MARXISM AND ETHNICITY: RETHINKING THE FUNDAMENTALS

Kumar David

The terms ethnic and ethnicity are used in this paper to include religious, racial, linguistic, tribal and similar divides which are activated in socio-political conflict in the present age. The use of a single generic term is justified by the palpable fact that the common features of these conflicts greatly overshadow the particularity of their religious, racial etc character. Indeed a religious conflict in one place may have more in common with, say, a linguistic problem in another, than with some other religious conflict. The unfolding of events in a specific case depends much more on the particular political antecedents, economic conditions and problems of state, than on whether the phenomenon manifests itself as, for example, a language or a religious conflict. It needs to be stated at the outset that this paper is concerned with ethnicity in relation to political conflict in the present period and that categories and concepts are advanced for this purpose.

The paper takes it as an agreed and given fact that ethnic conflicts have assumed major proportions and become an important feature of political life in the third quarter of this century. It is taken as agreed that the scale, intensity and persistence of these conflicts is persuasive evidence that we are not dealing with ephemeral events or accidental reflections of some other predicates. That is to say, it is taken as agreed, that ethnic conflict cannot be reduced to a distorted or indirect reflection of class conflict - it is asserted that such reductionism is false. This is not to deny that class conflicts are themselves fundamental determinants of history but rather to emphasise their intertwining with ethnic issues.

Ethnicity as a Category

Superficially, ethnicity is associated with a sense of identity arising from shared customs, language and culture, physical characteristics, and so on, and appears to be far removed from the material categories of economic and social life. In the context of the discussion in this paper, this is far from adequate as an appreciation of the role of identity as a political factor. True enough ethnicity as a category in modern political conflict exists at the level of consciousness, but it is a reflection in consciousness of very real, concrete and material circumstances [1]. Consciousness does not reflect material reality in some mechanistic way, and indeed a consciousness of ethnic identity can persist long after the material foundations that engendered it have withered away, or emerge in advance of the proper consolidation of an immanent identity [2]. Nevertheless, there is a firm causal link between the consciousness of ethnic identity and the material organisation of social life.

The material circumstance that underlies an ethnic unit is more simply illustrated by drawing attention to the periphery, or boundary, of a socio-economic unit which, of course, possesses its own internal structures or mode of production. This is most obvious in the case of the separate tribes or the homogeneous kingdoms and nations of previous ages. A well defined and specific set of people, a common territory (land, water, wild life) and frontiers that must be guarded against invasion, delineate the boundary of production. The boundary, or periphery of a mode of production, is a material fact - a feature it shares with the productive powers of society and its internal or class divisions [3]. The sense of identity and the sense of security derive at the level of consciousness from the material reality of belonging within the mode of production, of being within the periphery.

A stark example is South Africa where Boer worker, for example, identified with Boer landowner and bourgeois than with his black class brother. But these identities were consolidated by separate economic existence, and its concomitant of war, conquest, slavery and territorial expansion, from the earliest settler times. In South Africa, historically, the Boer and the numerous African economic units were distinct enclaves, distinct modes of production, and modern capitalism supplanted this only much later and especially so only after the consolidation of British imperialism at the turn of the century. The extreme form of apartheid consciousness and of separate identity is deeply rooted in a now largely defunct, but at one time very real, sub-division of the economic universe into distinct and warring units and modes of production - war, subjugation and peonage, of course, being in those times but an adjunct to economics [4].

It is in the light of this process that racial nationalism must be understood. The Boers' espousal of a doctrine of African inferiority, justified on biblical grounds, was interconnected with their desire to justify peonage. And why not? These people have inherited from their settler forefathers feudal-like institutions with rigid hierarchical structures. For their ancestors, "race" had provided a suitable principle on which to create a servile population. Their religious leaders found in the Bible the "Curse of Canaan", which they adapted to justify their activities.

The theoretical approach developed in this paper also provides the answer to the question of why some ethnicities are activated but not others. For example, why do Tamils, including Tamil Christians, take one side and Sinhalese, including Christians, the other? Why not Buddhists against Christians instead of Sinhalese against Tamils? The answer lies in seeking out which material identities were historically separate and significant and hence were consolidated into

ethnicities; which material boundaries of cohesive socio-economic units formed important peripheries to modes of production. Tamil Christians were internal to and a part of Tamil (or Jaffna) society, economy, trade, agriculture and so on. Sinhalese Christians were, similarly internal to another cohesive socio-economic unit. There is no Christian or Buddhist ethnicity, there are Sinhalese and Tamil ones. In the Punjab, or in Northern Ireland, the superficial division is precisely the opposite, religion being the determinant of cleavage in the ethnic civil wars. The argument from historically sustained economic separateness functioning as an original delineator of ethnic identity does not suffer from the contradictions that superficial theorisation is prone to and is wholly plausible in all of these examples, many oversimplifications in conventional left thinking, for example Bipan Chandra (see note[5], notwithstanding.

This approach also explains why, however slowly and tortuously, ethnicities disappear or become politically irrelevant. What became of Vandals and Goths? How did German ethnicity replace it? What on earth happened to Normans and Saxons and who on earth is an Englishman? Why are the Protestants and Catholics in England, or in Germany, not at each others throats in emulation of their faithful brothers in Belfast? The answer lies wholly in material categories - membership of a common mode of production, shared material intercourse and consanguinity which follows this have been realised in Germany and England a long time ago. Such too will be the future of the USA, that great melting pot of innumerable people, where ethnic particularity appears destined to disappear.

Though ethnicity as a category in political conflict and the concomitant consciousness of identity is linked in this way to material life, it would be great mistake to overlook their dis-synchronous time scales of development and the consequent relative autonomies of their particular dynamics. For example, it would be hard to argue that the Boers and the Blacks of South Africa do not even today co-habit the same material socio-economic entity. But it is obvious that consciousness of racial identity is not changing at a pace which is synchronised with these material transformations. Ideology will finally align itself with reality but not until it has exhausted its own tortuous and extended life span. Furthermore, the very history of material change has brought about a new overlapping of class with race in South Africa [6], and is given a new and more complex rationale to perception of ethnic division and identity.

New Nation States

In current discussions of ethnic conflict it is not uncommon to hear remarks about the "arbitrary boundaries of new artificial nation states which have been created by colonialism". What is partly at least implicit in this is the assertion that these nations are entities which are in some way irrational and have little right to exist. What is at issue here is not colonial conquest per se but rather one specific aspect of the colonial legacy, the new nation states as they actually exist. It is necessary to re-examine the immanent critique of the right of such "artificial" entities to exist. But the very posing of the question raises difficulty - surely it is not possible to suggest that the world should return to the patchwork mosaic of a myriad kingdoms, tribes, principalities, states and fiefdoms, surely it is not possible to suggest that Germany should return to the dozens of independent or semi-independent units that preceded the conquest and unification of these lands by Napoleon?

It is worth pursuing this argument a little further and to push to its limits the view that India, for example, is an artificial entity created by British Imperialism. Implicit in some formulations of this assertion could lie the value judgement that the sub-continent be divided into 6 or 16, or whatever, ethnically more homogeneous entities. The examples can be multiplied. Why not Matebeleland and Shonaland instead of a single Zimbabwe, why not a separate Eritrea and Ethiopia, why not Croatia,Serbia, Slovenia and Macedonia instead of Yugoslavia, why not a separate Quebec and a separate Tamil Eelam and a separate Moro-Philippine, and so the list goes on. It is necessary to take this argument at face value and to respond to it seriously and in general terms.

Looking at the world as it has emerged out of centuries of colonialism and its legacy of forced amalgamation of people and races, and taking into account the numerous separatist movements that exist today, it is perfectly reasonable to take the following hypothesis as a serious agenda for discussion: "What is so magic about the number 150 (or so), what is wrong with a world consisting of 300, or for that matter 500, nation states? Long live the slogan: **A STATE FOR EACH ETHNICITY!**". The hypothesis, of course, fails at first sight because it can simply be seen to be absurd, but this does not amount to a considered refutation. A considered response, formulated in a general way, as to why the sub-division of the world into an ever larger number of smaller entities, or put it more starkly, why the subdivision of India into say 16 ethnic states, would be irrational and reactionary, consists of the following three points.

a) Large national units, without carrying the idea to absurd limits, and taking into account specific and practical constraints in each case, are capable of marshalling their resources more efficiently and organising their economic production more rationally for example the USA and China.

b) A mosaic of small nations all with their own customs barriers, passports, national anthems and flags are a positive hindrance to the full development of the spiritual, intellectual and cultural potentials of the human species. The removal of artificial impediments of this nature within the EEC, for example,quite apart from its intrinsic economic rationality, and the way in which people are taking advantage of this enhanced freedom of movement and interaction, are pointers to how a more unified world of the future should look.

c) Integration into a larger national states in the case of the less developed countries reduced the scope for external exploitation by more powerful imperial or neighbouring states. For example, a separate Puerto Rico on the borders of the USA and Puerto Rico as the 51st state in the federation, are very different entities in this respect. Or again, China was not Vietnam in relation to Soviet interests in the last three decades.

In general, therefore, there are very strong economic and spiritual-intellectual-cultural reasons for dispensing with divisions and integrating people into nations which owe their raison d'etre to considerations other than ethnic particularism. To complete the discussion, however, it is important to point out that against these arguments must be considered the possibility of economic exploitation of specific ethnicities within an expanded state, the possibility that a minority identity or culture is oppressed within an existing state, and the likelihood that a heritage of backwardness may make the largeness of a unit not an advantage but a problem in relation to efficient and rational economic management. The generalisation that has been previously attempted therefore is not without exceptions, but in other words, the real significance of the generalisation lies not in the fact that the exceptions are less numerous than the norm, but rather that for the exceptions too the generalisation points to the long term future.

I will mention, without extended discussion for reasons of brevity, a few examples which to my mind are, on balance, exceptions to the generalisation for one or another reason. Clearly the dismemberment of the old Pakistan into Bangladesh and Pakistan is a forward step; probably it was better for all concerned that the Baltic state ceded from the Soviet Union; it is difficult to justify China's continued occupation of Tibet. I make the last remark without prejudice to the arguments put forward by each side whether a Tibet is, or is not, historically, a part of China.

These are indeed possible exceptions, and in specific cases, indeed, the particular history and circumstances may be compelling. The concept of an exception, therefore, needs to be located and understood more precisely. There is a historically progressive and general trend towards the integration of nations politically and economically, as well as culturally, into larger entities. However, while this trend has been self-evident over time spans such as centuries or decades the process is also an uneven one since it is mediated by concrete and specific factors of shorter historical duration but of great though ephemeral intensity. Hence, reversals of the general trend, from time to time, in specific instances and along one or another of its axis (that is political(state), economic or cultural axis) will take place. It would be correct in certain such instances to support some specific "reversal" if in the final analysis it is conductive to a progressive historical trend. However, even in doing so, that is in formulating the particular form and nature of the support to be extended, the longer term progressive world historical view must be kept in mind, and in the long run must assert its priority. This is the essence of the concept of exceptionalism.

It appears, therefore, that those who say that modern India is a creation of the British Raj, forgot to add that, nevertheless, it is an irreversible one. The meaning of the concept of irreversibility needs to be stated more precisely: economic production and the market in India have been sufficiently well integrated that its continued existence as a unified nation is in the interest of all of the classes of the modern society, the bourgeois and proletariat included, and the strength of these classes is likely to overcome fissiparous pressures from remnant classes of previous (pre-modern) society when they do arise from time to time. Secondly, even culturally, modern cultural contents are, on the whole, strong enough to overcome fissiparous remnants from previous historical times. This is the essential content of the concept of irreversibility as used here; it does not purport to make prognosticative statements about what might happen in, say Kashmir, but rather it is a concept whose meaningfulness arises in the context of the general thesis of human progress that underlies this discussion.

The demise of the Soviet Union gives rise to some important attitudinal questions. The unresolved confrontation regarding the economic system in the nations issuing from the former USSR is shot through by a perpendicular emergence of ethnopolitics and widespread armed nationalist conflicts. We are witnessing, simultaneously, a political revolution (the overthrow of Stalinism), a social counter-revolution(the attempted restoration of capitalism) and also a resurgence of ethno-politics. The class-state axis, that is to say the question of the restoration of capitalism, remains the supreme issue of the moment. As the resolution of this issue mediated by the intervention of world capitalism works itself out, and irrespective of whichever direction this resolution takes, a period of nationalist political conflicts and wars will follow. It is not entirely unreasonable to suppose that the disintegration of the Soviet Union may produce some economically viable and politically stable nations, nevertheless it remains paradoxically true that ethnic conflicts are the greatest impediment to long term progress.

The importance of understanding each particular example on its own terms places the methodological emphasis on concrete analysis, with abstraction and generalisation forming a necessary, but only a background of knowledge. Or as Clive Thomas says [7].

There are...further methodological advantages to this approach. One is that the use of concrete examples allows us to study simultaneously the similarities and differences in the form that the state takes in peripheral capitalist societies. We can then avoid two dangers. One is oversimplification-that is, an approach that is premised on the view that since each society is different, that there can be no general theories; the other is overgeneralisation, which result from a preoccupation with similarities.

State-Nation-Class

This section of the paper is devoted to an examination of nature of the state in the newly independent countries and its interaction with class formation and the national question. The first point that needs to be made is that as colonialism withdraws it does not leave behind a society with a strong potential ruling class in place. The other side of the same coin is the economic backwardness and the weakness and distortion of the productive forces in these countries. From the beginning, therefore, the state is an unstable and tottering structure. The most primitive form is the military state, governance by the crude violence of a body of armed oppressors in a manner reminiscent of the ordering of the proto-state among old barbarian hordes. The junta, in the case of the smallest or most unstable military regimes, rests on the narrowest of possible social bases, the military itself, which is held together by pure violence until it is overthrown by another armed horde similarly intent on plunder. Even if less transparent in some case, this is the taxonomical genesis and quintessential character of all third world military dictatorships.

In larger countries with military regimes, the formal class structures are better formed. Although the ruling class is not always able to sustain power, at all times on its own within and through civil society, it does have its residues of strength. It also has its liberal and democratic segments who despise the uncouthness of the gangsters in khaki uniform. The relationship between the military regime and the class basis of government and state is now a more complex and changeable one. In this unstable environment, with both the ruling class and the sections of the military leaning for support on narrow and specific social segments, the activation of ethnicity as a political dimension is frequent. This is the only way these entities can survive once bereft of their moral basis. At best, the state and the proto-state may enjoy short lived periods of ideological hegemony during moments of military victory over the ethnic "enemy", but true political hegemony and moral acceptability, among their own people, always evades them. Physical suffering, in those cases where conditions of war prevail, further accentuates this alienation of the state and the proto-state from their respective ethnic populations.

Ethnic instability, however, is not a peculiarity of the Third World. At the moment of writing Yugoslavia is attempting to tear itself apart and the future relationship of the ex-soviet countries is a matter of much contention, and there is Ulster, Quebec and the Basque Provinces, to mention but a few. Yugoslavia appears to be a good reference point to make some relevant points about the problems of consolidation of nation states.

The consolidation of several South Slav nationalities (tribe and kingdom) into a single state took place in tortuous ways that can be traced from the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire up to its realization in Tito's Socialist Yugoslavia. Throughout this period, and up to now, ethnocentrism, Ser-

bian domination, Croatian extremism, Albanian 'irredentism', have remained now dormant, now threatening, on the political landscape of the modern nation state. The progress that has been made, though halting and interrupted, has to do with two imperatives; a recognition by South Slav nationalists of the mutual advantages of Slav unity and the natural tendencies that flowed from the ideology of Yugoslav Communism. [12]

As new nations in the third world, and elsewhere as the Yugoslav and Soviet examples show, struggle towards the consolidation of nation states, two crucial lessons can be learnt. First periods of consolidation will alternate with periods of crisis and rupture, and second, the later periods may include the re-drawing of the boundaries of these nation states. Furthermore, the time scale inherent in nation formation is an extremely long one and is deeply punctuated by economic success and failure. In the economically advanced countries, USA, Canada, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, France, mainland-UK, and so on, although ethnic conflict is far from absent, the issue of the redefinition of national boundaries is not of real significance.

The general hypothesis that this analysis leads to is that while class, state and ethnic variables (or political and military factors, to state it in another way) account for the sharp turns and sometimes irreversible ruptures and rearrangements, in the long run the consolidation of the nation state, arising partly therefrom, is determined mainly by the economic success of the prevailing mode of production. To put it crudely, there are two dis-synchronous time cycles at work, and they impinge on each other and are partly, but not wholly, determined by each other. Therefore, we have to think of overdetermination as a dynamic concept describing a changing reality, and to understand that the impinging of these two different structures on each other mediates the metabolism of change. The consolidation of new nation states is imbued with an uncertainty at the root of which lies this dis-synchrony of the determining events and variables.

Limits of Conventional Solutions

The turmoil arising from ethnic conflict has now been with us for several decades and much has been attempted, and written about, as a "solution" to the problem. To the extent that all of these answers have been around and/or been attempted in practice for this long, they are neither new nor radical any more, and for this reason, it is convenient to refer to them as conventional solutions. To this category belong "solutions" of the left and the right, of oppressors and the oppressed, and among them number the following:-

a) Forcible, mainly military, integration,incorporation or elimination of recalcitrant ethnicities.

b) Civil wars, national liberation struggles, separatism.

c) Federalism, regionalism, autonomy,democratization, economic decentralization, implemented to various degrees and in various forms.

d) Statesmanship, its opposite political chicanery, linkage between class politics and self determination concepts, ethno-coalition politics.

e) Foreign interference, intervention or intercession, by other countries and/or various agencies such as the UN, EEC, IMF, human rights and peace movements.

In practice, obviously, many or all of these factors are at work all the time and in each case some one or the other is the central strategy at any given time. In this section of the paper the limits of such solutions will be explored in general terms; although based on the experiences of the last four decades, explicit references to individual cases will be avoided for the sake of brevity.

The first assertion that I believe is possible, is that, unlike in previous centuries (the colonial and the settler period) a forcible or military solution is exceptional, if not impossible, in the present period. That is to say, a military solution to a mature ethnic movement, whether by its defeat or conversely by the victory of separatism, is very exceptional indeed. The reason lie in both the changed nature and balance of world politics as well as in world technological changes and the near universal accessibility of this technology, albeit at a price.

The second important feature is to understand the complex, and in a sense peculiar, ways in which constitutional re-arrangements and enhanced democratisation can effect ethnic instabilities. Thus, for example, the transition from a repressive regime under which ethnic tension lay invisible, to a more democratic one which sets about attempting to restore greater autonomy, may lead not to a period of compromise and harmony, but rather to a period in which various extremist tendencies gain ground, narrow chauvinist ideas triumph and ethnic clashes in society multiply. The root cause here is to do with the fundamental limitedness of ethnic consciousness itself, which question will be discussed a little later in this section.

Much has been said about democracy and autonomy/devolution being the corner-stones of a solution to ethnic conflict. Great faith has been placed on this approach by democratic peoples movements in affected countries and by international human rights and peace agencies. Undoubtedly, these assertions as a set of core ideas are valuable. The point, however, is that their limitedness as a complete programme, has not been sufficiently drawn out and discussed.

There is a fundamental contradiction, therefore, between ethnicity as the embodiment of the identity of a separate consciousness (arising from and carrying the stamp of an isolated mode of production), and the reality of modern nation states and, indeed, the modern world, where the integration of the mode of production is far advanced, and material intercourse is universalised between different peoples and inextricably intertwined between nations.

Some discussion of ethnic consciousness is in order at this point. There are several conflicting value judgements that have to be ordered and reconciled. There is ethnicity as the specificity, the richness and the repository of the culture of a particular people; there is tolerance and respect for all ethnicities and the call for a 'celebration of plurality'; there is identity as a haven of security and hope for oppressed and exploited races and religions; there is ethnicity as a narrow identity in a material world which has far outgrown the origins of the consciousness of separate identities; there is ethnicity as a politically and morally divisive influence; there is ethnicity as racism, chauvinism and prejudice. Apart from the trite observation that ethnicity is good but too much of it, like red meat, is bad for the body (politic), liberal philosophy has not had much else to say. Something more, however, is crying to be said.

It has to be recognised that ethnic consciousness, in the final analysis, is a remembrance of things past, and as mankind grows it will, in the words of St. Paul, "put aside childish things". Surely, there will be a universalisation of our heritage instead of an eternal particularisation of it? The sense of identity and security that particularity provides, and which indeed is so important at times today, must nevertheless be seen as an ephemeral phase in the longer journey that mankind has undertaken. When men circumnavigate the sun and settle on Mars will they still carry their ethnic identities with them? Perhaps, and this gives rise to the need for some remarks regarding ethnic ideology of a more base kind.

I am using the terms ethnic idealogy as differentiated from ethnic consciousness to denote the base elements, racism, intolerance, prejudice and chauvinism which are a part of the ethno-political scene. Such ideologies are still deep and divisive all over the world; they are not confined to small numbers of less enlightened individuals or to extremist organisations. [13]

The ever so comforting assertion that say, racism or communalism, do not run deep in the ordinary people who are but innocents misled by guileful politicians, is nothing but a naive oversimplification. Divisive ethnic consciousness, chauvinism, racism and religious intolerance, as the case may be, are ubiquitous ideologies that run deep among the people in various ethnic groups, at least for protracted periods. It is simply untrue and naive, and flies in the face of empirical evidence to assert during an epoch of sustained ethnic conflict that the rural folk, the ordinary man and woman, the middle classes, the worker, and so on, are free from prejudice like the noble savage and are simply the victims of false leaders and opportunist politicians. Ethnic ideology has a deep grip on mass audiences for reasons that have already been discussed in the foregoing pages and false prophets and opportunist politicians may be more a result than a cause. We can borrow this quote about the authoritarian state [14] and read it quite meaning fully with ethnicity in mind,

....despite the notoriety of the Shah, Bokasa, Somoza and Gairy, and despite the unmistakable influence they have had on the state and on political forms in their societies, it is not the leaders who determined the

character of these states- they are more effect than cause. Consequently, as we shall see, the authoritarian state cannot be reduced to the existence of a dictator or to authoritarian and dictatorial forms of rule, although these accompany it. We must look at the state as a historical materialist category and understand its social and material basis.

If, for example, Sinhala chauvinism is a fact, it is then also a deep reality of the consciousness of the corresponding people. To move forward in the long fight against false ideology is a major task that cannot be avoided. This is a sustained struggle and will not be accomplished in a few brief years and for long periods the task will fall on a few who have the vision and the courage to bear it. A whole epoch of disappointment and defeat will precede tangible achievements in the larger social arena. The reason why progress will be slow and difficult is because ethnic ideology has old and deep roots which have been reinforced by modern social and political conflict and economic crisis. The defeat of ethnic ideology, a sine qua non for ending ethnic conflict, will necessarily be a protracted process.

About Dialectics

At a sufficiently fundamental philosophical level the ideology of ethnicity must be rejected as false consciousness. The economic unification of the world is irreversible and modern science implies the universalisation of knowledge. As barriers break down, culture intermingling is going on apace. Yet the rights of oppressed nations to self-determination must be upheld, democratic and cultural-linguistic-religious rights of ethnic minorities must be protected and a plural, and by implication secular, society must be advanced. Do these two assertions appear to contradict each other? I think not. It is not a contradiction to accept the unavoidable limitations of the world as one finds it while undertaking at one and the same time a commitment to ending such limitations. Surely, it is not contradictory to say (15),

Religion is at once the expression of real oppression and the protest against that oppression. Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions....To abolish religion as the illusory happiness of the people is a demand for their real happiness. The call to abandon illusion about their conditions is the call to abandon a condition which requires illusion. Thus, the critique of religion is in embryo the critique of the vale of tears whose halo is religion....Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers from the chain, not so that man may bear the chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he can cast off the chain and gather the living flower....so that he shall think, act, and fashion his reality as a man who has lost his illusions and regained his reason, so that he will revolve about himself as his own true sun.

and while saying this, at the same time, to demand the freedom of religion for all men!

Another reason for reproducing this only too well known passage at some length is that there is a parallel between this criticism of the socio-psychological role of religion and the criticism of ethnic ideology as false consciousness in this paper.

The point then is that a true approach to ethnopolitics must run simultaneously at two levels. One simply has to grasp the following dialectic: It is not only a commitment to oppose racial or religious oppression, to stand up against oppressive regimes and social orders, but also, in the final analysis, a commitment to a new and, paradoxically, opposite world order and vision of universal human consciousness. Therefore the issues of class and social justice are inseparable from those of national and ethnic justice. No organisation which fails to link these two aspects of social change within itself can achieve lasting solution to either.

Conclusion

The thesis developed in this paper has argued that ethnic-conflict as a modern political phenomenon is not confined to back ward societies in which the state is still in the process of formation and consolidation, and that it will persist for a further period of human civilisation. The events of the last few years and more importantly their underlying causes-sustained ethnic oppression and conflict, based, in part, on the persistence of ethnic consciousness in civil society-which have festered for many decades prior to the explosive manifestation, and which manifestations are in any case only signposts of the ebb and flow of more fundamental trends, have amply justified this thesis.

The paper has also insisted that the activation, the catalysation, of some ethnicity somersaulting it from a latent state into the sphere of real and intense political activity, can only be understood on the basis of a concrete, historical materialist, examination. It cannot be understood from an idealist analysis, that is it cannot be understood in terms of a thesis primarily based on the "philosophy", language, ethnic traits, ancient history, some supposed natural characteristic or consciousness, and so on, of a particular race, religion or people. This too has been borne out by recent events, which have furthermore dramatically justified the assertion that whether a problem is religious in one location, linguistic in a second, and racial in a third, is far less important than the specific socio-economic dynamics that actually drives the events forward. Theoretically, this has justified the introduction and use of the generic category "ethnic" as a valid concept in the construction of modern political theory.

The paper has also discussed the dichotomous nature of modern ethno-politics-being at one and the same time, an expression of a peoples desire for liberation and a recrude-scence of enmity and xenophobia. The concepts of overdetermination time dis-synchrony were found to be use-

ful in thinking through the uneven and dynamic nature of the complex interactions between the different elements (economy, class, state, ethnicity) of a social formation. The paper has argued against certain reductionist approaches and has sought to debunk naivete of underestimating the depth of ethnic prejudice in the populace at large. A dialectical approach which attempts to reconcile what is feasible at a given time with commitment to a long term vision has been advocated.

References and Notes

1. There is a rich accumulation of literature attempting to define and discuss ethnicity in the modern world. Anthony D. Smith places it in the context of modernisation in *The Ethnic Revival in the Modern World,* Cambridge University Press and *State and Nation in the Third World:* The Western State and African Nationalism, Wheatshaef Harvester, 1983. Cynthia Enloe examines the issue in the context of class and tribe in relation to imperialism and the modes of production debate in *"The dialectics of class and tribe"*, Race and Class, xx,4 1979, pp. 347-372. An essentially idealist discussion will be found in Walker Connor, *"Nation building or nation destroying"*, World Politics, XXIV, 2, pp. 319-355. Readers are no doubt also familiar with a mechanistic incorporation of ethnicity into class analysis which was common at one time and is now dismissed as crude or mechanistic marxism.

2. The emergence of a new ethnicity, right now in the mid and late 20th Century in the Jharkhand region is described by Javeed Alem, *"India: Nationality formation under retarded capitalism,"* in *Ethnicity: Identity, Conflict, Crisis,* eds. Kumar David and Santasilan Kadiragamer, Arena Press, Hong Kong, 1989,pp. 45-69.

3. The concept of "conditions of production" to supplement those of "forces and relations of production" was first introduced by B. Borochov, *"Nationalism and Class Struggle: A Marxist Approach to the Jewish Question",* Greenwood Press, Westport,pp. 157-165. A more recent discussion can be found in R. Munck *"The Difficult Dialogue: Marxism and Nationalism,"* Zed Books, London, 1986.

4. Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane, *"The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa",* Monthly Review Press, New York, 1979, pp. 32-33.

5. The following is taken from Bipan Chandra, *"Communalism in Modern India",* Vani Educational Books, New Delhi, 1984,p.13,

"Not only did Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs or Christians not form a nation or a nationality, they did not even form a distinct and homogeneous `community' except for religious purposes. That is, they did not separately form a `monolithic social structure' or a cohesive unit on a religious basis with common economic, political, social and cultural interests, or bonds or outlook. The religious coordinates did not coincide with the class, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural coordinates. There was no sharply etched or articulated interests of Hindus or Muslims `standing in juxtaposition to one another'; in particular, the conditions of Hindu and Muslim workers and peasants was the same.

Historically, of course, this assertion is not valid. The history of the Muslim invasions of the Indo-Gangetic plane followed by several centuries of war, the establishment of Muslim rulers, the attendant court and of civil society around it, subsequently religious conversions and the linkage of conversions to castes which were oppressed by prevailing Hindu society, and finally the partial separation of Hindu and Muslim villages even up to recent times, is the history of societies which were to a considerable degree materially divided. These centuries constitute the historical roots of ethnic consciousness. The remark about the common interests of workers and peasants, in a current political context, is certainly, but that is a seperate dimension of the discussion.

6. Bernards Makhosezwe Magubane, op.cit.,pp. 163-192.

7. Clive Y. Thomas, *"The Rise of the Authoritarian State in Peripheral Societies"*, Monthly Review Press, New York , 1984,p.xx.

8. Santasilan Kadirgamer, *"Lanka: Nationalism, self - determination and conflict"* pp.181-212, and Kumar David, *"Roots and results of Racism in Sri Lanka"* pp. 213-247, both in *Ethnicity: Identity, Conflict, Crisis,* op.cit.

9. Kumar David, *"Sri Lanka: is there a way out?",* Capital & Class, Number 40, Spring 1990.

10. Clive Y. Thomas, op. cit., 80-81.

11. The Glossary of Louis Althusser's For Marx, New Left Review Editions, London, 1977, provides the following explanation prepared by the translator Ben Brewester:

"OVERDETERMINATION: Freud used this term to describe (among other things) the presentation of the dream-thoughts in images privileged by their condensation of a number of thoughts in a single image, or the transference of psychic energy from a particular potent thought to apparently trivial images. Althusser uses the same term to describe the effects of the contradictions in each practice constituting the social formation as a whole, and hence back on each practice and each contradiction, defining the pattern of dominance and subordination, antagonism and non-antagonism of the contradictions in the structure in dominance at any given historical moment. More precisely, the overdetermination of a contradiction is the reflection in it of its conditions of existence within the complex whole, that is, of the other contradictions in the complex whole, in other words its uneven development".

12. Zachary T. Irwin, "Yugoslavia and ethnonationalists", in *" Ethnic Separatism and World Politics",* ed. Fredric L. University Press of America, Lanham, 1984, pp.107,109,119.

13. Bipan Chandra op.cit.,p.10 footnotes.

14. Clive Y.Thomas, op.cit., p.xx.

15. Karl Marx, Introduction to Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right", 1844.

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