

Socialism is Alive and Well

Historians writing about the 1980s will mark it as the period of the ascendancy of democratic movements all over the world. The decade saw the collapse or retreat of authoritarian regimes in many Third World countries. In Latin America, military rulers were forced out of power in the face of declining economies. In Asia, the Philippines led the way to democratization in 1986, closely followed by Pakistan. Taiwan and South Korea have instituted limited but unprecedented reforms.

Then it was the turn of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Sparked by Mikhail Gorbachev's twin policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring), erstwhile one-party systems crumbled and are now being replaced by multi-party democracies. Marxist Socialism is being refashioned in a radical way. As East German Ambassador to the Philippines Joachim Wittwer puts it:

In undertaking all these changes, we hope to build a socialist society that is humanist and democratic — an East Germany where there is not only job security, and free social services such as education, medical care and others, but also, more importantly, political and ideological pluralism.

Wittwer thinks that the events in his country represent the rebirth rather than the demise of socialism. On the other hand, right-wing Western commentators and their Filipino clones gloat over what they see as the end of socialism and the triumph of capitalism. Of course, the less informed have always equated socialism (especially the Marxist variety) with one-

party dictatorships. Existing Marxist parties and groups have only themselves to blame for this misconception.

Daily Globe columnist Francisco Nemenzo calls our attention to the fact that the "one-party state as a concept is alien to the political philosophy of Marx". Marx, after all, was a democrat at heart. In the Soviet Union, Lenin's first cabinet was bipartisan. The single-party regime emerged only as a historical accident when the coalition government failed and the Bolsheviks were forced to rule alone. It was the intellectual lightweight Stalin who institutionalized the one-party state by suppressing and physically liquidating the other socialist, democratic, and Marxist forces in the country. Thereafter, all Marxist-oriented parties in other parts of the world blindly followed Stalin's example as well as his mindless directives. Those who dared defy Moscow were dubbed "counter-revolutionaries" and ostracized from the international socialist community. All these have changed with the remarkable initiatives of Gorbachev.

Unfortunately, some forces are still resisting the democratic tide. Foremost is the gerontocratic Beijing regime. This is ironic because it was Mao Zedong who, in the 1930s, was the first to depart from Stalin's witless prescriptions for revolutionary change. In the Philippines, there are elements in the Left, schooled in Stalinist dogmas, who decry Gorbachev's reforms and the changes in Eastern Europe.

Perhaps the Philippine Left needs to undergo its own "perestroika". A once vibrant movement will soon become atrophied unless its old ideas and styles of work are always subjected to free debate.

As for those in the West who are prematurely celebrating the "demise of socialism", it would be best if they first examine their own societies. One editorial cartoon in the *International Herald Tribune* shows two corpulent New York businessmen dressed in fur coats stepping out of a stretched limousine during a heavy snowfall. Clutching a newspaper headlining the fall of the Berlin Wall, the two call out to a homeless man huddled hungry in one corner, shivering in the winter cold: "Hey boy, let's celebrate! We've won! Capitalism has won! Socialism is dead!" During this winter alone, hundreds of Americans died because they had no house to protect them from the harsh cold or because they could not afford to heat their homes.

Socialism, despite or because of the upheavals in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, will live on. In its generic sense, it will continue to be the only logical alternative to capitalism. In a less radical form, it is alive and dominant in Sweden, France, Spain, Peru, and Pakistan. In Japan and Italy, it guides the second biggest party. In the European Parliament based in Brussels, socialist, communist, and other Left-wing parties captured the majority of seats

in last year's continent-wide elections. Most of Africa's newly-decolonized nations have adopted socialism in one form or another. Socialist programs, such as social welfare, cooperatives, and state subsidies, have been appropriated by many capitalist states.

Throughout recent history, illustrious personalities have embraced socialism and championed its vision of a humane and egalitarian society. The list includes scientists like Albert Einstein, great thinkers like John Stuart Mill and Bertrand Russell, writers like George Orwell, George Bernard Shaw, Bertolt Brecht, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, world leaders like Nelson Mandela, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Salvador Allende, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, Olof Palme, and Willy Brandt, artists like Pablo Picasso and Vincent Van Gogh, and movie greats like Charlie Chaplin and Vanessa Redgrave.

Given such distinguished company, would it be any wonder that despite aberrants like Stalin, Brezhnev, Pol Pot, Ceaucescu, Kim Il Sung, and Deng Xiaoping, socialism will continue to fascinate young and old alike, for many generations to come?



December 25, 1989 #76 International Viewpoint