then why should Leela's and Urmila's relationship be considered personal? If rape and sexual harassment is one way of controlling women's sexuality, is not the practice of heterosexuality another form? Why is there such a pressure and compulsion on women to marry? Why does religion sanctify marriage? Who decides what is 'natural' and what is not? Who decides women's relationships, through marriage or not, and prescribes a punishment for breaking the rules?

Does this issue concern only lesbians or all women? The women's movement itself has challenged 'natural' male/female roles, sexual division of labour and myths of motherhood. If patriarchy defines and controls women's sexuality, then this issue questions women's role and position in relation to men. In

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understanding how sexuality is structured in society, we need to question the institution of marriage, especially the unequal relations within it. The double standards of morality in society for men and women, women's lack of choice in contraception and reproduction and the images of 'good' and 'bad' women also need questioning. Why do men and society in general show hostility to lesbianism?

Ecology

The heroic and deeply moving Chipko Movement (1969) initiated by local women and supported by Sarvodaya leaders shows that deforestation, ecological destruction and the development process have not been kind to women. These have made their skills obsolete, robbed them of employment and placed an unbearable strain on subsistence production and on women's domestic chores like fuel gathering and fetching water. Maria Mies (1986) and Vandana Shiva (1988) have painstakingly shown the strong patriarchal and colonial character to this technology based development process. It seems inevitable that women's biology and spirituality will motivate and draw them into ecological struggles.

Some women and environmentalists speak of women's special affinity or spiritual unity with Nature. In some cultures Nature has been called female. Women because of their reproductive and caring functions are nurturing, gentle and peace loving. In others, men have been equated with Nature as creators and preservers. We need to ask whether we can clearly identify Nature from biology and from human society. What is natural seems to emerge from social conventions. Women have challenged the 'natural' role and desire of women to be mothers. We have taken pains in establishing that biological behaviour is determined and transformed by society. This does not mean that we should ignore biology or disown women's links with Nature. Is it not necessary for us to work out the complex interweaving of biology, physical environment and the nature of our technological application and social development?

Simply because women are the victims of the development process does not mean that they will spearhead ecological protests or become ecology conscious. In fact barring the Chipko campaigns, women are not in the decision making process in either the Narmada Bachao Andolan against the building of the large Sardar Sarovar Dam on the borders of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, or against the nuclear plant at Kaiga, Karnataka. In Balliapal their main concern was the loss of their land and cultivation. On the other hand, ecology activists have expected women to join in with men without differentiating between their class and specific gender issues. How will the land lost to the Sardar Sarovar Dam and subsequent displacement affect women?

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Have the women of Kaiga heard about the Bhopal tragedy and the effects of the poisonous gas leak on women?

There is no automatic shift from practical and class issues to a politicised anti-patriarchal struggle. Women activists of ecological struggles will need to fight on two fronts, against the destruction of the environment and against male interests. The Bodhgaya land rights struggle has already set a precedent and shown the hardships and the success of integrating class and gender issues. At a *dharna* (sit down strike) in Bombay of the dam affected people (March 1990), ecology groups were surprised at the support given by women's groups. According to them women's groups had ignored their efforts to 'involve' them. But women's groups saw these efforts as patronising. Perhaps now, we, like them, are ready for a dialogue and a more women oriented ecology struggle.

The "State" of our grey areas

The women's movement has had a very ambiguous relationship with the State and often taken contradictory positions in its theory and practice. The entire State structure seems formidable, enigmatic and all powerful. Should women try to be effective within it so as to reach out to thousands of people? There is a very real fear of being submerged in this massive complicated machine or of being coopted. Women have demanded that they sit in various government committees and commissions but their experiences of working with the authorities have seldom been positive. Half measures and lack of political will for implementation of programmes have been frustrating. We have asked for legal reforms but have not always followed them up with persistent lobbying. Nor have we made a consistent, hard hitting critical assault on the State and its policies.

Women are divided in their opinion on women's electoral participation. Most agree that political party nominations are a form of cooption or that such parties have brought in women relatives in a titular and nominal way. Women party members have consistently claimed that a larger number of women candidates could influence party and national politics. In some instances this has been true. The Pidghara Gram Panchayat in Madhya Pradesh has the first all women team in the country. It has initiated its reign by mooting women oriented schemes like providing tapped water, covered toilets and bathrooms, education centres and roads. (*Sunday Observer*, 12 February 1989) On the other hand, it is equally true that women in important posts may not always raise women's issues. The four women prime ministers: Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher and Sirimao Bandaranaike, never expressed much concern for women as a group.

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Perhaps the women's movement can actively promote certain women candidates who have been known to take up women's issues in local, state and national politics regardless of their party affiliations. Or it can bring out women's issues in mainstream politics through propaganda and agitations. It can concentrate on educating women voters. It can even think in terms of an independent women's party! This is one area which cannot be ignored for too long.

There has not been sufficient attention paid to the specific relations between the State, the family and capitalism. Like the rest of society, the State recognises women only through their relations with men and not as independent entities. Women have been able to retain their maiden names only after bitter arguments with officials. Bank officials and government bureaucrats always ask for the husband's or father's permission before signing documents like passports and ration cards. Until recently, women could not get abortions without their husband's signature. The tacit encouragement of 'one job' for a family' · programme and family wages implies that men are responsible for women and children. The link between the State and the family is also clearly seen in maintaining religion based personal laws. Even the size of the family is determined by government propaganda as also the incentives and disincentives of the family planning programme.

Often women workers find protective legislation a handicap. By preventing women from doing night shifts, the State and industry treat women as a weaker group and feed the patriarchal notions of home responsibilities and possibilities of sexual assault. Either night shift should be banned as a health hazard or be given as an option to both men and women. Women should be provided with late night transport and there should be public propaganda which urges men to help out with domestic chores. In times of crisis, industry does not hesitate to recruit women, with or without family, married or unmarried. For example, the electronic industry in its search for cheap, dispensable labour, has opted for young unmarried women to save on wages, maternity benefits, etc.

Feminism

In the course of our interviews with women's groups, we often asked women whether they would call themselves feminists. Most seemed to have overcome their earlier hesitations and fears of being called feminist, 'westernised' or 'man haters'. However, they shied away from any further categorisation of feminism. This may be a reaction to the different trends and the controversies around such categorisation which have emerged in other countries. On the other hand, there have also been some attempts to discuss other categories like Asian Feminism (by the SNDT Research Unit in Bombay) and Gandhian Feminism.

The questions which emerge are: Can feminism be called an ideology? Is there one or many types of feminism? We believe that it is necessary to identify oneself as a feminist to establish a set of beliefs and to make alliances with other like minded groups. However, there is no one definition of feminism but rather like socialism and Marxism it is evolving and adding newer layers of meanings. Feminism has been called an ideology because it establishes systemic links between women's lives and their oppression, suggests fundamental changes in the relationships between women and men; between different classes and castes, and with the state, and puts forward a vision of a total transformation of society.

Towards a model for effective trade unions in Malaysia

Arokia Dass

We have seen how the incipient militancy of an earlier generation of labour activists was both undermined and smashed by the violence of the colonial and neo-colonial state. [See 'A legacy of militancy', pp. 25-27 of this chapter.] We have established that, in its place, a semblance of workers' representation has been fabricated, which has consistently collaborated with the agencies of capital and the state to defuse the potentially powerful force of organised labour.

Today, with the policies of the state, traditional ethnic allegiances are being actively fostered as they continue to be a useful instrument of manipulation and control, while the scope for labour activism has been whittled away by repressive legislation, such as the infamous Internal Security Act, as well as by the threat of state violence. In effect, very little has changed as far as labour is concerned, despite the achievement of independence and the spurious campaign to improve the lot of the *Bumiputra* — the indigenous Malay. The same instruments of suppression are being used today as were employed by the colonial powers of yesteryear to entrench the masses of this country into the position of subservient labour.

New mechanisms of control are also being developed: free trade zones where female labour — easily exploitable because of the traditional conditioning of women into compliance — is used in preference to male labour, which has an established tradition of labour organising. Women, regarded as subsidiary wage-earners and not primary 'bread-winners', are more readily susceptible to rules which ban the formation of trade unions. The power of the national unions is being destroyed by laws which encourage the establishment of in-house unions and institute the illusion of worker consultation in structures such as the Joint Consultative Councils.

While all these strategies of the state may appear overwhelming, it is my contention that they will not ultimately succeed if the present generation of trade union leaders analyse the situation accurately, recognising that there has been a conscious and well-planned strategy to mislead and misdirect them into adopting the wrong models of labour organisation for over 40 years.

The basis of change

To extricate ourselves from this quicksand of impotence in which we have been embedded for the past four decades, we can find no better inspiration than the traditions of the pre-independence labour movement, for these were based on a spontaneous and focused struggle for betterment of the lives of subsistence workers, as well as the political objective of freeing society from colonial domination.

If we analyse it we will find that the original structure of labour organisation in the 1930s and 1940s was sound because it comprised individual plantation-based workers united into General Labour Unions (GLUs); these were not industry-based but open to all workers in a particular unit of production, the aim being to bring all social divisions of labour together. They were unlike the craft unions developed in the industrialised world, which fostered competitiveness between different sections of the working class and thereby sowed disunity. Individual unions in the GLUs were able to mount demands based on the specificity of their situation. The different levels of organisation encouraged democratic development: the state federations, the Federation of Trade Unions (FTUs), and the national federation, the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU). In spite of the difficulties encountered by the PMFTU, for a young trade union centre to have done so much for labour in so short a time was remarkable.

The ensuing destruction of this model need not deter us. Short-sighted analyses by some academics have seen the failure of the PMFTU as the result of the movement's political thrust. They argue that the PMFTU was not a genuine trade union movement but rather a front for the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and totally under its direction. But there is sufficient evidence that most of the labour leaders were not communists, but simply militant trade unionists who had become politicised by the local and international conditions prevailing at the time. They analysed, correctly, that trade union successes could only be negligible within the context of the colonial system; since the MCP was the only force coordinating the anti-colonial struggle, they naturally made common cause with it.

Beyond repair? Not!

From my own experience as a trade unionist, I have discovered that worker militancy lies just beneath the mask of apathy and despair which most observers accept as reality. Were it not for my firsthand experience, I, too, would have accepted the popular dismissal of the Malaysian labour movement as 'beyond repair'.

When I first became involved in the Transport Equipment and Allied Industries Employees' Union (TEAIEU) in 1972, it seemed as corrupt and ineffective as any other union in Malaysia. It had been organised in 1971 with the help of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC), in whose building it kept an office, and whose nominee held the post of general secretary. The shop-floor workers were aware of the corruption of its leaders and resented the high-handed practices by which a small group maintained control of what was supposed to be the members' organisation.

During the elections for the executive council some months before, some union members had failed to cast their votes. However, when the results were announced, the figures seemed to include the votes of these members. We had collected these unused ballot papers and were therefore able to demonstrate concretely to the entire membership that the election results had been fraudulent.

Thereupon we drafted a petition to call for an extraordinary general meeting to pass a motion of no confidence in the executive. More than a thousand workers signed this. At the same time, we visited the registrar of trade unions and complained, not only about the election rigging, but about the fact that union members had been debarred from electing the general secretary. According to the executive, he was to be appointed by the executive council. This manoeuvre had been adopted because the 'incumbent' had, in fact, disqualified himself from standing for election. This was against the law, as well as contradictory to the constitution of the union.

Excerpts from Chapter 8, "An example of possibilities: The Transport Equipment and Allied Industries Employees' Union," pp. 127-147.

Modern history vindicates such a decision, for in the industrialised world, the gains of labour movements which have remained divorced from political struggle have not been sufficient to create humane and just social systems.

The real failing of the early unionists resulted from the fact that, in the early stage of the development of society, most of the labour organisers had come from China. It was therefore a difficult task to organise workers with different cultures, ethnicity and religions. The industrial sector was not developed as yet, and the bulk of the proletariat came from the plantation industry and the mines. The Indian plantation worker was not 'free labour', unlike the Chinese worker who was mobile and thus had bargaining power.

But once Indians began coming out of the shackles of confinement on the plantations, they too began to develop new ideas and political awareness and contributed to the further development of unions. These early pioneers faced the problems of organising workers with a peasant mentality in line with the Asiatic mode of production. An impossible task, yet they managed to the extent that the British government was frightened of them.

The initial lack of understanding of the state of the workers' consciousness in general caused some mistakes to be made. Some of their initial methods were wrong, but they were inexperienced and their understanding of socialism, a newly emerging concept in those years, was flawed. Their links with the Chinese Communist Party caused them to undervalue the fundamental hold of traditional Malay culture on the lives of the Malay peasantry. This allowed elite groups with links to the indigenous culture to delude the peasantry into believing that they would best represent their interests.

Thus the PMFTU was not capable of mounting the mass popular movement which would have made their armed struggle successful. It was not, as some would have us believe, that the MCP abandoned labour during the initial stages of the war for independence, and therefore workers lost confidence and accepted the co-opted unions instead.

The important lesson for us now is to learn from the past experiences, good and bad, and to shape an effective trade union movement appropriate for present times. With the rise of the Malay peasants into wage labour in the factories, the situation has altered significantly, and this opens new opportunities for the revival of the early militancy in the labour movement.

The current time is ideal, for, despite all the machinations of the political leaders, their economic strategies have been shown to be of little benefit in creating the just social order that has been their basic platform for mobilisation. They are tainted with the odour of corruption and inefficiency, and the working

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On the day after we had handed in the petition, we were informed that the whole executive council had resigned *en bloc*, that they had sold the union's furniture and office equipment, and that the files had been left on the verandah of the office. We went there to see what was happening and the general secretary, after making personal threats, handed over the keys to the office, saying: "This is your baby."

The shocking thing was that this whole series of events had only taken two weeks. The arrogance of the leadership had created such strong discontent in the five factories that they had no support from the members and they were unable to resist our manoeuvres.

We, who had inherited the leadership of the union after this brief skirmish, had had no experience of trade unionism, no knowledge of labour laws, no leadership training, no knowledge of trade union tradition, no links and no advisers. But we did have mass support. So we set out to learn labour organising by ear.

Perhaps that was the main factor which made us ultimately effective. Having no guidebooks, creeds or dogmas, we simply reacted to the needs of the workers; we had to open our eyes and ears to the concrete realities which surrounded us and develop whatever skills were necessary for survival. We had to keep faith with the workers themselves and trust their instincts and knowledge for they were our only source of strength.

The process of learning from the workers became never-ending and, as we learnt from them, their confidence in the value of their own knowledge grew and we observed a rapid development of their innate skills of analysis and reasoning. Our own ignorance of the mechanics of trade-union management helped force us to immediately put into practice the ideology which had guided our coup. Union democracy could be our only strategy.

In the beginning, because of the involvement of remaining elements from the old leadership, we made many miscalculations. In 1974, for instance, one employer, Asia Automobile Industries, refused to recognise Muharram, an Islamic religious occasion and gazetted national public holiday. They were interested in meeting production targets but the workers felt that, as a matter of principle, the religious holiday should be respected.

class knows that they have little genuine concern for improvement for all Malaysians.

The task for trade union leaders

Why do our people seek employment in factories and plantations? Not out of choice but rather because they cannot earn a living on their own or are expelled from their areas. They want to have a better life, to be free and seek happiness. Every idea of life, happiness and freedom, is based on material well-being, which in third world countries such as Malaysia, has become unachievable within the traditional context of the rural village.

The basic role of the trade union, therefore, is to organise workers to struggle for material gains from their employers. Trade union leaders cannot ignore this fact and unions which emphasise better material benefits for their workers are not to be condemned, for they only subscribe to the needs of the members. Only if they can show commitment to this goal will they be able to gain the confidence of the workers and carry the struggle further.

But the leadership of the unions must understand also that material well-being, to the worker, is only a basic precondition in the search for security, freedom and self-expression, which, in the Malaysian context, is crucially bound up with cultural expression.

The unions must be self-conscious, not only defending the economic rights of the workers but also addressing the other existential problems they encounter as recent arrivals in the sphere of wage labour. These include:

1. The new uncertainty and dependence which the shift from the agricultural to the industrial environment inevitably brings. The worker is always conscious that he has to feed the family and maintain a certain level of lifestyle. If the plant closes he becomes dependent and this is a major source of fear and insecurity.

2. The alienation of industrial labour. In selling his labour power to the employer, the worker loses the comforts of traditional skilled activity and is tied to heavy, boring work, with its physical and psychological stresses. This is disorienting, and ultimately, debilitating and soul-destroying.

3. The loss of the sense of 'self' as a result of the hierarchical structure in the plant. The worker enters the plant, changes his clothes and becomes a child. He is told what to do, when to eat, and so on. His previous independence is gone.

These conditions are a violation of the humanity of the individual. Only with a change in the relations of production can these problems be overcome. In the interim, the trade union is the only organisation which can play an effective role

The workers decided to defy management and no worker, even the non-Muslims, turned up for work. Young work-site committee members, such as Atma Lingam, felt it was important that workers teamed up on such issues, even if they were only significant to one sector of the workers, the Muslims.

The following day, the management summoned the work-site committee and accused the workers of conducting a wildcat strike. The union was blamed. Selected members of the work-site committee, including Lingam, who were all new officials, were summoned before an inquiry and suspended for a week.

The union investigated and informed the four suspended officers that they were wrong in not consulting their headquarters about the matter. The union headquarters further suspended the four officers from the union for six months. The headquarters' decision came as a shock. This was a serious mistake on the part of the executive council members and the workers, naturally, were very resentful and criticised us strongly.

Eventually it became very clear that we should have recognised that the work-site committees should have the power to decide actions on the work-site according to the wishes of the workers who ultimately are the decision-makers of the union....

After this initial period, there came an era of consolidating the membership for collective action in relation to all work-site problems. The union concentrated on building worker unity and soon developed such a strong element of cohesiveness that they came to control the pace of production in the plants themselves, irrespective of management requirements. Various strategies were formulated to develop this consciousness of their own power, for they quickly realised how unity among themselves could work to their advantage.

The major problems we addressed in the early period were basic ones concerning wages and collective bargaining, and health and safety. Our combined strategies resulted in a wage rise of 250 percent for the lower grades over the 13 years that we handled collective bargaining. Our major intention was to narrow the gap between the lowest-paid and highest paid employees, so we negotiated for a percentage increase on the existing wages, which was divided by us, the union executive, among the various scales. The union gave the greatest increase to those on the lowest grades, moving upwards to the lowest increase to those then earning the most. In real terms, all union members obtained almost the same amount, but the percentage increase was significantly different. This was completely different from the practice in other unions, where emphasis was

in helping the worker develop strategies to understand and cope with such deeply destructive impositions on his psyche.

Moreover, because of the immature state of civil society, all matters which affect workers as a whole or as a citizen are the legitimate concerns of trade unions, whether we are talking about wages and working conditions, pensions, social welfare, housing, women's rights, education, defence, or foreign policy. The only way to force the authorities to recognise that there are basic rights that all our people should enjoy is to engage in a more generalised class struggle.

Destroying the illusions of the recent past

However, because of the rapid pace of industrialisation in this country, workers, while performing as proletarians, are still bound by the perspectives of their peasant traditions. Because social security is inaccessible to them in the current situation, the tendency is always to revert to traditional institutions which provide it: the family and the traditional culture of the villages. In Malaysia, this is particularly evident in the susceptibility of workers to the lure of fundamentalist religion, not just in its Islamic form, but also in its Christian and Hindu forms. The social security provided by traditional culture inhibits the development of class consciousness, especially since ethnicity is a barrier to class identification at the wider level of society.

Moreover, workers in the villages and those who have moved to urban settlements have become pauperised and are now subject to the culture of poverty. Only a few can achieve individual security. Others look forward to collective action, identification as slum dwellers, or joining gangs. This is a superficial relationship which does not amount to class consciousness. Those who can disguise their poverty tend to embrace the veneer of respectability, making distinctions between themselves and those who are unable to hide the poverty which dominates their lives.

As Marxist analysis explains, under the capitalist system, security is also a commodity that you can buy and sell. Everything has a price to the extent that one can even buy progress. For some, the impression of material progress through wage labour leads to a culture of adoption which might create an illusion of working-class solidarity based on common material and social aspirations. This culture can easily be destroyed, for the concept of human society is not based on the fact that all goods are accessible. In the face of increasing oppression, solidarity crumbles. Even during a strike, if workers do not get their demands quickly they abandon the strike and try to go back to work.

What is essential at this stage of their developing proletarian consciousness are the right influences to help the individual worker to understand that his

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placed on ex-gratia payments, and on signing the collective agreement to the detriment of increasing the salary scales of members. In the end, our members received significantly higher wages than those of other unions.

It was an uphill struggle to get uniforms and basic safety equipment. But beyond this, the work-site committee felt that the living conditions of the workers had to be a concern of the management, since the quality of living conditions clearly contributed to productivity in the factory.

Over the years, better salaries negotiated enabled the workers to enjoy better accommodation and such problems as 'excessive' medical leave ceased. But beyond addressing the basic issues, we recognised that we had to do far more to improve the status of the workers. We had seen unions being organised simply on the basis of wages and in the end they did not go further than that. So when the companies buy out the leaders, the union slowly dies a natural death, leaving the workers to succumb to apathy, concluding that their wretchedness is their own fate.

It was amazing to see the sudden flowering of creativity and resourcefulness among work-site committee members, ordinary workers and executive committee members. Each new challenge led to new forms of development as our instincts became honed and the group dynamics deepened. In this process, we often had to cast aside tenets of traditional trade union practice, as home-grown strategies regularly proved more fruitful than long-established theories. In a short time, we realised that the key to success was not in organising the workers as workers but as people.

Gradually, the union became more and more involved in the cultural issues that are so central to workers' lives, especially in a multi-cultural, ex-colonial state such as ours. Factory work is monotonous, boring, draining. The workers' real life lay in their villages and communities, and for us to have any real impact on them we had to become entwined with the joys and sorrows of their lives, not remain mechanically connected to the most hated part of their existence, the factory. This is a particularly complex issue in a multi-ethnic context such as Malaysia's, but because ethnic issues are a major platform of manipulation to destroy working-class solidarity, it is crucial that it be addressed.

oppression, his denial of happiness by the constraints of wage labour, can never be overcome except through class action. Today, in every section of our community, the masses are being led to believe that their oppression is the outcome of an imbalance in ethnic control over the forces of production. They need access to another interpretation of their condition.

At the same time, on an individual level they are subjected to the propaganda of managements which assure them that hard work will be rewarded, that new technology will make their work easier and that manual labour will eventually disappear, though in the interim, team effort is needed with close co-operation between management and workers.

These diversionary ideologies need to be counteracted with a careful education process undertaken by the trade union leadership. This must start with an analysis of the actual experiences of the workers themselves, not with any general theory or abstract analysis of social dynamics. Such a conscientising process need not, and certainly should not, be an attempt to sever the links with the traditional cultures of our peoples, for not only has that strategy been shown to be futile as in parts of Eastern Europe, but it is based on a lack of respect for the people themselves. We know that the traditional cultures and religions which have shaped our values are founded on tenets of 'sharing and caring'. These are fruitful elements in developing a healthy modern society and we should in no way contribute to the loss of such values for they provide an excellent basis for the development of socialism.

A sensitive approach based on intimate knowledge of the worker's experiences is required. The union's leadership needs not only to listen to workers intently and help them to analyse their experiences in relation to the workplace, but to be able to identify with the aspirations of the cultural groups out of which they come. The simplistic application of international trade union practice simply does not make for trust and proper guidance in a complex and sensitive situation such as we face in Malaysia today.

But through the discussion of the realities that workers face in everyday existence, they can be led to recognise the way the market economy decides their fate as workers, promoting insecurity and embedding them at the lowest level of existence. We need to pose the question to them: Who should organise work? Is work only for the creation of profit or for the social improvement of the whole community? We need to discuss the means of production which currently dictates that at all levels the workers are not masters of their own lives.

In this way, they will develop an understanding of the way society is organised which will prepare them to take class-conscious action to overcome the obstacles to their progress.

> Despite the many tricks and strategems that we employed to always keep management on the defensive and achieve our goals, I can state that the cornerstone of our organising was honesty. We were frank with the employers but never hesitated to use sly manoeuvres to corner them, or threaten and carry out industrial action to win our demands.
>
> But with the workers to whom we were responsible, we dealt in nothing but the truth. We would try to influence them by argument but never tried to hide things from them. If there is one cardinal principle for successful organising in the labour movement this is it.
>
> Times are changing now, and probably our strategies will be inappropriate in the current climate. But the essential principles are still, and will always be, valid. Respect and integrity are the only basis for human relations, and the human being is more important than all else in an enduring movement towards upliftment of the working class.

Such a process of education can only take place within the framework of a truly democratic union. Only unionists who can truly identify with the experience of the membership can develop the right instincts to locate the correct strategies in any given situation. Thus the leadership must develop from the rank and file and not from cadres from an educated class with some knowledge gained from foreign concepts and analysis.

Wider structures

Nevertheless, if these unions act on an individual basis alone, the limit of their capacity for actual change will be very narrow. Experience has shown that in general, union federations have been stronger politically than large industry-based unions, for, not being part of the day-to-day bargaining mechanism, they can act as a coordinating body for the whole labour movement. I therefore see it essential for us to reconstruct an organism based on the model developed by the PMFTU in the 1930s.

Such an organisation will have to act on a political level based on the vision of society that they embrace for the working class. Engels' analysis of *The condition of the working class in England in 1844* puts the reason for this clearest:

> The history of these unions is a series of defeats of the working men, interrupted by a few isolated victories. All these efforts naturally cannot

alter the economic law according to which wages are determined by the relation between supply and demand in the labour market. Hence the Unions remain powerless against all great forces which influence this relation. In a commercial crisis the Union itself must reduce wages or dissolve wholly; and in a time of considerable increase in the demand for labour, it cannot fix the rate of wages higher than would be reached spontaneously by the competition of the capitalists themselves. But in dealing with minor, single influences they are powerful. If the employer had no concentrated, collective opposition to expect, he would in his own interest gradually reduce wages to a lower and lower point; indeed, the battle of competition which he has to wage against his fellow manufacturers would force him to do so, and wages would soon reach the minimum. But this competition of the manufacturers among themselves is, under average conditions, somewhat restricted by the opposition of the working men.

We have already experienced this process in Malaysia. Despite earlier gains, the unions are now no longer in any position to dictate wages. In the industry in which TEAIU has members, we find that the average wage has dropped and the gains made by the union over the years have been lost. The supply of workers has increased over the years and workers are willing to accept lower pay. Existing workers who have seen their fellows retrenched during the period of recession so as to reduce wages find themselves trapped in fear of retrenchment and actually spontaneously work harder and increase production.

Retrenchment was a mechanism the employers used to get rid of militant workers and it has led to a perceptible weakening of the union. As a defensive mechanism against capitalism, therefore, the union was only effective during periods of economic prosperity for the employers, and cannot ultimately transcend the economics which govern wages.

We have to recognise, therefore, that trade union militancy, on its own, cannot change the overriding economic relations which dictate the terms on which we operate. It takes political structures to do this.

The labour movement must, as a consequence, interface with the political system through a political party which can represent its interests. There is a need to define political aims and objectives clearly based on our vision of the kind of society that will give workers their just position.

From a workers' perspective, there can be only one answer: a society based on true democracy, where everybody has avenues for influencing development. This implies democratic control over the means of production. Therefore, we have to opt for a planned economy, despite current propaganda blaming the disaster of Eastern Europe on centralised planning, instead of admitting that it was not the planning process that was wrong, but the failure to adhere to democratic ideals. In a country such as ours, there is no option if we want true

A legacy of militancy.

1926   first strike in Malaya, conducted by Chinese fitters, followed by several more involving secretly organised groups.

1927   Nanyang (South Seas) General Labour Union (NGLU) established on instructions of the Profintern — the communist international's trade union organisation. Total membership of 5,000 (42 affiliate unions).

1928-31   NGLU virtually eradicated due to crackdown by colonial administration.

1930   formation of Malayan General Labour Union (MGLU) from the remnants of NGLU. Because of frequent arrests of its members and the Great Depression, its influence grows only after 1934.

1935   significant strikes in Batu Arang coal mines and Singapore Traction (bus) Company. Workers from all ethnic groups demonstrate "the possibilities of workers' organisation overcoming traditional ethnic barriers."

Sep '36 to 1937   strike wave, mostly spontaneous, involving workers at pineapple canning factories, building workers, municipal labourers, tin miners, rubber tappers.

1940   the restrictive Trade Union Ordinance (TUO) enacted which requires compulsory registration, stresses 'conciliation procedures', denies right to picket, and bans political and sympathy strikes. TUO enacted to comply with Colonial Development and Welfare Act.

Mar '41   Klang Indian Association leads strikes at eight rubber estates. The British arrest their leader, fire workers, cut off water and rice supplies, call in troops. By mid-May strike spreads, involving some 10,000 workers.

development except that of control of the large forces of capital, natural reserves, and banks. Such control should not be extended to the class of small farmers and petty traders.

Despite the importance of this political activity, we should guard against the tradition of allowing the union movement to become subsumed into the party. Unions and political parties have distinct roles; neither organisation has exclusive rights to deal with particular issues. The political party in a democratic country acts through the institutions of the state, even though it may be a mass party and even though it may, and should, campaign for its policies outside the strict parliamentary forum. However it has the right and duty to take those policies into the legislative process.

The trade union's primary responsibility is the defense of the interests of workers. The union comes first, then the party. Any relationship between the

16 May 1941	state of emergency declared in Selangor. Troops kill four workers, arrest 300 others and banish the leader to India.
1945	end of Japanese occupation; return of the British.
Dec 1945	strike by 18,000 municipal workers, rubber-factory, brewery, engineering and transport workers. John Alfred Brazier appointed as first pan-Malayan Trade Union Adviser (TUAM), supposedly to promote trade unionism, but who institutes policies weakening workers movements.
29-30 Jan '46	attempted arrest of Soon Kwang, militant member of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), which leads to work stoppage, the biggest since re-occupation.
Feb '46	formation of the Pan-Malayan General Labour Union (PMGLU), later known as Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU). With a membership of 263,598 by 1947 — over half of workforce and 85 percent of all unions — it attempts to break divide-and-rule tactics of the British.
1947	'Kedah Incidents' investigated on demands by workers. The board of inquiry finds "a degree of cooperation that amounts to collusion between the vested interests on the one hand and the government executive, the police, on the other for the purpose of suppressing the fundamental rights of the largest class of people in this country, namely, labour."
12 June 1948	new law bans federation of unions except along same industry/trade lines. Influence of the now illegal PMFTU continues to grow. Its leaders are killed, arrested, and members are forced into the jungle. PMFTU loss felt to this day.

union and party should be a developed through a process of debate and discussion. The Brazilian national union federation, the Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (CUT) provides a good example as it formed a political party which, because of its mass base, it was able to control.

In the process of social development, the workers' party seeks allies in other development-oriented groups, such as the environmental movement, women's organisations and so on, for it must be serious about challenging the existing government if any change is to take place. We have to try to build a popular movement and adopt a revolutionary perspective, whatever the current conditions.

Patience and absolute fidelity to the ideals of social development are the major ingredients for long-term effectiveness. There can be no shortcuts in this process. The labour movement in Malaysia has lost forty years, and many people have lost their lives. There is no way to stem the tide; one must take positive action to turn it.

26 Mar 1950	Malaysia Trade Union Congress (MTUC) established. Projected as the 'voice of labour', but in fact an organisation of labour 'bosses', it enjoys state patronage. Other genuine unions are effectively marginalised.
31 Aug 1957	*Merdeka* (bahasa for independence). Malaya's 11 states gain independence. In 1963, Republic of Malaysia formed with Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore, which pulls out two years later.
1959	MTUC endorses the Trade Union Ordinance, which empowers the registrar of trade unions to refuse registration if a union does not meet requirements and if he *suspects* it of harbouring illegal aims; also, to investigate any person regarding existence or operation of a trade union. Ordinance limits union membership to workers of similar trades or occupations.
1960	enactment of the infamous Internal Security Act (ISA) to replace emergency rule. Hundreds of militant trade unionists detained [including the author, Arokia Dass]. Under the ISA, the state can indefinitely detain any person suspected of 'subversive' activities. Atmosphere of fear and inhibition created.
1969	launch of new industrialisation policy accompanied by more restrictive amendments to labour laws: union officials to have served at least three years in the industry before standing for elections; ban on membership/hiring of officials of political parties in unions; denial of right to strike or negotiate over retrenchment, promotion, hiring, dismissal or transfer of workers; more power to registrar of trade unions allowing him to suspend a union and freeze its funds.

SOURCE: Arokia Dass, *Not Beyond Repair — Reflections of a Malaysian trade unionist,* Hong Kong: Asia Monitor Resource Centre, 1991.

Reform the party! Save the revolution!
An open letter to comrades

Tales Duhaylungsod

Editor's note: This letter, written by a member of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) under a pseudonym, was one of the first to open the debate and discussion of issues among the broad membership of the Party. Not long after this was circulated, a document ["Reaffirm our basic principles..."] allegedly written by Jose Maria Sison, alleged chairman of the Party, under the name Armando Liwanag, was circulated, calling on all Party members to reaffirm the pre-martial law Party line. Since then the discussions and debates within the Party have been flourishing. In mid-December 1992, a barrage of fax messages from Jose Ma. Sison carried the debate in the Philippine underground into the headlines of Manila newspapers. Already rampant in underground circles for half a year, now reverberating through open Philippine political circles, this debate will slowly seep into progressive international circles.

It is too early for a full-scale analysis of this struggle in the Philippine Left. The debate remains at a point where it is difficult to tell what the outcome will be. Much of it remains hidden in the often arcane language and processes of the underground. We are printing the open letter, one of the earliest to come out when the current stage of the debate started in early 1992, in the hope that it will shed some light on the issues being fiercely fought over by the underground. We have also added excerpts from the "Reaffirm" document to help the reader obtain another dimension of the ongoing struggle within the Left.

Nasa panganib ang kilusan natin, mga kasama. Our movement has been stagnating for the past three or more years. If we do not move quickly and decisively, we will soon enter a period of decline that may be irreversible.

We built our movement with our commitment to our people, the force of our ideas, and belief in our people's capacity to seize power and create a new and just society. There are tens of thousands of us who continue to believe in these ideals. We have the capacity to solve our problems, regain our momentum and

advance the Philippine revolution. We have to act now. To do otherwise would be to betray those of our comrades who have sacrificed their lives for our revolution.

Our responsibility is not just to our past but to the future of our people. As serious as our problems are, our mass organisations remain the largest and best organised in the country. They continue to be the most important resource of those of our people who have so little in the way of political resources. While too many of us are disoriented, we continue to count within our ranks among the most dedicated and the most self-sacrificing people in the country. We have to act soon not just to save our party, but because our country's future requires a vital, active and creative national democratic movement.

The task that faces us is not just the task of our leaders. Our problems are such that we all need to participate in finding solutions. To be sure, this process requires leadership. Our leaders need to define the problems, suggest solutions and organise a process of democratic discussion in order to come to resolutions that we can all support. Democratic participation in this process is essential. The tendency to impose solutions without sufficient discussion within the ranks is precisely one of the roots of our problems today.

Some comrades will say that we should not even write about or widely discuss our problems because if the enemy gets wind of these discussions they will use them against us. We should, of course, remain vigilant in preventing the enemy from getting information of tactical importance and some discussions should remain restricted within the leadership. But broader issues of strategy and tactics and the nature of the alternative we are fighting for cannot be kept within leadership ranks. Even less, the current state of our movement and the problems we face. Even if comrades do not know the details of our problems, they sense that there are serious problems. If they feel that there are problems and are not provided the basis for understanding them, they will only retreat into apathy and become disillusioned. If they are not brought into discussions of what these problems are they cannot be part of the solution.

Is our condition serious?

To find solutions, we need to discuss our problems with unstinting realism. To understand the need for urgency, we need to come to some agreement about how serious our problems are. The need for discussion can be measured by radically different assessments of our movement's condition. Some comrades believe that we are in a "revolutionary flow". I disagree. I believe our problems are very serious. I believe that they are so serious that they threaten our very existence as a revolutionary movement.

Excerpts from "Reaffirm our basic principles and rectify errors"

Let us reaffirm the basic revolutionary principles of the Party on the 23rd anniversary of its reestablishment. These are our guiding light in taking stock of and celebrating the accomplishments of the Party as well as in confronting certain long-running problems and unprecedented setbacks.

These principles include 1) the repudiation of modern revisionism and adherence to the following: 2) theory of Marxism-Leninism, 3) class analysis of Philippine society as semi-colonial and semi-feudal, 4) general line of a new democratic revolution, 5) leading role of the working class through the Party, 6) theory of people's war and the strategic line of encircling the cities from the countryside, 7) concept of a united front along the revolutionary class line, 8) democratic centralism, 9) socialist perspective and proletarian internationalism.

The worst deviations and errors arise from petty-bourgeois impetuosity and subjectivism characterized by flights from the concrete conditions and the current strength of the revolutionary forces. It combines wishful thinking for the armed urban insurrection with army "regularisation." This takes away cadres and resources from mass work in order to build prematurely higher and unsustainable military formations (companies and battalions) and top-heavy staff structures. This is misrepresented as an adjustment on or refinement of the theory and practice of people's war, or as a superior theory or strategy altogether. Now, we are confronted with an unprecedented loss of mass base and other related problems.

It should be made clear, however, that we are still far stronger in several respects than we were in 1968, 1977, or 1980. There is a firm ground for further leading the masses (arousing, organising, and mobilizing them) and launching the offensives (mass actions, armed tactical offensives) that we are capable of.

The grossest example of the failure to recognize the principal and secondary aspects of a certain thing or process is the *Kampanyang* AHOS (AHOS campaign, the anti-informer hysteria in Mindanao). The grave violations of civil

Our problems are partly the result of improved government counterinsurgency work. Better military intelligence work has resulted in a continuing series of arrests of party leaders and brutal but effective military operations in the countryside have shrunk our rural base. Government propaganda has kept us on the defensive throughout most of the past few years. This does not mean that the government will achieve the strategic victory in 1992 that it has bragged about. At the same time, it is clear that the government's failure to achieve its counterinsurgency goals derives less from our efforts than from the government's own weaknesses. The political bankruptcy of the Aquino regime and divisions within military ranks are the main obstacles to counterinsurgency.

While government claims of victory are hollow, counterinsurgency operations have seriously hurt us. Arrests have decimated the top ranks of our leadership. The Executive Committee and the Politburo operate way below optimum strength. Recent arrests have, for all intents and purposes, destroyed the National People's Army (NPA) General Staff. Major areas of work such as education and propaganda operate without functional national units. While some regions and some areas of work have achieved some growth, others have declined such that the national situation is one of no growth. For the first time in a decade, we began losing significant numbers of party members in 1988. I have not seen any national assessments of our forces since 1989, but I suspect the situation has not changed and may in fact have gotten worse.

Quantitative indicators of our strength, however, are not the best measure of our movement's condition. We have had fewer members and a smaller mass base in the past. We still have a large, sophisticated national organisation with tens of thousands of dedicated members. What is a major problem is that nationally, we have not regained political momentum. We are not centre stage. We participate in a number of coalitions. But even progressive groups continue to be wary of our tendency towards sectarianism. We have the initiative in shaping a number of national issues but have failed to fuse those within a comprehensive national programme acceptable to a range of political forces outside our own ranks.

Disagreements

Government counterinsurgency operations are hurting us more than in the past. But the more important reasons for our problems are internal. Among our many internal problems, the most important is our failure to effectively deal with disagreement on key issues. Because these disagreements involve vital issues of strategy and tactics and more recently on socialism, it is becoming increasingly difficult to resolve other, less inclusive issues. Disagreements on peasant

rights, the unjust taking of lives of comrades and other individuals, and the attendant devastation of the revolutionary forces by this campaign are so strikingly clear and revolting. But some elements who have risen in rank within the Party rationalize that the campaign is correct because it probably succeeded in eliminating real deep penetration agents (DPAs) even if hundreds upon hundreds of good comrades and innocent people were victimized and killed.

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For a while, from 1981 to 1983, the military offensive companies, oversized companies, and coordinated companies were effective. Fighters were recruited rapidly. But mass work and the mass base in the countryside deteriorated and dwindled at the same time. As the enemy military forces increased, the companies and oversized companies of the people's army were forced into a purely military situation. Thus, the enemy forces could use to their advantage their military superior forces.

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When the boycott error of 1986 was under fire and was not resolved for several months, the floodgates of ultrademocracy were opened at various levels of the Party and among Party members in general. The Executive Committee, as it was then composed, was beleaguered. Certain central staff organs were acting like centers of comprehensive political authority. Some elements issued publications and promoted their own lines, like "critical support for the 'liberal-democratic' Aquino regime" and the line of armed urban insurrection cum premature build-up of unsustainable higher military formations. There was ideological and political osmosis between ultrademocratic elements in the Party and populists, liberals, "social democrats," and other petty-bourgeois elements outside the Party who collaborated in denouncing the boycott error of 1986.

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Under the guise of reacting to bureaucratism, there are certain elements who whip up ultrademocracy in order to question and oppose the basic principles, line, and policies of the Party; to disinform the Party membership; to misrepresent, provoke, and turn the Party inside out. Ultrademocracy or liberalism is as bad as bureaucratism. It can confuse, degrade, endanger, and even disintegrate a revolutionary Party that allows it.

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But there are more cases of ultrademocracy in which mere staff organs and lower leading organs take major decisions even against the Party line without

organising in more populated areas and on the orientation of our main labour centre divide our leadership and hinder organising work. We are unable to agree on and enthusiastically support a national "line of march". Many disagreed, for example, with the analysis of the national situation and the assessment of the condition of our forces that lay behind the December 1990 call for "launching the offensives". It is no wonder then that not much was achieved in answer to that call.

Disagreements, per se, are not a problem. Handled properly, disagreements are the source of new ideas. Resolved expeditiously and democratically, disagreements can be the beginning of firm unity. Our biggest problem today is not disagreement within our ranks but our failure to resolve these disagreements. We have a tendency to suppress views other than those of the leadership. While debate was encouraged in the period immediately after the "snap election boycott" but not long after, in early 1986, and certainly by mid-1987, there was a tendency to suppress and use organisational sanctions against individuals and sometimes whole units who continued to raise questions on various aspects of policy and line. This intolerance of dissenting opinion continues today within party units at home and abroad.

Another problem is the tendency of some sections of our leadership to take positions on key issues without sufficient discussion not just within the ranks but even within the leadership. One crucial example is the positions interpreting the fall of socialist governments in Eastern Europe and problems in the Soviet Union taken in the December 1990 party anniversary statement. The January-February 1991 *Ang Bayan* indicates that there is disagreement on this crucial issue all the way to the top of the party leadership. There is also disagreement over the rather intemperate attack on the FMLN leadership in El Salvador and on the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in the latest issue of *Rebolusyon*. On crucial issues such as these, it does not make sense to publish official positions when no unity has been achieved within the leadership and within the ranks.

Finally, we cannot look at the resolution of these disagreements as simply a question of ideological consolidation and political education within the ranks. Doing so preempts discussion and biases the resolution of disagreements towards a form of ideological fundamentalism. This formula is what lies behind the opinion of some leaders that our problems can be solved by rooting out incorrect ideas propagated by some leaders from a large island. According to this explanation, the severe decline in party work on that island as a result of the DPA problem was the direct result of an incorrect "Insurrectionist" line. Instead of being held responsible for their errors, these leaders were promoted and

bothering to consult the higher leading organ. The UFC [United Front Commission] could proceed with a "peace process framework" that degrades the NDF [National Democratic Front] and is detrimental to the interests of the revolutionary movement. It also proceeded with the NDF Congress without the Executive Committee or the PB [Political Bureau or Politburo] being able to go over the draft documents and plans. *Ang Bayan* could publish articles against the decisions of the central leadership and against the anti-revisionist line of the Party.

There are certain elements who keep on writing "strategy", "orientation", and even "policy" papers which deviate from and attack the Party line. They even manage to use some central staff organs to promote the wrong line on the national and international scale. Notwithstanding the disastrous results of their line, they continue to tout it.

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Influences of liberalism, populism, social democracy, and other petty bourgeois trends — and even of imperialist and modern revisionist propaganda (especially Gorbachovite) — are seeping into the Party. There are ultrademocratic elements who attack the leading role of the working class, the socialist perspective of the Philippine revolution, democratic centralism, and other basic principles of the Party. Some of them go to the extreme of demanding that the Party go beyond the framework of or disregard its basic Marxist-Leninist principles because these are supposed to constitute fundamentalism. They demand that the leading organs of the Party give up their responsibilities.

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Under conditions of setbacks and extreme difficulties due to effective enemy operations in the cities and the countryside, those members of the Mindanao Commission who were left behind were prone to oversuspiciousness and panic about the possibility that there were DPAs in their midst who were tipping them off. Believing that their line was correct and victorious and could be fouled up only by the enemy agents within the Party and the movement, they were ready to believe the report from certain political detainees in early 1985 that there were large numbers of enemy DPAs in the Party, the people's army, and the mass organisations and institutions. They believed that the Party was being infiltrated over a long period of time through the white area organisations and that the agents were already being mobilized in late 1985 or early 1986 to bring down and destroy the revolutionary movement. Thus, in 1985 and onward, the anti-informer hysteria started and raged in Mindanao.

allowed to propagate their line nationally, thus explaining the nationwide scope of our problems today.

While the summation of the DPA problem leaves much to be desired and much more work needs to be done to understand the severe decline in party work on that island in 1985-86, I do not believe that this explanation is sufficient for understanding the situation there much less national trends. The recurrence of the DPA problem in another area under a completely different set of leaders indicates that the DPA problem has deeper ideological roots than "insurrectionism". Many more factors have to be brought into an explanation of our problems. More importantly, the solution implicit in the "insurrectionism" explanation, which involves an ideological purge of incorrect ideas and their propagators will divide the party and bring about an even bigger disaster.

The position that the solution to our problems lies in the return to the basic ideas of our movement in the late 1960s and 1970s is also at the heart of what might be called the "modern revisionism" position in the debate on socialism. Disagreement on the nature of socialism which is the logical outcome of different interpretations of developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union goes to the very heart of our party's programme. It does not make sense to assume that there is a body of knowledge about socialism that can simply be imparted in political education after the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Similarly, the resolution of our disagreements on strategy and tactics cannot be seen as a simple matter of going back to our original strategy. We have more than twenty years of practice and a radically different world to incorporate into the discussion.

Strategy

By far the most damaging disagreement within our ranks is that on strategy. This disagreement has divided our top leadership and is clearly one of the major reasons for our leaders' problems in the last few years. Debates on this issue have affected our military work, our united front work, peasant and labour organising and our tactics in the Manila-Rizal region. These deep fissures have made it difficult to provide consistent and effective leadership.

I believe that improper handling of this debate has also deeply affected morale within our ranks. Many of the comrades who have left the party or who remain without much enthusiasm do not have developed critiques of strategy much less carefully worked out alternatives. What is debilitating is the uncertainty generated by the debate. At the same time, for people who have been in the struggle for many long years, it is very difficult to accept the idea that the only thing we can do is continue doing what we have been doing all these

...On the basis of mere suspicion, close to a thousand people (including cadres and mass activists) became victims of civil rights violations and severe punishment. Due process was completely disregarded as panic and hysteria took over. The Party membership fell abruptly from 9,000 to 3,000. The effective armed strength fell to that of the 1982 level.

Despite the devastation wrought which victimized comrades and the people of Mindanao, those responsible have not accounted for their political and criminal responsibility but instead have been promoted to national positions in the Party and allowed to spread their wrong line at the further and bigger expense of the Party and the revolutionary movement.

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There is a gross lack of understanding of the theory of people's war and the strategic line of encircling the cities from the countryside. This strategic line is not an arbitrary edict for a permanent condition. It simply means that when the people's army cannot as yet seize the cities, the revolutionary forces have to accumulate strength first in the countryside where reactionary power and control is relatively weaker and where there is a wide area of maneuver for the people's army to launch tactical offensives, accumulate armed strength, and engage in mass work.

Conditions in the future will arise to allow the people's army and the people to finally seize the centers of municipalities, provincial capitals, minor cities, and major cities (in that probable order) in mass uprisings led by the Party. But it will be foolhardy to believe that Metro Manila could fall in an uprising led by the Party even before the backbone of the enemy forces is broken in the countryside or before such forces go into a process of final disintegration.

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Building the people's army in stages is ridiculed by certain elements who have not really studied the theory of people's war and who obviously do not believe that it is necessary for the NPA to smash the reactionary armed forces and replace it in the end. We have seen how the NPA started from scratch in 1969 and grew. The people's war will certainly have to go through a middle stage of development before it can totally and finally defeat the enemy forces and replace them.

The initial, middle, and final stages of the people's war cannot be dismissed as useless concepts by those who hold the opportunist notion that urban armed insurrection and imported heavy weapons can replace the full development of people's war. When the term probability (closer to realization than the term possibility) instead of certainty is used to refer to the stages of people's war, it is

years. When victory seems far away, many comrades who are tired have a tremendous need for new ideas, new ways of doing things.

This is an extremely complex and profoundly difficult issue and there are others who are better placed to understand all of its ramifications. But in studying the history of our movement, I have come across certain elements in the development of the debate that may shed light on it. Although the first major debate on strategy within our ranks occurred in 1978 in Manila-Rizal, the first attempt to revise our strategy occurred in 1980 during the Central Committee (CC) Plenum of that year and the Politburo meeting of 1982. The formulation of the concept of "three strategic combinations" during that time did not constitute the abandonment of the strategy of people's war. It represented an attempt to learn from the lessons of our successful implementation of the strategy. In particular, it sought to integrate our practice in non-armed struggle, in the mass movement and in united front work especially in the urban areas to balance our previous emphasis on armed struggle in the rural areas.

Unfortunately, the concept of "three strategic combinations" was not particularised in specific areas of work nor sufficiently popularised within our ranks. In the 1985 CC Plenum, the new formulation was abandoned in favour of a return to a classic Maoist interpretation of our strategy. Perhaps one of the reasons for this was the explosion of growth in all areas of our work after the murder of Ninoy Aquino in August 1983 and the mistaken belief of our leaders that it was not a time for tinkering with an apparently successful strategic framework. I believe that it was this decision that made it difficult for our leaders to see the opportunities in the situation in the last few months of the Marcos dictatorship. The result was our disastrous boycott of the snap election.

It is important to go back to the concept of "three strategic combinations" because there has been a tendency for the debate to be posed in terms of a choice between "people's war" and "insurrection" as if the two were mutually exclusive. Opponents of the "insurrectionary strategy" have tended to caricature it as an adventurist strategy which would stake our military resources in one major insurrectionary push in urban areas. My understanding of the "insurrectionary strategy" is that it can be integrated into the idea of "people's war" as long as the primary emphasis on armed struggle in the rural areas and on a military victory as the only possible end game scenario is abandoned in favour of "three strategic combinations". Such a strategy would enable us to find a dynamic balance between armed and non-armed, urban and rural, and national and international struggle.

to give allowance for non-realization or defeat due to deviations and errors like those committed by the Mindanao Commission against the line of people's war.

The expression "left opportunism" is apt when it refers to demagogically taking advantage of the natural desire for quick and easy victory while leading the revolutionary forces to defeat and self-destruction. Urban insurrectionism and military adventurism have so far been the gravest form of left opportunism in the history of the Party since 1968. These are retrogressions to the line of urban guerilla warfare (Carlos Marighela) and the foco theory (promoted by Regis Debray), which some elements tried to promote within the Party in the early 1970s but which were effectively combatted by the Party.

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Inherent to the line of seizing power through urban uprisings with the aid of a few prematurely enlarged NPA units that lacked extensive and deepgoing mass base was the undermining and lessening of the interest of Party members and mass activists in going to the countryside to do revolutionary work. The cadres were encouraged to stay in leading and staff organs of the urban-based Party organisation and legal mass organisations. They failed to recognise that the peasant masses do not by themselves produce the kind of cadres and other personnel that the urban areas produce and which the rural areas need.

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It is wrong to say that luring the enemy in deep, letting him move around blind and deaf, and letting him punch the air when we cannot fight to win are outmoded tactics. These are useful at any stage of the people's war. The winning line is to fight only the battles that we can win. The losing line is to stick out big heads or to overreach. Another losing line is not to fight even the battles that we can win. All the way we assume that we expand and consolidate the mass base.

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We must maintain and further develop our Marxist-Leninist stand, viewpoint, and method. We must constantly improve our knowledge of the materialist philosophy, historical materialism, political economy, scientific socialism, the new democratic revolution, party building, people's war, and the building of the united front.

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It is not a matter of arbitrary choice that in the structure of theoretical education a large part should be allotted to the study of the works of Mao and

Socialism

The debate on the crisis of socialism has been slow to develop within our ranks. The January-February 1991 *Ang Bayan* attempt to stimulate debate has apparently been stopped. Whatever technical violations of organisational policy were made by *Ang Bayan* staff should not be used to suppress the debate on socialism that they initiated. Neither should the fact that the Executive Committee has apparently taken a formal position on the issue. There are too many party leaders and rank and file members who disagree with that position. To impose that position without further discussion would be disastrous to inner party life.

We should intensify our efforts to promote debate on the crisis of socialism. The issue goes right to the heart of what we are fighting for. Without such a debate, this issue will continue to divide us and poison our relations with each other. The successful resolution of this disagreement, on the other hand, could be the key to the solution of at least two of our most difficult problems, namely, low morale within our ranks and our inability to regain political momentum on the national stage. By adding uncertainty about the nature of the alternative society we are fighting for, to uncertainty about our strategy, the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has caught many of us in an ideological vise that has sapped morale. As long as people including those on the left believe that the kind of society we want is what has collapsed in a massive and depressing heap in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, there is no way we can gain their trust and regain our political momentum.

As with the debate on strategy, this issue is too complex to examine in detail in a letter like this. What I want to get into here is what I believe to be the core of this debate, the question of democracy. Revolution is a profoundly democratic process. It means the mobilisation of the masses in politics, their involvement in decisions that affect their lives. During the long Marcos years, we were at the forefront of the fight against dictatorship and for democracy. Today, our mass organisations above and underground continue to inspire hundreds of thousands of our people to fight for their rights. All the more reason then why we should affirm democracy in our party life, in our proposal for an alternative society, and in our critique of the practice of socialism.

In their critique of "actually existing socialism" in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the Executive Committee has focused on "revisionism" — on the abandonment of the basics of socialism as the major reason for the collapse of socialist regimes there. Undoubtedly, the leadership of these countries made mistakes in the handling of domestic and foreign issues and problems. Otherwise they would not have made a mess of their economies and lost the support of their people. By focusing on "revisionism", however, the Executive Committee begs

the Chinese Revolution. Mao represents a stage of theory and practice which is a major development of Marxism-Leninism. His works bring Marxism-Leninism deeper into the East. And this arose from semi-colonial and semi-feudal conditions basically similar to those of the Philippines.

The Chinese and the Vietnamese examples of people's war bear closer relevance to the current people's war in the Philippines than any other armed revolution abroad. These examples demonstrate that the chronic crisis of the semi-feudal conditions is the ground for a protracted people's war and, to this day, they remain the best available and most relevant to our struggle.

Inside and outside the Party, there are a few but articulate elements espousing ideas of insurrectionism, populism, liberalism, social democracy, and the like who have been influenced by the swindling and wrecking operations of the Gorbachovite crew in the Soviet Union and who have derided, denigrated, and attacked the basic principles of the Party. Just as it is important to take the most responsible among them to account for celebrating Aquino in the past as the champion of democracy and economic recovery, let us take them to account for continuing to celebrate Gorbachev as the ideologist of socialist renewal and democracy.

The glib advertising job of Gorbachev has turned out to be a cover for the total negation of Marxism-Leninism and the entire course of Bolshevik history; for capitalist restructuring; for the rise of the bourgeois class dictatorship; for unleashing nationalism, ethnic conflicts, and civil war; and for the emergence of all kinds of monsters, including racism, fascism, and rampant criminality.

The Party is the advanced detachment of the working class and the Philippine revolution. Without this vanguard, the revolutionary mass movement along the new democratic line cannot arise and develop. Even the by-products of this movement, such as petty bourgeois groups and trends of thought which are patriotic and progressive in varying degrees, cannot thrive without the growth and advance of the Party and the revolutionary mass movement. To attack the vanguard role and development of the Party is to try to defeat the revolution and bring back the worst forms of reaction.

Just as they simplistically hold Stalin responsible for everything that has gone wrong under the anti-Stalinist revisionist regimes long after the death of Stalin,

the question of the adequacy of the socialist model developed under Stalin and passed on to other socialist regimes and communist parties. It assumes, implicitly, that the model was essentially correct.

I believe that the main lesson we should derive from the current crisis of socialism is that socialism cannot succeed without integrating democracy into the core of its theory and practice. The reason why socialist economies have collapsed is because the centrally planned Stalinist economic model is anti-democratic. By centralising all economic decision making, such a model deprives the masses of the right to make economic decisions for themselves at all levels of the economic process. This is not the same as saying that socialist economies need to revert back to market capitalism. At the core of our critique of capitalism is that it is anti-democratic. The modern capitalist corporation is one of the few remaining Stalinist organisations around.

The anti-democratic thrust of Stalinism is even more pronounced in politics. Political decision-making under Stalinism is limited to the party and within the party, to its top leadership. Mass organisations which were built for democratic popular participation are neutralised and turned into instruments of the party and the state, often against their own members. Because this type of autocracy necessarily breeds dissent, a pervasive secret police apparatus is built to spy on and terrorise the people. There is now too much evidence of mass murder and mass political imprisonment under Stalin to deny that they existed. These are not "errors" or "mistakes" in implementing an essentially correct theory of socialism. This is an essentially incorrect formulation of the ideal of socialism. It is not just mass murder which is a crime, the Stalinist perversion of the socialist ideal is itself a crime.

As in the issue of strategy, I believe that the correct position on the issue of the nature of socialism lies in the correct summation of our practice as a movement. The NDF programme for an alternative economy and political system is a democratic programme. This programme is a crystalisation of the ideas and the hopes of ND activists through the years. It may be argued that the NDF programme is not supposed to be a socialist programme so it cannot be discussed in a debate on socialism. But party cadre played major roles in the formulation of the NDF programme. It should at least be consistent with the party programme. If the party does not disavow the anti-democratic theory and practice of Stalinism, then it would be inconsistent with the NDF programme.

Taking a risk

Bringing these debates into the centre of our party life is risky. More debate could result in more division instead of greater unity. It is understandable

they wish to put the stigma of their specious definitions of Stalinism on the Party. The Party will not allow itself to be wrecked from within by those stereotyping it by any epithet and by those trying to damn it by some analogies. We know exactly how Gorbachev pushed the line of negating the entire course of Leninism, socialism, and Soviet history under the guise of totally negating Stalin.

Among those who are whipping up ultrademocracy are elements who are responsible for the gross violation of the civil rights and brutal victimization of a large number of Party and non-Party members. The Party is determined to hold such elements to account for their deeds no matter how many issues they drum up to sidetrack the one which concerns their responsibility and no matter how much anti-Party "conjuncture" they find with other promoters of ultrademocracy.

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Errors keep on arising in united front work. There are those who equate the united front with the entire people and then accuse the Party of instrumentalizing the people when the Party speaks of the armed struggle and the united front as weapons of the Party. They do not understand that the working class leadership through the Party, the armed struggle through the NPA, and the united front through the NDF and other formations or informal cooperative relations are all functional aspects of the revolutionary movement. They are all weapons or instruments of the Filipino people in the national democratic revolution.

There are also those who wish to equate the NDF with the entire united front and make the NDF a catch-all federation which assumes the leadership over the Philippine revolution and in which the Party is politically and organisationally subordinated not only to a "federal center" but to one with a preponderance of petty bourgeois formations.

There are those who erase from the history of the NDF the role and initiative of the Party in its formation and who eliminate the leading role of the working class in united front.... In fact, the programme of the NDF has been overwritten and diluted several times under the wrong notion that even after the seizure of political power (the basic completion of the new democratic revolution) the goal is not to build the socialist society but the "national democratic society" under the influence of the (now failed) Sandinista programme of "multi-party democracy" (no socialist revolution) and "mixed economy" (no socialist construction) and the policies of revisionist regimes whose cornerstone is the elimination of the leading role of the working class.

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therefore why our leadership has hesitated to promote more debate. They believe that more debate at this time could lead to open splits and the collapse of our party and movement. These are real concerns that we should respect. I do not believe that any of our leaders are holding on to their ideas simply because they are defending their power or the supposed perquisites of power.

While inhibiting debate at a time when there are deep disagreements on key issues may prevent splits in the short run, I believe that it will also prevent us from solving our problems and advancing our struggle. It will assure further stagnation and the slow death of our movement. Making revolution is risky business. We have to trust our ability to resolve these disagreements in open debate without creating warring factions that will destroy our party. We have to have the courage to stake the life of our party and our movement in exchange for the possibility of once again being in the forefront of revolutionary change in our country.

Doing this is not as difficult as starting armed struggle with only a few rusty rifles against a full-fledged military armed by US imperialism. There is, in fact, a proposal that has been made by two comrades that can become the basis for formulating a detailed plan. I hope they will not mind my elaborating on and popularising their proposal.

1. Form a small committee of comrades from the homefront and those abroad with sufficient depth and breadth of experience to identify the key issues, explain them and lay out the opposing positions. Short papers should be written on each of the issues under debate. This committee, necessarily, must include people with different positions on these issues.
2. These papers should then be discussed carefully in all party units. Once the unit has reached consensus, leaders can be elected who will be delegated to represent the unit's position in discussions at the next higher level of organisation. This ascending process of discussion and leadership selection should culminate in a party congress where a party programme is approved and leadership elected.

Of course, implementing this is not going to be as easy as it sounds. We have not had a party congress since the founding congress in 1968 because of security considerations. I believe that it is time to risk the security problems attendant to holding such a congress. If discussions on key issues are carefully organised in lower level meetings and conferences, the congress does not have to last more than a week or two. If delegates are elected in carefully, democratically to represent the opinions of party rank and file, there do not have to be too many delegates to the congress. If the number of delegates and the time spent at the congress itself are kept to a minimum, it should be possible to hold a party congress. If security problems could be surmounted such that we could hold the

It is now a matter of life and death for the entire Party to reaffirm its basic principles, assert its correct line, and criticize, repudiate, and rectify those major deviations and errors which have run for so long (overlapping with half of the existence of the Party and armed revolution) and which have brought about unprecedented setbacks to the Party, the New People's Army, and the entire revolutionary movement.

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We anticipate that there will be elements who will oppose or deflect the rectification movement by using the following tactics:

1. Continuing to question and attack the Party's basic principles no less in order to dogmatically insist on the erroneous line;
2. Detaching the erroneous line from the serious adverse consequences;
3. Confusing the evaluation of the deviations and errors by playing down bigger errors and playing up lesser ones;
4. Confusing the evaluation of collective and individual responsibilities;
5. Generating new and old issues of lesser importance and relevance to the major problems and unprecedented setbacks that we now face;
6. Retaliating against well-founded criticism by making unfounded attacks;
7. Attacking the many in order to conceal a few in error.

At every level of the Party, in any organ, the central leadership must not hesitate to remove from the Party any element who is responsible for any major deviation or error and who, instead of accepting responsibility, continues to systematically attack the Party line or is incorrigible and resorts to any of the aforesaid tactics to deflect or defeat the purpose of the rectification process. We must also serve serious warning to those elements who resort to ultrademocracy by campaigning outside of the appropriate Party channels or by going beyond the bounds of the Party.

It is a fair estimate to make that only a few will be removed from the Party due to the gravity of the error for which they are responsible or due to the loss of conviction to the revolutionary cause and to the basic principles of the Party. In this regard, the slogan of the Party is "A bit fewer but a lot better," to paraphrase Lenin and Mao.

There may be those who are no longer fit to remain in the Party for ideological reasons such as the loss of conviction to all or any of the basic principles of the Party. They can be considered allies if they can still cooperate with us on political issues, provided they do not become special agents of the enemy by attacking the Party and capitalizing on their previous association with or inside knowledge of the Party.

NDF congress successfully, there is no reason why we cannot hold a party congress.

To hold this congress successfully, our attitude towards the process is an even more important requirement than security precautions. If we come into this debate with the attitude of securing victory for preconceived ideas despite all costs, then debate will lead to greater division and the collapse of our party and movement. As good Marxists, we should understand that the resolution of ideological struggles is a materialist process that involves more than the logic, coherence and even brilliance of our ideas. To prevent further division, we should give great importance to achieving unity. We should devise a democratic process whereby the opinions of all party members are heard and sharpened through debate at all levels.

We need to undertake this task with a sense of urgency in order to arrest the stagnation of our party and movement. Another reason is that Philippine politics is at a crucial conjuncture where our people are open to new ideas. Our country's economic crisis continues. The GNP is expected to contract in 1991 for the first time since 1985. At the end of Cory Aquino's term, the hopes of 1986 have given way to profound disillusionment. The coming [1992] elections will be dominated by traditional politicians who do not have any new ideas for solving our country's economic and political crises. The sooner we can solve our internal problems, the sooner we can contribute to the task of finding economic and political alternatives for our country's future. This conjuncture in our country's history will not last very long. If we do not measure up to this challenge, history will pass us by.

Many of us who are not in the leadership have a tendency to shy away from this crucial debate because we do not trust our grasp of these complex issues. Others are afraid to challenge the ideas of our leaders, to risk old friendships in the heat of intense debate. We prefer to continue doing our assigned tasks in the hope that time or our leaders will resolve these problems without our having to get into the debate. But we have sacrificed a lot for this movement of ours. For many of us, this movement constitutes the work of a lifetime. Are we prepared for the possibility that at the end of our productive lives we will be forced to say that we did not do enough, risk enough to save our movement?

Gender issues in revolutionary praxis

Sunny Lansang

This paper is borne out of the need to make some attempt to link the theoretical advances brought about by feminism to the day-to-day concerns of comrades.[1] These concerns are brought out through *chismis* (informal talk among friends) sessions, formal sharing sessions and one-on-one conversations. They cover the concerns of mental health professionals dealing with family problems; of comrades in the army attempting to better understand women's empowerment or disempowerment; of people in human rights work attempting to understand our recent errors in judgement that led to the Digos massacre[2] and other violations in the past few years; of those struggling with our moralistic way of handling sexual relations and sexual choice; of those who after years of full-time work have come to the decision that they must leave the Party, not because they no longer believe in Marxism-Leninism but because they no longer agree with the way we are conducting politics.

Most of all it is borne out of the concern of this writer, a feminist, who has not yet met another feminist comrade who is satisfied with the way the Party is confronting the practical and theoretical challenges posed by the local and international women's movement.

All these are interrelated. The shortcomings of our organisation are becoming of increasing concern to growing numbers of comrades, which I believe comes from a lack of ideological work. It is increasingly evident that the movement must reassess our communist vision for the future, our application of Marxist theory to our conditions and the day-to-day ethic of struggle which results from this reassessment.

It is my belief that an integration of feminist theorising with our previous constructs holds tremendous promise in bringing to light possible courses that can be taken in order that the revolution may keep step with our changing internal (to the revolutionary movement) and external realities.

Methodological constraints

Admittedly, the evidence that these are concerns of the people in the revolutionary movement is anecdotal. This is also due to several methodological and philosophical considerations.

Methodologically, it will be difficult due to organisational and security constraints to conduct an empirical study among the ranks of comrades. The ethicality of using documents to which the writer has access is also difficult to ascertain. Small-scale limited studies of one collective, on the other hand, do not provide the breadth of insight that is achieved through the discussions with various comrade friends and comrades who seek professional advice. These sources provide a broad range of information from various levels of the party hierarchy, in various lines of work and sectors, from different class backgrounds.

Philosophically, one must also take into consideration the nature of feminist research and pedagogy. Feminist pedagogy and research, coming as they do from a hidden and oppositional tradition to the mainstream logical positivist tradition in science, have long placed greater emphasis on the validity of individual experience as a basis for revolutionary action.

This position also stems from the awareness that the oppression of women is rooted not just in what has been defined as the public sphere of production, but in the more intimate and personal sphere that has been assigned to reproduction. Because women experience oppression in the most intimate spaces of their lives, in areas not traditionally accepted as being part of public concern, personal testimony has great importance in ascertaining the truth of this oppression. The challenge is how to understand the validity of subjective discourse from a framework that does not make the universality of truth the assumption behind test of validity. This viewpoint has direct implication to the nature of evidence and proof.

Production and reproduction

This has implications larger than the need to point out that anecdotal evidence can be justified on the basis of critical theory and the need to liberate science and transform its rules into those that more greatly empower the dispossessed.

The feminist insight which ties up in a continuum the daily experience of exploitation in the private life of a woman to the exercise of coercive power by the state apparatus is a major theoretical construct. It is a construct that in my view must be more completely understood and must stand as a basis for our praxis.

The call to abolish the classic distinction between the public and the private sphere and to make the private sphere an area for political analysis and action finds its foundations in socialist feminist theory. A theory that according to its proponents, is a more consistent application of Marxist principles.

Traditionally, only the public sphere has been considered as an arena for political action. This stems from the liberal democratic theory which makes distinctions between those aspects of life which must be regulated by the state (public sphere) and those which are the reserve of the individual (private sphere).

Marxist analysis has accepted that the family and home are a basis for an analysis of prevalent social relations in society. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels states:

> According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction, of immediate life. This again, is of twofold character; on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the production of the species. The social organisation under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development on the one hand, and of the family on the other.[3]

It would seem that there is a recognition here of two circumstances which determine the development of society: production and reproduction. But the Marxist analysis of the area of reproduction has long been problematic, if not underdeveloped. In other works, Marx and Engels give differing interpretations to the sphere of reproduction to include not only aspects of the production of human being. Alison Jaggar writes:

> ...(T)raditional Marxists use "reproduction" to cover a wide variety of social practices. In its broadest meaning, "reproduction" is that aspect of production devoted to replacing the means of production, such as the production of seedcorn or replacements of existing machinery. "Reproduction" is also used in a more restricted sense to refer to those institutions that maintain and reproduce the social relations of production. As Marxists construe them, these are capitalist social relations. In this usage, "reproduction" is taken to include entertainment, education, advertising, in short, the whole realm of culture and ideology — what Marxists call the superstructure. Finally, "reproduction" is sometimes used to refer to what I have been calling "procreation," those activities involved in bearing and rearing children.[4]

What has become problematic about the arena of reproduction is that whatever the meaning given to the word, Marx and Engels seem to have held

this field as secondary to the area of production in determining the course of human history.

Lenin himself states that while the forces of production were underdeveloped, the social order was more dominated by the ties of sex. But in the light of the development of productive capacity:

> The old society built on groups based on ties of sex bursts asunder in the collision of the newly developed social classes; in its place a new society appears constituted in a state, the lower units of which are no longer groups based on ties of sex but territorial groups, a society in which the family system is entirely dominated by the property system and in which the class antagonisms and class struggles, which make up the content of all written history, now freely develop.

On ideology and culture, Marx writes:

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production, which correspond to a definite stage in development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitute the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.[6]

The above-mentioned quotation has often been cited as leading to economic determinist interpretations as to the relation of culture to the mode of production.

At the current stage of our development, both the reproduction of human beings and the reproduction of ideology in the early stages of life are located largely in the family, the private sphere. It is also here that the exploitation of women, i.e. the creation of gender in relations of exploitation, are rooted.

This is not to deny that women are not exploited in the sphere of production. Women's work in agriculture has in fact been a long overlooked reality. Women workers everywhere earn less because they are women. They are subject also to all forms of sexual harassment and are denied basic needs such as adequately paid maternity leaves and daycare centers. Home-based work such as those which involve subcontracting in the garments industry has fallen to women and has resulted in superexploitation in the countryside.

Indeed as the economic crisis worsens globally and locally, we are seeing the increasing feminisation of poverty. This can be seen in the area of migrant

workers where women have become the majority even as the rate of exploitation of our migrant workers increases.

All revolutionary projects must deal with the fact that:

> While women represent half the global population and one-third of the (paid) labour force, they receive only one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one percent of the world property. They are also responsible for two-thirds of all working hours.[7]

Any political analysis which takes the sphere of production alone as its purview cannot account for the fact that exploitation, even as it occurs in the sphere of production, is gendered. It definitely cannot take into account that in the sphere of childbearing and rearing, in housework and in the area of emotional sustenance, women are exploited and oppressed.

In this latter context, it is obvious that women are indeed exploited by men in a Marxist sense. Because of the unequal burden of work in the home, women do forced, unpaid, surplus labour. This labour results in products or services which are not at all controlled by women themselves.

This basic exploitation of women in the reproductive sphere is attended by a deeply rooted ideological structure which is reproduced just as surely as any other element of the bourgeois (capitalist or colonialist) culture. The socialisation of women (or, to be more clearly Marxist, the social construction and reproduction of the categories, woman, man and child) begins in early life and pervades all aspects of our culture.

The stereotyping that occurs is a matter of wide acceptance although it has been confirmed by academic study in our universities. Women are considered weak, emotional, subservient and inclined to the tasks of childrearing and housework. They are very often considered inferior to men and, at worst, are considered commodities for men's pleasure. It must be added at this point, although this shall be returned to later, that these stereotypes are not merely found in the prevailing culture but within the movement and the party itself.

Patriarchy and the semicolonial and semifeudal system

It is not, however, the purpose of this paper merely to convince the unconvinced that women are exploited. At this point the National Democratic Front (NDF) programme has recognised this exploitation and correctly stated that the emancipation of women is a project of the entire people.

What is more important is the insight that the exploitation of women, the construction of gender, is fundamental to the survival of the semicolonial and

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semifeudal system. All class societies are also gendered societies. The socialist conception of complete freedom through the absolute democratisation of the means of production is incompatible with continuing exploitation in the area of reproduction.

Thus, just as we ensure that our praxis, our revolutionary ethics, our very lifestyles are a rejection of capitalist hegemony — so must we ensure that this same praxis is a rejection of patriarchy. To allow the continuation of patriarchal attitudes and practices among our ranks, is to oppose imperialism and feudalism with our right hand only to caress it with our left.

We must realise that the areas of childbearing, childrearing, sexuality — the whole question of biology — are social constructs like everything else that is human. As part of the material base of society, these activities which are part of reproduction, are subject too to historical changes that are brought about by a constant struggle of one group to establish dominance of the other. The material conditions of reproduction in any society, including the technologies that are pertinent to its activities, as well as the social relations that structure these, are just as surely characteristic of a given society at a particular historical period as the mode of production is.

In this sense the men and women in gendered society are in a class relation. Socialists must therefore work for a classless society not only in the sense that we wish to see the dissolution of classes but also the dissolution of gender. In the final analysis, socialism demands the abolition of men and women as constructed in present-day society as surely as it demands the abolition of classes and the withering away of the state.

Indeed, modern-day philosophers such as Michel Foucault have made explicit the changing power relations in the historical evolution of human sexuality and the relations of these to the more institutionalised powers of class and state.[8]

Sexuality

But it is one thing to establish a vision, and another to see to it that our praxis abides by it.

At this point, we must critically examine certain areas that are proving problematic to us and how our praxis in these areas might well be guided by a revolutionary agenda guided by socialist and feminist principles.

The area of sexual relations and sexuality is one such area. In *The German Ideology*, Marx defined "three aspects of social activity": the production of material life which at its very fulfillment creates new needs (the second aspect or circumstance) and a third circumstance, reproduction within the family.[9]

This reproduction is a social relation insofar as the activity demands conscious and purposive cooperation between human beings. Yet these relations have been structured in present-day society in a form that is repressive of free human agency, that is, in fact, alienating in the Marxist sense.

As Marx states:

> The human essence of nature first exists only for social man; for only here does nature exist for him as bond with man — as his existence for the other and the other's existence for him as the life-element of human reality.[10]

And yet these relations are alienated in capitalist society as Marx saw:

> Thus alienated labour turns the species of man, and also nature as his mental species-property, into an alien being and into a means for his individual existence. It alienates from man his own body, external nature, mental life, and his human life. A direct consequence of the alienation of man from the product of his labour, from his life activity and from his life species is that man is alienated from other men. When man confronts himself he also confronts other men. What is true of man's relationship to his work, and to himself, is also true of his relationship to other men, to their labour, and to the objects of their labour. In general, the statement that man is alienated from his life species means that each man is alienated from the others, and that each of the others is likewise alienated from human life.[11]

Marx's concept was that alienation occurred only in capitalist society because of the extraction of surplus from labour in the form of commodities. But it can be argued that such alienation has occurred to women and men in the social relations of reproduction that have been imposed through history.

Family and sexual relations have varied through history and deserve their own dialectical and materialist treatment. What is clear, however, is that present norms that sanction only heterosexual relations within marriage are as much a part of Spanish and later American colonialisation as they are a part of present-day neocolonialism. These norms were in fact clearly imposed by the Spanish and later modified by US cultural dominance and are surely a part of the colonial legacy.

They are part of this legacy through no accident. Norms of heterosexuality within the bonds of state and religious sanctions have contributed to the subjugation of women and children in families as well as the subjugation of the Filipino family itself to the demands of colonial expansion. It has ensured a passive and long-suffering family based on women's ability for self-sacrifice; it has ensured the reproduction of this subservient and gendered ideology. It has assured that women's (and men's) reproductive labour power is tied to a system easily exploitable by feudal, colonial and neocolonial interests.

On sexual relations

It is therefore surprising that until very recently, our own rules on sexual relations have been a replication of these norms. We have imposed the same repression on sexuality — sex outside of marriage being banned and bisexual, lesbian and homosexual relations being seen as ideological failings.

It is to the credit of the movement that the freedom of sexual orientation has now been upheld in the NDF programme. But we must not be content with this acceptance on paper. Because to liberate sexual relations and sexuality from patriarchal repression is a major strategy in our efforts to change the relations of reproduction in society.

Reproductive rights

Similarly, the idea of reproductive rights, i.e., the right of a woman to control her own body must be seen as a strategic call that will extend through the course of the national democratic revolution and the early stages of socialism. Until such time as social relations of reproduction are democratised, women will be tasked with the care and rearing of children. Until such time as the individual is gendered as a social construction, then pregnancy will occur within women's bodies. As such, the right to decide if, how many, when, how and with whom to have children regardless of age, disability, sexual orientation, civil status, religious and political affiliation will remain essential to the liberation of women.

Human rights and women's rights

In general, our human rights propaganda has dealt with the issues of violence against women only as they occur within the framework of the violation of other political rights — usually in the case of women detainees. We must elevate our propaganda against violence against women in society in general to a political call to end all such violence, in the same way that we have called for the end of violence brought about by poverty and fascism. There is a continuum between the violence that besets women in their individual and private lives at the hands of men, and the more public aspect of state fascism. The two are related not just in terms of their being linked in patriarchal and militarist ideology but also in the way this violence shapes and reshapes productive and reproductive social relations.

Sexual harassment

In this regard we must also pay attention to the way we handle issues of sexual harassment among our own ranks. To tolerate such lapses of discipline results

in the deterioration of the morale not only of the comrade who is the victim but also speaks badly of the ideological level and sense of moral agency of the male comrade who has done this harassment. We must remember also that sexual harassment must of necessity occur in situations where the male comrade is in a situation of power vis-a-vis the female comrade. In these cases therefore the higher position of the male comrade must not be taken as a mitigating circumstance. Rather, charges of sexual harassment, if proven, must surely be a gauge of the comrade's unsuitability for positions of responsibility.

Reconstructing the patriarchal family

The whole question of family relations must also be considered. Often enough, we have been remiss in realizing that we must struggle just as much to restructure families as we do other social relations.

In failing to recognize this need, the movement falls into the danger of exploiting women's reproductive labour. For men comrades to leave family responsibilities to their wives in order to go full time is not a gauge of ideological strength any more than it is the particular contribution to the revolution of his wife that she take on the entire task of raising and caring for her children. When as in some cases, women who complain at this injustice are castigated for their lack of commitment, it is tantamount to a betrayal of true revolutionary ethic. But these cases, though common enough, represent only one extreme of our failure to liberate women, children, the elderly in our own families. We must also contribute to ask why women comrades (or non-comrade women married to comrades) continue to do the bulk of household, secretarial, childrearing and even emotional work in our families. We must also ask whether issues concerning alimony and infidelity (areas where more often enough men take advantage of women's marginalised and oppressed positions in society) are handled with an eye to revolutionary justice and discipline. We must ask whether there are enough comrades who have used the principle of "politics in command," of self-sacrifice, to bring injustice upon their families by their neglect and insensitivity.

In our organising work among women of all classes, but especially the basic masses, we are beginning to realise how difficult it is for women to go to meetings, to organise and to struggle because they are truly burdened with child care and housework. A socialist feminist ethic tells us that revolutionary work lies just as much in organising these women to liberate themselves from these privatised burdens which they are forced to bear in the isolation of patriarchal families, as it is in organising them around the issues of imperialism and feudalism.

Political integrity and moral agency

Against the call "politics in command," we must juxtapose the feminist cry "the personal is political." To rise above personal circumstances and problems in order to sacrifice for the revolution does not mean that we turn our backs to our responsibilities towards specific individuals whether they be friends or family. Neither does it demand the infantilisation of comrades within the limited life of our subculture to the point that we lose all sense of the mainstream, the ordinary unpoliticised *tao* [person].

Political integrity demands that our personal relations live up to the same non-exploitative, empowering and liberational standards that we impose on all other aspects of our political work.

If in fact there is one sense in which feminist politics bears on all our praxis, it is to re-emphasise the sense of moral agency of the individual as part and parcel of our revolutionary ethic. Marxism has called attention to the fact that the alienation of capitalist society has reduced human relations to the adversarial or non-caring. In calling attention to the head to bring the sphere of the private and personal into the area for socialist analysis and praxis, we can put current meaning to our call to end alienation.

A sense of individual moral agency distinguishes our revolutionary movement as socialist, as fundamentally addressed to the liberation of the human from exploitation and alienation. The development of this individual responsibility cannot happen if, in the most intimate reaches of a comrade's life, we live whether as man or woman, in blissful ignorance or wilful acceptance of the inequalities of gender exploitation.

Our efforts at policing our ranks of all errors against the welfare of the people must find its bedrock in our total rejection of personal inequalities of which gender is as much a factor as class. Unless comrades see the injustices, the power relations of dominance and subordination that permeate all our interpersonal relations as men and women, then the sense of moral agency cannot be developed fully. In this sense, patriarchal practices and attitudes are the material basis for so much of our moral weakness. Weaknesses that find their most disturbing manifestation in the increasing number of human rights violations that our comrades have perpetrated among the people or even on other comrades.

Individual and collective

Perhaps in our communal life, in our fear of being charged as individualists, we have forgotten the role of the individual.

Agnes Heller writes that, "Marx recognises no needs other than those of individual people", and while understanding needs as generally social or "socially produced", such needs nevertheless "are the need of individual human beings": "When the domination of things over human beings ceases, when relations between human beings no longer appear as relations between things, then every need governs the need for the development of the individual, the need for self-realisation of the human personality."[12]

Conclusion

We have had many victories in the course of our more than 20 years of struggle to liberate our people. But our movement has changed and grown bringing with it many lessons that demand theoretical reformulation. Our movement has grown to include many, many individuals with various skills, talents and needs. An ever-widening number of families have comrades as a father, a mother, a son or a daughter. Entire families can be committed to the movement, even as we begin to see several generations, young and old, working side by side. It has also seen a larger number of women participate in the movement bringing with them their own concerns. As the movement goes on, there is a need in fact to turn our attention to the lives in this movement, to the personal and private, to the need for nurturance in a community of resistance. There is also a need to accept that the Marxist theory on women is underdeveloped and is only now being elucidated by women in their numbers.

Through their own experiences in revolutionary struggle against feudalism, imperialism and patriarchy, women have brought to our movement new ways of analysis that imply the need for a change in our theories, our ethics and our praxis.

Notes

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1. This is with reference to the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). *[Editor]*

2. *Editor's note:* This massacre took place on 25 June 1989 in the southern Philippine province of Davao del Sur. Thirty seven men, women and children (31 of them, women and children) were killed by members of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the CPP. Two of the dead men were beheaded by the NPA. The deaths occurred in the context of an encounter between NPA rebels and members of a church group, mostly unarmed, who had been organised by the local military into an anti-communist religious cult group called *Ituman*. The National Democratic Front (NDF) after conducting its own investigation found that the killing of innocent civilians could have been avoided by the NPA. Source: *The Philippines — Violating of the laws of war by both sides*, Asia Watch, 1990, pp. 76-82.

3. Engels, F., "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State", in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works In One Volume* (New York: International Publishers, 1977), p. 456.

4. Jaggar, A.M., *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, (New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), p. 156.

5. Engels, op cit., p. 456.

6. Marx, Karl, "Preface to the Critique of Political Economy", in *Marx and Engels Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), p.29.

7. U.N. Secretary Kurt Waldheim, *Report to the UN Committee on the Status of Women*.

8. Foucault, M., *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1978).

9. Marx, Karl, "The German Ideology", in *The Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, Lloyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, ed., (Garden City N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967), pp. 419-422.

10. Marx, K., "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", *Ibid.*, p. 244.

11. Op cit., p. 433.

12. Heller, A., *The Theory of Need in Marx* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), pp. 67-73.

Samizdat writings in China

Lau Kin Chi

Ever since the military crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators on 4 June 1989 in Tiananmen Square, ideological control in China has been very strict. Many newspapers or magazines were banned, reorganised or taken over by commissions sent by the authorities. The works of blacklisted writers were forbidden publication or circulation. Yet, because of economic decentralisation, local publishing firms have more say in what to publish, and very often, books are circulated in the market for some time before the authorities ban them. These may be literary works or works of social science. For example, *Huang Yuan Feng (Gale in the Wilderness)*, published by Modern Press in Beijing in May 1990, was banned presumably because the work espouses egoism. *Shui Lai Cheng Bao? (Who Gets This Contract?)*, published by Hua Cheng Press in Guangzhou, September 1990, was also banned, presumably because it covers extensively the economic and social conditions of the people.

The immediate aftermath of the 4 June 1989 crackdown led to student activities in Beijing and in the major provincial capitals which focussed on denouncing the repression, disseminating facts about the crackdown and organising protest actions. On June 5, the Beijing College Students Autonomous Federation issued a *Letter to all Citizens* with a call to give up all hope in the Li Peng government and launch a prolonged struggle, a movement of non-violent civil disobedience. In the provincial capitals, students also called for a long-term struggle after attempts by workers to paralyse the transport and other industries through strikes and traffic blockades failed. On June 8, it was reported that a crowd of 150,000 gathered in the square outside the train station in Changsha, the provincial capital of Hunan Province, for a memorial service for the dead in the Beijing crackdown, and for student leaders to bid farewell to the public before they went underground.[1]

In the massive wave of arrests after June 4, all protest activities had to be conducted in great secrecy. All networking was necessarily limited to clandestine links among individual core members of different groups. Ironically, much of the information about underground organisations and *samizdat* publications came to be known to the outside world only after the activists concerned were arrested

and the charges against them disclosed by the Chinese government. Some of the information was conveyed by contacts to journalists or students in exile.

Identifiable *samizdat* publications have appeared in Beijing, Shanghai, Changsha, Chengdu and Kunming. Most of them were put out by students or intellectuals who had participated in the 1989 movement for democracy, and occasionally by veteran activists whose involvement dated back to the Beijing Spring Democracy Movement of 1978-81. Some workers or professionals (lawyers, physicians, writers) were also involved.

In the first four months of 1991, the Public Security authorities had discovered 60 to 70 'illegal' organisations operating in major cities including Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Hangzhou, Shenyang, Chengdu, Wuhan, Nanjing, Chongqing and Xi'an according to a report on the speech given by Tao Siqu, Minister of Public Security, in an internal meeting of top leaders of the Beijing government and security forces on 6 May 1991. The more active underground organisations included the College Students Federation, Workers Autonomous Federation, Liberation United Front, Marxist United Front, Revolutionary Communist Party, and Alliance of the Oppressed and Exploited.[2] In the four months following the crackdown, over 137,000 copies of anti-government propaganda materials, leaflets and posters were seized all over the country.

The accuracy of these reports is difficult to ascertain. However, it does give some idea of the dimension of unrest fermenting in China. In this article, I will go through the literature (programmes or statements or leaflets) of seven underground organisations in China. Either the full texts or detailed reports about them are available outside China.

Samizdat publications are circulated among small circles of dozens or hundreds of people, while leaflets are usually produced and distributed in thousands. Another means of communicating news and ideas in a general situation of censorship is to resort to legal proceedings, such as the cases of Guo Luoji, Wang Meng and Chen Ziming. They filed lawsuits against the government, knowing well enough that these would invariably be rejected by the court but knowing also that public attention would be drawn to the injustices.

Appearing also for a brief period — for a month or so — in June 1991 were T-shirts with slogans expressing discontent or satirising official propaganda. They were the fashion until the government banned them.

Let us first go through the *samizdat* publications before coming to the literature related to the underground organisations.

Concern of *samizdat* publications

Chengdu, Sichuan Province, has produced many post-modernist poets since the early 1980's. Unaccepted by official literary publications, such poetry was circulated by *samizdat* publications. A well-known *samizdat* publication, *Sichuan Modern Poems*, was founded by the renowned poet Liao Yiwu in 1987. After 4 June 1989, Liao wrote a long poem entitled *The Massacre*, which he recorded on cassette tapes which were widely circulated in Shanghai and Beijing. In February 1990, Liao, together with the poets Li Yawei, Wan Xia, Liu Taiheng, Ba Tie and Gou Mingjun, wrote the script and began production of a videotape entitled *An Ling Qu (Condolence for the Dead)*. On March 25, the day of completion of the production, they were all arrested. Liao was sentenced to seven years in jail, and all the others to three years.[3]

Samizdat publications like *Wild Grass*, *Herb of No Name* and *Fracture* were also produced by underground poetry clubs in Sichuan. About a dozen people from an underground poetry club in Chengdu were reportedly arrested on 7 April 1990 and charged with illegal publication.[4] The name of their club is not yet known.

In Kunming, Yunnan Province, four persons — Ji Kunxing, Shang Jingzhong, Shi Ying and Yu Aumin — were arrested at the end of 1989 for organising a "counter-revolutionary organisation" and for producing the *samizdat* publication *Pioneer*.[5] The contents of this publication are not known.

The Shanghai *samizdat* publication *Rejuvenation* was published by the UFDMC. *Free Voice* was broken by the Shanghai authorities in May 1991. It had provided the overseas media with information about infringements on human rights in China.[6] About a hundred copies of *Modern Han Poetry*, a non-political collection of

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Samizdat publications

The following titles of *samizdat* publications are known outside China:

In Beijing:
Da Jia (All of Us) • Min Zhu Tao Lun (Democratic Discussion) • Tie Liu (Iron Currents) • Zi You Lun Tan (Free Forum)

In Changsha:
Wan Xiang (Phenomena on Earth)

In Chengdu:
Duan Ceng (Fracture) • Wu Ming Cao (Herb of No Name) • Ye Cao (Wild Grass)

In Kunming:
Xian Feng (Pioneer)

In Shanghai:
Fu Xing (Rejuvenation) • Xian Dai Han Shi (Modern Han Poetry) • Zi You Zhi Sheng (Free Voice)

underground poetry, were seized by the authorities on 17 April 1992, and two poets, Meng Lang (real name Meng Junliang) and Mo Mo (real name Zhu Weiguo), were arrested.[7]

Phenomena on Earth from Changsha, Hunan Province, was first published in November 1991. Its first issue of 26 pages was edited by Li Zhongyuan and Li Dingcheng, and contains essays and poems. The longer essays are rather abstract and liberal expositions of freedom, love, truth and human existence. The autonomous self and rationalism are championed as opposed to servitude and passivity. None of the articles touch on the immediate reality. The shorter essays are literary prose, mostly expressing bitterness for the world and longings for explosions to cleanse the world of evil. Some of these rather blunt writings might very well be censored in an official publication.

One interesting point about this publication is its title. The romanisation of *Phenomena on Earth* is given on the front page, apparently with an error identified and crossed out just in time. So, "WANGXIANG" has the "G" crossed out so that it correctly reads "WAN XIANG". Yet, "Wang Xiang" could mean "daring, unrealistic ideas or aspirations". There are apparently attempts to load words with allusions and to present ideas in a mildly subversive way.

It is not surprising that more *samizdat* publications from Beijing are known to the outside world. Beijing has been the centre of the

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Dissident groups

The names, statements and programmatic documents of the following underground organisations are available outside China.

Zhong Guo Gong Can Dang Ge Ming Wei Yuan Hui (Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, RC-CCP)

Zhong Guo Min Zhong Tuan Ti Zi Zhi Lian He Hui (Autonomous Federation of People's Organisations in China, AFPOC)

Zhong Guo Min Zhu Yun Dong Lian He Zhen Xian (United Front of the Democracy Movement in China, UFDMC)

Zhong Guo Ren Quan Wen Ti Yan Jiu Hui (Research Group on Human Rights in China, RGHRC)

Zhong Guo She Hui Min Zhu Dang (Socialist Democratic Party of China, SDPC)

Zhong Guo Zi You Gong Hui (Free Labour Union of China, FLUC)

Zhong Guo Zi You Min Zhu Dang (Party for Freedom and Democracy in China, PFDC)

Zhong Hua Jin Bu Tong Meng (China Progressive Alliance, CPA)

movement for democracy, and it also has easier access to journalists or foreigners. I will discuss some of these publications here.

Democratic Discussion was reportedly published by a student Liu Xianbin from the People's University, and contains articles demanding the reform of the communist system. Liu was arrested around early May 1991.[8]

Chen Yingbin and Zhang Yafei, former students of the Qinghua University, were arrested at the end of 1990 for publishing *Iron Currents*. Chen was sentenced to 15 years in jail for "counter-revolutionary propaganda", and Zhang has to serve seven years imprisonment.[9]

All of Us, a bimonthly, first came out in October 1991. It was published by the Study Club of the People's University, with the editorial board consisting of Shi Zhai, Yuan Cheng and Li Yan. Its inaugural issue describes how the publication came into being. It said that the Study Club was the largest student society in the People's University, and since its founding in October 1990, it had recruited over 200 members including postgraduates and undergraduates. Through publishing *All of Us*, it hopes to promote the exchange of ideas among responsible, rational and committed young scholars.

All of Us contains essays on philosophy, literature and culture, and also creative writings. In the first two issues, each over 50 pages of typed manuscripts, there are articles espousing the idea that socialism is compatible with human rights; criticizing the "ultra-left" cultural theories and practice; stressing the role of intellectuals in China as a significant force in the control of knowledge and capable of ushering in a new social order based on law instead of party ideology; rejecting feelings of impotence and helplessness through an analysis of the poetry of Baudelaire; commenting on China's foreign policy and proposing that the state be more pragmatic in pursuing its interests; and arguing against the Three Gorges Dam Project. There is a list of recommended readings at the end which includes literary or political works critical of the communist system or the bureaucracy, western views of the history of modern China, and the early works of Marx and Mao.

The articles in *All of Us* demonstrate a rational approach to problems both philosophical and temporal. While keeping away from forbidden areas which would certainly offend the authorities, the articles are by no means subservient to party orthodoxy; they take opportunities to present critiques, often bordering on dissent, of government policies. Two sensitive topics are raised in the first two issues: the role of intellectuals vis-a-vis social control, and the role of the state vis-a-vis the people. Judging from the premises and presuppositions that these two topics tackle, one may feel a sense of unease that the writers themselves may be lacking a profound understanding and hence critical appreciation of the relationship between knowledge and power, and the antagonism between the

state and the people. This, in turn, may give the reader the feeling that the publication is not intrinsically subversive.

On 8 June 1992, Wang Shengli and Liao Jiaan (whose alias is Shi Zhai), both editors of *All of Us*, were arrested. The police searched their dormitory rooms and found leaflets and a printing machine. On 12 June 1992, the university authorities announced that Wang and Liao had been arrested for distributing "counter-revolutionary leaflets" and would soon be prosecuted on charges of "counter- revolutionary propaganda and instigation".[10]

Free Forum is reportedly one of the best *samizdat* publications circulating in Beijing, with incisive analysis of current affairs and world events and good insights on ideas of freedom and democracy.[11] Several issues have come out and the concern of the publication has shifted from reports of the Tiananmen massacre and denunciation of the repression to reviewing problems of theory and practice within the democracy movement, analysing the participation (or lack of it) of different sectors of the population in projects for social change, and offering a critique of the Dengist reform. A special emphasis is placed on understanding and learning from the upsurge in Eastern Europe.

Xin Xi (Information), a 12-page monthly, is published in Hong Kong and has been distributed in China since October 1990. This is a digest of news and analytical articles, mostly from the media in Hong Kong.

Literature of underground organisations

Many of the organisations operating underground become known either when they distribute their programmes, statements or leaflets in public or to the press, or when their core members are arrested and the names of the organisations are made known by the government. It is always difficult to come to any realistic estimate of the size of these organisations. Some may never make any claim as to the size of their membership, and in cases where claims are made, it may be in dozens, hundreds or thousands but these are difficult to verify. In addition, members of an organisation may be cohesive as a group, or may relate to each other in a very loose manner, as must be the case for networks of underground groups from different cities. The repression and agent infiltration make it very dangerous and quite impossible for large groups to operate over long periods of time.

The programmes or statements issued by underground organisations in general tend to be direct and to the point, transmitting their political messages in an unequivocal way: denunciation of the regime's repression and criminal deeds; elaboration of the organisation's programmatic positions; and an appeal to the public to organise and/or act.

The RC-CCP which is based in Beijing has issued three statements — *Letter to all CCP members, Letter to the people of China*, and *Letter to the United Nations and all people of the world*.[12] In these documents, the RC-CCP claims it has operated as a clandestine dissident group inside the Chinese Communist Party since the end of the Cultural Revolution, and decided to make public its political views in response to the repression of the June 4 Movement. The letters appeal to party members to reject the reactionary clique headed by Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng and Yang Shangkun, abandon the Four Guiding Principles, stand with the people to overthrow the dictatorial rule of the CCP, and rebuild the Party. They ask the people to reject the one-party rule of the CCP, which for 40 years has been the rule of a bureaucratic, privileged class headed by Mao and Deng. In their letter to *all people of the world*, they assert that the Chinese government has lost its legitimacy to rule, and that the Chinese people do not recognise the existing government. They also make an appeal for general support and sympathy.

The RC-CCP, while expressing admiration for Marx and aspiring to rebuild the communist party, is in its more concrete positions, closer to social democracy, advocating "competition on an equal basis among various forms of economic ownership".

The UFDMC, in its leaflet entitled *The people will never forget* distributed before the second anniversary of the June 4 crackdown, also expresses disillusionment with the CCP's 40 years of rule, and asserts that instead of placing requests and hopes with the CCP, it will rely on its own strength — the strength of the people — to fight for truth and democracy.[13]

The RGHRC, based in Shanghai, is more specific in its area of concern — human rights. Many of its members have been arrested. The arrest of 26-year-old Gu Bin in early April 1991 was followed by the arrest of a dozen people including 47-year-old Yang Zhou, and the renowned writer Wang Ruowang and his wife Feng Suying. Wang and Feng were released after 30 hours of continuous interrogation (and in August 1992, the couple was allowed to leave the country); but Gu and Yang remain in detention. Gu Bin had participated in the 1986 student movement in Shanghai when he was then a student of the Shanghai Institute of Chemical Industry.[14] Yang Zhou has a longer history of participation in the movement. Towards the end of 1978, he promoted the setting up of a human rights association in Shanghai and was arrested in April 1979 and sent to jail for two and a half years.[15] On his release he continued his activism. On 25 July 1990, he wrote an open letter to Jiang Zemin, General Secretary of the CCP, arguing for the release of all political prisoners, and for the registration of all political parties or societies to enable

them to operate legally.[16] Open letters to party leaders, under the cover of petitions, are often a safer means to air one's views.

With the police raids the names of some personalities involved in the RGHRC were disclosed. It is now known that different generations of activists have come together to work for common goals. This is very significant for the movement for democracy.

More names of organisations surfaced in the third year after the June 4 crackdown. The PFDC signed a wall poster that appeared in the campus of the Beijing University in November 1991.[17] Entitled *Statement on the question of human rights in China*, the wall poster criticizes the government's violations of

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The Free Labour Union of China

Though the Communist Party of China claims it represents the working class of China, workers in China are deprived of their rights to free speech, assembly, strike and employment. The deteriorating living and working conditions of workers were further aggravated after the 1978 reforms. The lack of corresponding social security for workers with reforms on economic management has led to their working overtime without pay their having to shoulder medical expenses, and their having to cope with a worsening living standard.

Power has been concentrated in the hands of a few, especially in the hands of low-ranking bureaucrats. What causes concern is that while the private sector has been rapidly expanding, no legal provisions have been drawn up to defend the rights of workers in this sector. Workers are

sometimes placed in conditions worse than those portrayed in the nineteenth century by Charles Dickens.

Although China is signatory to international labour laws which guarantee the right to organisation, free labour unions have been repressed. However, there have been attempts by workers to set up their independent unions. In December 1991, the Free Labour Union of China (FLUC) was formally set up with a call to workers to form free unions and to act against repression and corruption.

The FLUC strongly believes that it is absolutely necessary for unions that truly represent the interests of workers to be set up, as the official unions stand on the side of the government and capitalists. It is committed to building an economic

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political rights of citizens, and urges the release of all political prisoners, rehabilitation of groups and persons that have been persecuted, recognition of the right of political association, and the convening of a national assembly with representatives of different parties and sectors of people. The wall poster was put up just before the US Secretary of State came on a visit to China and was hence designed to attract international attention.

It has been reported that the PFDC is made up of a number of underground organisations active not only in Beijing but also in Shanghai, Xi'an and Chengdu. A dozen people were arrested at the end of December 1991.[18] On 29 March 1992, the thirteenth anniversary of Wei Jingsheng's arrest, a member of the

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and political system based on justice and human rights. It aims to organise workers in state enterprises, especially in the heavy industries and in public transport. The FLUC has pledged to improve the working and living conditions as also the social and political standing of workers in China. Since its formation the FLUC has managed to recruit members in several places, conduct surveys in several factories on the actual working and living conditions of workers, start a newsletter which is mailed out, assist some workers in defending their rights and express its views on several state policies. The Chinese government was shocked at the formation of this organisation and the State Security Bureau classified the FLUC as a category one case and began secret arrests of members. In early June 1992, several members were arrested for attempting to distribute leaflets during the anniversary of the June 4 crackdown.

Those arrested included core members Liu Jingsheng, Gao Yuxiang and seven others whose names are not known. Liu Jingsheng, a bus driver, together with Wei Jingsheng, Yang Guang, Lu Lin and Yu Yi, founded the *samizdat* publication *Exploration*. As one of the core members, Liu used his home address as the correspondence address for the publication. He was also responsible for distributing the publications to places outside Beijing. Wei Jingsheng was arrested in March 1979, and Liu Jingsheng was detained in May 1979 by the State Security Bureau. Liu was released after six months and continued working as a bus driver and with the democracy movement. In June 1992 the State Security Bureau searched the homes of Liu Jingsheng and Gao Yuxiang. Both of them were arrested and their whereabouts remain unknown to this day.

PFDC distributed leaflets outside the North Gate of the People's Hall in Beijing and was arrested. The leaflet called for the release of political prisoners.[19]

The SDPC, based in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, was formally set up in 1991 and made public its existence in April 1992 when the National People's Congress was convened in Beijing. It claims over 100 member activists from the 1989 movement, students, workers, government cadres and self-employed workers. Its letter to the NPC demands democratic reforms, release of all political prisoners, rehabilitation of victims of the June 4 incident and abolition of one-party dictatorship. It pledges to uphold the ideals of democratic socialism and hopes to join the Socialist International. In April and May 1992, over 20 of its members were arrested, including Ding Mao, Liu Baiyu, Xing Shimin, Lu Yanghua, Liu Wensheng, Gao Changyun, Zhang Jian, Cao Jianyu, Xu Zhendong and Lu Yalin.

In January 1992, the Preparatory Committee of the FLUC distributed two leaflets voicing the position of ordinary workers in China. One statement dated 24 January 1992 denounces the criminal acts of the government in the June 4 crackdown and accuses the government of ruining China's economy. It also predicts the end to the people's patience. Another statement dated 16 January 1992 affirms the workers' right to form free labour unions, rejects the official labour union as a tool of the CCP and, most important, calls on workers to organise themselves at work or at district levels, to develop groups by engaging in all sorts of open and covert activities, and not to be impatient to seek outside linkages as this may lead to their infiltration by agents. The FLUC envisages numerous free labour unions mushrooming in China.

Indeed, workers' organisations and even strikes are occasionally reported by the media outside China. One instance took place on 11 August 1992 in a busy downtown area in Beijing. A poster appealing for a general strike on 17 August 1992 was signed by the "Workers Union of Brigade One of the East City Environment and Health Bureau". The poster listed the gross injustices in the differential treatment of senior officials, referred to as "vampires" and "parasites", and the sanitary workers. Asserting that it has the support of 90,000 sanitary workers, the Union demanded higher wages, better working conditions, and government recognition of the Union. The same poster appeared in several places, and was promptly removed by the police. It is not known if the strike took place.

Towards the end of May 1992, two founding members of the CPA were arrested: Kang Yuchun, a neuropathologist at the An Ding Hospital in Beijing, and Hu Shenglun, a lecturer at the Beijing Institute of Languages.[20] According to the CPA draft programme, China is in a deep political, economic and moral crisis. However, the programme deals primarily with political and economic

issues, and not much is said about moral aspects except for mentioning terms like humanism, justice, harmony. As is the problem with many such manifestoes, the CPA's propositions on the desired economic system are a conglomeration of what are considered ideal, and the possible contradictions between the different propositions and antagonisms between different interests are somehow brushed aside and not scrutinised. So, the CPA proposes that all members of society, as owners of property, can take up any form of ownership; that the shareholding system be promoted; that equality between different forms of ownership be guaranteed by the Constitution; that the market economy be introduced; that any monopoly of the economy by consortia be opposed; that a social security system be installed to defend minimum living standards; that all labourers have the right to economic decision-making; and that the state's role in guiding economic activities be respected. Politically, the CPA stresses that it is against factionalism and regionalism. It is also against authoritarianism within the organisation, and strives to cooperate or fuse with any other force fighting against dictatorship, be they groups based on theories of social analysis or on religious or humanist principles. It also aspires to cooperate with democratic progressive forces in the CCP. It sees the movement for democracy as involving all sectors of society with no group having total control. Its respect for other political forces and emphasis on maximum cooperation with groups in the movement indicates a conscious attempt to break through the long history of atomisation imposed by repression and censorship.

The AFPOC declared its existence on the third anniversary of the June 4 crackdown. It claims to have contacts in several cities in China and an overseas liaison network. Its spokesperson is Tang Boqiao, a student leader of the 1989 movement in Hunan, who fled from China in July 1991 and is now in New York.[21] The preliminary draft of the Constitution of AFPOC consists of three parts: Preamble, Programme of Action and Principles of Organisation.[22] The Preamble takes pains to explain AFPOC's views on democracy, placing emphasis on participation by the people, collective solution to everyday livelihood problems by the grassroots, and the assumption of social responsibility by everybody. People's organisations should be built at work as well as in the realm of private life and while encouraging individual initiative and creativity they should also foster responsibility for the problems of society. On this basis the AFPOC, as a federation of autonomous people's organisations, attempts to experiment with the practice of democracy in its own organisational functioning. While the AFPOC is people conscious in its general statements, its political and economic programmatic position is not much different from those of other organisations, except for its emphasis on safeguarding people's livelihood, caring for the underprivileged, and practising workers' self-management.

Understanding underground organisations through reading their literature is naturally inadequate, but the programmes or statements somehow define the general orientation of the organisations. What is proclaimed on paper may not actually be practised and in such cases, the literature serves more as an expression of what the activists find lacking in their real life conditions.

Members of the AFPOC appear to be hard hit by the round-up of dissidents following Shen Tong's "open return" from the United States in the summer of 1992. With contacts provided by Tang Boqiao and others, Shen Tong, a student leader in exile, "clandestinely" made and filmed his contacts with underground personalities just before openly declaring in Beijing his intention to set up a sub-office of his US-based organisation in China. Shen Tong was arrested and after some weeks of detention, was sent back to the States. Many people have been arrested after his visit and these include Qi Dafeng, Zu Guoqiang, Mao Wenke, Lu Gang, Zhao Zhangjian, Zhang Jianjun, An Ning and Meng Zhongwei and over a dozen people have fled China.

Apart from the names mentioned above, other people known to have been arrested around 4 June 1992 include Lu Zhigang, Wang Peizhong, Guo Shaoyan, Chen Hui, Wang Guoqi, Wang Qishan, Wang Wanxing, Chen Qinglin, Yu Liangqing, Wang Jinwan, Ma Lianggang and Tian Yang. Their current status is not known. The fact that activists continue to be arrested three years after the Tiananmen crackdown gives the outside world a glimpse of the ongoing resistance and repression in China.

Legal struggles

One way of expressing views without getting into trouble and being accused of "illegality" is the courts. One famous example is of Guo Luoji filing a lawsuit against the CCP and the state education authorities in January 1992. Guo Luoji as a lecturer in Nanjing University was deprived of the right to teach because of his dissidence.[23] Though the court rejected his suit, his case and his views became widely known.[24]

In September 1991, writer and former Minister of Culture, Wang Meng, also filed a lawsuit against *Wen Yi Bao (Journal on Literature)* accusing it of political persecution and in his indictment refuted charges made against him of attacking the reforms and Deng Xiaoping.

Chen Ziming, accused of masterminding the movement for democracy in 1989 and sentenced to 15 years in jail, wrote a 220,000-word book — *Reflections on the Decade of Reform* — while in jail and completed it in March 1990.[25] In December 1991, through his wife, he filed a lawsuit against the New China News Agency, the *People's Daily* and the State Education Committee for slander.

They accused him of "participating in and directly commanding the attack on the troops imposing martial law"; this charge had not been brought up by the authorities in the trial against him. This is also a way to legally refute the authorities and expose their absurdities.

Han Dongfang, leader of the Beijing Autonomous Workers Federation, applied to the police for a license to demonstrate on 23 March 1992. His application was naturally refused, and he took this opportunity to speak to the foreign press on the contents of the placard he would have carried and of the leaflets he would have distributed with demands for better medical welfare for railway workers, and the right of workers to organise free labour unions.

The above are examples of ways to bypass strict censorship and exercise the right of expression. There are other means of expression too. In the beginning of June 1991, T-shirts with slogans appeared in the free market and became very popular. Youngsters in the busy down-town centres wore T-shirts with slogans that read: "I'm terribly depressed! Keep away from me!" "Life is meaningless" "I'm real tired" "I am Emperor" "There's no tomorrows, get drunk today" "Mama taught me a song, without the Communist Party there would not be this new China" "The militant for the revolution is a piece of brick, up to the Party to dispose of as it sees fit" "I fear not sufferings, I fear not death, I fear not YOU either" "Cleanse the world of all evil beasts" "Sparks of fire can ignite the whole plain" "I have never been a thorn in anybody's side" "I've got no guts to be a smuggler, I've got no capital to be an entrepreneur, I've got no cunning to be an official, I muddle along, my rice bowl is broken, I am nothing". There were slogans from Mao and slogans that ridiculed Deng's reforms, such as the caricature of a black cat in tears, or a whole jumble of food ration cards and identity documents around the slogan "Hard to feed a family". One designer of the T-shirts, when interviewed, said "We are not allowed to parade, we are not allowed to write wall posters, can we not write the words on ourselves?"[26] On 30 June 1991, these T-shirts were seized and banned.

Words are largely contained and contaminated under censorship in China. Still, their "mysterious" potential is continuously explored by people unwilling to submit to the power that will have them say what they do not mean or not speak out at all.

Notes

1. *Anthems of Defeat — Crackdown in Hunan Province, 1989-1992*, Asia Watch, New York, 1992, p. 13.

2. *Cheng Ming*, No. 6, Hong Kong, 1991, pp. 6-9.

3. *Open Magazine*, No. 2, Hong Kong, 1992, p. 46.

4. *October Review*, No. 3, Hong Kong, 1990, p. 12.

5. *Ming Pao*, Hong Kong, 26 March 1992.

6. *Hong Kong Daily News*, Hong Kong, 11 December 1991.

7. *Hong Kong Economic Times*, Hong Kong, 1 May 1992.

8. Reuters despatch from Beijing, 5 May 1991.

9. *Ming Pao*, Hong Kong, 26 March 1992, and *United Daily News*, Taiwan, 19 March 1991.

10. *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, Hong Kong, 11, 14, 18 June 1992.

11. *Hong Kong Daily News*, Hong Kong, 11 December 1991, quoting sources in Beijing.

12. The three documents are reprinted in full in *October Review*, No. 3, Hong Kong, 1990, pp. 19-22.

13. The contents of the leaflet was reported by *Express Daily*, Hong Kong, 9 May 1991.

14. On 22 December 1986, the student movement in Shanghai reached a climax when 150,000 people demonstrated on the street and demanded democratic reforms. The movement sweeping the whole country was quietened by the Campaign against Bourgeois Liberalisation and the disgrace of Hu Yaobang.

15. See the full text of Li Guoping's article demanding the release of her husband Yang Zhou. Published in *Ming Pao*, Hong Kong, 4 June 1991.

16. The letter was sent to Jiang Zemin by registered post and at the same time released to the press. For the full text of the letter, see *Ming Pao*, Hong Kong, 25 April 1991.

17. The full text of the wall poster was reprinted in *Ming Pao*, Hong Kong, 16 November 1991.

18. *Hong Kong Daily News*, Hong Kong, 11 December 1991.

19. Central News Agency's despatch from Taipei, 2 April 1992.

20. *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, Hong Kong, 24 June 1992. The full text of the CPA draft programme was also reprinted.

21. Based on Tang Boqiao's verbal account of the 1989 student movement in Hunan and the government's persecution of students and workers, published in *Anthems of Defeat*, Asia Watch, New York, June 1992.

22. For the full text of the AFPOC Constitution, see *October Review*, No. 2, Hong Kong, 1992, pp. 10-11.

23. Ge Luoji, in his law suit documents, points out that Deng Xiaoping, at the 6th Plenary Meeting of the 12th Central Committee of the CCP, linked the name Ge Luoji to Wei Jingsheng and said they were "representatives of bourgeois liberalisation".

24. *Pai Shing*, No. 261, Hong Kong, reprinted two of Ge Luoji's lawsuit indictments.

25. The book was published in Hong Kong by *Contemporary Monthly*, in June 1992.

26. *Open Magazine*, No. 8, Hong Kong, 1991.

Some notes on micro-struggles: NGOs and the state

Harsh Sethi

For nearly two decades now, there has been a deluge of writing on NGOs and micro/grassroots struggles: their nature and spread, role and possibilities. And while the different participants in this debate have all articulated their favourite positions: from seeing these varied efforts as 'mere bubbles', to having the 'potential of coalescing into a major movement for a structural transformation of Indian polity and society' — a recent effort at surveying the literature came to the somewhat disconcerting conclusion that the large bulk of this writing is partisan, unsubstantiated, more in the nature of an in-house polemic, than presenting an empirically sound reading of the Indian scene.[1] Notwithstanding the general consensus that the phenomenon of a stirring at the grassroots is significant and worth analysing, there have been few attempts at mounting substantive research studies. In the absence of both macro-data and indepth case studies, it is therefore difficult to come to any conclusions that could be rigorously defended.

Partly the confusion in the literature on grassroots movements arises from an inadequate specification of the constituent sections of this phenomena, for every activity/organisation that is formally outside the ambit of either government or political parties tends to be lumped together under omnibus categories like voluntary organisations, non-governmental organisations, non-party political formations, etc. Thus, conclusions about one type of organisation or activity often get loaded onto another radically different entity. A greater problem however arises from the casting of ex-ante macro-political expectations of the analyst on the phenomena on the ground. In particular, one can discern a tendency in interventionist, radical transformative discourse that either perceives a new hope in every effort at dissent or alternatively continues to 'raise the criteria' that any activity/organisation has to satisfy before it can be certified as acceptable. In neither case is due cognizance given to the internal objectives of either the actors, activities nor organisations under scrutiny.

In itself, the inner subjectivity of the self-proclaimed analysts/theorists would be of little concern, for struggles and dissent at the base of society continue

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irrespective of how they are dissected and analysed, except that the 'word' does have a devastating impact on the 'world'. Not only is this discourse judgmental, it also moulds the legitimate space within which this activism operates. More importantly, it has displayed the potential of creating internecine divisions and splits in these various efforts, thereby increasing hostility in an already hostile environment.[2] This long preamble has been necessitated, because I, as much as anyone else, have been associated with the process of both participating in and commenting upon the phenomenon under discussion. And only through some very painful knocks has one learnt (hopefully) the virtues of reticence.

For the purpose of this brief note, I propose to comment only on a specific sub-sector/genre of the NGO world — the micro-grassroots organisations/movements that are not, at least self-consciously, involved in conventional charity, welfare or developmental activities, and to interrogate the discourse concerned with their potential to transform Indian politics and through that both State and society — an avowed goal of these movements. Many of these entities may not even be formally registered under one or the other of the Acts that govern NGOs in the country. In addition, I propose to examine those modern NGOs who claim to be political, albeit in non-party political terms. Most of these are middle class and professional, located mainly in urban areas, and conduct their activities with the express purpose of linking up with, extending support to, and improving the effectivity of the micro-struggles at the grassroots. Even if partially involved in development or charity work, their distinguishing feature is not the delivery of services/goods, but through conscientisation and mobilisation contributing to the organised strength and assertion of the poor and the organisations working for and with them. Much of what is today perceived as the radical and transformative edge of voluntary work has emerged from the activities of these two different streams and locations of politics. But before we turn to this sector, a few brief remarks on the changes in institutional politics would be in order.

The decline of institutional politics

Most of these 'movements' occupy social spaces created by the decline of the conventional, mainstream politics of legislatures, elections, political parties and trade unions. And while, with the exception of the period of the Emergency (1975-77), we have witnessed regular elections at all levels (in fact given the endemic instability in the electoral process, the frequency has of late increased), most analysts would agree that the formal representative institutions are in a state of decay. In fact, after the mid-sixties, most political parties have not even held internal elections and have closed down their district and local offices.[3]

> This has resulted in the retreat of democratic institutions from open, competitive politics where they continually sought to establish their claims for legitimation, into the pure politics of power and manoeuvre. In the process, political parties have lost their national character, both in political and geographical terms. Their role in inducting new groups into politics through waging struggles for their legal and political rights has been considerably reduced. Their ability to process issues arising in the economy, society and culture has declined greatly.[4]

The political process which over the first two decades after Independence had worked for the inclusion of middle-castes into mainstream politics halted by the mid-seventies — *ipso facto* excluding from the mainstream significant sections of the *dalits*, the tribals, the backward amongst the Other Backward Castes, and the poor and landless amongst the minorities. The 'excluded' strata were at times of elections approached for votes, their economic issues were ethnicised and communalised for electoral gains — but their struggles for survival and dignity ceased to be issues in mainstream politics. Further, since the populations in question are dispersed and fragmented on many dimensions — class, caste, gender, religious identity, language — they were dismissed by the political parties, including those of the Left, as simply unorganisable. This giving up of the 'movement' aspect of politics not only converted the parties into mere electoral machines, but also ceased to inform the process of government formation and policy making. Even trade unions displayed relative ineptitude in expanding their activities into the informal sectors of the economy.

This shift in larger politics was reflected in the legislatures, with crucial socio-political issues of the poor taking a backseat, the executive becoming the most powerful branch of governance, and the judiciary a final arbiter of all political disputes.

> The political discourse began to be increasingly informed by narrow constitutionalist positions held by the executive and often endorsed by the courts rather than by issues emerging from democratic politics. Even the Indian Constitution, which was held not only as an instrument of governance but also as an agenda for social transformation, became a document sanitised from the flesh and blood of social and political movements which enriched democratic politics.[5]

The flip side of this process of neglect, exclusion and a distorted-manipulative mobilisation by mainstream actors pushed the marginalised populations into a desperate scramble for survival. The endemic growth of extra-legal activities, of criminality and violence leading to a fracturing of civil society, and a breakdown of traditional mores and values that had earlier provided a framework of cohesion, can be traced to this process. So also the spectacular rise of extra-constitutional ethnic and ideological movements.

The emergence of the grassroots movements needs to be located within this context of the larger retreat of institutional politics. Sections of the middle classes, disillusioned by the failures of electoral politics and the inability of various regimes to ensure growth with justice, radicalised by the spate of movements that rocked the country from the mid-sixties to the early seventies, in collaboration with the hitherto dispossessed sought to create new organisations and initiate movements that could move into the niches yielded by the mainstream forces.

Over the last decade and a half, we have seen the growth of sporadic, short-run movements that address specific issues like bonded labour, dowry deaths, etc.; longer term movements with developed organisational forms that relate to a specific constituency like the farmers' movements; the emergence of human rights groups, ecology groups, feminist groups; groups seeking to redefine notions of education, health, culture; issues relating to ethnicity and community identity, focussing particularly on the discriminatory and exclusivist traditions in society buttressed by State policies that affect scheduled castes and tribes, minorities and women. There are groups engaged with issues of displacement and inadequate compensation and rehabilitation of those affected by large 'development' projects; with the appropriation of common property resources by industry and the State, and so on. These social-activist stirrings are often linked to para-professional groups, mainly urban and middle class, who use their skills in networking, training, research and documentation, law, media-communication — all to create national campaigns and public awareness around such issues and sectors.

By taking up issues and constituencies abandoned by the political parties and trade unions and ill-served by the bureaucracy, the activist formations have sought to reformulate the issues and expand their constituencies in a framework that is primarily non-electoral. The organisational form that has evolved is neither that of a political party nor of a pressure group; rather the effort is to evolve a participative and mobilisational form of politics which can sustain struggles on issues articulated by the people themselves and work for their empowerment. In the process they have sought to expand the meaning of constitutional politics by justifying their struggles in terms of the Directive Principles of State Policy — a chapter in the Constitution provisions of which are not justiciable in a court of law.[6]

Notwithstanding the fact that many of these movement groups share common arenas and broadly similar perspectives on social transformation, there is a great deal of variation between them. The differences are with respect to political lineage, size, geographical level of operation, the importance attached to some issues over others, the populations they work for and the organisational

forms they adopt. Nevertheless, all of these thousands of groups which start with involving and mobilising people, on issues that concern them directly, seek to harness the social energies so released towards a long-term movement for transforming the power relations in society.

The context

Before analysing the impact of these diverse stirrings, and thus their potentialities and limitations, what is needed is a clearer appreciation of the environment they operate in. And here a clear distinction needs to be made between the environment the social action groups are located in and the para-professional agencies, the support NGOs.

Micro-Struggles. In all the discussions of Indian democracy and its multitudes of institutions — not just representative, but those of the judiciary and the press — the disjunction between what is theoretically posited and empirically available is rarely appreciated. Nor is the difference that obtains in different parts of the country.

In the areas and the sections of populations that the social-activist formations work with, the congruence between the agencies of the State and the local vested interests is nearly complete. Consequently, except at the margin, they leave little legitimate institutional space available for operation. Thus at one level, the very enormity of problems that the grassroots groups/movements have taken upon themselves or are expected to tackle becomes so great that exhaustion and breakdown are inevitable. It is the inability of the State, the bureaucracy and institutional politics to process these problems into their own arena that creates an overwhelming situation, such that to expect scattered localised efforts to act as buffers between the chaos and violence in society and the neglect if not coercion by the State, is an exercise foredoomed to failure.

The activists of these movements are at one level constantly on the run, spending their time and energy on fire-fighting which leaves little time for reflection and interaction with others. Even limited success at tackling one local issue creates pressures to enter another. Since both issues and power at the local level are highly concentrated, the activist groups face simultaneously a growing complex of issues and concerted resistance from those whose power is being challenged. And though periodically, some help is forthcoming from the more sensitive and concerned sections of the state apparatus — in terms of legitimacy, funds, sometimes direct support and validation, and success, even if limited, does enthuse, fighting constant harassment and coercion tends to be wearying. Just an examination of the number of criminal cases instituted against social activists or their medical histories, would be a good indication of the life they lead.

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As important as the brutality encountered in the local environment is the lack of cohesion and coordination amongst these different efforts. While in itself not unexpected, for after all grassroots micro-stirrings have to be environmentally sensitive and rooted, as issues merge into each other and the need arises for coordination with a wider array of actors, consensus has to be achieved on ideological questions. This is at one level strongly resented by groups zealous in safeguarding their own autonomy, identity and territory. Add to this the fact that voluntarist and spontaneous groups are rarely able to work out a coherent perspective. Bitter quarrels and further fragmentation are thus not unusual.

The need to escape local boundary conditions, of being heard by those who matter, and being able to create an environment more sympathetic to the sets of issues that the social-activist formations are working on, brings to the fore issues related to networking. This process could either be one of lateral coordination with similar groups, linking up with support groups in urban areas, or often a mixture of the two. A quandary arises precisely because while such a move is seen as both desirable and necessary, attempting networking on a weak and divided base marked by suspicion at the bottom creates not only a dissonance, but often implies that the process through which issues are formulated and presented passes onto the non-grassroots para-professional groups and individuals.

Such a process has major implications for the activity on the ground. Often, as against a deepening of grassroots mobilisation and organisation, the focus shifts to efforts at achieving media coverage in a bid to influence the environment and policy processes, a strategic impulse favoured by those somewhat removed from the ground. Increasingly thus, social activist groups get drawn into organising and participating in seminars and workshops, holding press conferences, preparing audio-visuals and films, attempting to intervene via the courts by resorting to public interest litigation, etc. Towards this end, they are drawn into new research and documentation activities, into becoming feeders of information so that a proper case can be made on their behalf.[7]

The most extreme form of distortion comes via an increasing involvement of these groups/movements into a new 'politics of symbolism'. Thus fighting the deep-rooted social inequity exemplified in a lack of access of the 'untouchables' to places of worship, etc., gets transformed into well publicised marches for the liberation of temples. Or equally, struggles for the improvement in the status of widows get reduced to episodic and media focused protests around *sati*. Little do the votaries of this event-based, episodic, media-centered approach realise, that far from highlighting issues or preparing the ground for a more concerted attack on the evils within us, such a politics of symbolism only serves to distort and caricature issues, becoming instead a mere 'politics of rituals'. Often, such a

process only makes the task of those trying to work on a more sustained level at the grassroots, even more difficult.

Support NGOs. Quite unlike the social activist formations at the micro level, whose emergence can be traced to the contradictions at the base of society and the inability of formal State and political structures to meaningfully respond to the survival and dignity issues of the poor and excluded, the phenomena of support NGOs (middle class and mainly urban) which seek to effect a radical transformation of Indian politics and society is relatively recent. Though they too, like all efforts in our society, claim inspiration from earlier attempts during the anti-colonial struggle for social reform and change, effectively they are the offsprings of the post-Emergency phase.

It was essentially in the late seventies that the realisation of the inefficacy of working through official structures in responding to widespread but localised issues of oppression and survival led to a commonality of approach, within both the country and international organisations. From the formal recognition granted to NGOs in the Seventh Five Year Plan, to the shift in the priorities of multilateral, bilateral and private co-financing agencies, the period witnessed a massive escalation of both funding and support to NGO formations.

Not unexpectedly, this change in environment led to a major explosion in the number of NGOs. While a large part of this new munificence was channelised towards conventional charity and developmental organisations, a large residual market was simultaneously created for the NGOs working with a political orientation. Thus new groups, whether working directly with the concerned populace in the field, as support organisations mediating between micro-social action groups, or between them and the State through diverse activities like networking and coordination; social research and documentation; monitoring, evaluation and training; creating pedagogic and media packages to impart information and skills; accessing formal structures; 'preparing' the environment; or lobbying for policy changes, etc. — activities which even two decades back were almost unknown in the NGO world, acquired a new presence. Through seminars and workshops, theatre and films, newsletters and journals — these new groupings with their specialised skills attempted to reach out both to the grassroots and the policy makers. Central to this new enterprise were new ideological debates — on human rights, ecology, feminism and the law — efforts at restructuring the epistemological universe in which meanings are ascribed to political activity.

Some early and noteworthy successes, to name a few: the reformulation of the rape law, the stalling of the forest bill, the national campaign on housing rights, the success at using the new innovation of public interest litigation, the presenting of a private bill on child labour in the Parliament, created a new

excitement. More than the ongoing struggles at the base of society, it was this 'new NGO' effort and its 'success' in reshaping the development and political discourse, that caught the attention of both policy makers and the public.

Without trying to undermine the genuine impulse behind many of these new efforts — networking, coordination and evolving a new ideological crystallisation for understanding and representing the new stirrings in society — it merits recognition that unlike earlier efforts during the anti-colonial struggle, many of these efforts depend strongly on an external infusion of funding, often international. This combination of legitimacy, excitement and relatively easy funding has however led to a range of unforeseen consequences, the primary amongst them being that the internal criteria of self-assessment seem to have been replaced by those sensitive to external donor concerns.[8] More specifically, the availability of larger amounts of easy money, and the shifts in the language of description and analysis have radically redefined the relationship between the 'new NGOs' and the micro social-action groups, and through that, the nature of and discourse on politics.

The shift in the mid-seventies towards NGOs as a favoured entity for funding support owes much to their 'brand distinction' from official agencies. In relative terms, they were seen as locally rooted and environmentally sensitive, flexible, low-cost and honest, and thus proper instruments to 'reach the people'. As however criticism grew of top-down, non-participative approaches to development and democracy, much greater stress started being given to processes that helped in the conscientisation, mobilisation and organisation of the poor and hitherto excluded. It was this new radical impulse that the NGOs were able to successfully capture and tap, bringing to the fore the new spectrum of activities and intervention that have been mentioned earlier.

While many of these changes in the thinking of both the government and the aid establishment was indeed welcome, for it was apparent that the earlier strategies were not working, the massive expansion of the 'grassroots market' invited a 'taking-over' of the new issues, vocabulary and sector of concerns by a new breed of actors. With everyone, from donor governments and agencies, our own governments, the social commentators and the middle class para-professional agencies now finding it lucrative to enter the 'grassroots business', what could be discerned in the process was a hegemonising of the voice of the grassroots, often so mutilating it that it became unrecognisable even to the concerned subjects.[9]

At one level this heightened radicalism led to a purposive devaluation of the notion of service, of doing good, of helping others in need. Consequently, even older voluntary formations which had in the past done stellar work, albeit of a conventional charity and development type, were made to appear as irrelevant,

if not counter-productive. Secondly, this led to a decline in the importance of material interventions in the lives of the poor. Thus, activities like introducing new technologies, a focus on income generation through production, etc., were seen as consolidating the capitalist system, only helping the better off. More importantly, all activities and organisations were now sought to be judged with respect to their political potential and role.

The focus on macro-political concerns was reflected in the efforts towards networking and coordination. This drawing in of local social-action groups into a macro-political frame meant both their rupturing from the base communities, as also an increased importance of the middle class NGO interlocutors, who had the funds, the contacts, the language and the skills to operate successfully in this new political marketplace.

One side implication of this new politics by new actors was a downgrading of the already enfeebled and 'discredited' conventional politics and political parties. Not unexpectedly, this led to a heightened conflict with the political parties, particularly of the Left, who classified the NGOs as 'fifth columnists', operating on behalf of neo-imperialist forces.[10] The challenge to the monopoly over radicalism could not be tolerated. The other was a shift in the perception of the government. While the subtle denunciation of the political parties, particularly of the Left, was probably welcomed, the government was decidedly hostile towards this new NGO constellation emerging as a dissenting force. Consequently, state governments in the mid-eighties attempted to formulate a code of conduct for voluntary agencies, and impose new conditionalities governing the receipt and operation of funds, particularly foreign.

The assumption of this new political role accompanied by radical rhetoric has led to the emergence of new pressures from diverse sources on the NGO sector. At the first level, partly as a result of the new expectations that the NGOs have generated, there is an overloading of demands from the ground. Networking and coordination, combined with servicing grassroots groups and struggles is a complex task. The inability to satisfy these expectations has led to the trading of vilificatory charges — mainly that the NGOs have become corrupt, lazy, used to an easy lifestyle, and distanced from the base communities and groups, much of it unfortunately true. The government, as mentioned earlier, has imposed new restrictive conditionalities.

More surprisingly, unlike what one might expect given the increased popularity of the grassroots orientation, NGOs today are facing a recessionary market. Over time, the competition amongst donor/sponsoring agencies to secure their own catchment areas combined with a progressive radicalisation of language, has led to the criteria and the conditionalities on which finance is available becoming stiffer. Partly this is because, unlike even a decade back,

donors today are more aware of the ground level situation. The increased nativisation of their staff and the greater availability of research based documentation and evaluation implies that they can no longer be taken for granted. In no small measure, their stiffer attitude was helped by indifferent results on the ground. No longer do funding requests for consciousness raising, organisation and support activities meet as receptive an audience.

Today, in the early nineties, the environment for NGOs with a radical orientation appears decidedly bleaker. Under the new IMF directed dispensation, a severe cutback in governmental support is clearly on the agenda. More importantly, the focus of concern has shifted from survival and dignity issues of the poor to global competitiveness and efficiency. If anything, performing creditably in the global capitalist market may imply a crackdown on all 'meddlesome' actors and agencies raising unnecessary issues of justice, equity, survival and sustainability, particularly by trying to organise the oppressed.

This is not to argue, as some indeed have done, that the NGO sector as a whole will vanish from the national scene. It is too large for that to happen. But the changed environment will demand altered language, issues and working styles. With the State under pressure to reduce its fiscal deficit and seeking to offload in the softer areas of social welfare, the conventional NGOs along with a few of the newer research, training and communication groups, are likely to be roped in for programming in sectors like education, health, social forestry, etc. The recent trend of externally assisted projects, located within the governmental apparatus but marked by significant NGO association, is a pointer in this direction. What however seems clear is that at least in the proximate medium term, the political impulse of these efforts, so prominent in the last decade, is likely to get muted.

Impacts

Having described, though briefly, the internal and external environments within which the social action groups and the political NGOs function, we can now turn to an assessment of the impacts of this phenomenon, particularly on how it shapes the construction of democracy in the country.

Most analysts, even those critical of these new tendencies, would admit that these diverse struggles/efforts have to a degree been able to alter the dominant discourse on development and politics in the country. They have both brought new issues on the public political agenda, as also forced rethinking about many of the old issues. The linking up of grassroots struggles with new middle class radicalised formations, though full of pitfalls and weaknesses, even when at times misplaced, has revitalised the flagging democratic spirit and consciousness

in the country. With many more people involved in looking at development and politics, formal structures are forced into greater accountability. Even the cooption by the State of the new language and concerns implies a process of adjustment.

While the above has merited some recognition, it still remains a gaze 'from above'. What is needed, as a complement, is an assessment of the impact of this new stirring on local politics and power structures. Given the fact that social activist formations have primarily focused on the politics of issues, talked about in the Directive Principles of State Policy but neglected by both the officialdom and the political parties, they have, to varying degrees, managed to make the local formal power structures (*panchayats*/bureaucracy) more transparent, accessible and accountable. In certain parts of the country, they have even managed to change the nature of participation by hitherto excluded groups in the formal structures of representation.[11]

More important however, is the incursion of the language and consciousness of 'rights' at the base of society. No longer are relations governed primarily via custom, tradition and obligation. As such, the changing nature of the Indian village, the replacement of the *jajmani* system by market determined contracts, has been responded to by these groups. A greater self-confidence and awareness, accompanied by some successes in handling local problems, all point to a discernible shift in power relations at the local level.

Little of this shift at the base of society may be apparent, at least partly because our gaze is focused more on the macro-environment, where large and spectacular shifts rather than the struggles of everyday resistance catch our attention. At the level of relating to and influencing macro-political formations, these struggles have not been very successful. Nor have they been able to emerge as a larger nationwide political movement by forging coalitions, alliances and mergers amongst themselves. While this may explain the relative invisibility of this politics, or its relative inefficacy in influencing electoral behaviour, such an analysis misses out on the fact that for many of these formations, there is a rejection of the capture of State power as a route to social transformation. In their self-assessment, a premature and excessive concern about capturing State power suppresses the real issues of politics and social transformation, distorts the priorities in struggle, and gives rise to authoritarian tendencies within the organisations of these movements. If anything, the long term goal of economic and political decentralisation can only be achieved through changing the forms of organisations and building people's own capabilities. Such changes, if achieved in the broader society and culture, may ultimately result in the transformation of the State itself.[12]

Functioning away from mainstream politics, focusing on issues of survival and dignity, organising for winning rights and changing the consciousness of people, the micro movements often come into confrontation with the State, bureaucracy, the local power structures, even the political parties and trade unions. The conventional response to such situations is to compete for the legitimacy claims of the prevalent systems by either organising for elections or working for a revolutionary overthrow of State power. Instead, most social action groups have emphasised the process of 'withdrawal of legitimation', by separating themselves from the institutions of mainstream politics and devoting their energies to building people's own organisations.

This does not mean that they are opposed to the institutional framework of Indian democracy. Rather they see formal democracy as a necessary but insufficient condition in the long haul towards social transformation. This, they believe, can take place if the main battleground is shifted from mainstream politics into society and culture. Only then can further democratisation be achieved — not only of the political institutions, but of the family, the community, the workplace — in short, the society at large.

Some concluding comments

In the first week of August 1992, select representatives of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), a broad based coalition of social action groups, NGOs and individuals committed to stopping the large, multi-purpose river valley project on the Narmada river, met with their various supporters to review the progress of their movement.[13] Through the decade of the eighties, what had initially started out as a struggle for 'fair compensation to and just rehabilitation of' the project affected people in a few of the villages notified for submergence, has grown into a unique, widespread movement against destructive development. The coalition of groups spans from local organisations of those adversely affected by this large project, to groups of lawyers, civil rights activists, ecological groups, technologists, researchers, media and communication groups, etc. — not just in the region but across the country, even internationally.

Inspite of the long tradition of viewing large dams as 'the temples of modern India', as the only way in which a country such as ours can harness its river water resources to multiple uses, this 'movement' has managed to keep a critical debate on such projects on center-stage. It has not only managed extensive media coverage, or spawned half-a-dozen documentaries, but has forced the government and the different co-financing agencies to revise the extant formats of cost-benefit analysis by bringing in social, cultural and ecological impacts as also substantially upwardly revising the terms governing compensation and rehabilitation of project affected people. The major external donor, the World

Bank, was forced into appointing a Commission under Bradford Morse, which strongly pilloried both the government, and the World Bank for being environmentally and culturally destructive, and pleaded for a fresh, comprehensive appraisal of the project. The August meeting of the NBA was held in the wake of the Morse Report.

What one encountered was no feeling of euphoria. Rather, the dominant mood was grim, even dejected. For, having exhausted all avenues of dissent and criticism, linked up and networked across the spectrum — from local groups all the way to the World Bank — the end result was a firm rejection of the NBA's major demand to stop further construction at the dam site till a fresh appraisal could be carried out. Significant in understanding the intransigence of the government is the fact that no political party, ruling or otherwise, across the political spectrum, has so far supported the demands of the NBA.

Even more distressing are the prospects of this unique coalition, centered around the Narmada project but simultaneously addressing similar issues around the country, falling apart. With the possibility of stopping the dam construction having declined, many of the project affected people are now resigned to seeking at least some compensation. In some places, they even blame the 'movement leadership' of leading them up the garden path, of being too purist in their demands, and thus getting them nothing at all. With this dwindling away of the support base, the elaborate 'superstructure' of support groups stands to lose its legitimacy. Even the various issues the movement has raised may be marginalised.

Even without an analysis of the reasons behind the 'lack of success' (and there are many strategic and tactical mistakes made by the NBA which can be pointed out), this brief outline of a long, complex and continuing struggle pithily illustrates the fate of grassroots and NGO politics in the country. It is undeniable that the debate on large development projects, particularly dams, will ever be the same again. Nor will it be easy for the government to push through easily another such scheme. It is also likely that the project affected people will get better compensation. But assessed against its primary objective, the movement remains a failure. It failed to acquire the necessary clout in an open representational system. With no support from the political parties, and no possibility of the NBA fielding candidates successfully, even in the affected region (possibly because it eschewed formal politics) it was unable to adequately 'mainstreamise' itself. 'These struggles do matter, but often not in the manner that either the participants or the antagonists thought they would'.

This brief description of one recent struggle has also tried to indicate some of the major fallacies in the conventional approaches to the study and analysis of these 'movements'. At one level, the relatively open and democratic system

in the country, with all its weaknesses and distortions, has institutionalised a legitimation criterion for politics. A movement must acquire representational clout for it to be taken seriously. Non electoral political struggles, even when they appear strong, remain essentially at the margin, often not responded to, unless they turn violent. On the other hand, the same system permits enough hearing and operating space for them to function, and through slow and osmotic processes, alter the terms of political discourse in the country.

To freeze these ongoing and evolving processes into categories like reformist or revolutionary, even success or failure, is to both miss the essence of these efforts and stirrings as also to dampen the processes contributing towards a deeper democratisation of State and society. Equally facile in some ways are the different debates on the co-option of these struggles by either the State or co-financing agencies. Without trying to minimise the potentially deleterious implications of the shifts in the larger environment or the relative inability of these efforts to read and respond efficaciously to market signals, the ever existent gap between aspirations and reality as also the emergence of new issues on the political agenda, create a continuing ground for such struggles and movements. From local self-help to organising for redressal and change, there is little likelihood of these stirrings dying out. Whether or not these stirrings for building the base of our evolving society will ever acquire a significant presence — and the likelihood is that in the absence of a macro-aggregation these efforts will remain scattered and isolated — we must never lose sight of them. For more than other efforts, it is they who provide a basis for hope.

Notes

1. D.L. Sheth and Harsh Sethi, "The NGO Sector in India: Historical Context and Current Discourse," *Voluntas*, No. 2/2, 1991.

2. Many examples could be cited wherein debates on ongoing struggles between self-proclaimed spokespersons, rather than bringing to the surface differing dimensions of a complex reality, have instead taken partisan positions and through building up 'heroes and villains' have both widened the differences between different strands of the struggle/movement as also imposed new agendas. The debate on the Chipko movement, J. Bandopadhyaya and V. Shiva, "The Chipko Movement", *Seminar*, February 1987; R. Guha, "Communications", *Seminar*, June 1987; Bandopadhyaya and Shiva, "Reply", *Seminar*, August 1987 is a good reflection of the former. The process through which the struggles against displacement in the Narmada Valley were sought to be subsumed in a 'No Big Dam Movement', thereby resulting in splits and a trading of charges between those struggling for just rehabilitation and those opposed to the dam, well illustrates the latter tendency. Some of these processes have been sketched out in

Harsh Sethi, "Some Considerations on Ecológical Struggles in India", *Asian Exchange*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1988.

3. The literature on the state of Indian politics is immense. Of particular note are the writings of Rajni Kothari put together in a five volume set, *State Against Democracy, Transformation and Survival, Rethinking Development, Politics and the People* (2 volumes), Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1988/1989.

   A recent book by Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent*, University Press, Cambridge, 1990, through a comparative study of the Congress Party organisation in the mid-sixties and the mid-eighties, provides a striking illustration of the breakdown of the party system.

4. D.L. Sheth, "Politics of Social Transformation: Grassroots Movements in India," Lecture delivered at the University of Hull, Summer 1991.

5. Sheth, *ibid*.

6. For a detailed account of the history of one such group, see Primila Lewis, *Social Action and the Labouring Poor*, Sage Publications, Delhi, 1991. Also useful in this context is Anil Bhatt, *Development and Social Justice*, Sage Publications, Delhi, 1989.

7. Harsh Sethi, "The Politics of Grassroots Movements", *Denouement*, September-October 1992.

8. On the implications of external funding, see Suresh Sharma, "Voluntary Efforts and Institutional Funding", *Lokayan Bulletin*, Vol. 5:2, 1987.

9. The hijacking, distortion and caricature through the imperialism of language and categories of description is rarely attended to. A hilarious account of this process is provided by novelist Tom Wolfe in *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers*, Cardinal, Sphere Books Ltd., London, 1989. The account would be funnier still, if it wasn't so true, though unfortunately nothing comparable on the sociology of the home-based radical chic has been attempted. A fascinating though caricatured analysis of the functioning of human rights groups, which emerged on the national scene in a big way after the State crackdown on the Maoist movement in the late sixties-early seventies, is provided by Professor Upendra Baxi. While more than commending the role of the various human rights groups in keeping the 'flag flying' in the face of both massive violation of human rights by the State and a vilificatory campaign launched by it, accusing all human rights groups as anti-national, he points to the disturbing prevalence of a praxis that focuses on the episodic and spectacular, almost deliberately eschewing serious and sustained work which might lead to institutional reform. He goes as far as to characterise such activity as marked by a 'libidinal fascination with the pathology of power', 'an ambivalence if not a fear that the reform of the State will lead to a dissolving of their agendas'. As such, the actual relief that victim groups might legitimately expect from the activities of the human rights groups remains low, leading to an erosion of their faith in human rights activism.

   While in the main, human rights activism does not draw upon international funding, it does seem to draw sustenance from a national/global human rights constituency which highlights their reports. In effect, as long as such coverage is available, it feeds into the narcissistic, self-obsessed and overly-radical praxis of the human rights groups, thereby downgrading the importance of the validation they must continually seek from the victim groups in whose name they operate. It is such praxis, as much as the attacks by the State or the increasing impatience of the middle classes with activism that constrains efforts at maintaining law and order, that is responsible both for the marginalisation of human rights groups as also the downgrading of public support to the cause of human rights today.

   As important as the implication of our (read the analyst's) language and categories on the actual struggles, are the dangers posed by a universalisation of radical discourse, most apparent in the

literature on ecology, feminism and ethnicity. As one of my colleagues wrote, "There is today a 'universalising' streak in Western feminism, based on the Western historical experience and perspectives, which views social processing of gender differences by other cultures almost uniformally as manifesting real or potential sexism. Backed by the power and credo of Western feminism, it also distorts the priorities of feminist movements elsewhere, who may view differences — not only between male-female but adult-child and adult-aged — in a manner which may not align with the dominant thinking in the Western movements. The issues, such as of sexism, are real and worldwide but not yet 'globalised' or 'universalised' for such treatment i.e., if they could ever be. This is true not only for feminism/sexism but also for such issues as 'globalising democracy' or achieving a global ecological regime. Consequently, a variety of solutions, emanating from this new 'universalising' credo of the Western movements have been let loose on the movements — activists the world over; solutions which are in search of problems. And these are readily fielded by a special breed of globally oriented activists in our parts of the world; they do their best in inventing problems to suit the 'global solutions'." (Private correspondence between D.L. Sheth and R.B.J. Walker, December 1991).

10. The charge that NGOs are part of a new imperialist conspiracy has been most cogently argued by Prakash Karat, a Politburo Member of the CPI(M). See *Foreign Funding and the Philosophy of Voluntary Organisations: A Factor in Imperialist Strategy*, National Book Center, New Delhi, 1988. Not that I agree with his analysis.

11. See G.K. Leiten, "Class, Gender and Caste in Panchayats: Case of Barddhaman, West Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 July 1992. It is however apparent that Leiten underplays the role of earlier particularly Naxalite struggles, and the work of various NGOs in pushing the CPI(M) into taking panchayat politics seriously.

This process, also evident in parts of Orissa, Maharashtra and Karnataka can, however, be contrasted with the situation in other regions where democratic space at the local level has not opened up sufficiently. In some of these regions, notably the Agency Areas of Andhra Pradesh, a vigorous revolutionary movement has sought to occupy the space in civil society. Notwithstanding intense repression over the last two decades, it has survived. The long-term prospects of the movement running a 'parallel State' are however unclear.

12. An extremely sympathetic account may be seen in Arthur Bonner, *Averting the Apocalypse*, Duke University Press, 1991.

13. As a sample see *Lokayan Bulletin* Vol. 9:3/4, 1991 (Special Issue on the Narmada Struggle).

Democratic alternatives:
A perspective from Eastern Europe

Radmila Nakarada

In the face of dramatic global changes, freshly awakened hopes have quickly given way to a new despair. The achievement of past aspirations, especially for détente between the superpowers and the dismantling of authoritarian socialist regimes, has led to painful setbacks and new oppressions. Amidst these new turbulences and complexities, it is necessary to reemphasize the pressing importance of democracy. For democracy remains a problem in all societies, those that have just begun to work toward it and those in which democratic institutions and civil rights are already established. The problem is common but not uniform, for different societies encounter special difficulties. At the same time, it is necessary to be aware that existing forms of democracy are not the ultimate solution, and that the task facing other societies is not simply to imitate existing institutional forms and normative conceptions.

Moreover, contemporary forms of political and social repression have an unmistakably global dimension. Oppression is both a cause of revolt and an object of indifference in all parts of the world. In this century, the most extreme forms of oppression have resulted in the death of millions from brutal torture and from mass starvation. The combination of indifference as a form of aggression and aggression as a form of indifference has dramatically challenged the morality of world civilization. It touches upon the least accessible mysteries of social experience.

The paradox of the present global situation is the fact that we are simultaneously witnessing an almost universal upsurge of movements and democratic institutions and the expansion and modification of power as a force of subjugation, control, and exclusion. On the one hand, the structures of power have expanded to become omnipresent globally, nationally, and locally. The autonomy of even the most powerful states has become circumscribed by global power structures that have become one of the key factors determining crucial policy decisions and the fate of oppressed groups. Here it is only necessary to recall the effect of IMF austerity policies on mass unemployment, extreme polarisation and pauperisation, and the "encouragement of continuing

devastation of third world ecosystems in exchange for participation in the global economy."[1] Within states, these structures of power have become hydra-headed, involving a vast network of interlocking and mutually reinforcing hierarchies. Power is becoming more informal and invisible, forming strategic centres and parallel institutions beyond the reach of the democratic order. It is felt even in the routines of everyday life, blurring consciousness, alienating needs, and anesthetizing the senses. On the other hand, modern structures of power generate new forms of exclusion. Impoverished classes, entire regions, and people with technologically or economically obsolete skills are declared redundant.

This simultaneous globalisation and dispersion of modern power structures has significantly eroded existing democratic institutions and established human rights. Accounts of democracy elaborated two centuries ago are unable to respond adequately to new historical conditions, while at the same time, existing democratic processes have proved adept at absorbing critical initiatives and adapting just enough to preserve existing forms of domination.

Nevertheless, in spite of the extension and dispersion of modern power, the human community remains an extremely mysterious creature, as Vaclav Havel would say, preserving hidden strengths to resist, to invent, and to think alternatively. The "power of the powerless"[2] lies in the slow accumulation of new ideas, in the creation of new patterns of everyday life, in the initiation of new forms of self-organisation, thereby creating small streams of otherness that may in time constitute an alternative society within the existing one and replace the ambition to conquer power with the promotion of a more humane life. This alternative logic has now been curtailed as a result of the disintegration of several Eastern European societies in spite of political democratisation. It has also been curtailed because of the compromises made by representatives of the powerless when gaining power and when resorting to classical party politics, and because of the overwhelming ability of the developed countries to defend and preserve the existing order and their privileged position within it. While it has been curtailed, however, it has not been extinguished.

The western scene

While the main problems with democracy may not be those now confronting western societies, these societies do participate in the general drama of democracy. Several aspects of western democracies are especially worth noting:

1. From the outset, political rights have been privileged over economic and social rights. This has become especially important at a time when the problem of social rights is becoming more acute. In the United States, for example, housing

has become a problem for more than ten million people, and is certainly not treated as a guaranteed basic right. In the UK, the Thatcher government effectively dismantled the welfare state. The west Germans were recently surprised to learn that four million of their own citizens were impoverished and living on welfare. In Scandinavia, where social needs are treated with greater respect, there is little participation in the major economic decisions that affect people's lives.

2. Existing democratic institutions are being eroded by new forms of hidden power, often in the name of state security. Censorship and police harassment have become more overt. In some places, notably the United States, two-party electoral systems work against any genuine pluralism and encourage massive apathy.

3. Participation at the national level in dramatic global issues of war and peace, the planetary environment, or the global economy — issues which have major impacts on people's lives — is severely restricted by prevailing democratic procedures.

4. The treatment of human rights and democracy is subject to a pervasive double standard at the international level. For example, western countries have had a considerable influence on the treatment of human rights in Eastern Europe, linking cooperation and economic assistance to the fulfillment of these rights. Thus, the European Parliament discontinued its trade relations with Romania as a result of the abuse of human and minority rights under Ceausescu. But at the same time, quite different criteria were applied when authoritarian regimes in Latin America were in question. Similarly, in the postauthoritarian phase of Eastern European development, questions of human rights are complexly related to those of national self-determination. There is a tendency to ignore the current political context and encourage extremist forces, thereby contributing to the intensification of disintegrative conflicts. The right of Kosovo, Slovenia, or the Baltic republics to secede is treated as legitimate while that of, say, Corsica or the Basques, is not. On the one hand, the west sincerely promotes the principles of liberty and human rights, and on the other it instrumentalises these principles for its own geostrategic interests.

Oppression within the social and economic realm highlights the problem of inequity and injustice in western societies. Under conditions of Cold War, the drama of deprivation amidst prosperity was pushed into the background. The dismal situation in the authoritarian societies offered a perfect excuse to resist reform in the west. Now the situation is changing, even if the Gulf War has revealed a powerful resistance to any alteration in western expectations or ways of life.

The collapse of the Soviet Union as a superpower has opened up a struggle for global hegemony led by the United States. This struggle may develop in several possible directions. The complete breakdown of the Soviet Union may be encouraged as a precondition of a new global order. Old tensions between the United States and Europe may be reactivated, thereby also reactivating tensions between old rivals in Europe. Attempts to establish a new global hegemony entail struggles against regional hegemonies, especially in areas rich with resources, as in the Gulf War. If the Middle East were merely a region of figs and not oil, certainly the US-led intervention on behalf of Kuwait would not have reached such proportions, becoming a critical collision between north and south as well as Muslim and Christian.

The German question also has global implications. The collapse of the Eastern European bloc, and the processes of democratisation that have led to the demolition of the Berlin Wall, has resulted in the rapid reunification of Germany. Yet this reintegration largely took the form of an *anschluss*, an incorporation of East Germany rather than an organic or democratic reunification. This may well strengthen extreme-conservative forces in both parts of the new Germany. If the creation of a united Europe reproduces the German experience, the basis for future instability and conflict will be laid, and all European democratisation will be endangered. Western states are primarily interested in the political democratisation of the East, offering various formulas to be implemented in spite of the fact that these political projects often surpass even the level attained in their own societies. At the same time, they are very slow to offer adequate financial assistance to ease the economic crisis that is in fact undermining stable democratisation in Eastern Europe. This hesitation may turn out to be a crucial indirect support for the antireformist forces, and thus another challenge to both European and global stability.

The East European scene

The recent upheavals in Eastern Europe are in many ways instructive for the general problematic of democratisation. The lessons to be drawn from the Eastern European experiences, however, are not mutually consistent. These experiences speak eloquently of "the power of the powerless" and their role in initiating processes of democratisation. But at the same time they reveal the shortcomings of the democratic processes that have been implemented. Many problems remain beyond the grasp of these processes, especially in the economic sphere, and safeguards against the instrumentalisation of democracy by authoritarian actors remain weak. Moreover, these new democratic processes express the disturbing implications of new dramas arising from the reconstruction of political life.

The "revolutionary spring" in Eastern Europe has suddenly brought unexpected and far-reaching changes to what seemed like frozen, immovable, and bureaucratically rigid societies. The pluralist forces of life that had been held captive by authoritarian states rushed to the surface. The actors of civil society demonstrated remarkable capabilities; accumulated wisdom, moral legitimacy, and — with the exception of Romania — nonviolent methods in the dismantling of powerful state structures. As Charter 77 spokesman Jan Urban describes the spirit of the Czechoslovakian velvet revolution:

> [Nonviolence] was the beginning and the end, it was everything. It was the most basic slogan of [the revolution]. We said in the first moments of this uprising that the side which uses violence is the old regime, and he who throws the first stone in a demonstration is a provocateur. And we shall win with nonviolence. So when you think that there were hundreds of thousands of people in the streets in a very dramatic moment, and there was not a single shop window broken, it makes me proud. When we found out that the police were not able to stop us, it was not easy. We told the people that nonviolence is our strategy, and it was enough. There were half a million people in the biggest demonstration. People just knew what was needed, and it was nonviolence.[3]

The initial dismantling of the authoritarian political order, the implementation of the principle of self-limitation, was made possible by, among other things, the emergence of the so-called "parallel societies". Alternative culture, unofficial publishing *samizdat*, political clubs, human rights groups, and independent trade unions: All created a network of civic initiatives, islands of openness and communications contributing to citizens' self-confidence, thereby reaffirming the principle of moral consistency and building bridges of solidarity between classes (as with Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) and Solidarity) and between national and international movements (especially peace and human rights movements). These parallel societies rediscovered the importance of individual responsibility as a source of empowerment: "Living within the truth, as humanity's revolt against an enforced position, is ... an attempt to regain control over one's own sense of responsibility."[4]

Events certainly proved the strength and importance of these parallel structures. Yesterday's prisoners became heads of state and members of governments. The "power of the powerless", the individual revolt against ideological distortions,[5] exclusions, atomisation, apathy and irresponsibility became one of the pillars of a new beginning, a national search for a new democratic identity. "The recent period — the past six weeks of our peaceable revolution in particular — has shown that an enormous human, moral and considerable civic culture had been slumbering in our nation under the enforced

mask of apathy."[6] Democracy became the main task, the unifying aim, and the beginning of a new chapter of history.

The initial moment of euphoria, the feeling of political and national renaissance, and the reawakening of the best traditions quickly gave way to confusion, disappointment and even despair. The pressure of an all encompassing social crisis, the full impact of economic devastation, the explosion of previously subdued national conflicts, the difficulties in breaking away from the more subtle forms of inherited authoritarianism, notably in gender relations,[7] have accelerated uncertainties about the direction of development. Rumours of coups, evidence of economic breakdown, and violent national confrontations are signs of dramatic objective circumstances that demand a very careful consideration of the policy of development that is to be implemented. This is where a dramatic arena of catastrophic "misreadings," simplifications and onesidedness is now opening.

New dramas

The field of new dramas is circumscribed by mind-boggling problems and a set of illusions about the character of the new society and the possibilities of its realisation. Three illusions that have become especially influential may be noted first.

Although it often appears unproblematic, the aim of a pluralistic society is not self-evident. On the contrary, it is best understood as a space of continuing conflicts between two extremist and sectarian viewpoints. Through one ideological lens, the new system is viewed exclusively as a "new socialism" or a "democratic socialism" (the stand taken by the leadership of the Socialist Party in Serbia and the Communist Party in the Soviet Union) even though the new economic or political order incorporates many of the achievements of capitalism such as labour and capital markets and mass reprivatisation. Through another lens, the new society is seen exclusively as a return to an "old capitalism," in spite of the fact that modern capitalism has evolved through the social struggles of labour and social-democratic movements and has incorporated important aspects of social welfare. Rather than realising that a modern pluralistic society involves a combination of different principles and social logics and the establishment of a more fruitful sense of proportion between, say, state and market, entrepreneurship and public property, competition and solidarity, or parliamentary and participatory democracy, the discussion of possible options is turned into unnecessary social confrontations. In this context, the outcome for many Eastern European societies may well be an undesirable combination of nineteenth century capitalism and authoritarian socialism. Misunderstanding

both their own experience and the experience of the developed countries, they will then enter a new phase of peripheralisation.

A second illusion stems from the idea of an automatic and harmonious transition to a new system as a consequence of liberating commodity production and the market from the state. Working with simplified and quite unrealistic assumptions about existing social structures, and in the context of widespread impatience for rapid change, this illusion is unleashing disintegrative energies and disrupting the possibility of establishing the necessary social consensus for irreversible transformation.

Third, appeals to a common ambition for a pluralistic society obscure the possibility that a wide range of options is possible, from those represented by Sweden to those represented by Chile. The achievement of these options depends on responses to major challenges: on whether economies will be restructured by completely dismantling the social state and encouraging chaotic reprivatisation; on whether the reorganisation of states, especially federal states, will be based on uncivilized responses to ethnic and nationalist conflicts; and on whether political reforms will succeed in creating democratic institutions and establishing a broad new consensus, or will inspire social revanchism. The character of these responses will depend on the wisdom and capability of key actors. Unfortunately, many of these actors are simply reproducing old assumptions under a new ideological veil.

Despite the influence of these illusions, it is clear that future possibilities depend on a more sustained response to three groups of very serious problems.

First, the transition from command economies to mixed market economies is taking the shape of destructive inflation, mass unemployment, shortages, pauperisation, and the severe polarisation of groups and classes. New inequalities replace the old. The fruits of development reach only a privileged minority while the majority of workers, women, youth, and the intelligentsia are becoming victims of unemployment and pauperisation on a grand scale. The price of new development may be unavoidable but the question of who pays remains open. To ignore this problem is to be confronted with several equally undesirable options: social unrest among the politically liberated and radicalised masses; some combination of neo-Stalinism and neoliberalism, a partial liberalisation of the economy, and the disciplining of cheap labour by force; or protracted economic agony. Consequently, it is necessary to develop far more complex economic strategies than reprivatisation and the encouragement of foreign capital in order to encourage the broad reformist coalition required for effective change.

The success or failure of any reforms depends to a large extent upon the west. It is possible that the establishment of new democratic processes will proceed

more rapidly than the creation of a viable market economy. The revitalisation of economic life, which is presently on the brink of collapse, is not possible without economic aid from the west. In the long run, it also requires the transformation of existing economic relations and the ending of gross indebtedness.

The second arena of objective contradictions involves the eruption of ethnic and national conflicts throughout the Soviet Union, Central Europe, and especially Yugoslavia. Paradoxically, the pluralistic revolution has reignited explosive national conflicts, and there are indications that this phenomenon will continue as societies undergo reforms in the future, notably in Albania. These old conflicts are becoming the central barrier to any new social evolution, even threatening the very existence of societies like the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

Multinational societies are living ethnic mosaics, shaped by two dynamics of unusual power and duration: forces of unification, creating common and more powerful communities, notably states; and forces of disintegration, awakening old antagonisms. In itself, the heterogeneity of nations, faiths, or cultures is not a fatal destiny. It can enhance the creative potential of a pluralistic society. When the old centralised political order is rapidly dismantled, however, or when the democratisation process is institutionally weak, unstable, inconsistent, and unsupported by a developed democratic culture, old antagonisms are easily awakened. Moreover, new antagonisms are likely to be created, especially where political legitimation comes to depend on appeals to national sovereignty or where particular groups are made the scapegoat for economic failures.[8]

Some of the societies of "actually existing socialism" are essentially political societies, formed more by political scissors than by social or cultural integration. In such cases, national relations oscillate between two extremes: social integration based on rigorous centralisation and the erasure of national autonomy; or autonomy, which is easily transformed into extreme separatism, into the struggle for "ethnically pure territories" or new dreams of past glories. "Today we have conquered Germany, tomorrow the whole world," is the message of an extremist group in what used to be East Germany. "Transylvania is ours, hell is yours," is the message of extremist Romanian nationalists to the Hungarian ethnic minority. The tragic combination of the struggle for one's own emancipation and the violence directed towards the "other" has found a particularly grim expression in the treatment of Yerevanians in Baku. Yugoslavia is a glaring example of the misuse of national sentiments in both the perpetuation of communist rule (Serbia) and challenges to it (Slovenia and Croatia). The result is a torn country on the brink of civil war.

Problems of national emancipation are especially difficult in an era of global transformations. The belated formation of national identities within

multinational societies, especially if it takes the form of dissolution into independent sovereign states, belongs more to the nineteenth than the late twentieth century. A more appropriate resolution requires a capacity for "unity in diversity," but this formula leaves many questions unanswered. It is not clear, for example, how it might be possible to reconcile the legitimate protection of national identity with the development of global political processes, or the legitimate right to self-determination and secession with the Helsinki Principle concerning the unalterability of existing boundaries.

The third arena involves the claims of political democracy, the absolute condition for the revitalisation of the life of societies, and the liberation of their full creativity. No class, party, or movement on its own possesses the ability to create a new pluralistic society. This ability belongs to a multitude of actors. However, the possibility of dialogue, consensus, and alliances for reform is constantly threatened by social revanchism, fragmentation of new political actors, "disintegrative pluralism," and new forms of authoritarianism.

Revanchism has strong but invisible sources in societies formed by violent revolutions, civil war, intervention, and authoritarian terror. Attempts to uphold moral and legal responsibility for the members of the regime who initiated, organised, and used inhuman methods is to be expected. However, the spirit of mass revanchism may bring a society to the brink of civil war. Too many people are involved to permit any simple justice. In Romania, for example, almost every fourth citizen worked in some way as an informer for the Securitate. Proposals have been made in the name of democracy to proclaim the Communist Party illegal, both in Czechoslovakia and in Romania (where one-fifth of the population belonged to it). These proposals were not accepted, but they are symptomatic. Fear has only changed sides: "Yesterday we were afraid, now they are afraid." In this context, justice must be sought more by compensating the victims than by punishing the guilty.

One way to avoid the danger of revanchism is to entrench the rules of the parliamentary game and free elections, to develop the capability for coalitions and broad historical alliances in order to place the interest of the society above the interest of particular parties. This means renouncing extremism and the illusion that the society is once again beginning anew, that the whole heritage of the "social state" is to be cast overboard. A democratic alliance created on this basis can become an effective dam against the mass eruption of a new conservatism, whether an anticommunist totalitarianism, nationalism, fundamentalism, or anti-Semitism. At the same time, the prevention of such eruptions is necessary to insure a greater stability of the democratic institutions that have been established.

Despite prevalent optimistic expectations, the present experience of democracy occasions considerable foreboding. This is especially the case in view of the strength of conservative and even militarised nationalist movements (in Croatia, paramilitary forces have been formed) and the depth of the economic crisis in Eastern Europe. Moreover, the west seems unprepared to accept many of the social consequences of democratisation, as indicated, for example, by its reaction to waves of immigration. Ideological triumphalism is preventing the constructive economic action needed to preserve and enhance the initial seeds of democratisation. Options are misread, imbalances are created: abolishing the Warsaw Pact, for example, while preserving NATO and even incorporating East Germany and Hungary into it. New fronts of violence are being opened in order to preserve the privileges of developed countries. The power of the powerful is reasserted by outright economic and military supremacy. Consequently, the new era seems likely to be much more one of conflict and chaos than was expected after the spring of Eastern Europe and détente. Even so, even the gloomiest of perspectives cannot justify ending the search for alternatives, for agents and institutions of peace and welfare that can be linked into new coalitions of truth, morality and sanity.

Alternative actors and institutions

Alternatives are embedded in the historical experiences of movements and in their conscious efforts to preserve and revitalise them. They derive from attempts to generalise some particular experiences and from the extension of some classical democratic procedures to the transnational arena. For it is impossible to overcome political and social oppression without citizen's participation both nationally and internationally. The rights and responsibilities of citizens to participate in transnational arenas result not only from the general principles of liberty but also from the character of existing problems and the emergence of new forms of power. Without attempting to construct a complete inventory, it seems reasonable to propose that the following initiatives may become increasingly important in this respect:

1. Given the extent to which ecological devastation has become such a widely recognised problem globally, it is possible to envisage some integration among dispersed green movements, reformist and ecologically aware segments of ruling parties, and independent citizens, and perhaps even the creation of some kind of transnational Green Parliament.

2. The possibility of enabling citizen participation in the politics of peace has been set in motion by, for example, the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly and has been affirmed by a similar initiative constituted in Prague in October 1990 as "a permanent forum of the public at which peace and civic groups as well as

individuals and institutions representing a broad spectrum of views can exchange experiences, discuss common concerns, and, where possible, formulate joint campaigns and strategies."

3. Economic life offers many opportunities for innovative action: revitalising the idea of economic democracy and self-management; reconstituting economic rights as an aspect of human rights; creating alternative financial institutions; organising for transnational solidarity, perhaps to assist poorer countries who refuse to pay high interest rates charged on their credits.

4. In the sphere of education, there remains ample need to challenge sexist, racist, and ethnic biases in curricula, as well as a need for regional universities — a Central European University is being established — and for a network of research institutes devoted to the establishment of democratic alternatives.

5. In the sphere of ethnic relations, it should be possible to secure a more effective "unity in diversity" through the nonviolent reconstitution of existing models of federation and confederation.

6. In the sphere of politics, alternative possibilities are apparent in several dimensions:
   - constitutional changes to accommodate new rights;
   - changes to international law so as to permit citizens and movements to appeal to the World Court;
   - establishing direct democracy on both national and international issues;
   - forming transnational parties, such as the Transnational Radical Party;
   - organising conferences of the Helsinki type for other regions of the world;
   - forming coalitions of movements, parties, and trade unions.

The concept of the defense of human beings that was at the core of the East European human rights movement could be enlarged to encompass social rights. At the same time, the defense of human beings who are undergoing the severest deprivations could become the object of practical defense initiatives that would replace merely verbal solidarities. States could be taken to courts, companies could be sued, and links could be established between international agencies and movements. Such movements for the defense of the oppressed on a transnational scale might begin with an understanding of deprivation in one's own country, for mobilising support for the eradication of social and political oppression in one's own country is the best basis for developing an active understanding of misery in other regions of the world, and an interest in eradicating it. An additional effort can be made to inform marginalised populations about their constitutional and civil rights, as has happened among groups of women in Latin America and Southeast Asia.

All of this may seem weak, pale, and insignificant. Perhaps it is. However, as long as there are people who remain powerless but unreconciled to their powerlessness, there will also be those who will continue searching for modes of appropriate, effective, and responsible intervention.

Notes

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1. Donald Snow, "Ecology Wars," *Nuclear Times* 8:1, 47.

2. Vaclav Havel, et al., *The Power of the Powerless* (New York: M.E. Sharp, 1985).

3. Jan Urban interview, *Humanitas* 1 (1990):8.

4. Vaclav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*, p. 45.

5. Vaclav Havel emphasized that Charter 77 drew its strength from the truth it articulated by being a mirror for the society; Havel, interview, *East European Reporter* 4:1 (1989/1990):3.

6. Vaclav Havel, "New Year's Day Address," *East European Reporter* 4:1 (1989/1990):56.

7. Witness recent attempts to introduce anti-abortion laws in most of these countries.

8. This can take extraordinary forms: witness the revival of anti-Semitism in Poland, where few Jewish people remain.

Preliminary Verdict

Permanent Peoples' Tribunal on Industrial and Environmental Hazards and Human Rights, third session

Bombay, India, 24 October 1992

Editor's note: The following is excerpted from the draft verdict of the third session of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal on Industrial and Environmental Hazards and Human Rights that was held in Bhopal and Bombay on 19-24 October 1992. The final verdict of the Bhopal session will be available in early 1993. The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) which is based in Rome was approached by the International Coalition for Justice in Bhopal (ICJIB) and subsequently by the International Network of Victims of Corporate and Government Abuse (INVOCGA) to hold a series of hearings that would allow victims of industrial hazards to voice their case. The session in Bhopal and Bombay was the third in a series which will hold its final session in Europe in 1993.

Formed in 1979 as the successor of the Bertrand Russell war crimes tribunal, the PPT is an international body that examines violations of the rights of people and suggests remedies for such violations. The Tribunal sends its findings to the United Nations Human Rights Commission and other national and international bodies. Most recently, the Tribunal has heard cases of human rights abuses in Guatemala and by the World Bank/IMF.

The India session heard testimonies of victims from 13 countries. The specific cases involved radioactive waste dumping by the Asian Rare Earth factory in Malaysia, the Union Carbide gas leak in Bhopal, the US use of Agent Orange in its war against Vietnam, asbestosis in India, a chemical explosion in a fur factory in Hong Kong and occupational accidents in small factories in Taiwan. Those corporations and governments accused of human rights violations were also invited to present their case, but not a single one responded to the invitation. Victims from Malaysia and a judge from Pakistan were refused visas by the Government of India.

The panel of judges included Dr. Rosalie Bertel (Canada), Professor Toshiyuki Tanaka (Japan), Professor A.R. Desai (India), Dr. M.M. Thomas (India), Professor Andrea Giardina (Italy), Ms. Asma Jehangir (Pakistan), Mr.

Augusto Sanchez (Philippines), Professor Hettigamage Sriyananda (Sri Lanka), Mr. Kuo Chi Jen, (Taiwan) and Dr. Syed Husin Ali (Malaysia). There was also an advisory committee and the *Amicus Curie* for the session were Professor Upendra Baxi (India), Mr. Michael Anderson (UK) and Dr. Gianni Tognoni (Italy).

One section of the verdict of the Tribunal focussed on proposals for action and this is the part that we reprint in the following pages.

The Tribunal considers it axiomatic that industrial and environmental hazards pose dangerous and continuing threats to the survival and well being of millions of people across the globe and that among those most vulnerable are indigenous peoples and impoverished peoples of the South who often lack access to medical, technical, legal and political resources to mitigate the disproportionate human suffering to which they are subjected.

People who are affected by industrial and environmental hazards are frequently treated as passive victims by governments, courts and the medical and technical professions. Yet the overwhelming evidence before the Tribunal indicates that the role of passive victim has been repeatedly and vigorously rejected, as people have asserted their rights to be full citizens, with the attendant rights to dignity, justice and full participation in their societies. The Tribunal affirms these rights and condemns their violation in the case of industrial and environmental hazards.

Accordingly, the Tribunal finds that urgent collective action is called for to ensure dignity, justice and amelioration to the present generation of victims as well as to ensure that future generations are spared the scourge of such hazards.

General

1. Governments should establish comprehensive national insurance schemes which would provide complete and speedy cover for risks relating to industrial and environmental hazards.
2. In recognition of the symbolic importance of Bhopal as the site of the world's worst industrial disaster and as a means of giving practical assistance to workers and communities exposed to serious risk from industrial and environmental hazards, we urge the formation of an International Centre for Research, Information Exchange and Analytical Services on Industrial and Environmental Hazards, in Bhopal.

The Centre would consist primarily of a small group of committed and knowledgeable intellectuals and citizens who have experience with and

subscribe to the PPT vision of combatting the growing threat posed by the accelerating pace of mindless industrialisation to the wellbeing and lives of millions of people all over the world. This kind of industrialisation is often the nexus of collusion between powerful multinational corporate interests and governments which, in seeking exploitation of natural resources, indulge in actions that ride roughshod over the human rights of usually poor people and ignore the often irreversible environmental degradation.

Active persons from all countries with commitment to human rights issues and knowledgeable about some aspect of industrial hazards and environmental problems would work at the Centre for certain periods of time, sharing their experience and conducting specified tasks such as the following:

a. Preparation, updating and distribution of maps of the hazard areas of the world where industrial environmental actions impinge on human rights. Availability of remotely sensed imagery from space plus conventional methods can make this very cost effective and timely. (Presently such information is not given out by government agencies.)

b. Worldwide catalogue of sample testing laboratories which would be accessible to PPT groups and can give reliable and timely reports.

c. Preparation and circulation of the methodology of environment impact assessment and the actions called for before projects are approved.

d. Information on legal and procedural issues often used by industry and bureaucracies to block implementation of human concerns.

e. Updated status of people's actions in affected areas—exchange of information on successful actions and identifying areas needing help and collective solidarity actions.

f. Formation of an international alert group to investigate hazards and issue appeals for protest and corrective action (along the lines of Amnesty International with human rights victims).

g. Preparation of a disaster management package of procedures to be followed by communities and workers at risk.

Recommendations to the international community

Since hazards do not respect national frontiers or ideological boundaries, all citizens of the world are potential victims. Since industrial and environmental hazards represent an urgent and common problem facing all humanity, concerted international action is imperative. Given the predictable regularity and severity of industrial and environmental hazards, entailing unconscionable victimisation of thousands of women, men and children through continuing

imposition of suffering and death, the Tribunal recommends that the United Nations system promote the following measures:

1. Establish a specialised committee on industrial and environmental hazards to formulate standards conceived in consultation with workers and community groups, to guide member states on appropriate strategies of disaster prevention and hazard mitigation and to supervise the implementation of such strategies;

2. Expand the technical assistance to developing countries programme to include consideration and vocalisation of such strategies;

3. Urge the Human Rights Commission to introduce an agenda item on industrial and environmental hazards, and to explore the formulation of standards for the promotion and protection of human rights in situations of endemic or extraordinary hazards;

4. Mandate the International Law Commission to include in the progressive development and codification of international law the responsibilities of states, both exporters and importers of hazardous technologies, concerning the duties of cooperation to ensure protection of individuals and peoples threatened or affected by such technologies;

5. Call upon the World Health Organisation to provide for appropriate training for medical professionals providing sustained health care to victims of industrial and environmental hazards.

6. Welcome the concern and work of the International Labour Organisation in the area of industrial disasters, but urge the ILO to evolve, in constant consultation with victims groups, principles and responsibilities applicable to governments, employers and workers to mitigate human suffering in the wake of industrial and environmental hazards;

7. Urge the UN Committee on Crime Prevention and Treatment of Offenders to develop appropriate instrumentalities for developing, through its educational and standard setting programmes, the capabilities of national criminal justice systems to process and punish violations of human rights necessarily entailed in situations of industrial and environmental hazards;

8. Urge UNESCO to contribute to greater awareness of these issues through pedagogy and curricula, and to support creative and artistic works which portray the impact of industrial and environmental hazards;

9. Establish by means of an international convention an industrial and environmental hazards insurance agency along the lines of the existing

Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, under which any enterprise investing in a lesser developed country would be obliged to insure against possible damages from industrial and environmental hazards, and which would apply to all projects financed by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, with the additional requirement that all projects insured by the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency should be required to assume this additional insurance cover;

10. Establish by means of an international convention a permanent tribunal

- Composed of internationally representative persons of high moral standing serving in their personal capacity;
- With jurisdiction on disputes relating to damage due to hazardous activities, empowered to make final and binding decisions on such disputes;
- Endowed with a hazards fund supported by mandatory deposits made by private investors and governments from which its monetary decisions should be satisfied; and
- With jurisdiction over international criminal charges in cases of industrial and environmental hazards;

11. Revise the Statute of International Court of Justice to ensure standing to individuals complaining of the violation of international law by states, including victims of major industrial and environmental disasters.

Recognising that intergovernmental regional organisations have a critical role to play in enhancing the culture of fundamental freedoms and human rights and their protection and promotion by regional collaborative efforts, the Tribunal urges such organisations, including ANCOM, ASEAN, CARICOM, ECOWAS and EC, to evolve appropriate instruments for regulating hazardous activities, enhance measures for the realisation of the rights to justice for victims of such hazards with access to inter-regional adjudication mechanisms.

Recommendations to people's organisations

Given the frequent failure of national and international institutions to address industrial and environmental hazards, there is an urgent need for a more effective response from people acting through local, national and international cooperation.

Recognising that the inter-governmental nature of UN specialised agencies limits their autonomy and inhibits their effectiveness, we envision the emergence of transnational institutions and networks which would act in

accordance with the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples. Just as the PPT attempts to provide a forum for justice where official institutions are inadequate, so too peoples' institutions analogous to the World Health Organisation and the International Labour Organisation should be established to provide information, assistance and technical support with a view to preventing and mitigating the human rights abuses associated with industrial and environmental hazards.

The Rajchadamnoen pledge, PP21–Thailand

Preamble

We, over 500 Thai and foreign participants of the People's Plan for the 21st Century, meeting in Bangkok between 6-10 December 1992, represent people's movements and networks, national, regional and international NGOs and solidarity groups from 46 countries from all regions and continents. We have come together to reiterate and renew our commitment to build transborder alliances of peoples in struggle, solidarity and hope. We gather in the spirit that we pledged ourselves to in the Minamata Declaration (1989) which marked the birth of PP-21.

Since Minamata, people-to-people alliances and processes at the local, national, regional and cross-continental levels have been realised across boundaries and cultures. Significant milestones in this process have been the forging of relations with the indigenous, black and people's resistance movements in the Americas and the establishment of a group in Central America.

We have met as women, as workers, as peasants, as youth and students, as indigenous peoples, as urban poor, and as activists and advocates of peace and human rights, participatory democracy, ecologically-sound grassroots development, alternative cultures and alternative tourism. The encounters and experiences, the ideas and action plans that emerged from these sectoral and multi-sectoral activities held in various parts of Thailand culminated in the Alliance Forum in Bangkok where we have shared our experiences of life and struggles in various forms — through poems, songs, dances, dramas and visual exhibits.

PP-21: From Minamata to Bangkok — renewing the alliance of hope

PP-21 is taking place in Thailand in the midst of momentous global and national changes which challenge the very basis of our existence.

The Soviet Union has collapsed. The international capitalist system has become more dominant. There is unprecedented global concentration of power with the United States and its Group of 7 allies exercising virtual monopoly control over political institutions, economic resources, military power, information and technological products and processes. Institutions like the IMF,

the World Bank, GATT and the Asian Development Bank work together to enforce the dominance of multinational corporations in the name of the free market, totally irresponsible to the basic needs and survival of the marginalised in society. The United Nations, particularly the Security Council, has become a tool of US foreign policy as demonstrated in the Gulf War and in subsequent events.

Integral to this system of global domination is a whole pattern of national control and domination expressing itself in different facets of life. Most governments in the region are armed to the teeth with wide-ranging powers that are stifling the growth of civil society. Democracy has become a system of symbols and rituals shorn of substance. The fundamental civil and political rights of our people continue to be denied. This denial of rights is perhaps most blatant in societies under military rule, but is equally, if not more, destructive in societies where authoritarianism parades with a human mask.

There is mass poverty and blatant exploitation of labour and of the environment. Marginalisation of women continues unabated, and violence against them is on the increase. Elites in many countries in Asia-Pacific emphasize the perpetuation of power and the pursuit of profits at the expense of the basic needs and fundamental rights of the people. The fatal grip of international capital and export-oriented industrialisation on our countries, which have been propped up as "economic miracles" (NICs), in itself brings further misery and destitution to the poor.

But we have no reason to despair. We know that unjust structures whether at community, national or international levels must crumble and collapse. They cannot last. Our confidence is not born of naiveté. Our faith in the just future of humanity is not the product of some utopian dream. In the last three years since Minamata, we have seen our struggles grow and develop.

Seven months ago, unarmed people waged a battle against guns and tanks to establish democracy. The people in this country became visible on the streets of the city and in the towns, in the countryside. As they challenged state power the people once again demonstrated the power of non-violent popular struggle. Through blood and tears they displayed their moral courage and their commitment to the cause of participatory democracy. In the process they re-asserted their inherent dignity and recovered the power that is their own.

While this was perhaps the most dramatic portrayal of people's power in the region since Minamata we have experienced ongoing struggles of women against violence and domination; indigenous peoples for their survival and to preserve their cultural and ethnic identity and harmonious relations between nature and humanity; peasants for their land; workers for more just and human working conditions; the urban poor for the right to shelter; the youth and

students for a just and democratic society, entire local and indigenous communities against mass and luxury tourism, and people against the unsustainable development paradigm and programmes.

Furthermore, democratic struggles have been successfully waged in 1990 in Bangladesh and Nepal against authoritarianism and military rule. The ongoing protracted struggle of the Burmese people against the military junta cries out for justice and international support. In the Philippines, the rejection of the RP-US Military Bases Treaty on 16 September 1991 has removed a major threat to peace in the Asia-Pacific region.

Each of these is a witness to the awakening of people's consciousness; a stir in our hearts in response to the injustices and the inequities of the existing order. Each struggle demonstrates the ability of people to determine their own destiny. This is proof of our confidence in our capacity to alter the course of history, which in turn strengthens that confidence.

The significance of these struggles within the Asia-Pacific reality is that they emphasise a profound commitment to life. It is a commitment that has great meaning since Asia is the continent that has given birth to the world's major spiritual and moral traditions. At the same time these struggles also point out the relevance and significance of the traditions, cultures and values of the indigenous peoples of the Asia-Pacific region. Central to these traditions is a vision of life and living inspired by justice, love and compassion. Harnessing what is essential in them demands re-interpretation of the traditions. It is this re-interpretation which has a resonance in the struggles of the poor and the oppressed to reassert their humanity.

Reasserting our humanity means destroying those unjust structures at family, community, national and international levels which de-humanise us and hold us in bondage to wealth and power. This demands a concerted effort on our part to create participatory democracy and foster genuine development. It demands strengthening of grassroots initiatives and networks, building alliances of people's organisations. It demands transborder linkages at the regional and international levels in support of people's struggles to create an ecologically sustainable, equitable and gender-just society.

Alliance building

Alliance building is oriented towards the long-term goals of PP-21 — Alliance of Hope, namely, global people's power which will confront and prevail over the powers of this unjust and unequal world. Building such power requires us to work towards the forging of alliances of people's movements at the grassroot, local, national, regional and global levels.

This alliance is based on people-to-people contacts rooted in a culture of friendship and partnership that transcends borders and sectoral and organisational concerns. This demands of us an attitude to learn from each other's struggles and strengthen the relationships and alliances already underway in our own societies. We are challenged to be open to other cultures and experiences in our efforts to link not just ideas but persons; to support and contribute rather than merely expect support; to give meaning to language and communication between peoples; and to be open to initiatives and alternatives coming from all levels.

PP-21 is based on the initiatives and participation of peoples and their organisations. This is the essence of our alliance-building wherein we encourage and endorse the concrete agendas on which people's actions are based.

We, as participants of PP-21 Thailand 1992 endorse the proposals and action plans adopted by the participants in the various sectoral and thematic forums that preceded the Alliance Forum, as an integral part of PP-21 Thailand 1992. At the same time, we have adopted for ourselves the following:

Information exchange and dissemination

We need to know more about the things happening to and around us. We must keep abreast of the fast-changing realities, trends and tendencies in all their dimensions, for many reasons. For one, information is increasingly being denied to us, and there is a deliberate tendency to block our access to information. For another, there are dominating processes at work in our localities, societies and regions which can only be fought against in a transborder manner. Furthermore, we need to learn from and build on each other's knowledge, experiences and struggles. All these bring us closer together and point the way towards concerted collaborative action to mutually reinforce our respective struggles.

Information dissemination is not to be seen merely as a process of mechanical transfer, given the complexity of issues that have direct and farreaching impact on the lives of the people. Ideas emerge from people and we need to be conscious not to impose our own ideas on them. Moreover, we also need to ensure that the ideas and analysis do not remain trapped in academic language. Proper communication strategies need to be implemented so that concerned sectors can utilise their own information base as well as obtain such analysis and information in easy people-oriented language for purposes of action.

During the Alliance Forum participants expressed the need for information exchange and dissemination on a wide and diverse range of issues. These include, among others:

- the impact of biotechnology on agriculture, cash crops, drugs and pharmaceuticals, and the implications for the vast majorities of people in the region;
- an inventory of NGOs in the region, and their respective skills, resources and areas of concern;
- the sex trade and industry;
- aid, trade, debt and structural adjustment;
- environmental issues directly related to development and sustainability.

Lobbying, advocacy and solidarity action

The demand for accountability of multinational corporations and governments to serve the needs and promote the fundamental rights of people was also constantly expressed. Among the issues that need solidarity action are: the demand for the right of free association, protection and promotion of human rights, the right to self-determination.

South-south, south-north alliance building

We need to build transborder sectoral and inter-sectoral alliances from the village to the international levels. Already some processes and initiatives are underway. One such exchange involves fisherfolk in southern Thailand and northern Malaysia. Another ongoing transborder initiative is being undertaken by a task force for the survival of Asian agriculture, farmers and peasants. Participants from among the students and youth have pledged to link up with farmers and indigenous peoples. Trading links on equitable terms have been forged and are being further developed between consumers in the north (e.g., Japan) and producers in the south (e.g., sugar workers in Negros).

At the Alliance Forum we learned of many transborder actions and events being organised by groups from different countries, which cover various themes and concerns. Among these initiatives that repeatedly found mention are:

- Strengthening mutual support networks for shelter, rescue, legal assistance, counselling, reintegration, etc., for women, particularly Thai women, who fall victim to the international flesh trade (in Japan, for example) as well as the trade in migrant female labour.
- Women forging alliances across gender, sectoral, cultural and national lines, to strongly condemn, on 25 November 1993, the violence perpetrated against women.

- The mobilisation of national and international support for the tribal and indigenous peoples, to mark 1993 as the Year of Indigenous Peoples. International Treaties and Declarations asserting the rights of indigenous people should be translated into the indigenous languages and made available in an easily understandable form.

Inter-cultural alliance building

We must build alliances based on liberative cultures, to respect and enrich our diversities amidst growing tendencies towards ethnic chauvinism, communalism and racism.

PP-21 : Follow-up and facilitation work — continuing mechanisms

We need to reinforce and strengthen the people's organisations' leading role and participation at the local, national and inter-sectoral levels, in collaboration with regional groups and alliances. On the regional level a minimum facilitating mechanism to ensure the follow-up of the PP-21 process, is proposed. Regional consultations must be held to decide upon the form and flow of future PP-21 events. Some specific proposals include, among others:

- the preparation and dissemination of a directory of participants (including personal profiles) to the Thai PP-21 events; and
- translation into local languages of the Thai PP-21 materials (it has been suggested that participants themselves undertake this task).

As we pledge our commitment, we are aware that we are creating power — it is a power that is not based on relying on the powerful, but in our capacity to do things despite the existing oppressive structures; a power that is based on our determination to create and maintain our own spaces of action, in our confidence and ability to learn and to build reliable relations and alliances towards the 21st century.

Not beyond repair:
Reflections of a Malaysian trade unionist

It is not too often that trade unionists write books on labour matters. Most of them are busy with the practical nature of their work, unwittingly leaving the writing and publishing part to academics. And of course, academics write and publish for their own career prospects. In this respect, I find Arokia Dass' book, *Not Beyond Repair*, a product of the author's own experience as a trade unionist, a welcome contribution. It is hoped such an endeavour will stimulate other trade unionists to write and publish books based on their own experiences.

Dass' book is no ordinary book; it emerged out of hardship and suffering. His detention under the dreaded ISA (Internal Security Act) in 1987 and incarceration for 15 months provided the inspiration to undertake this venture. (No wonder former Party Rakyat leader Kassim Ahmad termed the detention centre as his second university.) While Dass makes use of some reference materials, by and large, the contents of the book are derived from the rich reservoirs of his own experience. So in a way, this book is also a reflection of his own experience quite similar to the one written by V. Southarman (a former member of the Malayan Communist Party) entitled *Historical Reflections*.

In a nutshell, the book is about the political economy of the Malaysian labour movement with particular emphasis on the TEAIEU (Transport, Equipment and Allied Industries Employees Union). The first half of the book touches on such themes as labour recruitment and working class formation during the colonial period; the nature of labour organisation and the emergence of militant unions organised under the auspices of the left in the immediate post-war period; and a case-study of labour organisation in the plantations and how the British colonialists deliberately promoted pliant and so-called "moderate" trade unions like the NUPW (National Union of Plantation Workers' Union) under the leadership of P.P. Narayanan. (Narayanan was a British agent installed in the plantation trade union movement to subvert the left wing unions. By forming a close alliance with the British and later the CIA, he weakened the left-wing movement in the plantations. Narayanan was also responsible for the deportation of many Indian activists to India.)

The second half of the book looks at the political and economic conditions under which the MTUC (Malaysian Trade Union Council, alternatively,

"Empty You See") was formed and why it is totally ineffective in representing labour; the nature of state ownership of industries and implications for labour relations; the struggle of the TEAIEU in trying to improve labour conditions; the implications of following the Japanese model of labour relations; and finally a tentative discussion of a model for effective trade unionism in the future in Malaysia.

The most interesting aspect of this book is about the author's own experience in the TEAIEU. In the early 70's, he teamed up with a few like minded individuals, successfully changing the old, corrupt and ineffective leadership. By maintaining constant interaction with the grassroots, the new leadership soon built an effective union. Believing that the power of the union was with the shop-floor workers, the leadership grew in strength and brought about a number of benefits to the workers. For instance, when a particular employer refused to grant a holiday for Muslim workers to mark a religious event, the non-Muslims joined them in solidarity strike. By maintaining close organic links with shop-floor workers, the leadership was able to thwart the use of race and religion to divide the working class.

Over a 13 year period, the union effectively bargained a 250 percent wage increase for the workers. As stated by the author, the basic intention of the union was to narrow the wage gap between workers in different levels of employment. On one occasion, a particular employer ordered Malay and Indians workers to clean toilets whereas the Chinese were exempted. When the union demanded an explanation, the management said that the Chinese were not used to cleaning toilets. The union's immediate retort: who cleans toilets in China? exposed the management's divide and rule tactic.

In attempting to create a model on which future effective trade unionism could be built, the author thinks it is very important for Malaysians to take stock of the past, particularly the pre-independence period in which militant unionism flourished. By appraising the past, mistakes and strengths, genuine unionism can be built. Beyond this, he also thinks that the present union leaders have no sense of purpose and there seems to be no direction in the union movement. Too much economistic thinking, the author feels, has led to a sterile atmosphere within the labour movement. Alternatively, the author suggests that the trade union movement adopt broad approaches in championing the cause of labour. And not the least, the author argues that independence of trade unions should be maintained at all cost and no attempt should be made to subsume them into political parties. Although the author does not fully explain why this is important, we can only speculate that recent developments in Europe and in the former Soviet Union could have led him to make this point.

I have no quarrel with this book. Data presented is very reliable, at least to my knowledge. Although, I may not fully agree with some of his specific arguments, I nonetheless fully endorse the spirit and the overall thrust of the book (unlike the AMRC). I also fully agree with Dass that the Malaysian labour movement is not beyond repair. Even though capital has emerged stronger following the collapse of the so-called communist regimes, the primary labour-capital contradiction remains. Presently, the state's adherence to privatisation policies and the granting of more liberal provisions to foreign capital have in fact worsened labour conditions. In this same context, trade unions in the country have been rendered more ineffective due to a combination of legal and extra-legal measures. The most saddening thing is that the vast majority of trade unions have given full support to capitalist policies knowing very well their negative implications.

However, whatever is said and done, it must be remembered that capital remains the major obstacle to labour's social, political and economic emancipation. However, there are certain progressive groups in Malaysia, and I am sure Dass will agree with me, which have failed to arrive at a proper analysis of the state of affairs in this country. Working among the plantation workers, these groups give the impression that the NUPW is the major cause of the exploitation of plantation labour. Nothing can be further from the truth. While the NUPW is under a very reactionary leadership, it is not a fundamental obstacle to the plantation workers' progress. Even if these groups get rid of the old leadership, there is no guarantee that the state will allow a progressive leadership to emerge. It must not be forgotten that the NUPW's survival is mainly due to patronage it receives from the state.

While the Malaysian labour movement is not beyond repair, it is important as Dass points out that certain concrete principles be established and debated as to how to mobilise working class solidarity. Some kind of theoretical discourse is very necessary at this moment so as to prevent us from sinking into an empirical quagmire. To those of us who are seriously thinking about this particular issue, let us read and reflect on Dass' chapter (pp. 13-28 of this issue of *Asian Exchange*) on how to create effective trade unionism in Malaysia. I am sure Dass will want to find out where we stand on this.

P. Ramasamy

The trade in domestic helpers —
Causes, mechanisms and consequences

The boom in the international trade of human labour during the past decades has spawned a wealth of information regarding this phenomenon. The various facets of migration (from factors which push and pull people to work abroad, to hiring and recruitment process, actual work conditions, various government legislation, repatriation and reintegration) are well-documented. Theories on migration have also been popularized such as those by Bach and Schraml, Gibson and Graham, Crummet, et al.

The trade in domestic helpers — causes, mechanisms and consequences, offers a refreshing insight on migration as analyzed from the viewpoint of women. Published by the Asian and Pacific Development Center (APDC), the book is a collection of 14 articles by Asian women, which were discussed at a Planning Meeting on International Migration and Women held in the Philippines from 30 November to 5 December 1987.

Information on migration generally focusses on the male migrant. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have funded studies on male migration. The majority of existing policies, legislation and analysis on migration are not gender specific. Analysis of female migration is done from a patriarchal mode, wherein the women migrants are viewed in the context of their relationship with men.

Yet the migration of women has steadily increased during the past years. Vomen migrants now outnumber males in most receiving countries. The book resents an Asian picture of migrant women from Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

Third world governments such as those of the above-mentioned countries encourage and pursue the export of their nationals for jobs and for foreign exchange. Remittances of migrant workers are the top foreign exchange earner for the Philippines and Pakistan, and the second for Bangladesh. These governments have developed some responses to migration such as setting up agencies which deal with migration. Unfortunately, migrant workers also face the lackadaisical attitude of government bureaucrats when it comes to the protection and promotion of their rights and welfare.

While the whole spectrum of women migrants includes entertainers, professionals, teachers, medical workers and mail-order brides, the book focuses

on domestic helpers (DH) since they comprise the majority of women working abroad.

Migrant women employed as domestics are not representative of the poorest sections of their respective societies. With the high cost of migration (recruitment fees and other expenses), many are forced to borrow money and pawn meager possessions for the chance to work abroad. Many are not employed as domestic helpers in their own countries. Forty to 50 percent of Filipina domestic helpers working abroad are former school teachers and medical workers. The majority of Asian domestics have acquired formal education, ranging from secondary education to university degrees.

In its early stages, migration was seen as a means of allowing local workers to acquire know-how and expertise from abroad. This has proven to be the opposite for domestics. The knowledge and skills patiently acquired by these women through years of formal education are immaterial as they perform jobs unrelated to their training such as cleaning and cooking. A "deskilling" process takes place. At the same time, the feeling of confidence their education gives is slowly eroded by a growing sense of humiliation and a lowering of self-esteem.

Migrant women also undergo the same recruitment processes as those of male migrant workers. They have to contend with illegal recruiters and high placement fees. They also experience violations of contract provisions and contract substitution, long work hours, non-payment of overtime and other agreed benefits, illegal employment and racial discrimination.

But domestics face additional burdens. In Singapore, they must undertake regular pregnancy checks. Since domestic work is invisible or done in the confines of a household, domestics are susceptible to mental and physical abuse. They are dependent on the employer for food and shelter. Incidences of rape and sexual abuse have been documented. A report by the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) circulated only to government offices states that nine out of ten domestics in the Middle East face the possibility of sexual abuse. The figure is quite high since many cases go unreported.

In the face of such abuses, domestic helpers have to stay on to recover the amount spent for their employment and fulfill their family's needs and expectations. But these negative experiences also make women aware of their rights. They seek and explore venues for redressal of grievances; they band together into groups and develop mutual support systems; some actively work for their rights. In their own families, women, because of their substantial contribution to the household's income, are increasingly being recognised as decision makers. But are these material benefits enough to compensate the break-up of families and the low self-esteem which comes with the daily drudgery of manual work?

Proposals by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) abound on how to ensure a better work environment for domestics. Yet governments are slow to act on these recommendations, or if they do, their actions fall short of expectations. Governments are placed in a bind. The views expressed in the book are that governments hesitate to actively protect the rights and welfare of their nationals because hiring countries may retaliate by closing their doors to migrant workers. But the truth is these same governments cannot provide decent jobs for their citizens. Furthermore, they have come to depend on the remittances migrants send home.

There are several factors which point to a continuation of this trend. At the regional level, governments of sending countries must compete with each other in their efforts to find overseas placements for their nationals. The migrant labour trade is unfortunately one where the supply of workers seeking overseas jobs exceeds the demand of the receiving countries.

At the national level, governments view migration as a long-term dollar-earning industry and have even institutionalised the process of sending their citizens abroad. The social costs of migration are not given due consideration. People are seen in terms of the dollars they can earn and the consequences on the individuals working abroad are ignored.

This is where the conflict between the migrant workers and the national government lies. The book ascertains that migration should be seen as a temporary solution to the economic crisis which is endemic to third world countries. As long as the roots of society's problems — the different socio-cultural, political and economic factors which drives people to work abroad — are not acted upon, migration is here to stay.

Teddy Arellano

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