

## Where will this Politics Lead Us?

We would like to record our deep regret and concern about the way the government has handled the AL and JP protest programmes of Wednesday last. The blatant action of the police beating up senior AL leaders, indiscriminately firing tear gas shells and the random baton charging of the demonstrating public, was indeed most provocative. In a tit-for-tat political environment, it has given Awami League the reason for further action, and they are nobody's fool, not to exploit it to the hilt. However, we would like to add, that the AL's programme of sit-down demonstration surrounding the Secretariat was irresponsible and no less provocative. The cat-and-mouse game that the government and the opposition are now playing is ominous for democracy, development and foreign investment.

We would like to ask, what were the needs and the objectives of the Awami League and Jatiya Party's programme of Wednesday? As we said, the programme of sit down demonstration surrounding the Secretariat — the heart of the administration — amounted to a frontal challenge and no government worth its name can permit it. AL leaders said their intention was to take position at the Noor Hossain Square, make some speeches and leave. And all of this was to be done most peacefully. The experience is that whenever a large gathering is permitted, it has the propensity, if not a predictable tendency, of turning violent. Even if the AL wanted to keep it peaceful, they could not have guaranteed it. So a pre-emptive action by the police cannot be brushed aside as totally unnecessary. When the AL declared its intention of organising a sit-down demonstration around the Secretariat, it was fully aware of its implications. Why did the AL chose the Secretariat? Obviously because they felt that the government would be bound to react, and God willing, if there is a foul up — as obviously there was — then further action would automatically follow.

Couldn't the government have dealt with the situation in a less brutal manner? If we take the administration's record of handling protest demonstrations over the last few months — the attack on AL's programme of 1st Baishakh (launching of the new Bangla century), the attack on Nirmul's meeting and on the person of Jahanara Imam, the recent incident at Lalmonirhat and the use of section 144 to prevent especially, JP meetings in some district towns — it appears that the only way the government wants to handle opposition's protest activities is through tough police action. If we are to practice democracy then the opposition parties will have to be given — by law — the right to protest, and in the way they chose to express that protest, of course within the bounds of law. From the early hours of the morning, all roads leading to the proposed action site of the AL was cordoned off. It means that the government had taken the decision to try to prevent the AL programmes much before there was the slightest sign of violence. So the question can easily be put, what option did the opposition have but to try to force its will on the situation?

On the other hand, the government could have proposed or earmarked a designated area — like the place where the PM held her meeting on Monday last — where the AL could have been permitted to hold its rally. Instead the police kept on chasing the people all around, including in front of the AL's central office, and throwing tear gas, even on the onlookers. No, the way the government tried to disrupt the opposition's protest programme on Wednesday, was undemocratic and as such unacceptable.

We are concerned that our politics is increasingly going towards the confrontational path, and both sides are becoming increasingly stiff in their respective positions. We have said so before, and we say it again — please, for the country's sake, talk to each other. Days of police violence against political demonstration should really be a thing of the past. But it will never be, unless we substitute dialogue for confrontation.

## Goldrush

There has again been a big gold haul at Dhaka's international airport. The haul weighed this time 58 kg and has been valued at Tk 3.13 crore. This is undoubtedly impressive, being the biggest haul of all up to January this year. But on January 25 a bigger — more than double the present one — catch was made to beat Thursday's performance to second place. Big cases of gold smuggling through this airport — each valued at more than Taka one crore and above — now totals a staggering Tk 26.73 crore over the last 28 months time. Adjusting this figure to gold smuggling cases of lesser size, contraband gold inflow through air certainly add up to more than Taka one crore worth of the metal per month. In Chaplin's classic, men went madly on a gold hunt only to end up in immeasurable misfortune. We are here experiencing another kind of a goldrush — gold rushing after people — and what a rush it is!

Exactly three years back this month a haul of Tk 3 crore worth of smuggled gold was made at our nation's air enterpot. Quite a furore it made. A number of top people were on the verge of being implicated and the chief of civil aviation had to flee Bangladesh — perhaps to save his skin or perhaps forced by people on still higher perches than him for the good of the latter. It was then accepted at all hands that smuggling classics of this size were not the doing of ordinary mortals. Although after that six more hauls involving more than Tk 1 crore worth of gold were made before the present — all during the so-called democratic times — nothing came out by way of top people's involvement. The smugglers do not get caught always. When they do they evidently do not give up — they still succeed in shielding their principals. The point is, are we not falling the nation by not being able to strike at the root of this crime? If the police stop at only poor Abdul Majid Howladar, the Biman driver in the present, and can go no further, there must be something very very wrong and criminal with police and their controllers.

Well, we have not yet been told of the difference such smuggling of gold indeed pays. Is the gold consumed in the country, or is it, like the better part of the smuggled drugs, in transit to other countries? If it is in transit, where does the gold travel to? Can this possible re-smuggling have any significant impact on our economy?

The picture is not at all clear till now. One hopes with the investigations into the latest ZIA gold haul, things would start getting clear.

THE West now faces the countries of its former empires from a position of uncontested wealth and power, sustained by riches accumulated, in large measure, from those territories it once occupied. It presents itself now, however, no longer as conqueror or taker of tribute, but as benefactor, bringer of aid and succour.

The West is now more than willing to share, not its wealth — that would be going too far — but the secrets of its wealth-creation, with those it once held in subjection. The eagerness with which it now seeks to impart its knowledge could not be further from the single-minded determination with which it not long ago directly assaulted the land, resources and people of the South.

The change of heart appears total. It began to evolve at the time of the formal imperial dissolution. Indeed, it was directly related to the availability at that time of an alternative socialist model to the ex-colonial territories.

The new-found benevolence of the West was both prudent and self-serving; it sprang from a competitive desire to outdo the promises held out by the then Soviet Union to the liberated countries. Accordingly, where the USSR offered socialism, the West began to offer something called 'development': a promise, inchoate, barely articulated in its early years, that the South could become like the West, if it followed the Western way and renounced the treacherous delusions of socialism.

In the process the West learned to assume a quite different aspect in its dealings with lands to which freedom had been given: an apparent respect for the newly liberated countries, and a desire to help, the ambiguities of which could have been interpreted as an atonement for colonial predations, an acknowledgement of earlier error.

Having contributed conspicuously to the undoing and downfall of the socialist industrial model, the West has seen no reason to unlearn the civilities it acquired during its earlier rivalry. Why should it? The South has little option now but to accept the advice, prescriptions and instructions which the West now offers, somewhat more insistently than it did when there were still alternative prospectuses on the table.

In this way, the universalising mission of the West — briefly checked in the era of superpower balance — takes on a new dynamism. The ideology is no longer one of needless mil-

# The New 'White Man's Burden'

by Jeremy Seabrook

tary occupation and expensive colonial administration. What could be a more fitting vehicle of continuity than its economics, the symbol and science of its own self-enrichment? The ideology of the West is now borne by the proselytising world-wide extension of its market economics.

The mechanics of this are to be found in identical structural adjustment programmes and economic reforms, formulated by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank and imposed now upon more than 70 countries. There is, in this way, a direct descent from the policy of conquest, annexation and direct imperial rule, to the more subtle conduct of control carried by Western financial institutions, and as the Soviet alternative receded, so these have been urged upon Third World governments with ever more stringent conditionalities.

However, it is not simply the demise of Communism that has emboldened the West to spread the light of its civilising experience across the world once more. The global impulse is

The role of the colonial lands in this benign progression, was of course, crucial.

Buoyed up by this spectacular achievement, it comes as no surprise that the West should now seek to export world-wide this most notable of all its products. The achievement of economic pacification in the Western heartland is now offered as a model for the entire world; and this is what underpins the unshakeable convictions of the leaders of the West, and blinds them to the real consequences in the world of their fanatical devotion to market economics.

There is, furthermore, a direct parallel between the ambitions of a Labour Movement in the West which has been empowered, and those of Liberation Movements in the occupied territories which has been cancelled. If poverty and insufficiency were seen by the Labour Movement as the greatest enemy of the working class, alien rule was the equivalent evil to the movements for na-

reach out and impose the same settlement upon the planet which has worked so well at home. For once this model is established world-wide, once the happy state is attained where two-thirds of the people are attached to the Western system, what does it matter that the remaining third does, especially within that version of universal democracy of which the West dreams?

When that day comes, the minoritised poor can do as they choose, can sleep under bridges, destroy themselves with drugs and alcohol, turn upon one another, as they do in the Western inner cities and ghettos, or simply perish — it scarcely matters. It is only while a global majority of poor remains that circumspection will prevail; and this no doubt prudently dictates the civility with which the West treats its now clients, the three billion people whose countries are now implementing free market reforms dictated by the West.

This latest twist in a more

productive power which lifted a majority of the workers out of poverty; an affluence underwritten by intensified exploitation of those countries dominated by the British, French, Belgian, Dutch, Japanese and later, American, imperial spheres of influence.

The pacification of the Western working class was at the expense of others: that those others should now be the object of the exported programme of pacification, the new world order — for that is what this seductive phrase amounts to — is an outrage and insult: it demonstrates clearly the impossibility of ambition of the West, the wild fantasy that underlies its reign of reason and pragmatism. It simply cannot be done.

It cannot be done, because the countries of the South have nowhere to go, no colonised, oppressed others to compel into the service of a Western model of wealth creation. This is why what we see in those countries which have already been for a long period subject to the programmes of IMF and WB is an internal colonialism, whereby

*With the collapse of the Soviet model, the West has redoubled its efforts to persuade the Third World to accept its model of a market economy as the norm for development. But are the resources of the world sufficient to permit the replication of this model on a universal scale?*

based upon more tangible achievements at home. These, too, were designed to demonstrate the moral superiority of the West over its great rival, and may best be described as the pacification of its own working class.

This occurred against all the predictions of the early industrial era, when, it seemed, the working class was destined to remain dangerously and threateningly excluded from the wealth and power of the possessing classes. The West sought, above all, to invalidate the predictions of Marx, that increasing impoverishment of the workers must lead to the ultimate overthrow of so unjust a system. With what circumspection, with what painstaking and single-minded application did the West go about falsifying the prophecies of Marx, the hopes of socialists.

The wealth amassed by the West played a major role in the reconciliation of the estranged classes to capitalist society; so vast were these riches that they could be applied to lifting up the poor without ever jeopardising the increasing well-being of the rich in their serene ascent to ever higher levels of wealth.

tional independence. Both appeared to have been overcome in the middle years of the 20th century, which led, perhaps understandably, to much premature rejoicing, both within the metropolitan countries and in the newly emancipated periphery.

Since then, however, poverty has re-emerged, virtually unchallenged, brutal and violent as ever in the West; and the sovereign lands which achieved independence find themselves more and more tethered to those powers from whom they once, in pain and struggle, sought their freedom. They are once more dominated by an 'interdependence' in which they are destined to remain forever subordinate in a single integrated global system.

Just as in the early industrial period, only one-third of the population of the Western countries had enough for subsistence, leaving two-thirds excluded, this proportion has now been reversed. The ambition of the West is now to replicate globally the proportions of the having classes and the dispossessed. It is only natural that such a venturesome and enterprising system should want to

ancient universalising pretension is full of irony and paradox: the working class of the West was, to a great degree, pacified by the expropriated lands and produce of the South; and it was achieved by what was itself a form of colonialism: the colonising of society by the market. This meant, in effect, that all traditional, non-monetary, non-commodified ways of answering human need had to be suppressed, and these then filtered through the marketplace. It meant the enclosure of land, common resources and, indeed, human resources, and the re-sale of all these to the people.

The breaking of resistance to this was of crucial importance to the Western domestic plan. In practice, it meant the disgracing and undermining of the labour movement, which had originally carried the major critique of the market economy, mainly because so many workers discovered that no matter how hard they worked in the market system, they still could not earn enough to provide for themselves and their families. The most formidable weapon forged to disarm this critique was the vast enhancement of

their resource-base, their poor and subsistence farmers, their landless and indigenous peoples are exploited, forcibly dispossessed of the forests and lands which contain resources to which the market economy lays superior claim. We see, in caricature and in microcosm, what the West practised globally; and it is everywhere accompanied by the abridgement of freedom, growing impoverishment, expropriation, criminalisation, abuse of human rights, as people are driven into city slums for the sake of unsustainable cattle-ranching, agribusiness, capitalised agriculture.

Why do the leaders of the South seem so eager to believe the Western story of the world, that fairy-tale narrative of riches without end? If the West believes what it says, this is because it has the evidence of the strong; they imagine they bear a providential, god-given mission, because they have been so successful at home. It cannot be expected that they should make the necessary connections between what they did to the world in their efforts to grow rich, and what they now advocate to the leaders of the South.

The only conceivable reason why the leaders of India, the Philippines, Brazil or any of the countries whose affairs have now passed under the tender supervision of the Western financial institutions, believe the West is that their long experience of colonisation and subordination-caused them to lose faith in the intelligence, creativity and ability of their own peoples. This, once again, reflects the colonising mission at home: the leaders of the labour movement lost faith in the people; they yearned to belong, to be absorbed, to be caught up in the panoply of wealth, to be honoured and dignified by their betters. And so it is with Third World elites.

The process begun in the early industrial era is now globalised: there is a symbiotic relationship between a majority in the rich world and a minority in the poor world, who make up the one-third of the global having classes. The real question should be, can this model, whereby the proportions are reversed, be realised globally? Given the levels of violence, plunder, dispossession which the raising up of the Western working class has required, the resources of the world are simply insufficient to replicate it on the scale now proposed.

Can the people of India, of Brazil and of Nigeria really expect to enjoy the levels even of the average citizen of Germany or Spain or Canada? If not, what are the likely consequences of the imposition of this model on the world? Where will the resistance come from? What will happen when the hopes of the poor cannot be realised, when they understand that their destiny is even greater levels of poverty and exclusion?

Of course these questions are asked; by the popular movements and resistance in the South; even by some in the West. They really ought to be more widely debated; for they foreshadow the new liberation movement that will form, is forming, in the presence of this monstrosity emanating from an alliance between the Western majority and Southern elites. The new impulse towards liberation may as yet remain unelaborated, and not very clearly articulated; but this will be the only possible disturber of that new world order, whose real meaning is the repossessing of the world once more by the West. — *Third World Network*

JEREMY SEABROOK is a freelance journalist and author based in London.

THE other day I had been to a friend's place where incidentally I became an audience to a discourse on commonsense that my friend was imparting to his youngsters. He advised them, "When you bring in your friends, stay with them, don't leave them alone in the sitting room. You cannot trust anybody. Somebody may take away a show-piece from the show-case or a book from the book-shelf. Even somebody may leave something sinister with an ulterior motive and later entrap the whole family by calling in policemen. Be careful."

This exposure reminds me of a small event. We had just completed our SSC examination and had enough leisurely time in hand. So, it was usual for us to gather somewhere, play cards, gossip, go to watch a movie, etc. As the parents of one of our friends were away, he invited us to his house to have fun. At one point, he went inside to bring or see something. One of the rest of us just jumped off the sofa and approached one of the racks harassed with cute show-pieces. We, the others, were watching him intently. He snapped up two show-pieces from the rack and fumbled them into his pockets. A disturbed look flickered in our faces but swiftly we restored our composure to avoid possible unpleasant spate.

## To the Editor...

### Enterprise for wage earners

Sir, I would like to draw the attention of our government to the wage earners living abroad. One of the prime responsibilities of our government is to think about their future as the country gets a considerable amount of foreign currency due to them.

A joint venture automobile industry can be set up in our country with wage earners' money to meet our own requirement and also to export. This will give them an opportunity to invest. It is needless to mention here that a section of our skilled people are employed in different countries of the world. If a 25000 Taka equivalent amount of foreign currency is deposited by 100,000 people then a sum of Taka 250 crore (about 65 million US dollar) can be accumulated. Depositors will be shareholders, they can be given one year's time to deposit the full amount in a Bangladeshi bank operating abroad, against the specific industrial project. In a joint venture project, a 1000 crore-Taka venture can possibly be taken up with that amount of accumulated

cash. In neighbouring India Suzuki Motor Co of Japan has set up such industry and doing business quite successfully.

The concerned authority may take up a feasibility study programme on this matter paying kind and due attention to the wage earners' future. The important role they play in our national economy can never be overlooked or disregarded.

Motius Samad Chowdhury  
Phulata Tea Estate, Sylhet

### Theft at the port

Sir, Recently we imported some machinery from Japan for our modernization and balancing purposes. And in the process we have gained a unique experience which unfortunately goes against the Chittagong Port Authority administration.

After completing all formalities, when our agent went to take delivery of the machines, it was found that locks of the container were broken. A joint survey was made only to establish that 25% of the machinery were stolen and that from the strictly protected area of the Port Authority. The same day seven more similar cases were re-

ported at the port. We fail to understand how it is possible to steal from such protected area.

We urge the authorities concerned to look into the matter and do something effective immediately. Deployment of army on shift duty in the area may be a reasonable solution to the chronic problem.

We are convinced that organized group or groups allegedly consisting of even employees in the port administration are involved in the heinous activities. Corrupt employees, if any, must be identified and given exemplary punishment so that such activities are stopped for good. May we expect an immediate action.

Md Abdul Malek  
General Manager  
Shagore Garments Ltd, Dhaka

### 'Black-Gold' in Private Sector

Sir, In the past innumerable letters have been written on the valuable minerals 'black-gold' of Cox's Bazar but of no avail. The government is totally mum on the matter. We have now a democratic and accountable government in the country, can't we expect even a clarifica-

tion from the government on the matter?

During the last two decades the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources/Ministry of Science and Technology have not been successful and able to use the valuable minerals 'black-gold'. They have been continuously hatching a rotten egg 'The Atomic Energy Commission Sea Beach Sand Plant, Cox's Bazar' at the cost of crores of taka, from the public exchequer and wasting time.

It appears that the Ministry feels that the concept of 'black-gold' is worthless. Our people are also fed up with hearing 'black-gold' without any net result or benefit. Such a sad state of affair can not be allowed to continue any longer.

I would therefore, humbly suggest that in pursuance of our government, it may be allowed exploration, mining, commercial utilisation and export of the minerals in the private sector, seek, of course, without seeking, and financial help and assistance from the government, but only the logistic support.

O H Kabir  
Dhaka-1203

# In the Blind Alley of Mistrusts

by John Arun Sarkar

Many a time, we read in the newspapers that the policemen responding on anonymous calls, apprehended some hardened criminals. The anonymous complaints as believed are done on account of security. As one cannot trust somebody entrusted with the job of one's security, one prefers anonymity.

Some days back I heard a lady tell a gathering that her daughter could chant many religious verses without the slightest faltering. On enquiry from another lady, she said that a religious person was tutoring her daughter at home. Immediately, she added that when the teacher taught her daughter, the grandfather of the daughter was always present there. She could not trust the teacher. She had been reading about the violations of minor girls in the newspapers. Thus she had been finding it difficult to trust anybody.

In the offices too, distrust haunts. People cannot trust their colleagues even. They are always suspicious of the other people physically close to them.

No doubt, our society has been invaded by the most devastating phenomenon that is

distrust. We are living in a nobody-trusts-nobody situation. This in turn shoots open-ended unresolvable problems. Our family lives are shattered. Our offices have turned out to be booby traps. We have lost trust in the public leaders, the civil servants, the businessmen, the bankers, the officials of private organisations, the NGOs, even the foreigners (once our naive countrymen believed that all the expatriates were honest, kind, truthful and good-meaning).

To get back peace, tranquility, job, we need to restore trust. In this vein, we may contemplate the following drawing attention of the concerned in hope of the conscious and conscientious participation of all and sundry for materialising the dream:

1. Our first and foremost task will be to re-install trust among the members of our families. When the younger members of a family see that the elders lie and cannot trust each other, the whole world seems to be an equation of mistrusts to them. The old saying "Charity begins at home" should no way be overlooked. The experts in family affairs may formulate something and communicate the same to the common men through electronic and print media for better family lives.

2. In our society, we used to show utmost respect for the teachers. Today, we see that students do not trust their teachers. It is often alleged that teachers cheat their pupils at classes. They invite the students to private tuitions. Before the examinations, they tick the important questions and as such a student does not have to struggle with the whole syllabus. Everybody has accepted this and goes after the teachers who can more accurately tick the important questions.

There is nothing wrong with the private tutoring if teachers do not neglect the students in the classes and usually the weaker students will seek tutoring from the teachers privately. In the name of helping choose important questions, the teachers should not disclose the actual questions. Teachers should be above board so that the students can trust them.

3. The leaders whether political, social, religious should act as they preach. People do attach more importance to what they do instead of what they teach. Today's humans are living a very complex life. They need somebody to soothe their bruises, stresses and strains of life. If the leaders can do something about that, people will automatically trust them.

4. One of our major problems is strained employer-employee relationship. Our government has been encouraging private sector for promoting economic activities. The effective result will primarily depend on the relationship between the employers and the employees. In our country, employers are frequently heard to complain about the employees to be lazy, truant etc and employees are almost always heard to complain about the employers to be oppressive, profit hungry, deceivers etc. Employers must make sure that the employees feel that the employers are concerned about their well-being and the employees must feel that the progress of the organisation means their progress.

5. Those who are on the taxpayers' payroll should feel that they have duties to accomplish towards the tax-payers. They are no way licensed to do whatever they like to do. We all are under the purview of the same laws irrespective of professional backgrounds. Some of us forget the same but the common men expect them to behave more humanly.

6. It is often said that politics does not have the last word. But one should not forget that a politician without principles is not a politician at all. We find it quite difficult to trust the general politicians in our country because they seldom keep their words. One small example is that many of our leading politicians who shout full voice for introduction of Bangla in every sphere of life are getting their wards' education in English medium schools and colleges.

7. We read newspapers to know facts as well as the analysis for understanding the world around. If one goes through a government owned newspaper one will read excessive flattery to the government; if one goes through the papers owned by an opposition party, one reads about all bad things the government has done and the best things the opposition party leader has suggested and done. If a newspaper is owned by somebody having good relationship with western embassies, it busies itself appreciating the generosity and cordiality of the western governments; if it is owned by a fundamentalist group, it excessively fans communal disharmony. Through experiences people have lost trust in the journalists too. Albeit some independent newspapers are endeavouring to be sincere, responsible and very much professional. Can't we have the media more trustworthy?

Finally, we hope that the persons who can will rise to the occasion and help restore trust in our society for the good of all and sundry before we are lost in the blind alley of mistrusts.