

rural development, environmental protection etc.) The fulfillment of these programmes requires greater intervention in the deep-running mechanisms of Indian society.

The realisation of the above-mentioned programmes entails a qualitative expansion of the public employment sector, with all its consequences. One precondition for this is that considerable funds be accumulated in the hands of state bodies and investment be decisively reoriented on the socially necessary labour intensive spheres of activity, as well as on the retraining of workers for employment in these spheres. But this can only be achieved, of course, in the course of an acute conflict - mainly on the political plane.

The second social consequence arises from the shifts it engenders in the structure of socially necessary labour and, consequently, in the labour force. A structural adjustment always presupposes the elimination of the old elements of the object to be transformed and the creation of new ones. Moreover, the more profound the readjustment, the greater the proportion of elements to be replaced.

The third type of consequence applies to the sphere of social security. In most of the cases, ruling circles try to find a way out of the financial crisis of the social funds by raising contributions. The proposed National Renewal fund is a case in point. This however, cannot produce any marked results. Employers, as a rule, resist any attempt to commit their contributions to the funds. IN the final count therefore, it comes down to a step by step deterioration in the

provisions for social assistance: the range of recipients of aid narrows, the funds are cut, etc. The National Renewal Fund is bound to be dismantled, unless regular measures are taken to provide finances for it. There can be different measures, but they can be effective only if they are based on the principle of tying the size of contributions into the funds to the benefits received by the government or the capitalists from the exit policy. In other words, restructuring on the basis of 'exit' must be transformed from a factor engendering a reduction of the social funds into a source for supplementing them.

The advocates of exit policy accuse trade unions of working against economic development and, consequently, against society. The true meaning of these accusations becomes obvious, however, if one asks some questions. If the exit policy is economically advisable, why should it bring benefits only to the owners and to the employees? Is a large mass of unused labour power profitable for society? Is society in a position to shoulder the burden of the maintenance of a large part of displaced workers, deprived of the opportunity to work? Would it not be more sensible to calculate the overall losses inflicted on the economy by the social disturbances engendered by mass laying off of millions of people? Answers to these questions are simple. The loss to society is inflicted not by those who try to achieve social and economic justice in the implementation of structural adjustment, but by those who, ignoring the effects, undermine the social foundations.

CONSULTATION, COMPROMISE AND CONSENSUS

Vinod Moonesinghe

On the fourth of June the clouds burst over the Colombo district. By dawn, the Colombo megapolis was inundated. 'The Water This Time' (to paraphrase that great newspaper columnist, Anuruddha Thilakasiri) thrust the issue of the environment under the collective nose of the elite, in the shape of floating debris and faecal matter.

For several weeks, the headlines of the national press displaced President Premadasa and Prabhakaran from the front pages in favour of Dr Obeysekera of the SLLRDC (better known by suburban residents as the 'Low Lying Corporation').

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What was never mentioned was the question of compensation for damage. Several thousands of people found their houses collapsing foundations subsiding, walls cracking due to the flood. These are poor people, their earnings lying in the Janasaviya bracket. The *Grama Sevakas* were apathetic about following up their claims for compensation. with good cause, as it turned out: the Government has still not paid compensation for last year's flood.

More matters are swept under the carpet as for instance, damage to the ecology caused by the uncontrolled filling up of marsh land. Where are the water retention areas? The residents of Marandan Kurunduwatte and Koswatte in Nawala, have been agitating for years to stop the filling up of the marsh between their 'wattes'. Opposite



Bandaranaikepura, a large stretch of marshlands, part of the traditional retention area, was filled up: one of the residents included a Cabinet Minister.

Then there is the question of drainage schemes such as the pumping out of flood water from the Wellawatte canal into the sea- thought of but not implemented.

The environmental issue is a touchy one. I suppose a great many individuals sin against ecology. We use non-biodegradable products, we burn all- and- sundry in bonfires, we are very anti-social in the disposal of our wastes. All these can at least be blamed on a lack of public education. But how can a Government plead guilty on the same grounds? The Sri Lanka Government has had a Central Environmental Authority for over a decade, it has had advisors and consultants on all manner of things. Can it honestly beg indulgence on the grounds of ignorance?

There is the long-standing controversy over the coal-fired thermal power plant, for example. The debate on this has centred on the ecological, rather than economical aspects: a proposal for a 900 megawatt (MW) plant at Trincomalee was shelved due to ecologist pressure. The proposal re-surfaced as a scaled down project for the Southern coast; but this too was submerged by environmentalist pressure. Finally, Power and Energy Minister Chandra Bandara told the people at the *Gam Udawa* festivities that the state had decided on a CFTPP in Trincomalee after all.

This time, the proposal seems to have received far less opposition than before. If we examine the total energy plan for the year 2000 in detail, however, we find a number of contradictions. The plan calls for a total of 800 MW in additional capacity in eight years.

This plan, we are told by the Minister, was formed after evaluating alternatives. However, the prime argument put forward for a CFTPP (which holds for all thermal power plant) was that Sri Lanka does not have the necessary hydro-electric potential for its energy needs by the year 2000. Yet, a full 25% of the additional power is to be supplied by hydro-electricity, while the total remaining hydrel potential is far in excess of the 800 MW addition that is contemplated.

What are the alternatives that have been considered? The Minister has not informed the public, except by mentioning solar power (in this case photo-voltaic cells). How is the public to know whether or not a correct evaluation has been made? The alternatives discussed in the press (we must rely on the press because there has been no revelation from the State), have only included the traditional fossil-fuelled

thermal power, large hydro-power, OTEC and solar-electric power options. However, we have a far larger range of options, such as Kinetic power (Hydro electric power, wind and wave power), substitution and conservation. There is mini-hydro power, for example, which is ignored by the Government (although several examples have been put forward in the state-owned press, regarding the inventive capabilities of Janasaviya-type inventors.)

The options for substitution and conservation are almost totally ignored. For example, there is refrigeration and air-conditioning, which must account for a significant proportion of commercial and industrial energy consumption (once again, there is a dearth of figures). A few years ago, it was reported that several ice-making plants had gone out of production due to the high cost of electricity (this was the time when the fisheries industry discovered the preservative qualities of formalin, a cheap alternative to ice). Yet our own professor Chinnappah pointed out the solution almost three decades ago: solar- absorption refrigeration (It is truly said that a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country- when last I heard, he was in that exile that Sri Lanka reserves for its most brilliant

innovators). Chinnappah's system would not only have lowered the cost of ice; in rural areas it could have provided the cool rooms needed for agricultural produce.

As far as conservation of energy is concerned, a prime example of the possibilities is in lighting. A fluorescent bulb (available at Rs.350), can lower one's electricity bills considerably. If locally made such a

bulb would be cheaper and save 2/3 the energy consumed in lighting. But no publicity is given to this option nor has a study been made of the effects of such a simple method of conservation.

Unless the State reveals its base for evaluation, therefore, the public cannot be sure whether or not the entire spectrum of possibilities has been examined. It is vital that the Ministry of Power and Energy reveal to the public the report on which its decision was based.

Another example is the Kandalama hotel proposal. Until the local Buddhist monk raised the question, very few members of the public were aware of the project at all. Whether opposition to the hotel is justified or not, the opponents of the project should be congratulated for raising the question. In his letter to the *Mahanayakes*, Prime Minister Wijetunge annexes the environmental report (this being the first time anyone has seen it). He reviles the opponents of the project as guest-house owners who give rooms out for immoral purposes etc.

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The very vehemence of the Government's riposte on the Kandalama issue brings into question its motives. This is definitely counter-productive. An example from overseas should be sufficient to establish this: when there was a pressure-group in England demanding the stoppage of a Motorway project, the Government instituted a Committee of Inquiry. Yet, in the case of Kandalama, the State openly refuses to appoint a Committee of Inquiry. Why?

This is not to argue against the Kandalama project. However, the issue has been raised within the community of the neighbourhood. It is therefore incumbent on the state to establish the bona fides of the project.

The unfortunate parallel to Kandalama is the Iranawila Hotel Project. The state did not institute a Committee of Inquiry into the effects of this project when the Catholic Church and the residents of the area opposed it (with good reason). It was incumbent on the state to inquire into the dispute. It did not do so. Instead, the Government took a unilateral decision to suspend the project. In the same way, it appears that the Government is taking a unilateral decision to proceed with Kandalama.

The point I wish to make here is that the Government is avoiding public discussion of issues concerning the public domain, such as environmental questions. What should be the bone of contention regarding Kandalama is not so much the issue itself, but the controversy surrounding it: why is the Government so secretive, so defensive? why can't it take its opponents at their face value? Why is it necessary to bring accusations of immorality and criminality against the opponents of projects?

Kandalama is important to the local residents, in that it has a direct effect on them: they have not been informed of the quantitative effect the hotel project will have on water supply and pollution. Similarly, the public has not been informed as to what effect the coal-fired thermal power plant will have or what kind of plant it will be. No definite quantitative data as to what exactly the emissions will be, what scenarios have been considered for emissions during the North-East Monsoon, how this will effect the paddy and tea crops etc has been presented.

Let us go back to the recent flood. The SLLRDC told us that a project is in hand to drain the Greater Colombo area. Hitherto, no local authority has been informed of how the drainage scheme is to operate. The residents of 2nd lane, Koswatte, suddenly found a dredger digging into their boundaries. After much fuss, it was found that the drainage master plan involved destroying several of their houses, leaving the adjacent marsh intact. The Local authority, let alone the residents, was totally ignorant of the master plan. In short, the SLLRDC was instituting a project, the ramifications of which the public was totally unaware.

When President R. Premadasa came to power, he declared that the '3 Cs', Consultation, Compromise and Consensus were to be the order of the day. The question is, consultation compromise and consensus with *whom*? Without freedom of information and expression, the '3 Cs' are meaningless.

What are in fact required are the '4 Ds': Democracy, Discussion, Debate, and Decision. Or even ABCDEF: Analysis, Briefing, Consultation, Debate, Evaluation and Final decision. The point is not the alphabetical combinations that can be achieved but the degree to which the public is made aware of the issue and the public's ability to effect the outcome. From this point of view, the efficacy of the Swiss system of initiatives and referenda is instructive. Recently, there was a referendum in Switzerland as to whether or not the Armed forces were required. A further referendum is coming up to decide whether or not Switzerland requires new fighter aircraft.

For such a system to succeed, of course, it is requisite that the public be fully informed of the situation. In any issues, there will be figures open to debate. We simply do not know, for example, what effect a coal-fired thermal power plant will have on Sri Lanka. The facts should be presented to the people on such issues, on the lines of 'it is possible that we may lose our entire tea crop, or, on the other hand, that we may not.' Let the people decide. What is important is that the people should be made fully aware of all the facts and possibilities and that *they* should make the decisions.

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