

M.N. Roy Memorial Lecture : 14

HUMANISM, SOCIALISM AND CONSTITUTIONALISM

O. Chinnappa Reddy

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FOREWORD

The birthday of the late M.N. Roy, which falls on March 21, is celebrated each year by the Indian Renaissance Institute and the Indian Radical Humanist Association by arranging a lecture of an eminent authority on a topic of public importance. In celebration of the 98th birth anniversary this year, the Roy Memorial Address is being delivered in New Delhi on 21st March 1985 by the Supreme Court Judge Chinnappa Reddy. The full text of the address is published in this pamphlet.

The object of this lecture series is not to give a resume of the ideas of M.N. Roy, but to present new thinking on a critical topic. This, I believe, is an appropriate mode of perpetuating the memory of a revolutionary philosopher who was always opposed to ideological orthodoxy, who became alienated from communism because of its spirit of blind conformism, and who would have liked his own ideas to be critically appreciated but never sanctified.

The Indian Renaissance Institute and the Indian Radical Humanist Association are extremely grateful to Justice Chinnappa Reddy for his highly interesting and stimulating address.

V.M. TARKUNDE

HUMANISM, SOCIALISM AND CONSTITUTIONALISM

Late M.N. Roy needs no introduction from me. He was one of the most distinguished social and political philosophers of our age, a brilliant intellectual, a nationalist who was at the same time an internationalist, a communist and most important, a great humanist. Committed as he was to certain principles and values which he cherished and considered were basic, he chose political wilderness and obscurity and invited the abuse and contempt of many contemporary political leaders of our country, themselves often tragically errant and without ideology, rather than surrender his commitment. I have great pleasure in dedicating this lecture to his memory and I have chosen for my lecture a subject which was dear to his heart and to which he perhaps devoted the whole of the later part of his life, though, perhaps, he might not have agreed with some of the things I propose to say. With your permission, I will speak to you on 'Humanism, Socialism and' — after all I am a lawyer, may I add, — "Constitutionalism." However I am neither a philosopher, nor a political scientist, nor a jurist and you must excuse my shortcomings and my impudence in venturing to speak on such a subject.

At the Third World Appellate Judges Conference which was held at New Delhi last year I was indiscreet enough to read a brief paper on 'Social Ferment, Legal Ideology and Judicial Process', which in the debate that followed, the Chief Justice of N. Ireland described as 'a political tract'. I had committed the unpardonable sin of quoting Marx and in his opinion, I had preached socialism, a despicable act totally unworthy of a judge. In the course of the debate, another learned judge declared that Marxism was totally opposed to humanism and there could be no legal ideology which would comprehend socialism and humanism. This declaration of a quite literate judge shocked me and it is my object to explain to you that Humanism is the

essential, ultimate goal of Socialism and that all socialist thought is and must necessarily be directed towards that end. It is my earnest belief that the problem of man is the central theme of socialism. Socialism without humanism is no socialism and humanism without socialism cannot be humanism.

First, let us begin with the word 'Humanism' and try to understand what it means. Now, Professor Mihailo Markovic, a contemporary Yugoslav philosopher and sociologist, defines humanism as "a philosophy that tries to solve all philosophical problems in the perspective of Man, that embraces not only anthropological problems, like human nature, alienation, freedom, etc., but also all other ontological, epistemological and axiological problems." I do not know if any of you are any wiser but I certainly am not. I always understood it to be the exclusive privilege of lawyers and judges to use unintelligible words and speak in a jargon which others won't understand but that is because we make a living of it and thrive on it. If laws were couched in language which ordinary mortals would understand, where would lawyers be? But I find that philosopher-sociologists beat us on the homeground of language, their language being much more inaccessible than ours. Digressing here for a minute, I wish to tell you that the problem of language is fundamental; it has become more fundamental not only because it is not the bourgeois intellectuals only that revel in the use of this stilted language but it has crept into the writings of all those leftists who consider themselves as leaders of the working class movement but who have ceased to speak their language. Cultural inequality is not an accident but it is part and parcel of the oppressive structure of all exploitative societies. Universities and Public Schools are factories of privilege and the present educational structure is such that the majority of working class children are barred not merely from bourgeois society but are also denied the intellectual means of seeing through it. It is one of the essential functions of any revolutionary movement to liberate language and to narrow the gulf between manual and intellectual workers. It must be obvious to every thinking man that only a real socialist, humanist revolution can bridge the gulf that divides society into manual and intellectual workers and only a socialist-humanist society can finally end it. Though I am only mentioning this in passing, the problem of language and communication is one to

which everyone of you humanists here must bestow serious thought.

So let us look for a more human definition of Humanism. According to Erich Fromm, "Humanism, in simplest terms, is the belief in the unity of the human race and man's potential to perfect himself by his own efforts." Broadly it is "a progressive trend in social thought which is characterized by its defence of the dignity, freedom and all-sided development of the individual and by its promotion of humane social relations," (*Filosofskaia Entsiklopediia*) and directed towards the creation of the necessary conditions for the fullest possible happiness and the all-round harmonious development of all members of society. Some humanists believe in the existence of God and the goodness of man; others deny the existence of God. But all humanists believe that the attainment of human's perfection is dependent on human effort. They believe that man makes his own history and the whole of what is called human history is but the creation of man by human labour. There can be no question that humanistic ideals have formed part of the ideology of the popular masses from the earliest times of class-based society. Out-pourings of humanistic ideals have always found expression in the epics, the ballads, the poems and the folklore of all nations on earth. In the west, during the Renaissance and during the era of the so-called Enlightenment, it took a philosophical turn and there grew a cult of man, human reason and human creative power. The ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity were nurtured and cultivated and there was an upsurge of the desire of the popular masses to end exploitation. Freedom and Equality became the major themes of the humanists but reckoning as they did with the empire, the Church and feudalism, ideologically it became a twofold struggle, the bourgeoisie against feudalism and materialism against religion. But the bourgeois humanists became more concerned with what they styled the 'natural rights' which inhered in man and so they emphasized individualism and private property and failed to solve the essential problems of exploitation inherent in capitalist society and disharmony between individual and social interest. They were more concerned with abstractions like absolute truth, reason and justice and the striving of man towards 'the Good, the Beautiful and the True' and less towards what was unfolded by the laws of history, the inevitable class

conflicts and the course which history must take to achieve a humanistic society.

"...Everything had to justify its existence at the bar of reason...the reasoning intellect was applied to everything as the sole measure...superstition, injustice, privilege and oppression were to be superseded by eternal truth, eternal justice, equality grounded in Nature and the inalienable rights of man. This kingdom of reason, we know today, was nothing more than the idealised kingdom of the bourgeoisie; that eternal justice found its realisation in bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the essential rights of man; that the Government of reason could only come into existence as a bourgeois democratic republic."

To them ideal human being was the enlightened man, the all-round educated individual. It was thought that education alone would lead to the liberation of mankind and would culminate in the complete fulfilment of the human being in all the cultural manifestations. They accorded a great privilege to the humanities — poetry, rhetoric, ethics, politics, history and travel—based upon the conviction that these disciplines alone would so educate a man as to effectively use his freedom. The attitude was primarily ethical and aesthetic with no political, economic or sociological overtones. It is easy to perceive that their ideal of an enlightened man was truly no more than an expression of protest against the expanding coercion of the division of labour, a protest which believed that the freedom of the individual and his integrity could be affirmed and fully developed through education.

All this, of course, was topsy-turvy and paradoxical. A myriad false ideas were preventing man from realising how they were snared into unreality and slavery. For example, the right to equality before the law and the equal protection of the laws and the right to freedom of expression were reduced to mere formalities since in a bourgeois democracy poverty divided the populace into a minority of the wealthy and a majority of the poor, and deprived the mass of people of any possibility of really enjoying the freedoms recognised by the law and of using them effectively. There was a conflict between human reason and human reality and this conflict needed resolution through a new analysis and a new concept of humanism. That was what Marx provided.

Marx was the first philosopher who went beyond the confines of philosophy and, from the point of view of practical life and practical needs of the proletariat analysed the basic question of philosophy as a truly scientific method of revolutionary change and knowledge of the actual world (V.A. Karpushin : Voprosy Filosofii; Questions of Philosophy). "Marx was the first to declare that theory cannot be separated from practice, knowledge from action, the spiritual aim from social system." 'Marx held that free and independent man could exist only in a social and economic system that, by its rationality and abundance, brought to an end the epoch of 'pre-history' and opened the epoch of 'human history' which would make the full development of the individual the condition for the full development of the society and vice-versa."

Marx refused to accept the traditional religious answer to the meaning of life that it can be found only through belief in the existence of God. He did not accept that man was the work of higher powers or that his being was determined once for all. True, man was not above and beyond history, assuming the role of an all powerful creator with divine qualities but 'he created history and creating history, he created himself and creating himself, he created history.' He discovered, in his own words, that "it is not the consciousness of men that determined their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness." Probing human nature and searching for the root of the contradictions in society, he discovered the irreconcilable opposition of capital and labour. He pointed out how in any capitalist society "the general and the banker have a large role but man as man has only a wretched role." He wanted to know: why human labour which worked miracles for the wealthy brought poverty to the labourer? Why did work become a hardship instead of a satisfaction to the labourer? Why was man alienated from man and from his own humanity? Why was history a constant tyranny over man? His search led him to found contemporary, scientific socialism. He discovered that private property and exploitation made universal alienation manifest itself as the alienation of all those potentialities that raised the human being from all other living creatures. The advances of science and technology became, as a result of alienation, the instruments of inhumanity, leading today to the

greatest threat that ever faced mankind that man may become the slave of what has been created by himself and jeopardise his very physical existence, by putting it in danger of annihilation by nuclear weapons. Marx concluded that without complete and true emancipation of labour, people could not become human and society could not become human society. Bentham's theory of bourgeois gradualism was anathema to Marx. He condemned the existing forms of society because its economic system stunted and distorted human beings and prevented the exploited masses, and even their exploiters, from developing their distinctly human powers. This could be rectified not by mere enlightened education or reform by stages but only by a radical transformation of the economic and social structure of society. But when that transformation was complete, there would be conditions under which all men could achieve their full development in a form of society where men were humanly related to each other. The abolition of private property and exploitation were the first steps in the direction and humanisation of labour was the first task of socialist practice. Socialism was, therefore, not Marx's ultimate aim. His ultimate aim was a perfect human society in which human labour was truly emancipated, there was no dehumanisation and all conditions necessary for the development and dignity of man were present. The dizzy heights to which the bourgeoisie had taken mankind, required to be dehumanised and the only way to do it was through humanistic, scientific socialism. So it was that Marx, Engels and others who may now be described as Marxists engineered the philosophy which not merely interpreted the world but sought to change it. They propounded the philosophy that

"The true freedom of man is...only possible under socialist conditions, where there is no more exploitation and no more suppression of some by others, where people are the 'most valuable and decisive of capital'."

and that,

"Socialism cannot abstract itself from individual interests. Socialist society alone can most fully satisfy these personal interests. More than that, socialist society alone can firmly safeguard the interests of the individual."

Much of the misunderstanding of Marx is the refusal of his critics

to accept that "Humanism, the philosophy of humanism, rather than economics, is the basic character and basic contribution of Marxian thought". "We must not consider Marx as an economist like Keynes, but as a sociologist, a philosopher."

That socialism is no more than humanism or at any rate the essential step towards humanism will become further clear if we understand what socialism is about. Indeed there were many brands of socialism — Utopian socialism, Fabian socialism, Gandhian socialism, Soviet socialism, Chinese socialism, Cuban socialism, and not to be outdone, Indian socialism but I am concerning myself with scientific socialism only. But whatever be the brand of socialism, the central problem of any socialism is the problem of man and its most essential aspect is that of creating conditions for man's happiness and full development. Any socialism must have its roots in rebellion against social ills, poverty and exploitation, slavery and oppression and every other source of human suffering. Any brand of socialism must have in its programme by necessary implication ways and means of eliminating the sources of man's misery. Marx the humanist attempted to provide a scientific, logical, coherent, systematic history-based socialist theory for the benefit of the emerging working class movement, replacing the vague dreams of earlier socialists with the laws of history and science. He preferred not to deal with ethereal visions but with material reality. To him, socialism was not a pious, vague dream but a potent, present possibility. He probed history, he analysed past and present social, political and economic systems and discovered the laws that influenced the development of society. Distinguishing between various economic modes of production, primitive, ancient, feudal, capitalist and socialist, he went on to explain how in every historical epoch, economic power was gained by the development of the forces of production and how it resulted in a class struggle, for the control of society, between the existing ruling classes and the classes striving to obtain control through the new forces of production. Every class struggle resulted in the creation of a new society. Each new society would then establish its new classes and its new forms of oppression and exploitation and there would be a conflict between State power and the rising revolutionary class of that age and out of the conflict would grow the current ideas and ideologies. The class struggle

may not be seen by those involved in it as a class struggle. It may take fancy garbs and appear as a fight for religion, for liberty, for equality and so on, the class seeking the control of society adopting a revolutionary pose and developing a revolutionary ideology. Thus, it was that the bourgeoisie destroyed the feudal system and on its ruins established the bourgeois social order, the realm of free competition, freedom of movement, equal rights for commodity owners and all the other bourgeois glories. Thus it is that the proletariat, using the very weapons forged by the bourgeoisie, will be able to triumph over the capitalist system and build upon its ashes a new socialist society. As has been said "the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of the class struggle".

Working on the basis of science and history and recognising Marx as the founder of scientific socialism, what do we understand today by socialism? First of all it expresses the struggle against the entire social order of the capitalist system, its rulers, its supporters, its ideologists, its apologists, its willing slaves and all those whose interests are bound up with its survival. It expresses the proletariat's angry protest against the viciousness of the material and cultural poverty inflicted by the capitalist system and its competitive, grasping ethos on the mass of the people and the degradation and dehumanisation of labour. It voices the hopes and aspirations of the exploited, the oppressed and unfortunate. It means the abolition of all inequalities and the destruction of all relationships in which man is humbled, enslaved, abandoned and despised. Naturally, it rejects bourgeois liberalism and affirms the ideal of an egalitarian, democratic, classless society. To achieve this a vital and essential step is seen as the ownership and control of productive wealth by the community and its unserving use for communal ends. This must necessarily mean the end of all private ownership of the means of production and its replacement by social ownership, resulting in the elimination of the very basis of the exploitation of man by man. Another equally vital step is the adoption of a totally scientific approach in all human activity, doing away with false hypotheses, false theory and superstitious belief. It means a recognition of the reality that the world today 'is made and is powered by science' and 'for any man to abdicate an interest in science is to walk with open eyes towards slavery.' It involves the full development

of the human personality on the one hand and the development of science and technology on the other. It inevitably involves a highly collective economy with a good deal of government planning and control, softened by much welfare legislation and it must equally inevitably involve a fraternal society of free man, managing for their common good the natural resources and the scientific tools at their command. It involves a new social ethos, an abolition of every manner and kind of discrimination whether based on sex, race, creed, colour or nationality. Socialism and Humanism are thus seen to appeal to science and reason and to destroy the links with national and racial traditions and to look forward to the future when all distinctions of the past are abolished. The fusion of socialism into humanism constitutes the effort to establish the kingdom of God against God, if it could be so described, to realise humanism against tradition and prejudice.

What then is constitutionalism? What has it to do with humanism and socialism? If we just look around we find that never in the history of the world have the forces of change been so demanding. The choice which the people of many nations are facing today and which before long many other nations may have to face, may be between the slow-grinding orderly processes of the law and the processes of force which seem so much more swift and effective. By constitutionalism I simply mean, the constitutional means of achieving change and in our case, the change to socialistic humanism. Constitutionalism is the antithesis of arbitrary rule or unrule as you may call it. Everywhere in the world, right before our eyes, we see and hear of bloody revolutions and counter-revolutions, some times rooted in the people themselves, some times inspired by ambitious political warlords, other times inspired by multi-national and foreign intelligence agencies. Here in India, on 26th January, 1950, we gave ourselves a Constitution, an amalgam of bourgeois liberal ideals and humanist socialist principles. Unfortunately, the bourgeois liberal ideals have been incorporated as fundamental rights which may be enforced in a court of law, while the humanist, socialist principles have been incorporated as Directive Principles of State Policy, which are not justiciable. In the beginning, the constitution-makers were even afraid of the word 'socialism' but 27 years after the Constitution, Parliament made

bold to add the word 'socialism' in the preamble to the Constitution. Of course, it does not follow that over-night India has become a socialist republic. We have still miles to go. As I said, the Directive Principles of State Policy do incorporate some socialist, humanist principles. Thus, the State is enjoined to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting a social order in which justice, social, economic and political shall inform all the institutions of the national life. Concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment is to be prevented and ownership and control of the material resources of the community are to be so distributed as to best subserve the common good. The State is enjoined to secure the right to work, to education and to public assistance in case of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, to secure just and humane conditions of work, ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities. The State is further to endeavour to promote international peace and security, to maintain just and honourable relations between nations, to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations and to encourage a settlement of international disputes by arbitration. But all these, as I said, are only Directive Principles, not justiciable. It is quite obvious that one cannot conceive of a socialist State where the right to work, the right to a decent wage and the right to education, particularly scientific education, are not guaranteed. Equally obviously one cannot conceive of a socialist State where what is sought is not elimination of private property and ownership and the complete control of all the means of production of wealth and not mere prevention of concentration of wealth and means of production. One cannot conceive of a socialist State where the producers of wealth, the workers, are not involved and are not required to participate in the decision-making, managerial and planning activity. These basic tenets of socialism must be duly incorporated into the Constitution by making fundamental and revolutionary changes, transforming the 'boneless wonders', as someone described the Directive Principles, into 'bone and marrow rights'. They are but essential preliminary steps. There have to be many more important and far-reaching changes. Those of you, humanists and socialists, who have gathered here, who believe in constitutional means of achieving humanist

socialist goals, it is up to you to suggest such constitutional ways and means of transforming the Constitution into a truly humanist, socialist Constitution. Delay, I warn you, can be deadly. There is a whiff of violence in the air. The pollution is spreading. Meanwhile, the politicians are busy in the corridors of power, the executive is busy simultaneously appeasing politician and the multi-national, and the judges are busy making alibis for the politicians and the executive. Vital contests are in progress which will affect the character of new India. The contests assume critical importance when the economic, political and social trends of a new era are being shaped. How will the nation conduct itself in the world community? How democratic will it remain? Will the fruits of progress be shared by all the people in the form of better living conditions, educational and cultural opportunities, higher health standards and personal security? The intellectuals of the country own a special duty, but they are the products of an inherited system of education which is saturated with bourgeois ideology and a mass of reactionary ideas, prejudices and superstitious beliefs also inherited from the past. The intellectuals of our country instead of becoming the leaders of a socialist humanist revolution have become the apostles and the minstrels of revivalism, to sing and chant of the glories of our great, ancient culture and heritage. Their credulity and chauvinism are indeed amazing. They are unable to grasp the elementary processes of history and sociology that a highly developed technology could not have possibly existed in a pre-industrial society merely because some Rishis so willed it. So they go on to discover from the 'Mahabharata' and 'Ramayana' evidence to prove that our ancients possessed scientific knowledge rivalling and indeed more advanced than our own. Aeroplanes and even nuclear weapons were known to the Rishis of the Vedic age! Today intellectuals continue to swarm the ashrams of swamis, maharishis and babas, they consult all manner of astrologers, palmists, super-seers and so on, and rush every now and then to Tirupati and other places of pilgrimage whether to win elections by capturing booths or to make millions, black-marketing and smuggling. These manifestations of revivalism expose our intellectuals as great hypocrites. They shed copious tears at the sufferings of the Sita of the Puranas but are oblivious to the sufferings of the millions of today's living Sitas some of whom are sacrificed at

the altar of dowry. As late Shri M.N. Roy pointed out in one of his books, we are such great hypocrites that even 'the delightful sexual lyrics of Vidyapati, Chandidas and Jayadev are interpreted as mystic accounts of spiritual elevation of an exotic communion with the impersonal God; legendary tales of the philanderings of a youthful cowherd and the delicious abandon of the milk-maids, jolted out of inhibitions by the flood of tropical springs are given a dull scriptural value and even philosophical content is read into them—mutual attraction between jeevatma and paramatma'. But make no mistake, revivalism and religion and superstition are the weapons of the capitalist class and if you want a humanist, socialist society, it is necessary for you to wage a war against revivalism, religion and superstition. And these cannot be fought on a mere intellectual basis, but have to be fought from the economic base.

"The world is weary of the past,
Oh, might it die or rest at last" (Shelley)

I, therefore, appeal to you, my humanist, socialist friends, to join the oppressed classes of the country and wage a war against superstition, against prejudice, against every form of irrationalism, to adopt and practice a scientific and a rational approach to life and its problems, to preach and inculcate the scientific approach in your writings, in your speeches and by your actions and thus to participate in the relentless revolutionary class struggle. Let the people of India move towards a better future and a greater humanism "where man has emerged from the archaic ties of blood and soil, and feels himself to be the son of man, a citizen of the world, whose loyalty is to the human race and to life rather than any exclusive part of it, a man who loves his country because he loves mankind and whose judgement is not warped by tribal loyalties." "Let the new man, the new citizen of India and the world emancipate the toiling masses from the ancient superstitions and prejudices of race, nation, class, religion and create a universal fraternal society, every member of which will work according to his ability and receive according to his need."

I think I will do well to end this speech with a Telugu poem which I will myself translate into English. Telugu, I may inform

my linguistic, chauvinist friends who may be present here, is one of the great languages spoken south of Vindhyas and the second largest spoken language of India. It is also the sweetest of all the languages on earth, described by Prof. Haldane, the great scientist, as the Italian of the East.

విదగధిగే గుండెలకు వినిపిస్తుంది
 విరాంతి భేదాల చప్పుడు
 స్వాతంత్ర్యం రావాలి మళ్ళీ
 జాతి ఘోషాదును కరచి పట్టుకొన్న
 భూతదృక్కుల సంతకమంది
 తెల్లవాళ్ళు వజలేసిన ముసుగుల్లా
 నల్ల బజారు నడుపుతున్న
 నవ నాయకత్వముల గుప్పెళ్ళ మంచి
 వాగ్దానాల ఇంద్రధనుసులతో
 సగటు మనిషిని సమైక్యవాదచేస్తున్న
 వన్నెలవన్నెల మలకొన్నాయి
 స్వాతంత్ర్యం రావాలి

బెన్నాళు మనం చూసింది
 ఈ పరిపంథించు కొన్న స్వాతంత్ర్యాన్ని
 ఒక మంచి మనం పంథించవలసింది
 నూతనతల అభ్యుదయ మనకావచ్చు

తూర్పుత్రాసరిచర తప్పదు
 మార్పు త్రాసరిచర తప్పదు
 అర్ధరాత్రి అసల పచ్చపానం
 బట్టలు కాక తప్పదు, తప్పదు"

"To the hearts that are ready to beat,
 Hark! the drums of revolution!

Once more, we seek freedom
From the shackles of the fiendish past
Which hold and strangle the nation's mind;

From the grip of the revered new masters
Moving in dark alleys, under veils
Cast off by the old white masters;

From the net of embraces
Woven in rainbow colours
of promises and promises
Once more, we seek freedom.

The freedom won heretofore
Is freedom of the soil,
The freedom we seek hereafter
Is the upward rising of the people.

Dawn shall break without fail,
Change shall follow without fail,
At midnight shall the volcano erupt
Without fail, without fail."

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