

Socialist International Council

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RESOLUTION ON THE MAIN THEME

'Social Democracy and Asia Today: Developing Common Policies for Global Change'

While nothing should obscure the remarkable achievements of Asian nations in recent years - achievements which have seen the largest and fastest economic growth in history, the emergence of Asian economies as strong, export-oriented and integrated with the global economy, and a substantial easing of poverty - the recent currency crisis in East Asia is cause for a deeper analysis of globalisation and a reminder that social democratic principles have just as much relevance in Asia as they do everywhere else.

Globalisation is in many ways a unique and powerful force. But it lacks a political and ethical framework and must be transformed into a process of inclusion, not of exclusion. Whilst the poverty of some has been alleviated, many more millions have been left behind, the gap between rich and poor has widened, and if the trend continues we could see a form of global apartheid taking shape.

The application of social democratic policy is the only way to keep that from happening. Social democratic ideals have gained in strength worldwide. In this regard, we note that some former communist parties have transformed themselves into social democratic parties. The Socialist International welcomes these newly-emerging trends that mark the ideological triumph of social democracy and is now applying its principles - of democracy, freedom, human rights, civil liberties, peace, economic equity and social justice - to the task of ensuring that globalisation is a force for positive change for all people.

Attitudes toward the state and the market must be redefined. For social democracy in general, and in the developing countries of Asia and Africa in particular, this aspect is very important. On one hand, we have witnessed the oppressive attitudes and actions of totalitarian states, which thwart people's local initiatives and deny the empowerment of local bodies at the grassroot level as well as their participation in governance and in the planning and development of the economy. On the other hand,

unregulated markets do not recognise the reality that 'markets must serve people and not the other way around', as stated by John Smith. The unfettered market is based on speculative mechanisms and high profits, whereas the welfare state is integral to the pursuit of fulfilling social needs and obligations which unregulated markets often ignore.

The fate of the poor cannot be left to the mercy of market forces in the developing countries of Asia. The state must intervene in a positive way to eradicate poverty. This cannot be achieved unless the poor are mobilised to exert pressure both on the state and the market to ensure the liberation of people from misery. One of the principal tasks of social democracy is therefore to recognize the right of poor people to determine their future. With this right of self-determination, they can begin to lift themselves out of poverty and degradation.

In the developing countries of Asia, growth per se, or growth based on low wages, is irrelevant. What is needed is growth which will result in productive employment, eradication of poverty and distributive justice. This means there must be a far greater emphasis on providing better social services on an equal basis, particularly in education and health. We recognise the vital contribution that high standards of education make to the elimination of poverty, to sustainable economic growth and to the raising of standards of living. We therefore urge both the countries of the region and the international community to ensure that adequate resources are devoted to educational advancement.

In Asia, as elsewhere, environment is another casualty of unfettered markets. The right to clean air, safe water and quality environment should be recognised as a fundamental human right. The developed countries must discontinue the policies of dumping hazardous nuclear and chemical waste in the countries of the Southern hemisphere. Nor should the developing countries be required to bear all the burdens of maintaining the ecological balance which continues to be disturbed owing to the release of gases in the developed world which erodes the ozone layer and has a detrimental effect on the global climate.

If we are completely overwhelmed by unregulated market forces, there will be no prospect for balanced development and the alleviation of poverty. In the social interest, child and bonded labour systems must be abolished and fair labour standards, including the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike, must be protected.

In the current situation in Asia - with insufficient capital, high levels of unemployment and poverty, wide disparities both within and across the borders of nations and inadequate technological inputs - the economy must be characterised by a harmonious co-existence between a public sector accountable to the people, a healthy cooperative sector which can usher in greater equality and a private sector which can meet the needs of capital formation. Further, a new culture of politics in which there is zero tolerance for corruption should be a top priority for the Socialist International.

The import of technology and the inflow of foreign investment and capital should be carried out in such a way that it facilitates rather than threatens domestic industries - particularly in decentralised, small-scale and informal sectors - which provide large employment, substantial manufacturing capacity and exports in the developing Asian countries.

The process of liberalisation through the opening of economies thus must be selective in sectors such as infrastructure in countries where large technological gaps exist. In the present scheme of globalisation, there is a great imbalance since there is mobility of capital but not always of labour, and that imbalance must be rectified. At the same time, when labour mobility does take place, there is a need to guarantee the social rights of migrant workers and their families.

Against the background of the failure of highly centralised economies, the devolution and decentralisation of planning, development and use of resources, from the centre to the levels of

provincial and local bodies, is needed to promote a participatory democracy and economy.

The interplay of neoliberal economic policies, political marginalisation and cultural as well as religious biases make women most vulnerable, resulting in further deterioration of their situation. Women, therefore, must be afforded equal opportunities with men and their specific needs and concerns adequately addressed. There must be a proper balance between men and women in political institutions and the policy-making process. Further, women must be empowered so that they can be an effective force for social change and sustainable development.

Peace is not an abstract concept for the developing countries of Asia. A favourable security environment is imperative for achieving the aim of sustainable development. Thus harmony and good neighborly relations among the nations of Asia are priorities for political stability and economic consolidation in Asia.

International relations should be based on solidarity among nations free from exploitation and domination, and should be conducted in such a way that the principles of democracy and human rights are not undermined. The Socialist International, in the interest of positive global change, therefore extends its full support to those who are still struggling for basic democratic freedoms.