

"A fundamental ideological flaw haunts Leftism today. It is the failure of socialism itself."

A striking feature of the August General Elections is the unexpected slump of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna Much was expected that this party would rev up the forces for socialism and ,once again, resurrect the red flag of protest against privilege. As one of the numerous who has been im-pressed by its leader, Anura Kumar Dissanayake, I was disappointed with the poor showing of that party. Unrealistically though, I was hoping that the JVP would replace UPFA as the main voice of the Opposition. Anura Kumar Dissanayake does his homework and is thorough with the facts and figures. He is intelligent, well educated, forceful and honest and can fling himself aggressively to make a dent in any powerful government.

Sri Lanka desperately needs such voices in Parliament. Yet, that was not to be. Human events in social and political life are complex in character and many factors have to be reckoned in their explanation. Basically, I think, the JVP was caught right in the middle of the general polarisation of an electorate that had to decide on whether to bring back the former President, Mahinda Rajapakse or whether to resume the Yahapanaya revolution signified by the January 8th Presidential elections. It had to be either one or the other to most voters and in such a context there was no room for a middle force that was theoretically attacking both options. The JVP lost itself in the way. In fact all their articulate and vociferous criticism of the Rajapakse regime went to help the UNP-led campaign. The UNP derived the benefit of the rhetoric of Anura Kumar. Dissanayake, Lankantha and other capable orators.

This reveals that the JVP platform was badly oriented. A better course of action for the party would have been to join the United National Front as a constituent member but, as Vladimir Lych Lenin famously said in 1921, "march separately; strike together." within the UNF camp until the day of reckoning comes when the party would have gathered greater strength to combat directly. In this election the party was lost in an ambivalent position that confused its potential backers. Voters who went against a Rajapaksa comeback desperately wanted that to happen. The space for any body in between was simply not there.

There are other immediate matters of concern for the JVP. The party frontline is not strong and broad enough to appeal to the masses. In the heyday of the old LSSP that party had many a stalwart- NM Perera, Colvin R de Silva, Leslie Gunawardena, Cholomondoley Gunawardena, Vivienne Gunawardena , Edmund Samarakkody and so on. A very impressive frontline indeed! The JVP, on the other hand is an Anura Kumar show. Somawanse retired into madness. The UNFPA was also a Rajapaksa show but Mahinda Rajapaksa had built up adequate charisma to hold the imagination of the people. UNP isn't a mere Ranil show; a strong second line of leadership is already growing in its fold.

These are, however, rather trifling matters on the surface that adversely affects the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna On the other hand, a fundamental ideological flaw haunts socialist leftism in general today. It is the failure of socialism itself and this is reflected all over the world-not only in Sri Lanka. Ideas, as men, are socially located. The emergence of socialism was rooted in the un-savoury ex-

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THE MISCARRIAGE OF THE JVP SIGNALS THE END OF THE SOCIALIST IDEA IN SRI LANKA

periences of the early phase of capitalism and industrialisation as reflected in the famous novels of Charles Dickens. That was a time when private ownership and private profit invaded social life to the point that exploitation of working people became rampant. "How about a new world order," many thinking people asked "where social or collective ownership replaces private ownership"? Thinking people the world over recoil from seeing deprivation and social justice. The appeal of socialism grew from such a natural revulsion among thinking people. Karl Marx 91818-1883)and Frederick Engels (1820-1895) intellectually epitomised such a response by bringing out their grand theories to end all exploitation. A great new world free from exploitation, was promised and the world was lit up by that appeal.

However, two things happened in a few decades to rescue capitalism from the socialist onslaught. Firstly, the state intervened with legislation that successfully curbed many of the felt evils of the old capitalist order. Regulatory mechanisms were erected. The influence of new intellectuals like John Maynard Keynes, the economist, came to the fore. Economics changed.

Second, decades of practical experience in the socialist experiment showed up that socialism had failed to deliver the promised land. "While it promised prosperity, equality, and security, it delivered poverty, misery, and tyranny. Equality was achieved only in the sense that everyone was equal in his or her misery. Cuba is probably the only practising socialist country in the world and Cuba is poor.

Many reformists of the failed socialism began to emerge They began urging that socialism had failed because it had not been practised properly. Sri Lanka itself today has its own brand of so-cialist rescuers known as the Frontline Socialist Party who are trying to take the place of the failed original doctrine JVP movement. These passionate individuals didn't and don't realise the possible causal connection between the failure and

the inherent ideology itself.

To most ordinary masses the idea that a country's resources should be distributed in equity and fairness is a self-evident aspiration. Gaps between rich and poor should be narrowed and exploitation eliminated. The short word for all these is egalitarianism. Theoretically egalitarianism is a worthy goal in society.

How could such an idealistic goal be achieved? A government must have at its disposal adequate resources to ensure that everybody's basic needs are met. How do these resources come? It is through the growth of the national income. The bigger the national pie gets the easier to reach the goal. If the pie is small few welfare benefits can be given. The socialist answer is for the state to assume a central control of the commanding heights of the economy so that it can have a free hand. Private capital and private ownership should be kept to a minimum and market forces should be under control. Collective enterprise is preferred under socialism to privately-owned enterprise. In some socialist rhetoric owners of private business and capita are derided as blood suckers.

This line of reasoning is today increasingly regarded as being impractical and adverse in impact leading as it does to a constriction of the national economy and not growth. The ideology of so-cialism is against the principles of human behaviour. Human beings work on incentive. You and I are not going to



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work our butts out simply for an abstract cause of a collectively owned enterprise-be it a collective farm or other. The Kibbutz idea flopped in Israeli. On the other hand, we will labour hard if we are to be paid well and given

other incentives. The latter can happen in either an enterprise owned by us or by another. In a privately owned enterprise owners will be incentivised by profits while workers will be incentivised by pay. Workers can still be incentivised in a public enterprise but there is no incentive to a live body of owners in such an undertaking; the owner being the abstract state. The human being is fundamentally a selfish entity. We like to grab for ourselves. That is our instinctive nature. The capitalist West developed so vastly from the time of the Industrial Revolution due to incentive-based private entrepreneurship. Private Companies became engines of growth in those economies.

Those who understand the working of the price mechanism under a capitalist economy will grasp how

smoothly and invisibly it does the job of distribution of resources and increasing national income. The price system in a capitalist economy guides the economy invisibly but efficiently. Under government regulatory mechanisms in place the aberrations and evils of such he a system can be kept to a minimum. There isn't an alternative to that. The socialist ideology of central planning pushes for price determination by a central planner. This goes against the grain of supply and demand and results in people queuing up for essentials. Sri Lankans experienced these in the social-list days of Sirima Bandaranaike. The point is that, at bottom ,market forces represent consumer (people) choice and is thus democratic, too.

Many former state-controlled economies have now abandoned their socialism and moved toward the Western model of incentive-based capitalism. Strangely, the old lure of statism and social-ism still hankers in the public imagination of Sri Lankans, leaving space in that fancy for statism and socialism. The discerning observer notices that even the JVP isn't diehard about an old style socialism or Marxism. The red party seems to be in a hazier ideological territory being more in the role of a hesitant Marxist party. Its preference for statism, nevertheless, seems more apparent. The results of the General Election of August 2015 seems to suggest the electorate's lack of enthusiasm for such ideologies.

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