

New forms of socialist vision needed

Today, one thing has become clear. We cannot do without Parliamentary democracy. There cannot be a system in which an individual can be denied his liberty, his dignity. The so-called group rights are basically founded on their claim to individual liberty. Individual liberty has got a bad name because it is being used by capitalist thinkers and practitioners but without individual liberty, it is difficult to build democratic socialism or socialism of any kind. Individual liberties can be misutilized by the state to advance the sectional interest of the rich classes which what seems to have happened in the last hundred years. Therefore, we need to build powerful democratic movements. Their objective must be optimal social justice.

Individual liberty can be harmful when divorced from the objectives of larger societal justice. That's possible only when we keep building up democratic movements and struggles. While we talk on movements and struggles, I wish to emphasize that non-violence not only as a moral doctrine as a practical policy is inescapable. Any violence in the name of social justice or social change, I'm afraid, will only breed fascism. I remember JP saying something during his movements. I agree that the power flows through the barrel of the gun but who holds the barrel of the gun? The gun is held by the government and the state and that will lead the society to mutual destruction. In my view, individual liberty should be used to promote the concept of social justice and it is possible only through the instrument of democratic non-violence.

What is the objective? The minimum of objective is abolition of poverty which has been enunciated in the UN Development Millennium Goals. In spite of such unprecedented increase in global prosperity why there is so much of poverty? Even in America, which is the richest country in the world, 30 million people cannot even afford insur-

Socialist and Union Minister S Jaipal Reddy calls for inclusion of multi-culturalism, environmentalism and the MDG like abolition of poverty in the New Socialist Vision for 21st century. Excerpts from his speech at an international seminar on 'Democracy, Socialism - Visions for the 21st Century' in Hyderabad on Friday

ance policy. Three crores of people means 10 percent of US population cannot afford insurance policy. They have their own definitions of poverty which is naturally different from ours. So therefore, the theory -once growth takes place that somehow will spread to everybody and see that poverty is eliminated- is absolutely incorrect.

I would like to emphasize that in addition to abolition of poverty as a goal, we must also have the ideal of increasing re-

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duction in income and wealth inequalities. For the last few decades, some people tried to propagate inequality should not bother us any more so long as justice is done to everybody, so long as minimum needs of all people are taken care of, economic inequality per se need not bother. I don't agree for the simple reason concentration of wealth in society leads to perversities not only



S Jaipal Reddy speaking at the seminar

in the form of conspicuous consumption of the rich but also in promotion of militaristic tendencies in every society.

Today, what we are seeing is huge increase in wealth without corresponding decrease in the poverty of peoples. I am not saying that the poor have become poorer. That's not correct. But inequalities per se have gone up and they have their own deleterious consequences. They have their own distorting effects on social structure, state policy, so on.

Before 2008, I had a chat with an Indian multi millionaire in America; He was saying what's the problem in the world and if there is any problem anywhere in the world, our boys wish go there and fix it up. It will not mind you, an American. An Indian multi-millioner who is completely innocent to philosophies was saying this. That means America would produce Rambos and they will fix up all problems. This simplistic thinking is promoted by the phenomenon of concentration of riches. So we should not forget the ideal of increasing reduction in income and wealth inequalities. That question doesn't arise because we are not

able to succeed in eliminating poverty, disease and illiteracy.

If you look at the total wealth or GDP of the world and if we had a rational system at global level, a minimal rational system at global level, there should not be any poverty. But every year a trillion dollars- a thousand billion dollars are spent on defense budgets of various countries. They are preparing against whom? Each country is spending billions of dollars; America itself spends 500 billion dollars an year. So are countries like Russia, China, and India, Pakistan. Against whom? These weapons are meant for destruction of people. Socialism is nothing but welfare of the people. We can go in for complex definitions of socialism.

Today, one of the causes of conflicts of the society is aggressive assertion of ethnic identity. I have no difficulty with the assertion of ethnic identity so long as it is related to complaints against exploitation.. so long as it relates to dominance by certain classes. There was a time when progressive thinkers, even before the First World War, thought that nationalism had become an outdated doctrine. Bertrand Russell

protested against First World War and went to prison. Remand Rolla of France went to prison as a protest against First World War. They all thought nationalism had become outdated. Of course, they were avant guard thinkers. Bernard Shaw in fact in 1918 called nationalism measles of mankind. I don't think we have reached a stage in history when every section of people can transcend their cultural identities. But cultural identities should not be stressed to the point of pitting one section of people against humanity. That's very important. Any concept of modern socialism has to include multi-culturalism which means tolerance of various cultures, religious groups.

May I further say, socialism, be it democratic or otherwise, cannot be a stagnant concept. It has to be a living dynamic process.

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Today's socialist vision must not only include multi-culturalism which has not been thought of before but environmentalism. Can we think of some socialism without commitment to environmentalism?

May I tell you as a student and youth leader I was myself getting

excited over the conquest of Nature by Science? Today I know conquest of Nature by science would also mean, in certain ways, the destruction of environmentalism.

So, I would plead from this forum our vision of 21st century socialism should contain all these elements. There can be no socialism without protection of individual liberty and there can be no individual liberty without concern for greater social justice. Therefore, some of the elements which are a must for this, I repeat, are individual liberty, greater societal justice, abolition of poverty, conscious effort to reduce income-wealth inequalities.

I would also agree you can't do without market system. Market, in my view, is a vibrant instrument in itself. I plead for well-regulated market. I think all these things cannot be combined without being inspired by and committed to non-violence, multi-culturalism and environmentalism which were not thought of at that time in 19th century or in the first part of 20th century should be parts of new socialist vision. Every age must have its own intellectual icons. One intellectual icon is John Rawls who gave a new definition of liberalism. His theory of justice, which he wrote in 1971, is a classic which is not been equaled in recent decades. His second classic- political liberalism again pleads for multiculturalism. Then we have icons like Prof Amartya Sen who concentrates on the goal of abolition of poverty, disease etc. We have people like Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize winners and Paul Krugman who in developed countries are pleading for proper regulation of markets and proper welfare systems for the poor. So, we need to meet more often, discuss various elements that go into new socialist vision of 21st century while the values that inspired Robert Owens, Carl Marx and others are still relevant. Same values are relevant. But we have to look at new forms and new mixtures.