

Whither free education?

Monday 8 November 2010, by [KARUNARATNE Vickramabahu \("Bahu"\)](#) (Date first published: 24 October 2010).

Minister Dissanayake has antagonized students. He wants to clearly show that he is for private education, with English at the helm. Probably he wants to show the west that he is for the agenda of the multinational corporation system. He himself declared, that already nearly 80 institutes operate as university colleges affiliated to foreign universities. But that has not created a special problem as long as the free education system is concerned, at least as it is continued by the state. The Mahinda regime so far, was able to claim that they are doing so. Here comes the Banda from Hanguranketha who could not sleep unless he exposed the truth. That is, the regime is only nominally populist, but in fact the programme is decided by the masters of global capitalism. Before the dramatic intervention of the Hanguranketha man the climate of the universities was drifting in a positive direction. The debate among students has started and it was becoming a challenge to JVP politics. Students opposed to chauvinist politics of the JVP and other chauvinist parties were willing to listen to speakers from other political parties. In fact there were students who contacted the Nava Sama Samaja party to arrange discussions. This was after a long time, maybe after a period of five years. Before that, even with JVP dominated student bodies, there were seminars where I also participated as an invited speaker. All that vanished in the last few years. However, in the last few months there was a definite change for the good. Some fresh air was blowing into the campuses. As I said above there were free discussions and the JVP was unable to keep the hegemony. But tough talks and brutal repression of students changed the winds. Students in desperation had to cluster around the existing student committees and active leaders. Those were the Antharayas and the JVP student leaders.

Open discussions and debates

At the time when we were students of the Ceylon University, there was a different atmosphere. Then there were open discussions and debates not only on politics but on Economics, Philosophy, Science and other subjects. There was liberty to form student societies registered under the university administration on any subject of academic interest. Trotskyist society, rationalist society, democratic club, science association, biology society, drama society etc; there were endless societies some functioning, some defunct but to be retrieved shortly. Of course we were interested in our subjects and all did well. After the degree, those who went to so-called distinguished universities were accepted as well and equipped graduates to do research. While our faculty teachers looked after us in our formal studies, there was liberty to get involved in other things including intellectual debates on interesting topics. I am not talking only about the few in the engineering faculty but also about others who haunted the corridors of other faculties! Those were the days when Keynesian economics and welfare politics dominated the whole world. There were illusions that capitalism can be easily tuned, to get full employment and enough to eat for everybody. The Stalinist states of Russia and China were still growing in their own way and we could buy all writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin, ever so cheap. There were other cheap books in these countries, and these were sold in People's publishing houses. The capitalist boom based on welfare economics collapsed and it was replaced by the decadent system of neo liberal politics. World over everybody except the neo illiberal bourgeoisie, has realised that the end has come. Not necessarily the end of the capitalist system but it could be the end of humanity.

We are back in an age, where students and youth are fighting together with workers. Last week in France the right wing government faced a continued national protests on President Nicolas

Sarkozy's pensions reform. Things became serious after youth battled riot police until filling stations ran dry. In these battles police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at students and youths who set cars on fire, smashed bus stops and hurled rocks. One report said that nearly 300 schools were disrupted by protests, and cities across France saw students take part in such street demonstrations. Such things will become common as right wing neo liberal policies are pushed on the people. In all such protests young people will be taking the lead. Because youth understand better the decadence setting in. The present policies are not only against the poor but also against future generations. The destruction of the environment and the burning of energy resources will affect the coming generations and their existence is challenged.

In this scenario, the language of the education minister is totally unacceptable. His vision is outdated to say the least. Instead of sensible discussion SB has reintroduced the method of terror and anarchy into the universities. It is also the best way to help petty bourgeoisie Narodnik politics.

P.S.

* Llakbimanews column, 24 October 2010.