

14/04/2001

Pendulum swings back towards Marxian thesis

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A DIFFERENT sort of celebration will take place on Labour Day. The Global M1 Alliance, a movement to fight globalisation and corporate tyranny, plans to stage a mass blockade in many countries, starting at the stock-exchange offices and spreading across the surrounding business block.

A sequel to the many anti-capitalist protests seen in recent days, the aim of the M1 protest is, at least symbolically, to bring the business of neo-liberal globalisation to a halt for a day.

Such developments beg the question eloquently put by Jacques Derrida: Is Marx, like the ghost in Hamlet, "looks at us and sees us not see it even when it is there"?

Derrida's Spectres of Marx and Alex Callinicos' Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique say we live in times when it is impossible to ignore the impact of Marxist thought, be it tangible or invisible.

It is there, at least in its many variants, subtleties and nuances, and we see it expressed, from the various strident anti-capitalist protests to the growing demands for reform to the international financial architecture.

Noted is the popular rise of social democrat and centre-left parties in Europe. Even Tony Blair's Third Way is undisputably centre-left, a new dimension to social democrat politics.

Global events such as the "peso" and "tom yam" crises and the recent pummelling of the Australian dollar debunk Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" and end of socialism.

Ironically, the victory of neo-liberalism has led to the resurgence of the left, in new forms. So we see how Russia's sorry state of affairs has prompted its intellectuals to call for left-wing politics to throw light on the nature of socio-economic and political struggles that stemmed from the major crisis in contemporary democratic politics and late capitalism.

Those reluctant to embrace the new left admit that the right is inadequate and contradictory. The grand design of extending free market mechanisms to all domains has the potential to oppress the less developed societies.

Like our own Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, they point to the tyranny of the international financial system as an example of "the face of economic growth that pose serious threats both to sustainability and democracy" (Andrew Carey, Taking the Risk Out of Democracy).

One of the contentions of the anti-corporate movement is that the realities of globalisation are the burgeoning power of transnational corporations to the point of overriding the sovereignty of the state and the hyper-reality of foot-loose capital.

It is a sentiment aptly expressed by David Korten in When Corporations Rule The World: "The rewards of the financial trader go through the roof while those of nurses, textile workers or teachers through the floor. The extractive investor is taking advantage of price fluctuations to claim a portion of the value created by productive investors and by people doing real work".

While the developing countries are wooing foreign investors they realise that, contrary to popular belief, some of the corporations are not kept properly in check by the mechanisms of a global competitive economy.

But there is no choice but to take what is dished out on the platter by the United States, her mighty allies and puppets such as WTO, IMF and

World Bank.

Despite the protests against neo-liberal capitalism, or casino capitalism as some call it, there seems to be no evidence of a concrete change except perhaps for the big powers' promise to do something for a capitalism with a humane face.

And all the more reason for the anti-capitalist movement to grow. So observed Cuba National Assembly president Ricardo Alarcon in the Jan 28 World Social Forum at Perto Alegre, Brazil, "The campaign against corporate tyranny that has united workers, environmentalists and supporters of democracy in a broad front: a "new international" - and the future will be socialist or there will be no future; a socialism that realises people's ideals and becomes the apex of democracy".

Leftists of all hue - the new Leninists, Trotskyites, Marxists and social democrats and left-centrists - reflect the spectre of Marx.

There is already wide interest in the Marxist classics and Fidel Castro's Neoliberal Global and the Third World and a write-up on the marxist view on the Yugoslav tragedy.

Where all this will lead to remains to be seen and, more importantly, depends on how the US looks upon it and challenges this new breed of socialism. For some, like Hamlet's ghost, the question is to be or not to be.

The only certainty is that the endism had arrived for a short while, enough for us to be seduced by the possible cloning of made-in-USA democracy but only too briefly.

What other spectres will contend with Marx? Jefferson, Mills, Dewey, Keynes? History is, after all, circular. In the end, there is a new beginning and in the beginning, there is an end. Everything is a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal.

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