

ARE NEW LAWS THE REPLY TO MARXIST AGITATION?

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According to a news item appearing in the daily Press it would appear that the National Government has decided to enact legislation to confiscate the properties and otherwise punish those who create disaffection and disunity among various sections of the people by raising religious and racial cries. The news item states that the contemplated legislation will be introduced in Parliament very shortly.

CLASS HATRED

During the last three decades the revolutionary Marxists have been incessantly preaching class hatred to the workers of our country, and promised them the Utopia of a so-called Dictatorship of the Proletariat through revolutionary class struggle. Having failed to capture power by mobilising the workers, they now appear in the guise of saviours of Buddhism, of the Sinhala language, and of Sinhala culture, and seek to achieve their goal by winning over the Sinhala Buddhist peasantry who have consistently been opposed to their revolutionary doctrines.

The Marxists who believe in the Machiavellian principle that the end justifies the means do not hesitate to exploit the national and religious feelings of the people, bring about religious and racial discord by that means, and through the chaos thus created, to capture power and set-up the so-called Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

WORSE

It may be that the National Government seeks to counter the latest strategy of the Marxists by the proposed legislation. The Buddhists, however, have a just fear that the remedy proposed by the Government may prove to be worse than the disease. As far as we can visualise, this legislation will make the Marxists martyrs in the eyes of the Buddhists to the cause of Buddhism Sinhala language and the Sinhala culture rather than curb their activities.

The Sinhala Buddhist whose life has been moulded for over twenty centuries by the practice of the Buddha Dhamma and by his association with the Sangha is indeed a nationalist. But he is no chauvinist who is intolerant towards persons of other races and nationalities.

He is devoted to his religion. But he is no fanatic who does not tolerate other religions, who thinks his is the only true religion and that all other religions are the creation of the devil. During the entire period of their long history the Buddhists have never persecuted people of other religions in the name of religion.

EXAMPLE OF TOLERANCE

They also have not harassed people of other races and nationalities in the name of nationalism. The Sinhalese Buddhist who waged a life and death struggle against foreign invaders to save the motherland, befriended and helped the very enemy once the struggle was over. Let us take for example the treatment accorded to the Portuguese by the Sinhalese during the 17th century. The Portuguese conquistadors, who invaded Ceylon in the 16th century occupied the Maritime Provinces and wantonly destroyed every Buddhist temple, every Pirivena and every Buddhists shrine within these provinces, literally without leaving one stone upon another.

They also either drove away or put to the sword every Buddhist monk living within their territory. They mercilessly tortured and massacred innocent Sinhalese Buddhists indiscriminately, without considering whether their victims were children or adults, men or women.

The Portuguese historian, Captain Joao Ribeiro for example, says in his book on "The Historic Tragedy of the Island of Ceilao" that "diabolical atrocities marked the route of Teixeira. By his orders men were hacked in two with axes like trees, the breasts of women were torn off, the wombs of mothers were slit open." (page 84).

SANCTUARY TO PORTUGUESE

But when these very Portuguese, who had resorted to such diabolical atrocities against the Sinhala Buddhists, were being persecuted by the Dutch in the 17th century, our Sinhalese Buddhist Kings not only gave them sanctuary but also gave them lands to build Churches for their worship.

Sections of the Sinhalese who had embraced the religion of the Portuguese conquerors, were also persecuted by the Dutch on religious grounds and they too sought and obtained sanctuary from the Sinhalese King within his kingdom.

FREE PRACTICE

They were also given every facility to practise their religion freely. To quote Ribeiro again "... he (the King of Kandy) gave orders to settle them (the Portuguese) at Ruanwella, in a handsome city in a strong situation, and there seven hundred of them live with their families quite comfortably, as he allotted to all of them villages belonging to the Crown and with them there live the priests and members of the religious orders to administer the Sacraments." (ibid,p.264).

THE SAME TODAY

Even today any non Sinhalese and non-Buddhist can go to the remotest Sinhalese Buddhist village and settle down there and pursue any avocation he likes without any let or hindrance from the villagers. The spirit of tolerance prevailing among the Buddhists, their friendliness towards

strangers and their helpfulness have been commented upon not only by foreign travelers who sojourned among them but also by English officials who administered the country during the British period.

Our Buddhist worker is in fact a peasant. He too possesses the good qualities mentioned above. He also likes to live in amity and friendship with his fellow workers belonging to other races and religions.

Now if among a people with such a background and such a tradition, ideas that tend to create racial and religious bitterness spread and if they become prone to listen to purveyors of such ideas, and if as a result of such propaganda they tend to go berserk, then there must be some good reasons for such a state of affairs.

UNDEMOCRATIC

In such a situation it is the duty of a democratic government to investigate the reasons and remedy them. It is not at all proper for a democratic government to enact new laws which may have the effect of gagging the entire people for all times.

FREEDOM

Freedom of thought, freedom of speech and freedom of the Press are democratic freedoms, and a democratic government is obliged to foster and protect these freedoms. It may be that certain power-hungry politicians and political parties abuse these freedoms with a view to capturing political power by extra Parliamentary methods and destroying the very foundations of democracy. In the last analysis, however, it is a healthy public opinion that can exercise a check on the abuses of these democratic freedoms.

As Harold Laski says: "It is wise to trust the free exercise of the mind rather than to seek ex-cathedra to put it in swaddling clothes." History shows that men cannot kill an ideology with a sword or by enacting laws. It is only by superior ideas that a false ideology can be destroyed.

There is this fact, too. If the people are confirmed in their belief that the democratic government will always act with justice and fair play towards all individuals and all groups that comprise the people, then any effort on the part of designing individuals to disrupt and destroy the government is bound to end in failure. To win the public confidence the government must act on the principle "justice must not only be done, but also appear to be done."

DISCRIMINATION

When we examine closely the nature of racial and religious dissensions that occurred during the post-independence period we see that these dissensions did not have their origin either among the peasantry or among the working class.

They also did not start among the elite and the affluent. These dissensions

invariably originated in the middle classes, especially among the white-collar workers, and other intelligentsia working in the public and private sector. This was mainly due to the feeling that certain racial and religious minorities were systematically discriminating against the Sinhala Buddhist majority in the field of education and employment.

The belief that the Sinhalese Buddhists were being discriminated against in the fields of education and employment was one that was prevailing from colonial times. There is ample justification for this belief. Although the British rulers were far more just and fair than the Portuguese and Dutch rulers, almost until the end of their period they discriminated against the Buddhists in the fields of education and employment.

According to Rev. Fr S G Perera for a long period under the British it was not possible for a person to secure a government job without an English education and nobody could get an English education without first getting himself baptised as a Christian. The Buddhists generally believed that after Ceylon attained political independence this kind of discrimination would cease once and for all.

But their hopes were shattered. As a matter of fact, evidence was forthcoming to the effect that the religious and racial minorities who received favoured treatment and special privileges under the Colonial regime were getting themselves organised better than ever before, and were discriminating against the Buddhists with a view to keeping them down for ever.

MINORITIES

The possibility of a privileged minority dominating a majority and discriminating against them with a view to keeping them down for all times is admitted even by the United Nations Organisation. In a UNO brochure entitled "The main types and causes of discrimination" 1949, page 27, the idea is stressed thus, "Ordinarily the group discriminated against is a minority in comparison with the group which discriminates. However, there may be and already are cases in which the group discriminated against is in the majority, dominated by a minority. This may occur, for example, in countries where colonial customs prevail."

Post-independent Ceylon is a classic example of a country where the under-privileged majority is being dominated and discriminated against by powerful and privileged minorities.

Furthermore the United Nations in its publication "The study of discrimination in education" page 150, holds the view that the perception of discrimination and education has produced a genuine awakening in the countries discriminated against. "Millions upon millions of human beings have regained their sense of dignity and place in the world."

"This movement is part of the onward march of history. "Gandhi was a result of a series of discriminatory practices".

TEMPORALITIES

In Ceylon the under-privileged Sinhala Buddhist majority is being discriminated against in two ways. Firstly there is the discrimination in law. During the colonial regime certain legislation, which had been enacted, had been embodied with a view to discriminating against the Buddhists, and these laws are still in operation and operate against the Buddhists. One such example is the Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance under which Buddhist Temporalities are rigidly controlled by the Government.

The Christian and other religious temporalities are however exempted from all control. Secondly there is the discrimination in administration. The Buddhists are being even now discriminated against in both the public and the private sectors. Certain mercantile establishments, which earn their profits by trading with the Buddhists themselves, discriminate against the Buddhists in employment as a matter of policy. If an applicant is found to be a Buddhist his application is not even considered by these establishments.

OPENLY

Whatever discriminatory policies the private sector may adopt the public sector i.e. Government and quasi-Government establishments are obliged to treat every citizen alike and to act with fair play and justice towards all, and never to discriminate against any one on grounds of race or religion.

It is however a matter for regret that certain non-Buddhist high officials who occupy positions of trust and power abuse their authority and discriminate against the Buddhists openly and blatantly. One of the main reasons for the spread of suspicion and ill will among the various religious groups in this country is the existence of the International Catholic Action Movement, which has as its avowed objective the Catholicisation of the country.

Within this movement is organized a group called "The Apostolate of Institutions" comprising top executives belonging to both the public and private sectors whose avowed objective is "The Christianization of Institutions" by capturing key positions in both sectors. The work of the "Apostolate of Institutions" is shrouded in secrecy, but its effects become manifest in the manner in which the key positions in both sectors come to be filled by Roman Catholics and in the way those Catholics in key positions discriminate against non-Catholics.

CATHOLIC ACTION

The present Pope, Paul VI, has initiated a move not only to bring about unity among the various Christian denominations but also to seek the hand of friendship and understanding with non-Christian religions. In the circumstances we expected that the conspiratorial movement called Catholic Action would be disbanded or its policies and principles would be re-orientated to suit the ecumenical and peaceful co-existence of the present Pope.

But we have been disappointed. From the evidence we now have in our possession it would appear that since the coming into being of the National Government, the Catholic Action Movement has intensified its anti-national and anti-Buddhist activities and it is carrying on its infiltration tactics with great vigour and in a more systematic and organized manner.

COMPLAINED TO P.M.

Already the Bauddha Jatika Balavegaya has had occasion to make representations to the Honourable Prime Minister against the discriminatory treatment accorded to Buddhists by Catholic high officials in the Departments under the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Housing, the Ministry of Works, Post & Telecommunications, and the Ministry of Social Services. We have no doubt that the Prime Minister will closely investigate our representations and take steps to put a stop to these disruptive activities.

However, when the Buddhists who comprise the majority in this country are discriminated against in this manner the Government would be doing them a great injustice and a disservice by enacting legislation which may have the effect of denying them even an opportunity to ventilate their just grievances. History teaches us one important lesson, that is, that revolutions are always built on popular grievances.

The Buddhists do not oppose any legislation to curb the activities of those who create racial and religious enmity. But they fear that the proposed legislation may even prevent the Buddhists from ventilating their legitimate grievances.

INJUSTICE

In any event it is the duty of the democratic government to set up the necessary machinery to put a stop to all the types of discriminatory activities on the part of its officials. Sinhalese are discriminated against because they are Sinhalese. Buddhists are discriminated against because they are Buddhists. This must be stopped before the Government enacts legislation to bring to book persons who raise racial and religious cries with whatsoever motive.

If such machinery is not set up, the proposed legislation will only serve the purpose of giving encouragement to non-Buddhists to discriminate more and more against the Buddhists with greater intensity. In that event this law, which is proposed to be enacted with the idea of protecting the Nation, will in fact spell the doom of the Nation.