

Islam and Socialism

Saturday 15 November 2008, by [TARIO Farooq](#) (Date first published: 13 November 2008).

Why Socialists are forced to discuss Islam today in almost all parts of the world? Islam has become a global question particularly for all those who want to transform the society from capitalism to Socialism. In almost all parts of the world, mainly in Asia, right wing ideas particularly the extreme right is on the growth apart from Latin America.

Politics have been dominated by the right wing mainly after the collapse of Soviet Union and other states claiming to be Socialists in early nineties. There are few exceptions like Nepal, where despite a Hindu state, communist parties are in absolute majority both at parliamentary and street level. Small groups of the Left have also grown in some parts. However, the rise of political Islam on a world level has posed new challenges for the Socialists worldwide.

There are two main reasons for the growth of Islam. Firstly, Islamic message is global. They want an Islamic world. They want all others to adopt Islamic way of life. They do not believe in diversity. Second, the oil is mainly produced by those countries known as Islamic countries.

Overall, in "Islamic world" the Islamists have filled the gap in many cases where the ruling right wing politician failed to solve the main problems of the working class. They had the organizational preparations for such a time. Their politics goes back to early twenties; Organizations like Akhwanul Muslimeen of Egypt and Jamaat Islami of Pakistan have long been established, but it is now that they are enjoying a mass support to some extent. That is a very dangerous development for the Socialists.

There are two main trends within those who are the main advocates of Islam. One is glorifying Islam as revolutionary, anti imperialist and finds all solutions within the written boundaries of Islamic teachings. This trend is politicizing Islam. They use all sorts of dogmatic, rigid, unbending, strict and inflexible remarks and explanations to glorify Islamic message as the only way to lead a life with a purpose. The other trend mainly believes in promoting Islam by preaching with non violence strategy. There is no fundamental difference between the two. Ultimately, the Islamic or any other religious teaching takes you back where Mullah or Father wants you be. In essence, they both want an Islamic state.

Religious politics is against the working class interests. It wants you to believe in fate. It promotes capitalist way of economy with minor changes. It does not believe in the trade union rights. It does not believe in classes. For them, all human beings are equal and the rich are rich because they are born rich. The poor have to accept the justifications of being poor. Socialists must expose the real anti working class nature of those using religion as basis of politics. We are not against Islam or for that matter against any religion but we are totally against the politicization of Islam.

Islam has been often presented against the social philosophy of Marxism. The Islamic religious scholars often term Marxism as un-Islamic. They say that it is fight between Kufar (non believers) and Islam. That is wrong. There are other social philosophies as democracy in different forms. The Islamic scholars have not targeted the Democracy as they have done with Marxism, which is wrong. Marxism has been discriminated more vigorously by the Islamic scholar than they opposed any other modern social sciences and science as whole. The reasons are very clear. Socialism talks about classes and elimination of classes. Religion protects classes, mainly the ruling classes and their way

of exploitation on the name of fate and God given wealth.

The religion Islam had a positive role to play when it was introduced 1400 years ago. It was a like a revolution against many tribal traditions. It was not in fact restricted to Arab world as the main source of knowledge. According to one saying of Prophet Mohammed, "Seek knowledge, even if you have to go to China". China was seen as the main center of many advances in knowledge at the time. The Islamic religious scholars with the passage of time have restricted, narrowed, constrained and guarded the original message of Islam.

Human nature to explore the myth of universe and development of social and physical science goes side by side. The religion is based on faith. It restricts to develop it further on this basis. While the scientific knowledge and investigation brings the scope of thinking to a new and higher level. Thus, there is contradiction between the two, which expands the conflicts.

The Religious scholars lubricated with their vested interests, then pitch religion of Islam against Marxism. The bare fact that we have seen strengthening of religion in those societies where there has been less industrial growth and democratic development, tells a lot. The conservative domain of traditions and customs and backwardness of a society is a playing ground for the growth of the religion.

Where the industrial revolutions took place, many people did not change their religion but their social behaviors became secular. Those who opted for atheism were not targeted by the state as is the case in the "Islamic world". There are fewer social contradictions in these societies with the ideology of Marxism. There is a less repressive measure against Marxist. However, all these democratic postures could change when the bourgeoisie fear an imminent Socialist revolution in these countries. They will restore even worst non democratic measures, repressive actions and propaganda than those seen in less advanced societies.

The conflict of Islamic scholars and Muslim society as whole with Socialist ideology is on a higher level in most countries of Asia in particular. The reason is very clear. The tasks of a modern society like industrial growth, democratic development, end of feudalism and tribalism and making of a nation still remain to be fulfilled in most of the Asian countries. To keep the status quo, the ruling classes in these countries are using and promoting religion and religious teachings. It suits them. It helps them to keep their grip of the society. It does not challenge their exploitation. It helps them to believe that they are in power because God wants them to be in power. It keeps the working class struggle divided on religious basis.

Marxist philosophy in essence is against the capitalist ruling classes. That is why there are aggressive behaviors of the rulers against Socialists and their ideology. The Socialist philosophy is in essence in favor of the people and working class, thus it is normal that this is popular among the most down trodden strata of society. We have seen Marxist and Communist parties having mass basis among some of the Muslim countries in the past. Iran, Iraq and Indonesia are some of the examples in Asia. The PKI of Indonesia was the largest Communist party outside the Socialist camp in the fifties and sixties. For historical reasons and blunders in Socialist strategies and methods, these parties were repressed, crushed or lost their popular basis with the passage of time.

Wherever, the question of opposing Socialists emerged, the effective strategy has been to use Islam or other religions against them. Religion normally brings a moral question of development of a social welfare society, so has been the case of modern ideas of democracy and so on. The essence of Marxist philosophy is the same but contradicts the other social sciences and faith in term of class question. It brings a unique and effective way of organizing, training, educating, guiding and enlightening the working class. Thus, we see a barrage of propaganda by the advocates Mullahs, and

so-called democrats.

The Islamic religion, like the other religions, has normally been used by the American imperialism in Asia and Africa in particular to defend the economic, social and political imperialist interests in the region. The local ruling class and imperialists used the religion as a weapon for the continuation of their power. The religious extremists and imperialists were brothers and sisters, hand in hand to oppose the Socialist ideology. The Marxists were the biggest threat for them at the time.

The imperialists have created, formed, developed, helped, constructed, assembled, pulled together, reinforced, built up, and strengthened the Islamic parties and the religious philosophy in the early seventies and eighties. Taliban are the one shining example of imperialist creation. Once the religious groups feel empowered, in most cases, they try to be independent and go against their former masters. That is what happened with Taliban. Once, abandoned after the collapse of Soviet Union, the Islamists felt they were being used by the imperialists as tissue papers. They had this strong notion among themselves that they have defeated the Soviet Union and are the main reason for their collapse, thus felt they can do it with US imperialism too. They were wrong in both cases.

The method of individual terrorism used against imperialists by the religious fanatics has helped the imperialist forces to attack the civil rights and political freedom of the working class that was won over with hard struggles. The most successful act of individual terrorism can only create confusions, terrifying, frighten, horrifying, and division among the imperialist forces on temporary basis. The state repression of the religious fanatics by the imperialist can also do the same with the opposite. These acts of repression can only create reaction on emotional basis.

The only way to defeat the imperialist forces is building social movements, trade unions, peasant organizations and progressive parties as an alternative. We can not side with the religious fanatics in their opposition to imperialism. The religious fanatics are no anti imperialists. What is anti imperialism? It is defending rights of women, minorities, ending class exploitation, defending democratic credentials and fighting for an equal and just society. Anti imperialism of religious fanatics is an emotional reaction against a state rather an ideology. They raise slogans "death to America" and not an end of imperialism. It is an anti imperialism of fools. We have to oppose the both. They both are anti Socialism. They both share a common ideology of private wealth and property. They both are in favor of a class society thus closing their eyes on nature of exploitation. We can not join the religious fundamentalists in a common anti imperialist alliance.

Socialism is a message of future, religious politics is a message of the past. They both stand on two different ends in ideology. We must oppose a religious politics but not religion.

Farooq Tariq

Spokesperson

Labour Party Pakistan

farooqtariq@hotmail.com

www.laborpakistan.org

P.S.

* Paper presented at the conference "Building Socialism While Capitalism Crumbles" of Malaysian Socialist Party at Kajang in Malaysia from 7-9 November.