

Factors which breed individual violence

By Abul Fazl

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COLIN POWELL is right that the civilized world cannot accept terrorism. The struggle against it must be relentless. And the stance of the government of Pakistan gives voice to the outrage of the Pakistani people and their desire to join the civilized world in combating it.

However, the exclusive focus on the fight against terrorism obscures the question of change, treating it as solved. Today, only one kind of change is admitted, the technological one, which is concerned with improvement in the instruments of production, with a view to increasing and improving output. It is the relationship of the man with nature.

The social change, a change in the relationship of man to man, which would determine the nature of the distribution of the wealth, is not on the agenda. It is assumed that the mankind has attained the ideal social organization, composed of capitalism and bourgeois democracy. Its details may be open to refinement but its essence is not subject to discussion. However, it is this relationship itself which has to be explained, as it determines the employment of technology on the one hand and the distribution of the wealth produced on the basis of the ownership of the means of production, on the other. The question of who eats less, who more, who works for whom, who takes order from whom, is resolved by this relationship.

The question of social organization on the relationship of man to man has two aspects.

In the wealthy countries, or the capitalist centre, comprising mainly western Europe, north America and Japan, an incomes policy determining the distribution of the national income between the various classes and state, has been agreed upon between them. Apparently, the workers there do not resent inequality any more provided their own incomes rise with the rise in production and there is a social security net under them. This income agreement, resulting in mass consumption and social peace, makes universal franchise and a stable political system possible. The condition, of course, is that the system itself will not be questioned.

The problem arises, however, with the assumption that since the social, and consequently, the political question has been settled in the capitalist centre it has also been settled in the periphery on the Third World where over eighty per cent of the manpower lives. This is far from being the case. Capitalism was brought to the periphery by the Europe at the end of the fifteenth century. Since then, the centre's income has increased over a thousand times, while that of the periphery has risen only five or six times. And the gap widens as the growth in the centre accelerates. The periphery is not poor because the productivity of its peasants and workers is low. They put in as

new value created by its peasants and workers, much higher in fact than in the centre. These two transfers can be reduced only through political action, in whose absence the relationships just go on reproducing themselves.

But the new world order, decreed after the fall of the Soviet Union, lays down that no social change is permissible outside the logic of capitalism, which, in the case of periphery, can only be dependent capitalism. This policy is enforced through financial and trade means and, failing those, through outright force. The countries which themselves entered the modern age through revolutions — 1647, 1776, 1789 — are adamant that a political change is admissible only through elections. However, if the elections themselves yield unwanted results, as happened in Chile, Guiana and Granada, the "mistake" is corrected by the centre by means of force.

Attempts at changing the social relations through force, as in Venezuela, Colombia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, etc., are of course crushed as illegitimate.

Most of the countries of the periphery are neo-colonial in various degrees. This means these are inserted in such a manner into the world market that their economies can reproduce themselves only if they meet the requirements of accumulation in the centre. In short, their economies can survive only with open veins. And since it is the function of the ruling classes to extract the surplus produced in the economies, the ruling classes of the neo-colonial countries are charged with both extracting the surplus and passing a part of it to the centre. Therefore, while the ultimate contradiction of the peoples of the periphery is with the world capital, their immediate conflict is with their own ruling classes, which are the primary extractors of the surplus and the guarantors of the neo-colonial relationship abroad.

Whenever the people in any neo-colonial country revolt, they find the ruling class replacing one set of rulers by another for them. But the basic policies do not change because solutions are permitted to be sought only within the limits of the neo-colonial relationship. But the political right cannot bring a solution to the social contradictions. Since societies require not palliatives but a basic redistribution of wealth and incomes which the right cannot give. Moreover the basis of any re-distribution must be a profound modification of the neo-colonial relationship. This is opposed both by the centre and by the local ruling class. The peoples of the periphery thus face growing poverty, while all the doors of social change, legal or illegal, are closed to them. They see the enemy ever more powerful and even more ready to use force promptly and massively to block every attempt at social change.

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The problem arises, however, with the assumption that since the social, and consequently, the political question has been settled in the capitalist centre it has also been settled in the periphery on the Third World where over eighty per cent of the manpower lives. This is far from being the case. Capitalism was brought to the periphery by the Europe at the end of the fifteenth century. Since then, the centre's income has increased over a thousand times, while that of the periphery has risen only five or six times. And the gap widens as the growth in the centre accelerates. The periphery is not poor because the productivity of its peasants and workers is low. They put in as many or more socially-necessary labour hours on their products as do the workers in the Centre. And to say that its backwardness is due to the absence of technology is like saying that one is poor because he is poor.

The periphery is poor because the surplus produced there, which should be invested locally, is constantly transferred to the centre through unequal exchange, monopoly prices and the so-called equalization of the rate of profit at the global level. This, in turn, becomes possible only because the periphery's ruling classes are able to puncture a very high proportion of the

relationship abroad.

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Such a situation must breed forces of revolutionary change. But every such movement first expresses itself in random violence, which is the weapon of the weak. The social cost of such violence is greater than gain. But it is unlikely to disappear until an organised revolutionary movement emerges. The attempt to eliminate blind acts of violence, while keeping all doors of social change blocked, would only create a situation of individual violence being met by increasingly angry and violent retributions. This cycle, if allowed to continue, will lead not to a settlement but to barbarism. ■