

The pivotal role of Thailand in the economic development of Southeast Asia

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The paper which we excerpt here was prepared for an Oct. 31-Nov. 1 conference in Bangkok on the strategic significance and technical feasibility of building a canal through the Isthmus of Kra in Thailand. The conference was jointly sponsored by EIR, the Fusion Energy Foundation, and the Thai Communications Ministry. The following remarks constitute about one-third of Mr. LaRouche's document.

... The prospect of establishing a sea-level waterway through the Isthmus of Thailand, ought to be seen not only as an important development of basic economic infrastructure both for Thailand and the cooperating nations of the region; this proposed canal should also be seen as a keystone, around which might be constructed a healthy and balanced development of needed basic infrastructure in a more general way.

I present now my approach to assessing the objective merits of the proposed canal. I stress some extremely important, but usually overlooked facts. The significance of the differences in cultural heritage and institutions between the nations of Asia and those of western Europe and the Americas, must be examined closely if we are to master the problems of economic development in general today.

From the middle of the fifteenth century, in Italy, in the France of King Louis XI, in the Netherlands, and in Tudor England, there emerged one of the most remarkable developments in human history. Many branches of human culture have, at various times, supplied leadership in scientific and cultural progress for all the nations of the world. However, from the middle of the fifteenth century into the middle of the nineteenth, the rate of advancement of science and the related rate of increase of the average productive powers of labor was more rapid than in any other period of known history.

Over the past 200 years, leading patriots of non-European peoples have demanded the right to participate in continuing

this progress and enjoying the benefits of this progress for their own peoples. The powerful factions in Europe and the Americas which promoted colonialism used the by-products of European scientific progress for subjugation of colonized regions, but those European colonialist factions, more or less to the present day, have continued to deny participation in that progress to peoples which are not of European ethnic origins.

The situation in Asia

Despite the emergence of a well-educated stratum of scientists and related professionals within parts of the populations of colonized Asia, and despite the development of modern industries within some parts of these nations, up to the present, among the non-European populations of Asia and Africa, only Japan has succeeded fully in achieving parity with the leading industrialized nations of Europe and the Americas.

Those among us who work to correct this inequity are confronted today with two distinct but interrelated classes of scientific problems:

1) From five centuries of the emergence of the modern form of sovereign industrial state in western Europe and the Americas, we must abstract those principles of economy which have universal validity for use among the nations of Africa and Asia, as well as Europe and the Americas.

2) However, despite the universal validity of those principles of economic development, the more deeply we examine the intimate connection between certain key features of western European culture and European scientific and industrial progress, the greater importance we must see in the fact that the cultural heritages and related social and political institutions of Africa and Asia are not the same as the relevant aspects of western European culture.

On the one side, science and technology are governed by the laws of the universe, which are the same everywhere for all peoples. Unfortunately, even some among the most accomplished contemporary physicists today know almost nothing of the internal history of European scientific development over the period from the fifteenth through the middle of the nineteenth centuries. Although some aspects of the work of such figures as Gottfried Leibniz, Karl Gauss, and Bernhard Riemann are recognized by all competent professionals as indispensable to modern physics, the approach to scientific discovery employed by these leading figures of earlier periods has been made almost unknown to all but a tiny minority of specialists living in Europe and the Americas today. In other words, twentieth-century European scientists and other policy influencers lack, with rare exceptions, any understanding of those principles which made possible the scientific and technological progress of the preceding centuries. Yet, it is precisely those forgotten principles of fundamental scientific progress which are more or less indispensable for the success of economic development today.

I shall not go into the details of this important subject today, but it is important to indicate that this area of study must be included in the formulating of development policies today.

Today, I stress the point that there are distinctions between western European and Asian cultures to the effect that it may not be practicable or desirable that African and Asian nations simply attempt to imitate the experience of western Europe and the Americas among the peoples of Africa and Asia. I had my first glimpse of the importance of this asymmetry of science and culture during my military service in India and Burma during the last World War, and, especially during the recent 10 years, as I have been engaged increasingly in promoting the cause of development in Africa and Asia, the practical importance of this historical asymmetry in the history of various cultures has become increasingly obvious to me.

Blindness in the United States

Among the most important faults I recognize among some influential and well-meaning circles in the United States, for example, is that most of them are blindly insensitive to the reality of African and Asian cultures. Part of the problem here is that my country has been the victim of an acquired habit of insularity in its way of looking at the larger world around the United States. My countrymen tend to view other nations through the eyes of tourists, rather than attempting to understand that the peoples of somewhat different cultural histories view their nation's vital interests not quite as the average American might do. Among the important benefits which I hope might be gained from international conferences such as this present one, is the beginning of a new quality of dialogue, through which policy-shapers in my own country would come to appreciate the cultural environment confront-

ing the leading forces of the nations of Africa and Asia. My remarks here today are intended to help representatives from Asian nations discover a fresh view of the inside of western European and American achievements of the past. I also hope that what I say here on the subject of the relationship between science and culture in development will be overheard in Washington, D.C.

It is not unfair to report that most university graduates today admire very much the personal professional status which they have acquired through their studies; they admire this so much, that they see very little else. Not only are most of the professionals educated after World War I uninformed of the scientific method by which most of Europe's own technological progress was made possible; partly for this reason, most among them overlook the most important of the facts about scientific and technological progress. For example: They overlook the significance of the fact that the laws of the universe were already fully in existence and operated quite efficiently long before any man discovered those laws:

They overlook the first question of scientific progress: "What preconditions must exist before an individual can actually discover a law of the universe?"

They overlook the second question of scientific progress: "Once some individuals have discovered a law of the universe, what preconditions must exist before society generally will be able to assimilate those discoveries as improved technology, and what preconditions must exist before a population generally will develop the desire to assimilate such improved technology?"

These two questions are the first to confront us whenever we attempt to introduce technological changes in methods of production and distribution to a rural population which has adopted a deep and powerful cultural commitment to what we may describe as "a traditional mode of production." The study of these two questions is indispensable for understanding the reasons the fifteenth-century Golden Renaissance in Europe unleashed the spectacular advances in both science and productive powers of labor to which we referred earlier.

The scientific renaissance

Modern European scientific progress was set into motion by the elaboration of the principles of scientific hypothesis provided by Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa during the middle of the fifteenth century. The explosion of scientific progress unleashed by Cusa's definitions of scientific method would not have been possible but for a major shift within European culture by Cusa and his leading predecessors of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although Cusa laid down the principles of scientific hypothesis which made possible the work of such figures as Leonardo da Vinci, Johannes Kepler, and Gottfried Leibniz, Cusa's discoveries would not have led to such results, if the culture of Europe had not been given increasing cultural fertility for such kinds of development.

The development of this cultural fertility has a long his-

tory, but the revolution in European culture which was unleashed by the Golden Renaissance was prepared most immediately by the influence of such figures as Dante Alighieri. Central to the importance of Dante's influence, was his success in contributing to establishment of literate forms of popular language. The chief purpose and benefit of this reform in policy toward development of language was to make the development of the creative mental powers of the individual the center of the policies of the nation-builders of the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries.

This development of a literate popular culture in Europe during the late fourteenth through the eighteenth centuries, became an effort to draw the majority of the population into this cultural process. Great literature, such as the influence of Dante's writings, was the foundation for this; but, the Golden Renaissance of the fifteenth century was made possible by the development of new kinds of popular educational programs, such as Groote's Brothers of the Common Life, beginning the closing decades of the fourteenth century. Cusa himself, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and numerous other leading figures of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were products of the Brothers of the Common Life, or of institutions similarly modelled on Plato's Academy at Athens.

This cultural shift produced within the society of western Europe and the Americas, increasing numbers of individual persons who believed that their identity as members of society depended upon their ability to make, or to use the kinds of discoveries which had the effect of increasing the average individual's power to command nature. In other words, such individuals adopted the kind of sense of personal identity which motivated them to develop their mental powers for making and assimilating such discoveries.

This shift in the sense of personal identity of the individual within society was the key to the unprecedented rate of scientific, economic, and social progress unleashed in western Europe by the Golden Renaissance. Although this emphasis on the value of the development of the powers of the individual mind is among the finest contributions of European Judeo-Christian culture, it was not until the Golden Renaissance that a successful program was set into motion for drawing the majority of the population of nations into participation in the quality of education and culture previously available only to a relatively small educated elite.

The European empiricists and neo-positivists wrongly insist that the hedonistic appetites of the individual are the center of the self-interest of the individual in society. It is true, to a certain degree, that the new-born human infant is dominated by its appetites. However, if the child and adolescent, or adult are dominated by such appetites in the same degree as a new-born child, we describe such youth or adults as exhibiting an infantile personality. The primary individual self-interest of the morally developed child, youth or adult, includes the satisfaction of essential physical needs, but the individual's true self-interest is located not in his or her ma-

terial needs, as much as in a sense of individual personal identity within the family and society.

The patriotic soldier, in warfare, does not risk his life for sake of personal greed, but for sake of his nation, his culture, his family. The strongest of those motives which distinguish men and women from lower beasts, is the motive to be a worthy individual person by the standards of the family and society. Therefore, if a member of society is cultured to believe that a traditional mode of production is the practice of an honorable person, technological progress becomes almost impossible. Whereas, if the member of society believes that technological revolutions are the work of honorable members in society, the individual will devote much of his effort to developing his mental powers sufficiently to become an honorable person in society in this way.

For this reason, the problem of economic development takes a somewhat different form in Mexico and South America than is usually the case in nations of Africa or Asia. The Spanish-speaking populations of Mexico and South America, for example, represent the embedded cultural heritage of the European Golden Renaissance. In these countries, the only persistent obstacle to development which is of any general and major importance is the stubborn conviction of some powerful circles in Europe and North America, that we ought to keep those nations of the Americas relatively backward economically, that those Ibero-American nations should be kept in a condition of reservoirs of cheap labor, producing cheap raw materials for export. Among the population of Ibero-American nations generally, there is a powerful desire for a European type of technological progress.

In Africa and Asia, it is frequently the case that large segments of the population, especially certain rural segments, are what the ethnologists and anthropologists describe as "traditionalist" cultures, a "traditionalism" reinforced in numerous cases by the fact that those segments of the population have no experience of the benefits of technological changes in their modes of production. This point of difference with western European cultures must be taken prominently into account in approaching the work of economic development. . . .

The governments of the presently industrialized nations must recognize the fact, that unless the international climate is reshaped in such a way that governments of these nations have access to adequate practical means for delivering the benefits of technological progress to their rural populations, the unavoidable growth of population and growth of material desires within that population creates the objective preconditions for destabilizing social ferment, and frustrates most of the efforts of governments committed to development. Either such governments are committed to those kinds of changes in the present international monetary order, or those governments should not delude themselves that they are promoting economic development of developing nations generally. . . .