

EXIT CASTRO

Does the exit of Fidel Castro signal the end of the road for communism?

This would be a question that most political pundits are tackling at the moment. The U.S. authorities, on their part, may be planning the next step in getting their errant neighbor into their fold, at last, away from the evils of communism. It is said that there had been at least thirty attempts made by the U.S. to wipe this enemy from the face of the earth. They don't have to bother about him any more. The only worry they would have is how long is this other Castro going to last? Or is he going to be a reformist?

The world at large will have a bigger and perhaps a far more important question to sort out. The biggest communist power in the world - China - is experimenting with a new model of capitalism under a communist regime. Whether they like it or not, the country will not be able to stop the growth of capitalistic symbols or landmarks of a free press and free elections. True it will take time, but the growing capitalist class in China is going to take the lead in the process sooner or later.

What about North Korea, the most elusive part of the evil axis that George W. Bush discovered? With its economic problems, and growing poverty, North Korea will not be able to carry on for long without changing its tune and attitude towards the capitalist world. The winds of change blowing across the continent will no doubt affect the people and the rulers alike in that country.

The specter that Karl Marx said was haunting the world in his historic and epoch-making thesis, the Communist Manifesto, has practically vanished from the stage, and for good. Although communism was ushered in a land Marx least expected, and survived for more than half a century, the inevitable end is fast approaching. Communism saw the growth of a powerful industrial country amidst so much destruction and suffering and sacrifice by a people looking for a bright future. Communist Russia launched the sputnik and vied with the U.S in the space race, but Gorbachov pulled the rug under the whole system with his new doctrine of perestroika. Vladimir Putin is not going to halt the march towards capitalism, although he has his own way of accommodating the change.

Then there are the Latin American countries, which are still courting communism. How long will they be able to withstand the pressure from outside? Will they be able to solve all their problems through the brand of communism they have borrowed from their friend mentor, Fidel Castro? Communism started and will end, with the Russian experiment. Now it is a case of experimenting with what the hated idealists have forced on them. Will it be a success? That is yet to be seen. But there is no going back to the good old days of communism.

That is the stark reality they have to live with.

Sri Lanka is a country that has admired Fidel Castro both as a freedom fighter and as a leader of the Non-alignment movement. He stood shoulder with Sri Lankan leaders is the movement. Both Bandanaikes - SWRD and Sirimavo, had long associations with the Cuban leader. It is even rumored that Castro was sending a packet of Cuban cigars to our own Junius Jayewardene annually. Fortunately it was not known to his admirers in the country.

Castro perhaps was not responsible for the death or killing of millions of his countrymen as were other communist leaders in Russia and China, namely Joseph Stalin and Mao Tse Tung. Perhaps, he was also popular among his countrymen as to have been elected in a free and fair election, which was not allowed under his rule.



IS IT THE END OF THE ROAD?



The question is whether communism is what we should adopt to solve our problems and give the people opportunities to develop their potential and make the world a better place for generations to come.

With all its attractions of equal opportunities and a place for the down-trodden, communism carries with it the most dangerous trend of creating a ruling class that does not want to make way for others. Once in power, the communist rulers assume the role of supreme arbiter, who only can solve the problems of the masses, who only knows what is best for the people, who only must decide what has to be done. Ultimately, it becomes question of maintaining their power base and its apparatus. All other things become secondary. It is the power of the ruling class that must prevail at any cost. No sacrifice is too big for this sacred task. That is what Stalin did in Russia. It is said that all the surviving communists who played a part in the 1917 revolution were gradually eliminated by Stalin. And for what? For the preservation of communism in the land of its birth.

What the current world needs is a form of government that protects the people, whether they are big or small - whether they are rulers or the innocent bystanders. The modern world needs a system of government that respects the lives of people without sacrificing them for anything. Life of an individual is far more sacred to be sacrificed to protect the power of an individual or a group. The people should be able to elect those who are going to make decisions on their behalf. The people should have the right to change their representatives if they find them wanting. Rulers should serve the people and not the other way around.

Looking closely at our motherland, we can see the attraction modern day youth have for communism, waiting for the day their own Castro to appears on the scene. The LSSP and the CP which would have claimed the privilege

of ushering in a communist society are now consigned to history. Dr. Wickramabahu Karunaratne will go on preaching his own brand of communism for some time. Vasudeva too will do likewise. Both will be remembered as friendly and likeable comrades who did their best to qualify to be parlour Bolsheviks. There might be other splinter groups calling themselves communists or by some other familiar name. But all of them are destined to disappear in the long run. There is one group that will continue for quite some time. One can safely say that the mantle of communism has truly fallen on them. That is the J.V.P.

Let us face it. Can the J.V.P. deliver the goods?

There is a chance that they would be returned to power in an election in the near future, although no one can predict what happens in Sri Lanka. They call themselves democrats who believe in free elections. Haven't communists all over the world been clamoring for democratic rights as long as they were in the opposition? Haven't all of them denied democratic rights to their opponents once in power? Have the J.V.P. given up their struggle for communism? No. They have been building bridges with the communists in neighboring countries.

We have to judge people and groups by what they have been and what they have done so far. Adopting that yardstick, what can we assume or expect under a J.V.P. government?

Let refresh our memory a little. During the days most Sri Lankans had a secret admiration towards the 'Boys' (as the Tigers are referred to by many Tamils) I remember how we were waiting with our identity cards to be handed over to these youths, while retaining the photocopies for future use. As for me I did not have to do so, although my brother-in-law had to surrender the licensed gun he kept at home. I feel sorry because it was I who got his permit after the police refused to recommend him. He has no gun

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with him now. This is just a simple example of an innocent trick compared to the suffering many others had to go through.

How could one expect justice from a group or party that is prepared to kill any one and every one who does not agree with them? We cannot forget the fact that Tevis Guruge and Premakeerthi de Alwis lost their lives because the J.V.P. did not either like their ideas or what they said? An innocent planter from South, who happened to entertain his friend and former class mate Lucky Algama of the Sri Lankan Army, was ruthlessly decapitated. Vimaladasa of the LSSP who was a worker at their Star Press was gunned down because the gunman could not find his intended victim. Then there were the Buddhist monks who are venerated by all Sri Lankans even if they do not believe in what they preach. Rev. Kotikawatte Saddhatissa, a reputed preacher, the chief monks at the temples in Vasuduwa and Soragune. There was a villager close to my home who was killed while he was seated in front of the *kattadiya* performing a ritual to hopefully cure him from the illness he was suffering from. He was relieved of all ills foe good. Was it done to prove the impermanence of all living things? No. They were preparing the ground for an all out attack on the government to capture power to alleviate the suffering of the masses.

Their attempts did not come some how succeed. Now they have adopted a far more conciliatory approach of winning the masses at the polls. What guarantee is there that they will not resort to the tactics communists all over the world have adopted after gaining power?

Let us respect Fidel Castro as a leader who stood up to the mighty Americans and led his nation for half a century. But let us not forget that he was not a communist to start with and was virtually pushed into the communist fold by the U.S. who wanted to continue their relationship with Cuba on the same old footing, as an out post or a vassal estate.

Castro captured power from a corrupt ruler by the name of Batista, who was a real stooge of the U.S. That was something the Americans could not stomach. Other nations behaved in a much more civilized manner towards Cuba. Cuba has made progress in certain areas. But democracy must be the basis of government in any civilized country, until and unless a more suitable alternative is discovered. Communism has failed. It has failed miserably. That is not an experiment for a country like Sri Lanka which is still being referred to as mainly Buddhist country.