

An ideological debate on the
solution for humanity

Friday, September 21st, 2001

“Solving the sickness of Capitalism”

A debate between
the
UWS Muslim Society
and the
Communist Party of Australia

The contribution by Peter Symon, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Australia to a dialogue between the UWS Muslim Society and the Communist Party of Australia on "solving the sickness of Capitalism".

ISLAM? COMMUNISM?

The topic has been well chosen and appropriate considering the events of the last two weeks – "Solving the sickness of capitalism".

But capitalism does not have a cold – it has a malignant cancer and it is terminal.

We have agreed to debate ideology but we cannot ignore the developments of the last two weeks.

In the face of the present danger we say -- NO to war! To defeat this threat there will need to be an tremendous effort on the part of all those who are for peace between peoples and nations. A major war would make all ideological debate irrelevant just as environmental change could also wipe out existing civilisations, whether capitalist, socialist or Islamic.

Communist philosophy has three main pillars. Firstly, dialectical materialism, secondly political economy, and thirdly the class struggle. I will go into these a little more.

By materialism is meant a recognition that the world around us is a reality. It is material. We call it nature and nature embraces all things including people. Homo-sapiens are a product of nature and have only one outstanding quality and that is the development of the

human brain. We believe that this reality is being confirmed again and again by scientific advances, by the proven theories of evolution, for example. In this context communists reject the idea of a single Creator. We say that man created God and not the other way around.

In saying that we do not mean any disrespect for those who hold a different opinion and I will come to this question again shortly.

By dialectical we mean that there are certain principles by which nature moves and changes. There is an interconnection between all things no matter how tenuous that may seem. There is a unity about nature and all the material things and non-material things of which it is made up.

Another dialectical concept is that change is constant. Nothing stands still. This is true of all things including human society. You know something of history and even in the last few hundred years there have been many changes. And this will continue. Our own selves are an example of change -- we are born, we grow through a number of stages, we die. Our home, planet earth, is also subject to the same laws and will eventually die.

The same goes for ideas which are a product of our brain and are fashioned by the world around us. None of the existing religions always existed. Christianity has a 2000 year history and Islam about 1400 years. Before that people had other beliefs.

Communist ideas are merely a result of the accumulation of ideas and theories over millennia and are a much more recent product than religious theories. Communist ideas are also subject to change and much has already been

added because of experiences. That process will continue inevitably.

Contradictions are also inherent in all things but time does not permit going into this. Time is limited. That is also a reality!

The second main principle of Marxism is what is called political economy. This explains the economic and social systems we live under -- capitalism, socialism or some other. It also provides the means to work out a realistic and necessary change in the social order to bring to the people those things for which generations of people have fought through the centuries.

We assert that the problems of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, lack of health care or education, insecurity, wars, oppression of one country by another is not the fault of Christianity as such or Islamic laws or Buddhist ideas but of the economic and social system under which we have lived.

The woes that humanity has suffered for thousands of years have made many cry out for an explanation. Why should there be such suffering! It is in this context that many have sought an explanation in a God and a set of ideas that promised a better life in another world while often advocating acceptance of the suffering in our present existence.

Again we say that we make our own system. People made capitalism and people can also change it. Once there were slaves -- and they are still to be found in some countries. The slaves revolted in ancient Rome and people around the world are revolting now in opposition to the consequences of the rule of the big corporations.

Many called on their God to help them change the world for the better and, if that fails, to find a better world in an after life.

Marxists, on the other hand, believe that it is within the power of humanity itself -- people -- to change the world. We have all the resources and the skills to provide all the needs of the 6 billion inhabitants of this planet. We must take the next steps and so construct our economic and social system so that the great wealth created benefits all.

For this purpose we must have a comprehensive economic, political and social program. We have such a program which is relevant to the present period of history.

Recognising that change is always with us, our program is also open to change to take into account developments in social and economic conditions. For example, the overwhelming power and control of the transnational corporations is a change that has only taken place in the last 50 years.

The third main element of Marxist theory is the question of the class struggle. In our society, at the present stage of history, this mainly involves the contest between those who are the principle owners of property and the means of production and, on the other hand, the working people who work but do not own the means of production.

Of course there are many other aspects and elements in the struggle for a better world. Religious organisations and orders also play a part. I read in a document which gives an overview of Islam, that the Prophet Mahummad was ordered to lead a movement grounded in the ideological struggle

against the social, political, and economic structure of the society he lived in. I emphasise -- “the society he lived in.” The statement goes on to say that “the Creator must be recognised as the source of rules and regulations for all aspects of life, on the other hand, the message of Islam provided an alternative to the peoples’ way of life.”

We would contest the first part but support the second part -- to provide “an alternative to the people’s way of life”, recognising that there have been enormous changes in the 1400 years since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. We have to deal with different problems and find different solutions to those which may have been appropriate at that time.

At that time there was no working class as we know it today. Property ownership was substantially different. We did not have TNCs nor even large enterprises. Electricity was unknown and so on.

We cannot overlook these changes if we are to be relevant today. Unfortunately, I do not find any substantial economic program in the document I have which sets out the Islamic system. It does say that mineral resources should be public property. We agree. It does recognise both private and public forms of property ownership. We agree. However, we give decisive priority to public ownership in which those working and managing such enterprises should have a say and be consulted and encouraged to be involved. Why should we neglect to draw on the skills, the intelligence, the creativeness of those who actually do the work whether they be men or women?

I would like to state our views on the question of rights very clearly. We recognise that there are and will be many

believers holding different religions. We respect those who hold religious beliefs and accept their right to hold them. We support the UN Declaration of Human Rights which says: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

And again: “All human beings are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” And I would add, “sisterhood”.

In pursuit of these principles we are strongly opposed to any discrimination or war that uses as its justification the superiority of one religion over another or the superior rights of those who practice one religion that presents itself as “good” against another which is branded as “evil”.

Good and evil is not to be found as between one religion and another or even between believers and non-believers. It is to be seen more starkly in the division between those who make themselves obscenely rich by exploiting the labour of others and those who demand a fair distribution of the wealth created.

The good and evil divide is between those who attempt to suppress and dominate over others and those who are for real freedom. It is between countries striving for their independence and those who would subject them to colonialism.

The new form of colonialism is called globalisation these

days. We call it corporate globalisation or imperialism because an attempt is being made to fashion the whole world to the same pattern as that of corporate USA, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Australia and Japan. The leaders of the US call it “The New World Order”.

This is one aspect of the sickness of capitalism.

We have just seen another in the collapse of Ansett Airways. Before that HIH Insurance collapsed and then OneTel. In each case the workers were summarily sacked and their entitlements thieved.

You may ask, but what have these things got to do with ideology? It is merely our recognition of the reality around us, the reality of our material existence and the necessity to do something about real problems which affect the lives of tens of thousands, even millions of people. If man created these problems, man can fix them too.

Our philosophy can be summed up by saying we see the world in its reality, we recognise the inevitability of change, we put forward a program of change to fulfil the yearnings of humanity for centuries and we propose the way in which things can be changed and who can bring those changes about.

We must concern ourselves with these matters as all religions have done in the past. Christians declare that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. That is a profound economic and political statement.

Both religious orders and communists have always stood for a better life, for the poor and the sick and the homeless.

Perhaps our solutions are different – communists giving

emphasis to the here and now which many religious people also do, while religions also hold out the hereafter.

A better life means such simple things as jobs, housing, medical treatment, education, and a stable society without wars. It means the tolerance and richness of a multicultural, multi-lingual society with diverse religious and other beliefs. It means a welcome mat for refugees rather than their incarceration in far-away concentration camps or on a prison island.

But we cannot change things substantially unless there is a new direction in politics, in economic and in power structures.

Private enterprise has had hundreds of years to put things right. Capitalist representatives hold the power, have accumulated the wealth in their hands, have the technology, universities, think tanks — they even had the confidence and the trust of most of the people. Communist led states and Muslim led states also have this responsibility and each will be judged by its achievements.

We communists present both a political, economic and social program which offers a socialist way forward.

It is the socialist countries that have made the most rapid economic and social progress. Socialism lifted millions of people out of poverty, provided previously unheard of health and educational opportunities and services. They made great leaps in scientific achievements.

These countries championed peace and disarmament and the complete elimination of nuclear and other weapons

of mass destruction.

Of course the socialist countries had their faults, including some serious ones, but this does not cancel out the enormous achievements.

We have worked out some main principles that we think should guide a socialist society in building a new life for society. Our program and our social and moral attitudes come from our philosophy, our understanding of nature and of society and its up-to-date needs.

Of course, we are only talking about what might be appropriate for Australia. Other countries will work out their own liberation and salvation although the fundamental principles of socialism are universal.

There are no magic wands, however, by which a socialist government comes to power today and every problem is solved tomorrow nor is there such a thing as a “perfect” system in our opinion.

We say that socialism can only be achieved by the involvement of people in all aspects of the life of society. It is usually called democracy but we have a much different understanding of this term than the present democracy which depends on the power of money.

The mass media would have to be democratised and put in the hands of progressive community organisations rather than in the hands of the Murdochs and Packers. They have become the manipulators of men’s minds, much more powerful than that of any religion.

We are also in favour of strong trade unions and support for the many community organisations which contribute

a great deal to the economic and social welfare of many people.

We believe that a number of political parties will continue to exist and represent the different sections of the people and that they would co-operate in the task of building a new society by working out an agreed program of what had to be done.

A socialist society would be based on the predominance of public ownership of industries, banks, energy supplies, transport, mineral resources and so on. It is really important that those enterprises that are major or key factors in the economy should be publicly owned and managed.

Other forms of ownership including cooperative, private enterprise and joint public and private enterprises would continue to exist for a considerable period of time.

A socialist society presupposes the planning of economic and social development to eliminate the booms and slumps of capitalist economies. We are seeing right now a major slump in all the capitalist economies of the world. Millions of people are going to be hurt — lose their money and lose their jobs.

It is also necessary to protect the environment. This is a major responsibility of government, all industries and people and must be attended to as a matter of urgency. A socialist society would educate everyone in an attitude of concern for the environment. Community environmental organisations would be encouraged and supported.

There are two main threats to life on earth — one is nuclear war and the other is climate change.

Economic regulation and planning which serve the people are distinguishing features of socialist society. Various forms can be used — a planning authority, the use of taxation, interest rates, import and export controls, price controls, and so on. These are not new but the difference is that they should be used to benefit people, not the profits or giant and hugely rich corporations.

The promotion of cooperation between peoples and their equality is a fundamental socialist principle. Individualism and an inequality of opportunities and rights does not accord with the social nature of society. We are all dependent on one another in one way or another.

We are also opposed to racism and nationalism which claims that this or that nation is the greatest.

We are for a secular society in which the state and the church are separated.

If a Communist Party becomes the leading political force in society it must respect the role and contribution that other organisations make to society. These include trade unions, youth and women's organisations, religious bodies, and so on.

To conclude:

Our philosophy is one of freedom and an end at last to barbarism and war.

Our philosophy is one of equality and the recognition of the contribution to civilisation made by many people, many religions, and many scientific discoverers.

The resources of planet earth are enough to feed everyone, house everyone, educate everyone, and provide medical services to everyone.

Our philosophy is to implement these objectives through the actions of millions of people who accept that the world can and should be a better place and that by their actions, remove the roadblock to the onward march of humanity. We see that roadblock today being the system of capitalism.

Our philosophy is to implement this program and, by doing so, to at last bring humanity out of barbarism and into the sunshine of real civilisation.

We believe that this is a worthwhile ambition and objective for believers and non-believers alike.

These are the good things for which millions have fought to achieve over thousands of years. They are not the invention of communists but arise from the desperate needs of ordinary people worldwide. What communists have done is to understand the workings of society better and to find a way by which the historic yearnings of millions of people can be fulfilled.

Our philosophy is therefore not only profound and deep thinking but we think it works and serves the interests of the people of the world. I believe we are entitled to ask of any and every set of ideas -- do they work, are they up-to-date and do they serve humanity?

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