

## **Is It Possible To Renew Third World Marxism?**

**Old Problems and New Perspectives from India, Indonesia and the Philippines**

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### **Introduction**

Marxist perspectives, I suggest, became of vital importance in the third world for three main reasons:

First, while Marxist theories in Western Europe explained how and why capitalism developed, and claimed that certain contradictions would pave the way for radical socialist transformations, Marxism in the third world offered convincing explanations of why capitalism *did not* develop and why dynamic bourgeois revolutions *did not* come about. Fundamental analyses spoke of development being blocked because of the coexistence of imperialism and feudal-like structures, hence, forming a powerful grand theory of blocked development.

Secondly, Marxism in the third world presented striking theories of what social forces could be interested in altering this impasse *and* how those changes could come about. The workers were comparatively few. In addition, the driving social forces included the huge majority of oppressed peasants and the frustrated bourgeois factions. This called for efficient organisation, enlightened leadership and strategies – to gain political power, to get rid of colonial or neo-colonial masters and their partners, and to conquer the state. The latter would then be used to implement grand development strategies. Equality, freedom and national independence were basic principles. Movements should agree on anti-feudalism, anti-imperialism, and anti-big-business (or oligarchism). Altogether thus, a powerful *political* development project; a political shortcut to progress.

Thirdly, there were also pioneering development strategies, i.e. plans and policies to be implemented once the progressive forces had gained control of the state.

However, we shall mainly discuss the political development project.

Currently almost everybody agrees that it is in shambles. But what went wrong? Will a new one emerge?

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We will begin with a summary of conclusions from previous research on why the project ran aground. This will then be substantiated by references to what really happened when communists in especially Indonesia and India made political use of mainstream Marxism. On the basis of this knowledge about the problems, we thereafter discuss in what direction it might be possible to advance. Finally we shall also benefit from additional studies of how new popular movements try to improve their understanding of the contemporary developments in the Philippines and Kerala (India).

### What went wrong?

Why, then, did the project run aground? The causes and reasons are many and most of them vary with the contexts and various interpretations of the fundamental theses. But having dwelt at some length on the very different cases of Indonesia, India and the Philippines,<sup>1</sup> I think it is safe to say that while the project initially proved fruitful, a general and basic problem was an inability to take account the importance of new social, economic, and political forces emerging and giving birth to post-colonial authoritarianism and the often politically facilitated expansion of capitalism. This then paved the way for such occurrences as state-regulated growth in the Far East as well as crises and structural adjustment programmes. The basic assumption of blocked development was nullified. Even vital parts of radical politics and policies had unintentionally paved the way for the transformations. The project gradually lost momentum and became almost irrelevant. Many movements were severely repressed.

Hence, the foremost problem was *neither* due to the fact that Marxism rarely takes enough account of differences between

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<sup>1</sup> See Törnquist, Olle, *Dilemmas of Third World Communism: The destruction of the PKI in Indonesia*, Zed Books, London, 1984 (Swedish edition 1982) and *What's Wrong With Marxism? Volume I: On capitalists and State in India and Indonesia; Volume II: On Peasants and Workers in India and Indonesia*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1989 and 1991 respectively, and "Democracy and the Philippine Left" in *Kasarinlan* (University of the Philippines), Vol., 6, No 1-2, 1990 (also with the title "Communists and Democracy" in *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay) Vol. XXVI, No 27-29, 1991.

various societies and cultures, *nor* because various movements made more or less "revisionist" interpretations of Marx, Lenin, or Mao. On the contrary, from the three cases in very different contexts and irrespective of political strategy follows instead a rather clear cut pattern which all the movements had in common:<sup>2</sup>

(1) By subscribing to the traditional Marxist thesis – about "ideal" capitalist economies – that power and exploitation only grows out of productive labour in private processes of production, the radical Left disregarded the possibility that the emergence and growth of capitalism may differ. Consequently, they often ignored control of formally speaking publicly owned land and capital, as well as the importance of a whole lot of preconditions for production to get started and going but not directly linked to the very farm or company.

(2) This in turn meant, that one did not consider that controlling and governing such assets and preconditions for production constituted an independent source of power which was a way of indirectly appropriating parts of the surplus produced, and had a very important bearing on to what extent and in what way production could be further developed.

(3) Finally, the control and regulation of those assets and preconditions for production were often (but of course not only) carried out via the organs of the state and other "collective institutions" (such as co-operatives) with substantial resources but weak institutions. Consequently, a good part of the basis for, and the importance of, the exercising of powers by, for instance, administrators and politicians – as well as the more or less undemocratic forms of government of the state and "civil society organisations" – was also neglected.

### **How can this be substantiated?**

Let me try to convince you that we are on the right track by giving a few examples of what really happened when the communists, especially in Indonesia and India, tried to make use

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<sup>2</sup> What follows is, of course, only with regard to the theories made use of by the political Left under review. Moreover, I'm not saying that the neglected factors that I have identified were the only ones "missing" – but they proved to be the most important in the countries and during the periods that I have studied.

of mainstream Marxism in fighting for their political development projects from the early-fifties and onwards.

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To begin with, it was difficult to foresee that the state regulations and subsidies in favour of so-called national bourgeois forces to a certain extent would rather undermine than support the aim of promoting independent economic and political development.

Much of the political and administrative protection of businessmen and farmers, which the Left was a leading advocate of, made it namely possible for the former to escape the progressive capitalist compulsion of producing more and more efficient in order to survive on the market.

Most politicians and administrators had even less reason to place dynamic development on top of the agenda. Usually they were not businessmen themselves. And when instead linking up with those who were, the politicians and administrators were rarely powerful enough to gain from intervening in and promoting the very running of the companies – hence limiting themselves instead to the trading of protection.

Finally, everybody gaining from exclusive access to formally public regulations and resources was of course more interested in restricting or bypassing democratic forms of government than the other way around.

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When thereafter the Left turned instead more statist and tried to bet on so-called progressive nationalists and state led development policies, it became obvious that the importance of the resources and regulations which politicians, officers and other state administrators gained access to had been neglected.

*In Indonesia*, most foreign-owned companies were nationalised in 1957 and onwards. However, they were mainly taken over by officers – who then entered into co-operation with politicians, administrators and managers.

The thus gained powers and relations which were further cultivated as leftist anti-imperialist policies become even more important and legitimised emergency regulations. The latter gave the new masters even more privileged access to state resources and made it easier to control labour. State development programmes were further undermined. Previous attempts at "liberal democracy" were replaced by "guided democracy". And *this* more than anything else (including indirect intervention by

the US.) formed the socio-economic basis of the present authoritarian regime and brutal capitalist development.

*In India*, the victory in the late sixties of the so-called progressive nationalists within the Congress party led to the deterioration of large parts of its organised base and ability to accomplish national adjustment of various groups and interests. This was compensated by enlightened despotism, populism, and compromises with communal groups in various parts of the country.

Formally the powers of the state increased. Simultaneously, however, political and administrative institutions deteriorated, while actual control went into the hands of loyal ministers and executives on union and state level, nourishing contacts among, for instance, businessmen, affluent farmers, and communal leaders.

As in Indonesia, this, of course, neither promoted development nor democracy. Today we witness instead the disintegration of the state, its formal and informal privatisation, and the increasing importance of personalities as well as fractional interests and communal groups.

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From the early-sixties in Indonesia and early-seventies in India, the main question within the Left was how to handle the new problems. The fundamental argument was that the power exercised by the new rulers in Indonesia was in turn based on imperialists and their affiliated so-called bureaucratic capitalists, and, in India, on big capitalists and semi-feudal landlords.

However, although the Left and radical nationalists fought all these classes and fractions, the new rulers continued to act in such a way, and were only affected to such a limited extent, that they must rather have managed to gain their own rather independent sources of power – even by making use of and actually conquering the very regulations and the very resources, mainly within the state, which were meant for progressive development policies.

*In Indonesia*, the new rulers were not severely affected by the very harsh anti-imperialist policies of the communist party and president Sukarno. On the contrary they could sometimes even make use of it to get hold of more nationalised companies and to sustain their powers within the state apparatuses. Many of the new masters even opposed a kind of structural adjustment programme – since at that time it would have meant that they might have lost much of their actual control of state regulations and state resources. And when they finally, in the mid- and late-

sixties, also eliminated the communists, got rid of Sukarno and his radical nationalists and took over the government, they were in such powerful positions that they could combine their own semi-private interests with technocratic management of the economy and an internationally promoted brutal capitalist development.

Moreover, in contrast to the previous pattern of mainly trading protection to clients, the new overlords were now powerful enough to develop more direct links with actual business and develop an interest in the profitability of the companies.

*In India*, the state of emergency from 1975-77 can hardly be analysed as mainly being due to the interests of big capitalist and so called semi-feudal landlords. For instance, many "semi feudal landlords" actually turned against their ascribed representatives. And big business survived and gained in strength despite the fact that the state of emergency failed in really enforcing capitalism from above.

As far as I can see, it makes more sense to view the emergency as part of the struggles among the ruling groups in general for access to the reins of power. And much of the current structural adjustment and so-called "liberalisation" is actually about almost the same welders of power further "informalising", privatising, and redistributing among themselves more or less the same assets.

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Finally, the fundamental struggles for land reforms indicate that there were many important but neglected factors besides land-ownership. Even in the cases of Java, West Bengal and Kerala, where the communists were strongest, the actual results indicate that regulation of land ownership and prohibition or regulation of feudal rents did not prevent the possibility for old as well as new rulers to instead monopolise other resources, often by way of controlling public or co-operative organs. Those sources of power were often fairly independent of land-ownership and included credits, water, and various inputs, plus the ability to control prices on the market.

The lack of unity among peasants and rural labourers is another indicator of other and neglected forms of exploitation and subordination.

Further, it was difficult to identify and distribute "surplus land" when only focusing on ownership relations. Land was not as concentrated to a few landlords as had been assumed. Nether was it as consolidated as expected. The rural masters were usually quite capable of controlling land without necessarily owning it.

In addition to this, the emphasis on political struggles to get hold of state powers, and to then make use of state regulations, disregarded the very capacity of those tilling the land to really develop production by coming together and pooling their own resources. Petty peasants did not get hold of enough inputs and other preconditions for production to develop and be able to give labourers a decent pay. Some of their leaders with access to the limited resources available within state and state-run-co-operatives developed their own vested interests. Vested interests which were very difficult for the producers to contest since they were very dependent on the new patronage. An alternative patronage which, of course, restrained further democratisation, and paved the way for economic demands for more subsidies.

*Additional indicators*

Ideally one should now check those indicators by looking at cases where the Left has been more successful, and to then see if that is either related to them having paid more attention to the factors neglected or if the successes are due to the fact that the conditions have been entirely different so that the neglected factors were not important. But as we know, the success stories are few. So let us instead proceed by examining if similar problems have also played a significant role when things have gone wrong on the labour front and as the Left missed out in the Philippines.

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First the severe problems of the workers struggle in Indonesia in the end of the 70's, and the failure of the largest strike in the world, that of the textile workers in Bombay in the early 80's.

Even leftist activities within the framework of comparatively advanced capitalist production seem to have suffered from a common tendency to only pay attention to the control of the means of production as well the subordination of labour which were related to the very units of production at stake.

The strikes *in Indonesia* were isolated to modern private units. And even in this sector, the importance of mainly state exercised extra economic control of labourers were hardly taken into consideration.

*In Bombay* it was not possible to paralyse the mill owners by blocking their mills. They got a lot of support from the state. They had diversified their investments. They could subcontract a lot of production to other units. And the workers on strike rapidly lost

their collective strength as they had to turn to individual strategies of survival.

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In the early-eighties I wanted to include a comparison with *the radical Philippine Left*, which was the only traditional one in the area significantly gaining ground. Hence, it should have been a good "control case". Either it had paid attention to the factors which were neglected in Indonesia and India, or (more likely) the factors themselves had not been as important in the Philippine context.

However, I was too late. In 1985-86 the till then expanding Maoist Left swiftly lost the initiative. While the old Left insisted on its revolutionary track based on an anti-feudal people's war, the struggle for liberties and political democracy gained upper hand among wide sections of the population. Dissatisfied businessmen and officers, growing middle classes, and many NGOs and new movements got rid of the Marcos dictatorship with essentially peaceful means. The old Left seemed irrelevant. The new movements were organisationally weak and scattered. Powerful political, military, and economic actors gained upper hand in the very transition and took over the new institutions.

Why did this come as a total surprise for the old Left?

Their own perspectives only allowed for the identification of main sources of power outside the political field. Democracy did not make sense for them and should not make sense to most of the suffering people. Liberalisation and democratisation would not help much to alter basic relations of power and inequalities. A fundamental assumption was that politicians, administrators and, for instance, so-called "bureaucratic capitalists" had no real basis of power of their own which could be hit at by way of political democratisation. Instead they relied on more powerful imperialists, compradors, and landlords with private sources of power – which thus had to be tackled head on by other means, including anti-feudal guerrilla struggles. Hence, according to the mainstream leftist analyses, what actually happened could not happen!



## A way out?

Let me now assume that our three initial points about what was wrong with the Marxist perspectives that informed the traditional Left have been reasonably substantiated.<sup>3</sup> How, then, do we proceed? Is there a way out?

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Unfortunately, the most common reactions to the analytical problems of Marxism have been intellectually dishonest. Instead of first locating the specific problems, and finding out if some of them can be solved without abandoning the basic theoretical perspective before turning to alternatives, the usual pattern has *either* been to do away with it all by way of simple straw man arguments, and then look around for the options that are in vogue, *or* to say that, for instance, Marxist class analysis is fine but too narrow and must be supplemented with several other approaches. While the first path hardly merits further comments, the second may seem sensible. However, our findings clearly indicate that the analytical problems of Marxism are so fundamental and, for instance, have a lot to do with how basic class analyses are carried out, that we must try to further develop the basics before adding supplementary theoretical perspectives.

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<sup>3</sup> The three points were:(1) By subscribing to the traditional Marxist thesis – about "ideal" capitalist economies – that power and exploitation only grows out of productive labour in private processes of production, the radical Left neglected the possibility that the emergence and growth of capitalism may differ. Consequently, they often ignored control of formally speaking publicly owned land and capital, as well as the importance of a whole lot of preconditions for production to get started and going but not directly linked to the very farm or company.  
(2) This in turn meant, that one did not consider, that the control and the governing of such assets and preconditions for production constituted an independent source of power, was a way of indirectly appropriating parts of the surplus produced, and had a very important bearing on to what extent and in what way production could be further developed.  
(3) Finally, the control and regulation of those assets and preconditions for production were often (but of course not only) carried out via the organs of the state and other "collective institutions" (such as co-operatives) with substantial resources but weak institutions. Consequently, a good part of the basis for, and the importance of, the exercising of powers by, for instance, administrators and politicians – as well as the more or less undemocratic forms of government of the state and "civil society organisations" – was also neglected.

Moreover, it is true that several of the neglected factors behind post-colonial authoritarianism and the often politically facilitated expansion of capitalism have at least been observed by other theorists. However, as far as I can see, none of these alternatives is capable of explaining the basic material factors which, according to our previous analyses, were set aside by mainstream Marxism, but only identify certain important dimensions. Let me give a few examples:

First, most scholars trying to take account the importance of politics, state, and institutions rarely consider the assets which politicians, administrators, officers, and their institutions are more or less capable of mobilising and commanding. And the few analysts who try – for instance by talking about rentier states – simply add them as fixed resources, for example oil revenues, while neglecting the dynamics and how the assets are put to use. Moreover, most political and military institutions are not especially homogeneous and capable of efficient policy implementation. And those who recognise this, and focus instead on clientelism, neo-patrimonialism etc., hardly offer explanations which take account of the control of material resources, and the associated appropriation of surplus, which we earlier found to be of fundamental importance.

Secondly, the new-political economy and public choice analysts, on the other hand, do assume that there is a material basis of, for instance, patronage and corruption and stress "rent-seeking". But politics is reduced to an assumption about individuals behaving as rational economic men. The extremely important "rent-seeking" going on outside a narrowly defined political and administrative sphere – and in co-operation between, on the one hand, leading businessmen and landlords and, on the other hand, politicians, administrators, and officers – are set aside. And in trying to do away with as much politics as possible, since to some extent it always include elements of rents, and instead preaching neo-liberal solutions, they even forget about the fact that some outstanding rentiers have actually made productive use of their rents and promoted a brutal but nevertheless rapid economic development in such countries as Indonesia.

To finally turn this up-side-down, however, and by way of discursive analysis stress the importance of what is imagined, is hardly a fruitful way of handling the lost material factors, no

matter how important and neglected ideologies and strategies may be.<sup>4</sup>

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Consequently, while many of those analytical perspectives offer studies of dimensions which one should consider at a later stage, they do not help us to take into account the material factors which obviously constituted the general and basic problems as the traditional Left put mainstream Marxism to test. So once again, to look for a way out, we should first return to the problematic parts of historical materialism and discuss if and in what way they may be improved.

In the following section we shall also see how far this may take us and benefit from some additional studies of how new radical movements try to improve their understanding of the contemporary developments. But to begin with: in what direction should it be possible to advance on the basis of our previous knowledge about problems of Marxism?

*Generally speaking*, I believe one must break with the traditional thesis that power and exploitation only grows out of productive labour in private processes of production, set aside much of the theory of value, and instead allow for analyses of different paths to and dynamics of capitalism. This, then, requires that we try to broaden the mainstream narrow conceptualisations of means of production and exploitation. (Something which, of course, also implies the questioning of equally rigid definitions of relations of production, classes, base and superstructure, and state power. While, for instance, extra-economic means of oppression is part of the superstructure under "ideal" capitalism, they may in another framework very well be part of the base – just as under "ideal" feudalism.)

*Firstly*, however, this is possible without negating the very idea of focusing upon means of production, and various ways of controlling the means of production.

What we should do is rather to:

- widen the concept of "means of production" to include all conditions (assets/resources/capacities) that prove important in getting production of various kinds started and running.

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<sup>4</sup> Allow me to mention, that in my own attempts at trying to understand the problems of the traditional Left, I have not applied much of mainstream Marxian materialism but rather given priority to the analytical, ideological, and strategical factors – *and* have to admit that those factors, of course, can only explain parts of what went wrong.

For instance, many resources which are not directly related to the very processes of production – including, if we take agriculture as an example, various inputs but also the possibility of controlling environment affected by say excessive use of fertilisers. The very capacity to control labour must also be taken into consideration, both labourers within regular production and those being "marginalised".

- widen the concepts for analysing various ways of controlling those conditions of production.

For instance, the informal monopolisation of state or co-operative property; or indirect control of many resources by monopolisation of strategic ones, such as irrigation or credit; be they private, public, or co-operative. Or, when it comes to the control of labour, the use of extra-economic force or fear, communal loyalties, and social oppression – besides subordination within the very processes of production and via the labour market.

*Secondly*, moreover, these revisions are possible without negating the basic idea of exploitation.

What we should do is rather to:

- broaden the analysis of exploitation by identifying various ways of appropriating surplus produced besides within the framework of regular units of production.

- open up for analyses of various ways of making use of the surplus.

Let me just mention one additional way of appropriating surplus which I think is most important, namely by appropriating monopoly rents. The methods include, for instance, the plundering of monopolised resources, the trading of monopolised resources, the "investing" of monopolised resources and, thus getting a share of the profit. The latter is also a way of making use of the resources which may make "rent seeking" less parasitic (sometimes even dynamic).

*Thirdly*, all this implies, thus, that we move from theses and comparatively ready made grand theories towards a conceptual framework of what should be taken into consideration when trying to test hypotheses and develop less ambitious theories.

Of course, this means that we make Marxism very general and, for instance, miss the elegant logic based on the theory of value. But if we take the previous results about basic problems of

mainstream Marxism seriously, it is probably only a general analytical perspective that can be defended and prove fruitful.<sup>5</sup>

*Finally*, let me round up with a few examples of how we can benefit from the perspective.

To begin with, we are now able to discuss why state leaders and bureaucrats have been capable of acting comparatively independent *and* forcefully. Some of them have monopolised and made use of vital conditions of production. And we can further develop studies of how they get access to fixed resources by examining how they make use of them and generate more.

Moreover, we can analyse the material bases of various patron-client relations, ethnic loyalties etc. within and outside the organs of the state – as well as the much debated "softness" of the state. These phenomena are thus not only the result of, for instance, historical legacy, manipulating politicians, or undeveloped capitalism but are also, and perhaps mainly, part of the actual way in which capitalism *is* expanding from within the preserves of the state. Clientelism, ethnic loyalties and "soft" states are in other words associated with how people have to relate to those who monopolise vital and formally public resources and regulations – as well as with how the monopolists in their turn have to approach people as they appropriate surplus and reproduce their positions.

I would also maintain that while the increasingly important protests among "rich" as well as petty farmers against the state and its policies indicate that class struggles over land (and rent on land) are no longer as important as they used to be, the new conflicts are in a way also *related* to class. They may namely be interpreted as a struggle over increasingly important conditions of production (such as credits and various inputs but also regulations of the market) as well as over the appropriation of monopoly rents on them.

In addition to this, we may be able to explain a lot of the problems of democratisation through detailed analyses of the various ways in which important groups and individuals control resources and regulation and thereby can appropriate surplus. What we may label a rent-capitalist path of development and expansion of domestic bourgeois forces may thus hinder rather than promote democracy. This may then be qualified. For

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<sup>5</sup> And, as previously stated several times, later on we must also take advantage of several supplementary perspectives.

instance, those in Indonesia who appropriate rents by mainly trading and investing public resources may at least be open for steps towards more efficient administration. And Indian politicians and civil servants with less absolutist control of resources and regulations may help reproducing their own positions by way of vote catching, mediation, respect for elitism etc.

Moreover, groups and movements which rise the banner of "civil society against the state" can, to begin with, be analysed in terms of how they relate to the conflicts over monopolisation: Most of the groups and movements emphasise various liberties and the rule of law – but do they go for privatisation and deregulation or do they stress instead democratic government of public resources and regulations?

Finally we may also discuss how and why this rent-capitalist business sometimes hampers and sometimes, despite everything, promotes development. One example is that while appropriation of rents by way of exclusive control of certain regulations usually requires the reproduction of complicated and inefficient administration, those in control of real assets may have to invest them productively in order to reproduce their positions.

## New Left ideas

However, a lot more theorising remains to be done within our revisionist conceptual framework. We can hardly advance much longer on the basis of analyses of previous experiences from making political use of Marxism. The world is now changing much more rapidly and drastically than what we can grasp with the predominant approaches and theories. We need both theoretical studies and more empirical knowledge. One way of combining both is to carry out *and* learn from empirical studies of how new and theoretically exciting popular movements try to improve their understanding of the contemporary situation.

To begin with, then, let us make use of our analytical framework to define the situation and identify the problem.

### *The state of affairs*

As previously concluded, the political development project of the third world Left is in shambles. Post-colonial authoritarianism and an often politically facilitated expansion of capitalism came in between.

Neither has, generally speaking, the old Left been in the forefront in the recent struggles for political liberties and democratisation. Repression, isolation and general weakness were some factors. The already demonstrated problem of understanding the rise and dynamics of authoritarianism and expansion of capitalism was another. Besides, according to the conventional leftist theories, liberalisation and democratisation would not help much anyway to alter basic relations of power and inequalities.<sup>6</sup> The prominent more or less "democratic forces" at work have instead usually included middle class people and students, sections of the business community, some religious organisations, horse trading politicians and officers, various foreign agencies and powers, and a broad spectrum of labour and professional organisations, new social movements and NGOs.

Despite this, however, could it be that the seeds of a New Left are being sown within this spectrum of forces and interests, converging behind demands for more freedom and democratisation?

On the one hand the situation is uneven and open. In countries like Indonesia, even political liberalisation is still being suppressed. Elsewhere, for instance in the Philippines, most of the recent processes of democratisation lack a solid foundation in movements with genuine roots among the people, standing up for various interests and ideas, and keeping track of their political representatives. And where previously such a polity seemed to evolve, like in India, the situation is deteriorating and problems similar to those in the Philippines are becoming more and more serious. To put it very squarely one could say thus, that since the rising middle and semi-private capitalist classes, as well as the established political elites (including some traditional leftists), are not capable of handling and consolidating democratisation, space could be expected instead to be open for popular movements and a New Left.

On the other hand, however, it is one thing for movements to agree on opposing an authoritarian regime, and another to constitute a powerful actor during the very transition – not to mention the problems of associating continuous socio-economic struggles with the consolidation and further development of democracy.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. the previous section on why the traditional Philippine Left lost out.

Most observers stress that vital preconditions are very different from those which allowed popular movements to play a principal role in the democratic breakthrough in Western Europe. To begin with, authoritarian development may not only bring new movements together for liberalisation and democracy. It also causes them to stress self-defense and survival. Human rights, scattered cultural and self-help activities, and a low organisational profile are typical.

While this thus usually makes them a weak collective actor in critical moments of reform or transition,<sup>7</sup> it is probably even more important that somewhat liberalised political and economic development brings additional problems.

First, the common enemy is gone.

Second, there is some dismantling of the state – but by certain factions already having monopolised its resources rather than by new strong capitalists and members of the middle class from "outside". (Normally the latter become partners instead.) While the fiscal and institutional base of the state is weakened, surviving rulers and executives rearrange and further privatise their "fiefdoms" and networks. The separation between state and civil society – normally associated with the development of capitalism as well as with liberalisation and democratisation – remains comparatively blurred.

Third, we are far from the classical protracted industrial and cultural transformations in general and the emergence of a large and comparatively homogeneous working class in particular. The division of labour, subordination of people, and appropriation of surplus are extremely complex and contradictory. For instance, formally publicly owned land and capital and especially control of a whole lot of preconditions for production to get started and going but not directly linked to the very farm or company continue

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<sup>7</sup> This was perhaps most obvious in the Latin American context. (For a recent very stimulating general perspective, see Manuel Antonio Garretón's paper *Social Movements and the Politics of Democratisation* to the Nordic Conference on Social Movements in the Third World, University of Lund, August 18-21, 1993.) The probably best Asian example would be from Manila, February 1986, when Marcos' in-the-very-last-minute-turned-moderately-dissidents cardinal (Sin), just expelled minister of defence (Enrile) and head of the constabulary (Ramos) in a few days almost entirely managed to capture the unique "people power revolution", thereafter striking a deal with Corazon Aquino and some other traditional actors. (South Africa seems to be an exception, so far.)



to constitute independent sources of power and as well as bases for indirect appropriation of surplus produced. Further, even where there is rapid economic growth and industrial labourers become more important, a parallel tendency arises in the direction of unevenly developed service societies, including huge so-called informal sectors. Another tendency is that many people are simultaneously involved in very different activities and ways of surviving. And large sections of the population – including many unemployed students, retrenched workers, and displaced peasants – are excluded from the dynamic parts of the system.

Hence, there seems to be a lack of broad classes of people with clear-cut material interests. This then breeds individualistic strategies of survival, clientelism, group specific organisation, and mobilisation behind religious and cultural identities. Many new movements taking the fragmented interests and specific issues as points of departure – and often also preaching the "deepening" of civil society – may thus be caught in this logic. To avoid the latter, the traditional Left worships instead the "politicisation" of civil society – but often overlooks important conflicts and interests.<sup>8</sup> For instance, the inclusion/exclusion problem even cuts right through unions and peasant movements.

### *The problem*

More difficulties could be added. But while the situation is definitely very different from the one that made radical popular movements play a central role in Western European democratisation, this does not exclude the possibility that something similar may come about for other causes and reasons.

For instance, a principal conclusion from my earlier studies is, that the importance of monopolisation of essential resources via the organs of the state and other "collective institutions" should give rise to popular politics of democratisation from below, while

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<sup>8</sup> The difference between "deepening" or "politicising" civil society may very briefly be indicated in terms of stressing empowerment of individual citizens versus giving priority to common ideas and collective organisation and action. For a brilliant analysis of "the recent career" of the concept of civil society, see Peter Gibbon's paper '*Civil Society' and Political Change, with Special Reference to 'Developmentalist' States*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, Sweden, July 1993.

more resourceful dissidents should be more interested in privatisation and the rule of law.

Hence, the essential problem which should be looked into is if the development of the actually existing conditions and long term perspectives among old as well as new movements may nevertheless (a) generate linkages between various interests and perspectives, which would, collective united action, and (b) possibly make politics of democratisation instrumental to the movements concerned.

This calls for studies of conditions and reasoning on the movements' level rather than for studies of possible unifying factors generated from outside, such as an oppressive regime. Similarly, one must start with the importance of politics of democratisation for the movements rather than with their relative importance in the overall processes of liberalisation and democratisation in a country. Further, while it is beyond reasonable doubt that social movements and popular demands in general (including sectional) are in some way associated with democratisation, the critical question – in view of the Western European experience – is rather if and when democracy makes sense for developmental purposes among old as well as new leftist movements. What is their ability to renew, converge, and work out another development project? Finally, in trying to challenge the predominant arguments about serious obstacles by pointing to "positive" tendencies that may emerge, it should be fruitful to analyse critically over time theoretically exciting movements which, at least initially, give some priority to politics of democratisation.

In other words, we like to analyse if (and if so, in what way and for how long) movements find politics of democratisation instrumental. And we want to explain this by looking at actual conditions and their own long term perspectives – with possible linkages between various interests and ideas, including collective action, as an intermediate variable.

This should be possible to handle if we enter on the intermediate level – by studying movements' implementation of their own special projects and actions, mobilisation and organisation of popular support, and handling of friends, foes and obstacles – and continuously ask questions about (a) what, if any, politics of

democratisation makes sense<sup>9</sup>, and (b) relations to actual conditions and long term perspectives.

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<sup>9</sup> When analysing movements' politics (including policies) of democratisation, their statements and activities need to be filtered through a non-partisan conceptualisation of democracy and democratisation.

However, even though a definition of democracy should be limited, it is not enough to ask to what extent and in what way the work carried out by the movements studied is characterised by the essence of democracy in terms of sovereignty of the people in accordance with the principle of political equality or one-person-one-vote. We also know that this principal point is closely associated with many other factors, which in turn relate to the actual politics of democratisation. A wide classification into four groups of such factors will be indicated below. Their importance and composition may vary from one society or context to another, and scholars as well as actors (such as our movements) do of course have different opinions about them.

A first cluster of factors is the preconditions for meaningful democracy. Our next question is thus what conditions the various movements really give priority to, try to promote or set aside in their different contexts and over time? For instance, the right to organise and to express opinions? Human rights? Constitutionalism and the rule of law? Social and economic equality or autonomy in order for people to be able to come forward as candidates and especially to cast their votes in accordance with their opinions without having to submit to the wishes of their leaders, employers or landlords, dominant propaganda, or intervening governments or armies? And if so, how much of this is regarded as necessary?

Second, *what forms of democracy do the movements support (or try to avoid)*? For instance, decentralisation of government, extensive participation (direct control), pressure politics, and co-operative efforts instead of or in addition to representation (indirect control), parties, and participation in national and/or local elections? What (if any) constitutional arrangements are important? What about the problem of "democratic centralism" within radical organisations?

Third, the extension of democracy. Do the movements try to spread democratic forms of government to almost all resources which people have in common? Where do they draw the line between state and "civil society"? What about democratisation within "civil society"? Within what parts of "civil society"? (Companies? co-operatives? NGOs?...) And who will here have the right to vote? Moreover, how do they tackle the problem of monopoly and non-democratic governance of already publicly controlled and regulated resources. Do they resort to privatisation or some kind of democratic rule?

Finally, the content. What democratically decided policies do the movements find undemocratic, arguing that they run counter to necessary prerequisites for democracy to become meaningful? Only, for instance, policies undermining basic civil rights – or do they include

In order to have a fruitful spectrum with different conditions and long term perspectives, movements are selected in three different contexts. One is the Philippines, which may in a way represent the many cases where authoritarian development models went aground, and were then followed by uneven processes of liberalisation and democratisation, dismantling of the state, further economic crisis, structural adjustment and so on. The struggle for transition involved, among others, sections of the growing middle class, many NGOs and new movements – while the still significant traditional Left insisted on its old revolutionary track. The very transition and new institutions, however, were to a large extent captured by powerful political and economic actors.

The second context is Kerala – in the framework of the Indian union – representing the cases of gradually reversed nation-state development models. The state-regulated mixed economy is deteriorating and so is the comparatively democratic polity. Structural adjustment has finally been introduced. At the same time, and especially in Kerala, the traditional Left is still quite strong and tries alternative paths, partly in co-operation with new movements.

Finally comes the context of Indonesia, with a very authoritarian regime and development, sharing certain characteristics with the NIC-models, accommodating some deregulation and privatisation, but having eliminated the once very strong traditional Left and continuously resisting demands for political liberalisation from, among others, some middle class people, NGOs, and social movements.

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also measures giving rise to serious inequalities? And do their own ends justify undemocratic means?

(If we now combine the minimum definition of democracy in terms of sovereignty of the people in accordance with the principle of political equality, or one-person-one-vote, and the four important clusters of factors as outlined above it is possible to conclude by offering a more comprehensive but unfortunately still general definition – since we want it to be open and non-partisan – of democracy, namely the actual capacity of the adult citizens to exercise in various forms equal and effective rule over resources which they hold in common without thereby undermining the absolutely necessary prerequisites for this rule.)

Let me now summarise the main results from the studies carried out so far, that is, the first round of field studies in the Philippines and Kerala – but unfortunately not yet Indonesia.

### *The Philippines*

To be brief, let me make six points.<sup>10</sup>

1. Maoist oriented revolutionaries were quite strong but missed out when the struggle for political liberties and democratisation came in the forefront. Fundamental conditions changed as capitalism expanded and, for instance, reduced the importance of landlordism, increased environmental destruction, and allowed for new forms of government. The old organisations were rarely capable of reading this and renewing themselves. Dissidents came forward with alternative analyses and propositions. They worked out concepts for how the already existing movements should be able to support at least supplementary efforts. But even devoted, emphatic, and well funded attempts to find some new *modus vivendi* often failed. Rethinking sections of the Left have thus often been forced to start anew on their own.

2. Those movements usually begin by addressing people's immediate problems of survival and development on the local level – instead of first trying to get hold of political power, which could then be used to redistribute essential means of production such as land. Their reasoning implies that people can enhance their bargaining power by carrying out labour, in addition to their usually employed ability to block production. In the famous case of former commander of the New People's Army "Dante" Buscayno's co-operative efforts, ascribed productive interests of the farmers have even been stressed to such an extent that critics speak of "economism".

3. Such attempts at promoting production seem to generate an interest in the availability, management, and control of necessary resources. Again, one example is "Dante" Buscayno's attempts to reorganise and improve the living of small farmers in Tarlac, Central Luzon. Here clear-cut class struggles over land are no more. But focus is on efficient use and co-operative control of many other vital resources such as inputs, credit, water, milling,

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<sup>10</sup> For the full report, see: Törnquist, Olle "Democratic 'Empowerment' and Democratisation of Politics: Radical popular movements and the May 1992 Philippine elections" in *Third World Quarterly* Vol. 14:3, 1993. (Also in *Kasarinlan* /University of the Philippines/ Vol. 8:3, First Quarter 1993 and Vol. 9:1, Third Quarter 1993.)

transportation etc. The same holds true where plantation workers no longer have strong capitalists to fight but try to save their jobs by taking over more or less abandoned companies. And community organising (as in my Bataan and Cebu City cases) is usually based on how people can make best use of their own minor resources, while dealing also with those who monopolise, for instance, the land where people have to live or the water that they have to drink.

Hence, while the rethinking groups go beyond conventional class-conceptions and acknowledge the importance of many different issues and movements – but cannot point at a clear-cut social basis or similar material interests – their activities nevertheless indicate a common focus on the use and control of material resources. And this, as we shall see, has a clear bearing on the importance of democratisation.

4. It is true, of course, that democratisation does not make much sense when the groups need some external funds and political protection to get new alternatives started. The traditional Left has rarely been a powerful and fruitful partner and is now falling apart. Foreign and private domestic funding is widespread. Access to central as well as local state or private support usually involves clientelism, even though several NGOs and popular movements act skillfully on the comparatively large and open "markets". This patronage is one of the new movements' weakest points.

Once off-ground, however, a most interesting trend is that democratic organising, management and co-operation so far seem to be instrumental when trying to directly promote people's "empowerment" and conditions of living, precisely by improving their own capacity to use and control vital resources.

Alternative projects have mainly been set up outside the framework of the state and the established political organisations, in the "civil society". There are two very different models of how to go about this. On the one hand, time consuming education, "conscientisation", and small scale projects with participatory democracy supplemented by coalition building. On the other hand, democratic guidance of large projects based on calculated interests and practical experiences to rapidly prepare the ground for further politics of democratisation.

5. Again, the rigidity of the traditional Left and its political development project has thus caused the rethinking sections to try building their own movements on the basis of rather scattered and rarely converging grass root projects. It is true that the more and

more serious crisis of the still dominating old Left may open up for fresh alternatives. For the last few years, it has already contributed to more democratic forms of co-operation within the Left as a whole. But even in face of the 1992 elections a broad front was not possible. Only the rethinking "soft" sections came together. They tried to use people's trust in radical extra-parliamentary work, to mobilise votes also for comparatively progressive political representatives. The results, however, indicated, that the certified capacity of the new movements to carry out actions and alternative and democratic development work could not be transformed into votes with temporary electoral alliances and machineries.

Either they will thus have to expand on the US model of pressure politics, lobbying, and temporary alliances behind as progressive personalities as possible, or try to transform the system from within. But compiling ideas and pooling resources has proved insufficient. Since the whole is more than the sum of its parts but cannot be proclaimed from above, the problem is thus if general political questions can be combined with the daily work and separate issues – so that people and various movements place special interests within a total perspective (and can generate a political party) well ahead of elections.

6. Actually there are signs of another promising tendency that may open up for this. In carrying out their work in "civil society", the movements face important structural conditions which even according to their own long term perspectives call for different forms of extended politics of democratisation.

*On the one hand*, democratisation may be taken beyond "civil society", to the state. Even unions or movements working with specific development projects find it instrumental to join forces and seriously get into local politics, for two basic reasons:

- They are confronted with problems that must be dealt with on a general level beyond their individual projects, like environmental destruction, aggressive development plans, unemployment, bad housing, and the running of workers' own co-operatives.

- A new local government code is now being implemented. A lot of resources and power will be allocated to local politicians and bureaucrats. The local political arena will be crucial. The law stipulates NGO representation in development councils. And grassroots organisations will be better equipped to support and keep track of local political candidates than national ones.

*On the other hand*, already existing attempts at linking development work and political interventions may be democratised. A most important negative experience from local elections nearby Dante's co-operative was, namely, that most of the people involved had no clear-cut material interests, for instance as farmers, even in sustaining the developmental efforts. Interests which the leaders could take for granted when offering an electoral alternative to threatening corrupt local politicians. Consequently, one logical conclusion is that the people really must get to know about, and preferably experience, the effects of how they and others are acting within the co-operative, as well as the consequences for the project of what the politicians they have elected are doing.

### *Kerala*

It is now less easy to be reasonably brief – I have not yet concluded the report from the initial round of field studies in Kerala, carried out in February-March 1993. So what follows is mainly some tentative reflections.

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Kerala is different. As already indicated, it is within the context of a gradually revised nation-state development model. The Indian state-regulated mixed economy is deteriorating and so is the comparatively democratic polity. Structural adjustment has finally been introduced. At the same time, and especially in Kerala, the traditional Left – with the Communist Party of India (Marxist), CPI-M, as the major force – is still quite strong and to some extent tries alternative paths, partly in co-operation with new movements.

Kerala differs from West Bengal, the other Indian state where Communists are strong and where exciting attempts have been made since 1977 at political decentralisation and democratisation in the framework of agrarian reforms.

The impressive agrarian reforms in West Bengal have not done away with landlordism. Many people have become dependent on alternative Left-patronage. The peasant movement in Kerala, on the other hand, enforced India's most radical "bourgeois land reform" – land to the tenants. Also, agricultural and other labourers successfully defended their interests. Teachers, scientists, and organic intellectuals developed impressive cultural movements. The Left stressed redistributive policies and reached its peak in the late-sixties and early-seventies.



But the free peasants had only small pieces of land. The labourers were well organised. And the vital agricultural resources besides land were often cornered on the markets and within the co-operative societies as well as the organs of the state. Communal and political loyalties were highly important.

Consequently, agricultural production stagnated. The few private and public-sector industries did likewise. Capitalists usually invested outside the state or in commerce, real estate and money-lending. Neither were most remittances from the many migrants invested productively. The employment problem grew seriously. The traditional popular movements faced a blind alley and elections were lost.

In the eighties, however, this crisis paved the way for the idea that unemployment must now be tackled by directly promoting development rather than, as before, by first splitting the pie.

Since this in turn required better resource management – which presupposed clean and efficient government – sections within the Left forcefully argued, that democratisation was a realistic and attractive way of approaching the problems. Actually, those ideas helped bring the Left Front – including moderate communist, socialist and liberal-left parties – back into office already in the 1987 state elections.<sup>11</sup>

Since the mid-80s it is thus possible to follow closely the popular movements which opted for democratisation – and to virtually see in what respects and why this has made and maybe will continue to make sense for them, including after June 1991 when the Left was voted out of office again. Having been extremely successful in district elections in early 1991, when democratisation was on the agenda, the Left failed in the State and national elections in June which at least partly were affected by the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For more comprehensive analyses, see my *What's Wrong...Vol. II, op.cit.* and "Communists and Democracy: Two Indian Cases and One Debate", in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* Vol. 23:2, 1991.

<sup>12</sup> For analyses of these elections see Thomas Isaac's "Kerala's verdict", "Muslim League: the inevitable end", "Kerala: advantage LDF", and "The Kerala shock: Factors that revised the trend" in *Frontline* February 16-March 1, March 2-15, April 13-26, and July 20-August 2, 1991, plus Thomas Isaac and Mohana Kumar, "Kerala Elections, 1991: Lessons and Non-Lessons", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 23, 1991.

The main thrust of the rethinking sections of the Left has so far been decentralisation of power and popular participation, so that planning, better resource management, and thereby development, can start from below and be based on joint interests. Their main projects include the following.

- Decentralisation of government and administration to districts and *panchayats*<sup>13</sup>.
- Massive mapping of local resources.

Nobody has a clear overall picture of what resources are available and what can be done, for instance, to prevent erosion or irrigate fields through simple local planning. Concerned scientists thus initiated a massive mapping of resources, approved by the Left-government. When the experts have done their part, instantly trained activists of the People's Science Movement<sup>14</sup> were to collect information from, *and* spread the message to, ordinary local people. Moreover, local plans would form the base for the State Planning Board. Many of those involved try to continue these efforts despite the fall of the Left Front Government.

- Group farming.

This was initiated by the Left-government and peasant movements to, for instance, pool resources, and thus promote agricultural production without harming anybody. (The labourers seem to have accepted it.) This may expand to other crops, processing, and marketing. Partially, the projects continue.

- Cultural, including literacy, campaigns among weak sections of the population. Most of those have come to a standstill after the change of government.

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The Kerala scene has been altered by the unexpected fall of the Left Front Government in 1991, by central government

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<sup>13</sup>*Panchayat*, rural local government covering many villages/cluster of houses – large parts of Kerala is actually semi-urban.

While the new state-government now negates the decentralisation of powers to the district councils which the Left Front Government had started to implement, (see e.g. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Dec. 7, 1991, pp. 7993 f.), the radical popular movements' reactions to these obstacles remain to be studied.

<sup>14</sup> The People's Science Movement is an independent radical popular movement with its roots in Kerala and a very wide following and basically aiming at spreading scientific knowledge and promoting its careful usage by and in the interest of common people.

introduction of structural adjustment and by the serious communal conflicts in India as a whole. As far as I can see, there are now two main trends.

On the one hand, there is a widespread and deeply felt need to defend what has been achieved against the onslaught of neo-liberal as well as communal ways of approaching the crisis of the nation state project. In a way this gives the traditional Left (as well as, for instance, nationalists with vested interests in semi-privatised public institutions) a new lease on life. And in the process, something essentially sick may very well be protected. But almost everyone seems to agree that such risks are as unavoidable as the threats are formidable. (Just imagine, for example, an Indian combination of neo-liberal structural adjustment within the economy, communalism within the "civil society", and authoritarian Hindu chauvinist forces within the government.)

On the other hand, many left-oriented groups and movements are *simultaneously* engaged in rethinking and trying out new or renewed political development projects. What are the tendencies?

#### *Focus on productive interests*

The point of departure for the rethinking Left was, as we may recall, that economic development had come to a standstill. The employment problem grew seriously. And this had to be tackled head on rather than by further attempts at splitting the pie.

The basic approach relates to productive interests. As in the Philippines, a fundamental idea is people's capacity to enhance their bargaining power by carrying out labour (in addition to their usually employed ability to block production). One example is the need among Kerala farmers to pool resources and arrange some joint management ("group farming") in order to promote more efficient production and increase returns.

These ideas and practices could perhaps help bring the Left back to the forefront of the development discourse. Previous political development projects focused on the need to get hold of and make use of political power to redistribute essential means of production such as land in favour of the actual producers. However, in the case of Kerala, this also meant that parts of the political institutions and public resources were used to by-pass the need to increase production in order to improve one's living standards. The various parties (and especially the election front they have to form), their attached interest groups, and political factions within the co-operative movement, rarely reflect clear-

cut collective interests in production. Instead, people are usually rallied on the basis of the organisations' and leaders' capacity to give groups, communities and individuals access to as large share of the cake as possible. This unproductive factionalism contributed to the current economic impasse – and paved the way for the expansion of capitalist relations. And the point is now, that by taking one step back to "civil society" and "economism", rethinking sections of the Left want to undermine such devastating forms of politicisation – so that they can thereafter take two steps forward with clear ideas on how to promote alternative development, which are *based on productive interests*.

Simultaneously there are also attempts within the established Left – though unfortunately separate from those indicated above – to work out more development oriented policies rather than such traditional methods as supporting union resistance to increases in productivity to prevent potential loss of jobs. More and more leaders are realising that the serious stagnation of production within industry as well as agriculture, and the associated fiscal crisis of the state, cause much more unemployment. The prescriptions, however, are rarely related to the previously mentioned alternative-development ideas and include everything from pioneering the promotion of social contracts between capital and labour (e.g. social security in exchange for rationalisations and retrenchments) and state sponsored co-operative reconstruction and management of sick industries, to more conventional state-led emphasis on infrastructure (cheap electricity) and modern industries.

#### *Joint interest in better resource management*

While even the main production-oriented activities of the rethinking movements involve particular and different issues and interests, as well as groups of people, it is interesting to note that they all seem to relate to the use and (after some time) the control of resources of various kinds.

The best example is when the People's Science Movements initiate mapping on the village level of at first hand natural and human resources. This is carried out by concerned experts and instantly trained local volunteers. They try as broad as possible co-operation and discussion of the results with the authorities and various political and social organisations. Focus is on how the resources can be used more efficiently without causing harm to anyone – for instance by improving local irrigation, by helping underemployed people to grow vegetables on others' land left

fallow in the dry season or by initiating new business. This may seem innocent. But the most exciting is the potential: that the literally public mapping and discussion of resources generate questions on how resources are controlled, what vested interests are there, how surplus is appropriated etc. – *and* that this discussion might continue to be open, involve many knowledgeable local participants, and be difficult to divert from the initial consensus on promoting socially responsible, efficient and sustainable development.

Hence, while the rethinking groups go beyond conventional class-conceptions and acknowledge the importance of many different issues and movements, but cannot point at a clear-cut social basis or similar material interests, their activities nevertheless indicate a common focus on productive interests and – when trying to increase production – the use and control of material resources. And this, as we shall see, has a clear bearing on the importance of democratisation.

#### *Democratic organising of development activities*

A most interesting trend is that, as in the Philippines, democratic organising, management and co-operation so far seem to be instrumental when the rethinking groups try to directly promote people's "empowerment" and conditions of living precisely by improving their own capacity to use and control vital resources.

It is true, of course, that democratisation may not always make much sense when activists need some external funds and political protection to get new alternatives started. While it is often possible to avoid risky foreign funding in Kerala, the rethinking groups have to link up with central state programmes and local authorities – usually via "good contacts" – as well as with important sections of the strong and authoritarian traditional Left. However, and again as in the Philippines, once started, the emphasis of democratic grassroots organisation is very much there, for instance in the already mentioned projects initiated by the People's Science Movement.

On the whole, however, there has been more attempts at co-operation with various organs of the state and the traditional Left in Kerala. Besides actions and lobbying in favour of decentralisation to and democratisation of district and *panchayat* bodies, this includes top-down guidance and co-operation with "positive" local organs of the state, co-operatives, and established political organisations.

Here is thus a major difference between the Philippines and Kerala. While the new Philippine Left is trying to promote alternative development by taking their own movements beyond democratisation in "civil society" to the more political sphere, the rethinking groups in Kerala are trying to combine this path with a unique and exciting effort to co-operate with and to renew the established Left.

*Alternative politics of development and democratisation via the renewal of the Left*

The traditional Left – with the CPI-M in the forefront – faces severe problems but is historically and socially well rooted, the only radical political force that really matters, and despite ideological and organisational rigidity often politically pragmatic. Most rethinking groups still find it possible *and* important to relate to, try to renew or influence, and get support from the old organisations, and, when the Left is in office, from public institutions. The dissidents have developed both methods of independent action and friendly pressure politics vis-à-vis the Left. And what will come out of this transitional relationship is an open question.

One characteristic is that the established Left views most of the alternative efforts as independent and supplementary relief to people, while the party and its mass movements would still have to accomplish the necessary radical political and socio-economic changes. And interestingly enough, several activists within the People's Science Movement also seem to take refuge behind similar arguments in trying to uphold a kind of political innocence – since they neither want to be accused of trying to build a full scale political alternative, nor of being part of the established Left.

Another feature is that when the Left is in office (as between 1987 and 1991), rethinking leaders and movements are invited to contribute to the formulation and implementation of alternative governmental policies. But when the Left later is out of office again (as after 1991), the same leaders and movements also lose much of their foothold. And the established Left retreats into traditional demand and pressure politics, thus relying entirely on traditional protest-demand-pressure organisations rather than also on people's capacity to think for themselves, work, and organise accordingly. There is no real attempt to sustain the exciting programmes as vital parts of a renewed *political* development project. And this is thus in sharp contrast to the rather autonomous peasants' struggle for land till the mid

seventies, which formed the basis for the then hegemonic political development project and went on irrespective of whether the Left was in or out of office.

After some time the People's Science Movement says now that it will try to maintain at least its own part of the state-sponsored programmes, including certain pilot projects. And some leading communists have stated that their cadres should not give up the efforts just because a new government is now in office. But a crucial problem is whether new broad movements like the previous one among peasants can really emerge when the issues and interests are now more diverse and complicated. Or is it instead perhaps the established perspectives and organisations which are incapable of identifying, analysing, and nourishing common interests and new dynamic movements?

Thirdly, while the rethinking groups and new movements are gaining importance and attracting many activists and sympathisers, they have little organised influence within the institutional framework of the established Left. As already indicated, they have to rely instead on personal contacts, lobbying, and a kind of pressure politics. The same holds true for the many new, young, often unemployed and middle-class oriented voters who brought the Left back in office in 1987. Especially the CPI-M (which is what really counts) is instead dominated by leaders drawing on the party apparatuses, traditional mass movements and institutions such as the unions and the co-operatives, in addition to their own popularity, networks and communal affiliations – even if the youth organisation seems to make some difference. And what is decided *or not decided* in the party affects most of the organisations and individuals on various levels whom the rethinking groups have to (and like to) work with, including members of the state assembly, district and *panchayat* councils, those appointed in public institutions and undertakings, and the politicised co-operatives.

This limited institutionalised influence is further accentuated by the centralised system of government. Below the union level there is only the state, leaving almost nothing to the districts and *panchayats* (villages) – which, however, are given priority to by most alternative groups.

In principle the Communists have been in favour of decentralisation for some time. During the last Left Front Government (1987-1991) new laws were implemented, dispersing at least some real powers to the local governments. Elections were held and the Left was very successful. But consequently, the

Congress-led front – which was brought back in the Kerala state-office in mid-1991 by the sympathy-wave for the assassinated Rajiv Gandhi – immediately clamped down on the decentralisation. Generally speaking, bureaucrats have also vested interests in the centralised system. And even more serious, on closer examination most politicians on the Left are hardly enthusiastic either.

The rethinking groups, on the other hand, aim at building up pressure from below. Like in the Philippines, they seem to be interested in extending democratic project-work to the participation in and democratisation of local politics when confronted with problems and issues that must be handled on a more general level. (For instance many of those brought forward in the process of the previously mentioned resource mapping and associated village actions plans). However, in the Kerala terrain of a strong and reasonably pragmatic traditional Left and many established social movements, the rethinking groups find it easier than in the Philippines to favour rather close co-operation with various parties and movements, plus with friendly local governments and state sponsored institutions. But a precondition is, that the unproductive political factionalism is weakened by the alternative development projects. So in a way, the new groups are both arguing for associative democracy and engaged in building its necessary foundations.

Another striking similarity is that just like in the case of Dante's co-operative in the Philippines there is now an obvious lack of clear-cut (traditional) class interests among most Kerala households which can be taken for granted and used in political planning. Organisation and collective action (that do not undermine the general efforts of the rethinking groups) thus seem to require that people themselves get to know and experience the consequences of how they and others act. That is, a kind of democratisation of the political work based on experience, dialogue, consciousness and so on: the development of an alternative discourse, to use a notion in vogue.

While this is especially important in Kerala, with its extensive middle class even outside the cities, and the socially widespread and crucial inflow of Gulf-money (migrant remittances), the chances of moving ahead are comparatively good thanks to the uniquely high and widespread educational standard in the state. Actually, a lot of the work carried out by the People's Science Movement is done by comparatively well educated "middle-class" people living in the villages, many of whom are young and



unemployed. Moreover, the role of popular cultural movements and personalities cannot be exaggerated. And local middle class activists are also instrumental in carrying out the unavoidable political "brokering", including the linking up of popular initiatives with experts and local as well as more centrally placed leaders and bureaucrats.

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Ultimately the rethinking groups thus hope to be able to promote enough widespread and solid local pressure to generate changes on the top as well. And whether or not the established Communist movement will *then* be able to reform and renew itself is usually considered to be an open question.

As far as I can see, however, an extremely vital precondition for most of this is that politics and administration really becomes decentralised to districts and *panchayats*. More real power at the local level and less dependency on central leaders and bureaucrats are crucial in carrying the rethinking groups beyond democratisation of civil society (including lobbying and pressure politics) to popular politics of democratisation. And the problem is, that this decentralisation of power seems to be much more difficult to implement in Kerala than in the Philippines (where also a lot of local bosses want to "get back" some of the powers centralised by Marcos.) Quite recently an amendment has been added to the Indian constitution which calls for real decentralisation. But as already mentioned, even the established Left hesitates. Among the many causes and reasons is the fact that the basis of many leaders is associated with centralised organisational powers. There is also the need to uphold enough central power, so that at least some influential state-portfolios remain when the CPI-M has taken its share and can then be given to the small member parties of the Left Front in return for their extremely important support in elections where margins are extremely tiny. And while the conservative land reforms in West Bengal made very many peasants quite dependent on political protection and economic support, and thus enabled the Bengali Communists to even strengthen their positions by far reaching decentralisation measures, their comrades in Kerala, where radical-bourgeois land reforms made peasants more independent, face a much more difficult position.

An additional problem is, that the rethinking groups are usually isolated from the main organised section of the Left, the unions. The new alternatives instead are based on specific issues and on the developmental capacity of broad groups of people locally

rather than on work-place conflicts over the distribution of surplus, jobs etc. The former are sometimes looked upon as a bit idealistic and of course reformist, while the latter has a tendency toward both revolutionary slogans *and* a very pragmatic acceptance of whoever and whatever that might bring about jobs and economic growth.

Moreover, since last year it has not only been neo-liberal structural adjustment that seem more urgent than the attempts at alternative development projects – and thus calls for broad unity and to a certain extent gives the established Left a new lease on life – but also communalism, which may even bring together all kinds of secular forces.

However, the wide consensus about the need for a kind of anti-fascist front does not seem to be based on a similarly widespread insight about the root causes of communalism. Most secularists, including the traditional Marxists, have paid much attention to social oppression in its own right. Secular politicians in general and Congress leaders in particular have settled more deals with and made use of more communal groups and sentiments to sustain their own positions as the nation state project ran aground, the political institutions deteriorated, and, for instance, the public social security systems could not match up with the increased vulnerability of most people under capitalism. And to instead side with the weaker parties in the present conflicts implies dangerous risks of being caught in the logic of the very communal conflicts themselves – if one is unable to effectively challenge the ideological hegemony of their present leaders. So a logical conclusion is, thus, that it is essential to revive previous attempts of cultural and religious reform movements (including Gandhian ones) to, for instance, challenge Hindu chauvinism, stress universalism etc. And after some time this may therefore rather make it possible for the rethinking groups than for the established secular organisations to advance .

But of course, this requires the reform movements to be linked up with the democratic development work and to the general struggle over structural adjustment. Whether that is feasible or not remains to be seen. Could, for instance, the previously discussed attempts at democratic development oriented local co-operation also come to serve as a powerful alternative to those looking for inspiration as well as political and material protection and support among communal organisations?

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To summarise, the rethinking popular movements in Kerala under review usually give priority to the ways in which resources are used and managed. This frequently calls for democratic organisation of the individual projects – and seems to rest with interests in promoting production.

The movements vacillate, however, between the building of their own politics of democratisation from below and of finding ways of pressurising and linking up with established institutions and organisations, which may then, perhaps, be reformed. So far a lot of the activities depend on skilled political "brokerage" by leading activists at various levels. The new movements are very much dependent on support from the established Left and friendly state-government institutions. And a very important precondition for their future work is the actual implementation of political decentralisation.

### **In lieu of a conclusion**

Methods and theories inspired by historical materialism and Marxist ideas are, thus, not only or even mainly alive in some seminar rooms. The most exciting development, I suggest, is actually going on among intellectuals, activists, and concerned people related to various popular movements where theory and practice are confronted. Quite naturally only a few of them find time or are capable of writing good scientific books and articles about what they are in the process of outlining and testing in practice. And the outcome, political as well as theoretical, is not clear. But this is really one of the places where we, in our roles as concerned academicians, can improve our knowledge and get the perhaps best possible input when trying to renew critical analyses about politics and development. Theirs is, in other words, both a most exciting discourse not to be set aside and an important object of study.

