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THE BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION: APPROACHES AND PROBLEMS

Wit Wisadavet

1. Some of the problems

1.1 *Education and social philosophy*

It may be said generally that societies arrange education with three main objectives in mind, even though those objectives may be stressed differently by different societies. The three objectives are:

(1) To prepare people to be good members of society. Good members of society must have at least two abilities: firstly to work to make a living; secondly to fit in with other members of society —that is, to know the forms, the procedures and the ways of life acceptable to that society. Societies down to the present have taught their youth to have these two abilities, although they have differed in details and methodology.

(2) To train people to be well-developed human beings according to the doctrines and beliefs upheld by the people of that society. Some societies view the two abilities cited above as insufficient because they simply make people good citizens, but not good people. People have two aspects, the outer and the inner. The outer aspect involves relations with other people. The inner aspect is the relationship with the inner core of one's humanity, the ultimate truth (*paramattha dhamma*). Arranging education to make people into good Buddhists, good Christians or good Muslims is for this objective.

(3) In order to enrich wisdom. Some societies believe that human

beings differ from the beasts in that they have the wisdom to search for and appreciate certain truths within themselves. They are truths that have no practical use or utility—they do not help those who know them become better citizens or better people or to perform their duties any better—but they do make those who know them contented in the knowing. Here knowledge is an end in itself, not a means to something else.

In Western societies, which have inherited the thinking of the Greeks and the Christians, education in the early periods stressed objectives (2) and (3). Religious bodies were responsible for arranging education on the highest level (*paramattha*) and universities were the meeting places for those interested in the pursuit of knowledge. Vocational training and education about social procedures and customs was done in the home. In early western societies the government did not play a role in organizing education. Later, as the economic system increased in complexity, labor became more divided and specialized into different fields, and the legal and political systems became correspondingly more complex. With the home, the church and the universities no longer capable of providing the knowledge needed to respond to new social changes, the state began to play a greater role in the organization of education. The state could do this more efficiently, could more effectively address the long term and could serve a broader sector of the community.

England is a good example in this case. Originally the state had nothing to do with education. Private organizations, religious and non-religious, were responsible. With the creation of the British Empire, the state began to supervise education with a view to creating people who could administer that empire. Industrialization began in the middle of the eighteenth century. It was fed by people outside of educational circles, so at the time England could see no relationship between education and economic advancement.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century England had found that its industries were behind those of other countries, and the state began to play a progressively greater role in organizing education.[1]

At present almost all countries of the modern world are competing in almost every sector: political, economic, military, cultural and more. All countries well realize that one of the most important aids in this competition is education, so the state has become more actively involved in organizing, supervising, encouraging and controlling education. Education aimed at improving wisdom and development of the individual as human beings has decreased, while education to develop assets of the nation has increased.

Turning to Thai society, it has from ancient times almost never provided education for enriching wisdom, be it in the home, the palace, the wat, or the state school or university. In this respect, Thai society is similar to Western society in that in the past the state was not involved in organizing education. This only happened later. In ancient times vocational knowledge was learned in the family, or if not then via apprenticeship. Literacy was not something everyone had to have, only government officials, who began their educations in the palace or in the home. Social procedures and customs were learned in the home. There was no necessity for the state to become involved in education to train the people to be good citizens.

Wats were the places of education outside of the home for the ordinary person. People who went to learn in the wat did so voluntarily. They gained no higher vocational knowledge there or learned any of the more complex social procedures and customs. They were taught instead how to be good Buddhists, and for those

1 Ashley, B.J., and others, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Education*,Macmillan, London, 1969, pp. 86-92.

who were interested this may have led to self-development on progressively higher levels culminating in attainment of the ultimate truth (*paramattha*). While the sphere of state was more powerful than the religious sphere (*sāsanacakka*),it did not interfere with or control education in the wat.

The state began to organize education during the reign of King Rāma V because the country's leaders felt that the knowledge given in the palace, the home and the wat was not enough to help preserve the country's independence and to lead the country into the modern world. Entering the modern world entailed developing the country in every sector, in politics, administration, defense, the economy, and culture, and these kinds of development required modern knowledge from the West. Opening up the country to the international community also meant opening it up to competition in all areas. Lacking people with modern knowledge, Thailand would become outdated and disadvantaged. The state required engineers, doctors, lawyers, military leaders, and administrators more than it needed first class Dhamma scholars (*nak tham ek*) or ninth grade Pāli scholars.

As time went on, and political, economic and cultural systems became more complex, the school system played an increasingly important role in providing a suitable education for the changing society, and the state became more involved in organizing education. This phenomenon has occurred all over the world, at different speeds. Relations and communications between countries have become much closer, the world has become smaller, and competition between countries has become more intense. Countries wishing to open up have no choice but to compete with other countries, and one of the most important factors for helping them in this competition is knowledge.

Till now no one seems to be suggesting closing the country or

reducing openness. We hear only more calls for increased competition. Modern academic learning has been raised to higher and higher status. Knowledge, which in the past was a vehicle for attaining transcendence (*lokuttaradhamma*), has become a tool for development (mostly economic). Human beings themselves have become tools in the development process; we call them "human resources." This is in marked contrast with the thinking of ancient times in which the objective was to develop human beings to penetrate to the core of their humanity, the ultimate truth. The organization of education for economic goals as done nowadays has caused the educational system to stray further and further from Buddhism and forced the state to take closer hold of the reins of education.

Now Thai society is concentrating on bringing the economy up to par with developed countries. Since Thailand is a late comer, the state has had to play a major role in organizing education. It has had to lay the foundations for both basic and advanced education, which has meant a greater economic investment. The onus is on the government, as the private sector would be unlikely to be interested in investing in a country only beginning a modern education program like Thailand. The central standards of the state give the various parties involved some credibility. Trying to address long term problems, or problems with no immediately apparent profit margin, would probably be not very attractive to the private sector. Late-coming countries like Thailand have to develop their economies to into capitalist industrial economies. Thus it is easy to understand why the state has become involved in organizing education.

The state's involvement with the organization of education means in effect that education has become a mechanism of the state, that is, one of the tools used by the state in the process of realizing its ideals.The state's ideals are the philosophy of the elites in that state.

No state or society will function without a social philosophy, and it is this social philosophy that defines the approach taken to carry out the activities of the society, including the approach to education.

In essence, social philosophy includes political ideals and economic ideals. Political ideals are connected to beliefs on which administrative system is best suited to the society, how much freedom the individual should have, for what reasons individual freedom can rightfully be limited, whether people should have equal rights or not and for what reason. Economic ideals are connected to ideas about how big a role material comfort should play in "a good life," whether our society should strive to attain the highest possible level of consumption, a moderate level or a level that is merely enough to sustain life, how wealth should be distributed to be fair, how much competition for individual advancement should be incited, and whether aid to the underprivileged should be enforced or voluntary.

In societies in which education is organized by the state, those who hold power organize education in accordance with the economic and political ideals they adhere to. For example, whether they will make learning compulsory, what is to be taught, what is not to be taught, how much the state will control education, how much the private sector will be allowed to organize education according to its own ideals, what subjects will be learned, whether education is closed or open, how much democracy there will be in schools, who has the right to teach, who has the right to learn on the more advanced levels—all are defined by political and economic ideals.

Competitive entrance tests for learning on the more advanced levels is a good example of how organization of education is defined by social ideals. For university entrance tests in Mao's China the method was to have particular localities select individuals with a

high motivation to work for the common good, and tests based on academic excellence were not used. However, when Teng Siu Ping took control he abolished this system, and went back to the system of selection based on academic ability. Mao's method was compliant with the ideals of socialism. Teng's method complied with the ideals of capitalism, which had begun little by little to infiltrate into China's social philosophy. Mao's method could not be expected to produce the most intelligent scholars, since for Mao that was less important than the presence of social conscience. Teng's method would have difficulty producing people with a social conscience, but it was the better method for producing the scholars, which is what is needed by a capitalist society.

In present-day Thailand there is debate over entrance tests for tertiary level education. Some feel that the current system is fair as it is, because the best learners get to enter the universities. Others feels that a quota system would be fairer. Here, those who are entitled to continue their studies would be selected from the best students of each school in a ratio of the number of its students and the total number of students the tertiary institutions were capable of taking on. This is fair because students in distant localities would have an equal opportunity to university education as students in Bangkok or the larger cities, which at present take up 80%–90% of the places in universities. The quota system would help to bring about an equality. The first group is looking to development of the country according to the industrialized capitalist approach, which seeks a work force of highest efficiency. Equality is less important here. The latter group know well that the student who finishes first in the Amper Non Tabaek school is not as bright as the very last student of a pre-tertiary school, but they believe that equality is more important. They would not be likely to agree with industrialized capitalist way of developing the country, and if they did they would be contradicting themselves.

Not a few people have criticized the current education system in Thailand as not geared to creating well-developed people, but more a "stairway to the stars," a system in which the losers are sifted out and people are taught to be selfish and compete mercilessly. There would probably be no opponents to this statement. However this phenomenon has occurred in all industrialized capitalist societies, including the societies of developing countries such as Thailand. This kind of society has been dominated by people or groups who are specialists. Specialization is impossible or almost impossible without high level education, thus education has become the most important tool in the industrialized capitalist system for leading people to prestige, power and wealth. People who have received a high education, who tend to be from the middle classes and upwards, have the chance to rise to the upper echelons of society. Thus almost all states will involve themselves in education so that people from the poorer classes have more opportunities. How much or little they get involved depends on the society's philosophy.

1.2 *Buddhist social philosophy*

From the discussion so far we can see that the Thailand government is unlikely to cease taking part in organizing education, as the leaders believe that: 1. the state must be the spearhead of development; the state organizes education so in order to develop its work force appropriately; 2. the state is a better agency than private enterprises for bringing about equality in education, which leads to social equality; 3. national security can be better preserved if the state organizes and controls education. How policies in relation to these three areas take shape depends on the philosophy of each society. Thus if we wish to propose a Thai philosophy of education based on Buddhism, we must first investigate the general features of the Buddhist social philosophy.

Some people believe that Buddhism offers no social philosophy.

Whether we agree with this or not depends on how we define social philosophy. If social philosophy means social ethics, that is, the principles governing how people in a society deal with each other, Buddhism has many teachings on this subject, such as the teaching on the six directions, the four divine abidings (*brahmavihāra*), and the four bases of benefaction (*saṅgahavatthu*).But if social philosophy means organizing the structure of society, with the state as the central agency for laying down the laws for equality, liberty and justice, Buddhism has no proposals.

Buddhism has as its ultimate goal the transcendent (*lokuttara dhamma*), which is a state that each individual must experience personally. Social forms, no matter how they may be adhered to, can lead at best to a material happiness, mundane equality and a reasonable amount of freedom, but it is incapable of leading to ever increasing peace and contentment in the mind, rising by stages to the transcendent. At best a society can only encourage these things, and at worst, pull people back from attaining them. The Buddha did not leave the home life to find a plan for the ideal society or a way to attain it, but to search for a way to transcend birth, aging, sickness and death in *saṁsāra.*

Buddhism is not interested in organizing a form for individual relationships, but in creating a form for the complicated forces within the individual. Buddhism is not interested in analyzing the relationships between the individual and the state, but it is interested in analyzing the relationship between the individual and *Nibbāna.* While Buddhism does give teachings on relationships between individuals, these are only on the level of morality —encouraging an inner moral conscience in people rather than an outer social form for forcing them.

Force is not condoned by Buddhism. If goodness, justice, equality and liberty are produced from external social coercion, from social

regulations, they are not considered to be of real value. In Buddhism what is of highest value is freedom from within. Forcing freedom from the outside is a contradiction in itself. Since this is the case it could be expected that Buddhism might oppose the state, because where there is a state there must be force. On this point Buddhism answers that the state is necessary on one level, for the bringing about of physical well-being. But no matter how perfect a state may be it can never be enough to create peace and contentment in the mind. The ideal Buddhist community needs no state, because such a society would be made up of people who were noble (*ariya*), who have already organized their "inner form," so there is no need for an outer form.

A good society according to Buddhism is one in which the majority of people, or all people, are good people. And each of those good people must be good from within. If each person trains and improves himself from within, the society will improve on its own. Good social forms may improve people, but that is an externally produced goodness It is not in accordance with the Buddhist ideal. Buddhism stresses the individual more than the system. Human problems must be corrected within the human being , not in a system. Thus a good society is not a society with a good system, but a society with good administrators, who are virtuous, in relation to which Buddhism has laid down many teachings. Venerable Buddhadāsa has proposed that the best social system is a democracy of Dhamma socialism which is despotic, meaning it has administrators who are just, who are concerned with the well-being of the general populace and exercise absolute power. Buddhadāsa saw that if the administrators were just it would be efficient and expedient for them to have absolute power.[2] This point is arguable.[3]

2 See a discussion about the social ethics of Buddhism in: King, Winston L., *In the Hope of Nibbāna,* Open Court, 1964, Ch 8.

3 Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, *Socialism According to Buddhism*, Phra Nakhon Press,

1.3 *Problems in proposing a Buddhist philosophy of education*

There are two ways to implement the Buddhadhamma in education. The first is establishing the Buddhadhamma as the paradigmatic philosophy or foundation and then to derive a philosophy of education from that paradigm. The second is to teach Buddhism in the schools in order to train the youth to be good people, to be moral and to appreciate that which is of value within the human mind. This second method does not make Buddhadhamma the basis for the education system. It merely uses the Buddhadhamma to reinforce the existing education system and make it more comprehensive, without having to be based on Buddhadhamma. This is the kind of implementation being done nowadays in Thai education. While there are some problems in terms of principle and practice, I will not discuss them here, but instead discuss the problems associated with the first method of implementation.

If the general characteristics of Buddhist social philosophy are really as stated above then there will be problems in proposing a philosophy of education that incorporates the Buddhadhamma. A philosophy of education must rely on a social philosophy. No society will organize education without basing it on beliefs in regard to equality, freedom and justice on the worldly level, and beliefs in regard to economic ideals, regardless of whether or not that society is conscious of having those beliefs. The reliance on social philosophy is far greater when the state organizes education and is the spearhead of development. If the state organizes education, the education system will be one of the lesser systems within the greater system of society itself, and where it lies within that system depends on the social philosophy of that society. Since Buddhism does not propose an organization of social forms, we are unable to state where an education system would lie in [a Buddhist] society.

Bangkok, 2518.

Many thinkers have proposed philosophies of education based on the Buddhadhamma, two important contributors being Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu and Venerable Rāchavaramuni (Prayudh Payutto). Buddhadāsa proposes that education should have as its objective teaching people to be human beings, to abandon their animal instincts. Venerable Rāchavaramuni suggest that the objective of education should be to teach people to have mental freedom. Both of these propositions are logical derivations of a philosophy of education from the paradigm of the Buddhadhamma and both are undoubtedly correct. They are very broad principles. Neither of these writers has gone into the details of their philosophies of education as to whether they depend on any particular kind of social philosophy or can be compatible with all kinds of social philosophy. They have not first gleaned a social philosophy from the Buddhadhamma and then derived from that a philosophy of education. It may be that those venerable writers felt that it was not possible to derive a social philosophy from the Buddhist teachings, or that a philosophy of education can be proposed without the need for a social philosophy.

The writer feels that it is almost impossible to have a philosophy of education that is not based on a social philosophy. In all modern societies the state takes on the task of organizing education. Certainly the state must use education to serve its social policies. In some places, the state not only organizes education, but also controls it, and the philosophy of education becomes even more a mechanism of the social philosophy. In many ancient societies the state did not organize or control education, as for example old Thai society or English society before the end of the nineteenth century. This does not mean that the educational system did not lean on social philosophy. The education of the masses [in Thailand], in which the wat was the institute of learning, was already in conformity with the political, economic and social ideals of the

absolute monarchy. That the state did not involve itself in organizing or controlling education was the result of a conscious decision, and that decision had to conform with social ideals that were agreeable to the members of the elite.

Theoretically speaking, it may still be arguable whether or not a philosophy of education must depend on social philosophy, but in practice the events of modern Thai society have caused the author to believe that it is almost impossible for the state to cease to organize education. Thus to propose a philosophy of education it is necessary to propose a social philosophy also, and when we wish to propose a Buddhist philosophy of education, we must also propose a Buddhist social philosophy.

2. The basis for organizing a Buddhist education

2.1 *The ideal society*

It has been stated that Buddhism does not propose to organize the social form. This seems to indicate that Buddhism has no social philosophy. In fact it is very difficult to glean a social philosophy from the teachings of Buddhism by means of logic, because the ultimate objective of Buddhism is the transcendent (*lokuttara dhamma*), as already explained, and according to the Buddhist way of thinking the form of society a person lives in is not the deciding factor for that person attaining to the ultimate goal. The deciding factor lies within the individual. The individual must deal with the forces within him or her, not with the external forms of society. However, some features of society may aid a person's attaining the highest objective and some features may hinder it.

Buddhadhamma may be broken up into many kinds of social philosophy, because the teaching has not laid down a single, fixed form of social philosophy. The author proposes a social philosophy as a paradigm for a philosophy of education. This social philosophy

may be called "Buddhist," bearing the following points in mind.

This social philosophy must contain nothing that contradicts the important principles of the Buddhist life philosophy. It must not, for example, be opposed to the way to Nibbāna. Those who attain the highest happiness in this society are people who have worldly happiness, but if they conceive the faith to do so they can leave and embark on the way to Nibbāna.

This social philosophy need not necessarily accord with the current trends of Thai society, but on the other hand it must not oppose it to the extent that it is not practically feasible (for instance, it is not feasible to return to the society of the Sukhothai kingdom).

This social philosophy must not be at odds with the attitude of the Buddhist life- and world-views, such as broad-mindedness, respect for reason, and walking the middle way.

This social philosophy must not be taken to be the only social philosophy that can be gleaned from the Buddhadhamma, and must not be taken to be logically derived from the Buddhadhamma, but should be seen as only one possible form that is seen to be an appropriate course of development for present Thai society. If Thai society ceases to fare in its present state the proposal may change.

The first consideration to be looked at is how great a portion of our desired society economic life should ideally occupy. In some societies the majority hold economic life to be the whole of the good life, and that happiness is entirely dependent on material comfort. This idea definitely goes against the Buddhadhamma. The opposite idea is that the body must be tormented before the mind can attain to true peace and happiness. Buddhism does not agree with this either. A slightly less radical version of this idea is that material comfort is of almost negligible importance in life. It is not necessary to torment oneself, but one should eat only just enough to

keep the body alive.Mahatma Gandhi seems to have held this idea.[4] The Buddha saw that the *Saṅgha* community should lead a life that accords with this principle, but he did not see it as appropriate for ordinary people.

Buddhism does not deny material comforts and does not deny the seeking of wealth. In the *Sukha Sutta*, of the Khuddaka Nikāya, there is a passage stating that the possession of wealth is one kind of happiness for a wise man.[5] Buddhism has never decried the rich simply on account of their being rich. Wealth that arises righteously and as a result of industriousness is not to be criticized. In fact, when the wealthy man is kind and shares with others he is given special praise. For ordinary people who are not monks, the happiness arising from wealth rightfully gained is one kind of profit in life, with the following provisos: it does not cause trouble for others; one always bears in mind that it is not lasting and so should not be entirely abandoned to; and it is not the only happiness human beings are capable of attaining, because there is also mental happiness of progressively subtler levels up to the ultimate level (*paramattha dhamma*).

The author's proposal is that Thai society should not uphold the idea of consumerism; i.e., it should not hold maximum consumption and the good life to be one and the same thing. No one will deny that nowadays Thai society is going in this direction, but it has not yet reached the point of no return. If maximum consumption proceeds to a certain level it becomes no longer compatible with Buddhism. Thailand is a country lagging behind on the economic road. Making maximum consumption an objective of development has led to too great a disparity among the various sectors of Thai

4 See Mahatma Gandhi, *The Answer Lies in the Village*, Rasana Tositrakul, ed., Komol Kheem Thong Foundation, Bangkok 2524.

5 Tipitaka, vol. 25, § 254. (The Tipitaka used here is the Syammarattha Pāli Version —*Editor.*)

society, as has been witnessed over the last thirty years.

Conversely, it would not be feasible to turn the direction of Thai society back to an earlier economic system, like the one in use many centuries ago. In fact the economy of such a society may be the most suitable for aiding the mental development of the members of that society to eventually attain ultimate truth, but it is no longer feasible. Thai society has opened itself to the outside world, and opened itself completely. To go back to the old system of subsistence production and not have any exchange with other societies would mean closing off the country, which would be a complete reversal. China, which once had such a reversal, has now begun to open up. Closing the country off in order to take Thai society back to a way of life as in ancient Sukhothai, even if it was found desirable, would not be possible. And most importantly, minimum consumption is not at absolute necessity for a Buddhist way of life.

Thai society should uphold the principle of moderate consumption and self-reliance. In fact these two principles must go hand in hand in economically behind-the-times Thai society. To be self-reliant means to consume in accordance with one's capacity for production, to buy a minimum from other sources and to sell a minimum to others. If this is done consumption will not be on a high level, since our production capacity is still small. The main objective of production will be raising the material standard of living of the majority of society, not trade with other countries as it is now. In the present time we produce to sell, so we have to buy modern materials of production from other countries in order to compete on the international level. This raises the standard of living for only a small portion of society.

Self-reliance and moderate consumption will take place when our openness is not completely open and free as it is now. There must

be limitations on our trade with other countries. If we allow trade to be free we will not be able to control consumption and self -reliance. Such a partial closing of the country would only be temporary. When we are able to produce most of the goods that we consume and so be self-reliant, we will be able to gradually develop our methods of production. Consumption will gradually increase, and throughout that time self-reliance will still be the basic principle. When our methods of production reach a certain level, exchange with other counties can be done with a stable foundation. The gradual increase of this moderate consumption will lead to less confusion, competition and exploitation because most of the people will live on a similar level and will raise their standards of living together.

At this point we must consider one of the most important problems of social philosophy, and that is the problem of economic equality or distribution of wealth. In modern societies this problem has become even more significant because the processes of production have become more complex, and production is on a greater scale. There are two diametrically opposed views on this problem: individualism and collectivism.

Individualism holds that each person in society has the freedom to do as he or she wishes, as long as it does not infringe on or obstruct the freedoms of others to do the same. Everyone has the right to do something for others,or to produce something for others, but whether one receives anything in exchange also depends on the rights of others. Everyone is equal in terms of exchange. If done voluntarily and with full understanding, an agreement to trade is always just and equal. The word equal does not mean that they receive the same or even similar things, but means that they receive as much as the other party voluntarily gives. According to this doctrine, the state or society has no right to establish regulations to forcibly take from one person and give to another (as by using a

system of progressive taxation), and the state has no right to establish standards forbidding one person from voluntarily giving something of his own to another. In actual fact there has never been a pure individualistic society because in every society there is forced taxation on those who have wealth, that tax to be put into a central fund from to be distributed to the poor, more or less depending on the social philosophy of each country.

Collectivism holds to the opposite. Individualism holds freedom of the individual to be of main importance: each person has full right to his own possessions and to the things he obtains without force from others. Collectivism sees this as not quite fair, because A .'s obtaining greater wealth than B. may be because A. has greater opportunities. For instance, he may have been born into a rich family and have had access to a high education, with a favorable environment etc. In fact, A. may not have greater ability than B., and if B. had the same opportunities as A. he may have been able to achieve even more than A. Collectivism goes so far as to see that the state should intervene in order to create equality. This should be done even if by so doing the rights of A. are infringed upon. This intervention can be in the form of confiscating wealth or collecting progressive taxes, depending on how stolidly each society adheres to the principle of collectivism. Collectivism stresses equality and sees mere voluntary equality as not enough for the modern world. It is necessary to enforce equality, either directly or indirectly, in order to give people similar opportunities to express their abilities.

In its strictest form, collectivism believes not only in making people equal in terms of opportunities, but also in the results they achieve. According to the form of collectivism described above, the state sees to it that all people have similar opportunities so that competition is fair, but the achievers can enjoy all or nearly all of the fruits of their winnings. In the strict form of collectivism, however, if the losers are in a much lower position the state must

step in and arrange things so that people are on as similar a level as possible, or arrange it so that the non-achievers obtain the necessities of a good life. According to this doctrine, not only the means of production, but also the goods produced, are centralized.

If the factor of force is taken out, such a strict collectivist state would have features very similar to the *saṅgha* community. Entrance into the *saṅgha* community is a matter of choice, but once one has entered that community one must uphold the standard of equality in terms of material requisites. The difference lies in the training of the mind. It would not be acceptable to Buddhism if the greater society was to be forcibly made collectivist like the *saṅgha* community, but if the collectivism was voluntary Buddhism would fully support it. However it would probably be very difficult for the majority of people, who are still unenlightened beings (*puthujjana*), to voluntarily give up competing and amassing wealth in order to live in such a community. Thus the equality of strict collectivism cannot be the social philosophy we are searching for.

Individualism in its strictest form would also be difficult for most people to accept. Suppose the child of a poor man was seriously ill. To treat the illness a large sum of money is needed. Suppose that the only way to get it was to allow a rich sadist to torture him into a slow, agonized death. The agreement has arisen from a voluntary decision on both sides, and both are in full possession of their faculties. Extreme individualism will hold that this agreement is acceptable because it has arisen from a voluntary agreement and is founded on equality, but most people could not accept it and would feel the state to be entitled in issuing a law forbidding such agreements. Individualism stresses individual freedom, which is good and of value, but it ignores other human values. Thus strict individualism does not seem to be the social philosophy we are searching for.

Both freedom and equality are worthy things. The strict individualists are right when they assert that freedom is valuable but they are wrong when they say that equality is not. The collectivists are right when they say that equality is valuable but they are wrong when they deny the value of freedom. Our choice lies in the balance. It is the nature of unenlightened beings to compete and enjoy the wealth obtained from their victories. A social philosophy that does to take this into account will not last. Recent events in China are good lessons on this. However, feeling sympathy for the losers of the competition and saddened to see fellow human beings in difficulty are also natural for unenlightened beings. The wanting that is "I and mine" and the wanting to see people escape from their difficulties are both within ordinary people. A social philosophy that stresses only one of those is at odds with human society.

We must allow people to compete and enjoy the fruits of their victories. Those who lose must accept their loss, but this is within limitations. We must acknowledge that people are not born equal and so must allow inequality to exist in society, but this inequality must not be allowed to exceed a certain level, and that is the level in which the disadvantaged are unable to lead a life in material terms that supports their development in non-material terms. When necessary, the state must intervene and establish laws and regulations, which may change with the changing conditions of the environment. This intervention in the cause of equality will help to reduce the violence of the competition. The more indirect this kind of intervention is (as taxes, for example) the better, but this intervention to bring about greater equality must be conducted with care not to damage the interests of the poor. For example, if under policy A. only the smaller portion of the society, who are already well-off, stand to gain, the state should not implement that policy. If under policy B. both the people who are well-off and the

underprivileged stand to gain, and without it nobody gains, then that policy should be implemented, even if it still leaves disparity, because the condition of the poor is improved.[6]

Now let us turn to politics. Social philosophy must address the power of the state, which is the power to establish laws, to enforce them and to physically give punishments to ensure that things proceed according to those laws. How the power of the state is achieved and maintained, how far it should extend or be limited, are fundamental problems of social philosophy. In the modern world almost all societies accept that the democratic system, in which the power of the state is gained through the plebiscite of the majority, is the ideal system. How much or little , quickly or slowly, it is to be practiced, is subject to different opinions in different societies. While Thai society is not a full democracy, all parties agree that this is the direction we are heading in.

Buddhadāsa proposes that a society can be a dictatorship, and may in fact be the better off, if the state or persons in power are virtuous. The "if" in this statement is a very big one. What standards do we have to ensure that we can effectively produce a virtuous leader? If we have one, what standards do we have to ensure that this person or group will continue to be virtuous and not become enslaved by craving as their power increases, and that their power is free of any resistance. Even given that the virtue of the despot does not wane, how can we be sure that the dictator will have the ability and acumen to carry out works for the true benefit of the people? If a despot is good, the society is good, but if he is evil the society becomes a hellish one. These days not many people would want to run such a risk.

However, democracy is not the ideal social system according to Buddhism. Buddhism believes in the laws of nature as standards for

6 See Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford University Press, NY., 1971, Ch 11.

gauging what is right and what is wrong, what is righteous (*dhamma*) and what is unrighteous (*adhamma*). These natural laws have existed from the very beginning, they are not laws that human beings have established. Even if no one discovers the truth that does not mean the truth disappears. What human beings establish as being the truth (*dhamma*) may or may not correspond with the real truth. Buddhism calls democracy "*lokādhipateyya,*" which means sovereignty of the world, or worldly beings. Worldly beings have the say as to what is righteous (*dhamma*) and what is unrighteous (*adhamma*), and in this they may be wrong. The solution is to use *dhammādhipateyya,* sovereignty of the *dhamma.* Thus human beings should conduct themselves according to the ways of *dhamma,* not according to ways they think up for themselves, even if that is the choice of the majority. The voice of the majority cannot make the unrighteous (*adhamma*) righteous (*dhamma*).

Since this is so, is democracy at odds with Buddhism? The answer is that it need not be. The Buddha discovered the *Dhamma* and then taught it to the world. These teachings are very general. People in any society can put them into practice to achieve progressively higher levels of mental peace until they arrive at the transcendent (*lokuttara dhamma*). The teachings for people's relationships with each other are entirely attuned to making people considerate of each other, and that is a universal virtue. However, different societies have different makeup, so the rules and regulations used in those societies naturally differ. Here the voice of the majority must be the deciding factor, but it must be accepted that as long as people are unenlightened (*puthujjana*) the rules and regulations they establish may deviate from the righteous (*dhamma*). This deviation may be gradually reduced as people find more contentment in their lives. As moderate consumption increases the desperate kind of competition will diminish, equality will increase and education will be more likely to be correct.

Thus the sovereignty of the state coming from the plebiscite of the majority does not contradict the teachings of Buddhism. Now we come to the problem of how far the state should limit individual freedom. The freedoms we have discussed so far are economic freedoms: the freedom to do business, to exchange, and to enjoy the material comforts obtained from one's achievements. The freedoms we will now discuss are political freedoms: the freedom to do as one wishes. On this point Buddhism states that this is not freedom. True freedom is the state free of, or which transcends, all obstacles to achieving the truth. The freedom to drink alcohol anytime we want without any restriction from the state may be thought of as being freedom, but Buddhism states that this simply shows that we are enslaved by defilements (*kilesa*).

Religious freedom is a concern of those who are aspiring for the ultimate truth (*paramattha dhamma*). Most people (*puthujjana*) want to live in the world of confusion and follow their desires. Thus the problem arises that in our ideal society how much limitations should be placed on political freedom? Freedom without restriction is self destructive. Liberalism holds that freedom should not be limited any more than is necessary to preserve freedom. That is, we should have the freedom to do anything we want as long as our actions do not infringe on the freedoms of others to do what they want. According to this idea we can drink alcohol, ignore others in distress, or commit suicide because these actions do not prevent other people from doing the same. Liberalism would probably not be compatible with a society that prescribed to self-reliance and moderate consumption, because if freedom is allowed fully those who have wealth will buy everything they want for their enjoyment, even things that we are incapable of producing ourselves. Others wanting to follow suit will be unable to do so, with the result that a small portion of society enjoys maximum consumption while the greater part has minimum consumption, as we see now, rather than

the majority of people enjoying moderate consumption.

The more extreme liberalism feels that the state should limit individual freedom as little as possible, that is, only to the extent of preventing people from infringing on each other's freedom. As long as it does not infringe on others, people can do as they like. This is tantamount to giving people full opportunity to indulge in their desires. In fact this kind of freedom does not contradict the teaching of Buddhism, because while Buddhism holds that the suppression of desires is a good thing, a person's suppression of and not acting on desires must arise from his or her own conscience, not as a result of external force. But even though freedom does not contradict the teaching of Buddhism, a fully liberal society is not conducive to a Buddhist life. Thus our desired social philosophy must not be full liberalism.

Liberalism limits individual freedom no more than is necessary to protect the happiness of others. Then the problem arises of whether the state has the right to limit people's freedoms to protect the interests and happiness of others. In the family parents feel they have the right to limit their children's freedoms, not only as a way of preventing them from infringing on the rights of others, but also to prevent them from infringing on themselves. Parents would feel they had wronged if they did not discipline their children for their own good. This school of thought is called "paternalism." The father must look after his children because they do not yet understand good and evil and cannot yet discipline themselves.

Most modern states act as "fathers," to a greater or lesser extent. Those who are more paternalistic are the states that forbid people from drinking alcohol, those that are less so are those that forbid driving or riding in a car without a seat belt. Laws against speeding are for protecting the rights of others, but laws enforcing the use of seat belts are for protecting one's own interests. Regardless of

whether paternalism is at odds with the teachings of Buddhism, it is in its extreme forms because Buddhism does not favor the use of force.

However, in practice, most people are still unenlightened and sometimes lose control. Sometimes we want to do something bad because we do not know it is bad, sometimes we know but we cannot help ourselves. Thus it would seem to be appropriate for the state to sometimes act as a father. In Thai society the state already does this to some extent: forbidding the sale of alcohol after 1 AM, forbidding horse racing on certain days and forbidding some kinds of gambling, or allowing some only with permits. The doctrine of paternalism would seem to be a valid social philosophy for Thailand to follow, with few practical problems if it is not too extreme. Theoretically, a paternalist society would be more conducive to Buddhist practice than a liberal society. The ideal of moderate consumption can proceed smoothly when the state acts as a parent and encourages people to protect their long-term interests. Moreover, a paternalist state would also see to the equality of the majority of its citizens.

Now let us turn to the subject of culture. What position should culture have in the state? The role of culture—here meaning religion, morality, traditions, and the arts—depends on ideals of political freedom. In a liberal society no particular culture is forced onto the people. People can adhere to or practice according to any culture they wish as long as it does not infringe on the rights of others. In a paternalist society cultural concerns are not enforced by the state, but in nationalist totalitarian societies culture becomes a state law, as for instance when Thai people were once enforced to wear hats.

Buddhism is a broad-minded religion. The Buddha never indicated that his teaching should be a state enforced regulation.

His teachings are simply ways to follow for those who wish to find peace and happiness within. One can follow them to any level one wishes, depending on each person's voluntary inclination. Buddhism says it is not good to drink alcohol, but it does not state that the government should make a law forbidding it. Buddhism teaches that to have a sense of gratitude to others is a high virtue, but it does not state that those who are ungrateful should be thrown in jail or forced to repay their benefactors. According to Buddhism, cultural matters should be voluntary. In fact the Buddha gave full freedom, even to argue with his teaching or to choose to practice or not according to his teaching. This is well known.

Our desired social philosophy should therefore allow freedom of cultural expression. Preference for any particular tradition, art, ethic or religion, as long as it does not infringe on the freedoms of others, is not to be forced or forbidden by the state. The only proviso is that for any one society to proceed to any one common goal, the people in that society must have a feeling of unity. This feeling can be brought about in many ways. It may arise as a result of the feeling of a common reward to be gained, but on a deeper level it is the feeling that the people are all members of the one community. This kind of feeling arises from having the same or similar culture. Thus it would be acceptable for a state to intervene and further implant the culture that its people already share, as long as that intervention is not too extreme. Moreover, culture is a concern of the mind. Not only does it hold people together as one group, but also helps to restrain economic activity from going to extremes. Thus it would aid the ideal of moderate consumption already discussed.

The last point to be examined in relation to our proposed social philosophy for Thailand is capitalism. At present Thailand is developing according to the capitalist approach. Is capitalism at odds with Buddhism? It depends on how we define capitalism. In a loose sense, capitalism is a system in which the state allows private

enterprise to conduct its concerns freely, allowing free competition and free agreement to exchange without intervention as to what to produce, what to buy, or what prices to fix. What people do, what they seek, and who they compete with is up to them. If they wish to share with others it is up to them, and the state cannot enforce them on these matters. In brief, capitalism is a combination of liberalism and individualism.

If this was all there is to capitalism then it would hold nothing to contradict the teachings of Buddhism, but many people think that it does because they see capitalism as materialism. In fact capitalism does not necessarily define itself as materialist. Whoever wants to find happiness in other ways is free to do so. Moreover, people in any form of society can be materialists. Materialism is not the core of capitalism, but incidental. It is incidental that human beings in this world, once they have freedom, will seek happiness in material things. If the aspect of materialism is taken out, capitalism is not at odds with Buddhism. Buddhism agrees with allowing people to live freely.A goodness that arises from being forced is not real goodness. Allowing people to do as they wish does not contradict Buddhism. Buddhism holds that people who train their minds receive the result of peace, and that result cannot be obtained from others. Capitalism is individualism, which can mean competition in material terms, and if exploitation arises it arises because there is a limited number of material things: one person's gain is another's loss. Buddhism is a spiritual individualism, and mental happiness is infinite: one person's gain does not infringe on another person's gain. However, the Thai capitalist society is materialist, and this does not help the Buddhist way of life. Thus we propose that the state should intervene in order to bring about a moderate level of consumption. Our society will not follow the extreme form of capitalism, but will take account of equality, self-reliance and moderate consumption.

2.2 *The ideal person*

A society that adheres to this social philosophy, while it may not yet be the highest ideal according to Buddhism, can nevertheless be taken as an objective toward which to direct the organization of education. Such a society, while not logically derived from Buddhism, is nevertheless not at odds with Buddhism.

In the complex modern world, it is possible to propose a philosophy of education that does not conform to a social philosophy, but it would be unlikely to lead to practical implementation. However, a philosophy of education must also be in conformity with people's lives. In fact a society is simply the coming together of a number of individuals. Once they have come together as a group, that group may sometimes have its own needs and interests which do not accord with those of the individuals within it. A philosophy of education that does not take into account the needs of the society, giving too much emphasis to the needs of the individual, would be difficult to put into practice. A philosophy of education that stresses too much the needs of the society without taking into account the needs of the individual would reduce human beings to mere "resources" void of any honor.

Thus the philosophy of education we want and which can be taken as a Buddhist philosophy of education must contain these three objectives:

1. Education must address social needs. We must build people into good citizens who perform their work of choice efficiently, respect the rights of others, are mindful of their rights, and know to some extent the mechanisms of society. A suitable person is one who is ready to take on a leadership role in society, who can be at ease with the deference and respect of others.

2. Education must address needs in terms of development of the

individual, preparing the individual to live in the world. That is, education must build people who have a respect for their own honor, who are their own masters, who have their own rationale. When a need arises they need not follow others, and, when available, they can enjoy the pleasures of the world such as food, travel, and arts.

3. Education must address the ultimate truth. This does not mean establishing Nibbāna as the objective, but not organizing an education system that goes against the Buddhadhamma. The people to be created by this educational system can, if they become tired of the worldly happiness, turn their lives to the search for inner happiness in progressively higher stages, culminating in the transcendent. We have already described the general principles of the social philosophy we will use as a foundation for organizing education. Now we will examine the features of the ideal person, which we will be using as a model on which to base our system of education. Ultimately the ideal human being in Buddhism is the arahant, but we will not place our goals so high. We are proposing a system of education for worldly society, so our ideal person must be one on the level of the good "worldly being." Good worldly beings must also be good citizens, and while they may not be arahants or nearly arahants, if they conceive the desire to search for the ultimate truth, they may attain that objective, because their features and qualities do not obstruct them from taking that path.

The worldly beings who will be the guides for our organization of education we will call "self-respecting people," the features of which are as follows:

The general characteristics of self-respecting people are a belief in their own potential, in their reasoning powers, and in their own freedom. We must teach people to have an awareness of each person's particular abilities, which may or may not be the same as

the abilities of others. These hidden abilities may be progressively developed if their owner is resolute. Human beings develop themselves. The success and failure, happiness and suffering that arise for us are entirely of our own creation. The social system may sometimes augment or obstruct them, but that system is again subject to change by people. We must also acknowledge that our efforts to change may not all be successful, but we must believe that the results that arise from our efforts are sometimes no more important than the efforts themselves, and the pleasure gained from actually trying is no less valuable than the happiness of seeing our efforts successful.

Self-respecting people must believe that they are free, that they have the right to choose their way of life for themselves. They must feel within themselves what it is that they really want; their wants are not just a result of imitating others or blindly following their advice. Self-respecting people are people with reason. It is reason that separates people from the animals and causes us to respect other people just as we would respect ourselves. It is reason that allows us to know what is right and what is wrong, and allows us to control our own minds and train ourselves, to transcend the pressure of external temptations, all in order to achieve both our and others' objectives.

Self-respecting people also wish to have a life in the world. They do not deceive themselves that money is of no importance in life. In the modern world people who have no money would find it very difficult to maintain themselves. They may have to depend on others for a living, causing them to look down on rather than respect themselves. People who are hungry, diseased, and sleeping in the middle of the streets would find it difficult to feel proud of themselves, except for those who had attained the transcendent dhamma.Ordinary worldlings would not be satisfied with such a lot. Self-respecting people do not disparage the money they make

rightfully, because money is necessary on one level, even though it cannot provide all kinds of happiness. Money does not make people without honor honorable, but it can increase the honor of those who already have it. But in regard to all this we must not forget to teach children that money is unable to buy many things of great value in life, such as love, friendship, and respect.

In Thai society, developing as it is at present, we do not need to teach people the importance of money—most people already see that—it is true, but to teach people to despise money rightfully gained runs more against the grain than ordinary people are willing to accept. What education needs to stress is the methods for obtaining money, which should be rightful. People who are crazy for money may seek it in any way they can. If they seek it dishonestly it becomes necessary for the government to impose a punishment. If it is not dishonest but merely "cruel," the government will have to become the father figure and seek measures to reduce the stimuli for seeking money to some extent. It is worth considering that when people are suppressed in the search for money they may devote most of their energies to seeking power instead. Power-crazy people are certainly more frightening than the money-crazy, because the power-crazy want to dominate others, whereas the money-crazy seek only to dominate things.

To obtain money people must work. Ordinary people who had to live off others would find it difficult to respect themselves. But money should not be the sole objective of work because that would render people mere economic animals, and human beings have a much higher potential than that. To teach youth the ideal of working not for money but for the work itself certainly conforms with the Buddhadhamma, but it is doubtful how much worldly beings could really apply themselves to this ideal. There is a middle way between working for money and working for the work itself, and that is working for honor, and to express one's abilities for

others to see. This teaching may be reinforcing the *attā* (self) but it is more feasible than teaching people to work for its own sake, and is not actually at odds with the Buddhadhamma.

Manual labor should be accorded a special place in the curriculum because this kind of work enables people to understand and sympathize deeply with their fellow human beings more than any mere verbal teaching. Manual labor helps people to feel themselves members of the human race, helps them to develop a respect for others, and indirectly leads to a sense of self respect. This kind of work helps people to know themselves better and leads to a sense of pride without looking down on others. Mental labor also gives people a sense of pride, but can more easily lead to looking down on others.

Self-respecting people do not denigrate material or semi-material happiness such as the pleasures arising from food, clothing, travel, and occasional entertainment, as material happiness is a product of the human race just as much as other kinds of happiness. Being able to participate in enjoying these pleasures makes life more fulfilling, so they are kinds of happiness that should not be rejected from the worldly life, but it is fitting that society should seek ways to allow all people the opportunity to attain them. It is a kind of happiness which to ordinary people has a value no less and no more than material happiness. Education must teach people to see these forms of happiness as allowable and provide them with some basic foundation to seek them if they so choose. They would not be able to choose if we did not open their eyes and ears, if we imposed on them one thing and concealed another, virtually depriving them of the chance to choose, which is once more depriving them of the opportunity to be self-respecting people.

Self-respecting people are not frugal. Buddhism does not teach people to be frugal. Frugality (*appicchatā*) was taught by the

Buddha as a practice for monks. For lay people he taught the principle of being contented with what they have and with what they are able to obtain through their own efforts. Buddhism teaches people only to know their real strengths and abilities, not to force themselves to do nothing even when they know full well that they are capable of obtaining more for themselves in a rightful way. People who know they have abilities but who just do nothing, who do not use their abilities to go out and obtain the things they rightfully deserve, are insulting themselves; they are not self -respecting people.

Fairness is an important characteristic of the self-respecting person. Self-respecting people must also respect others. When they want something they will also want others to have it. When they want others to have something, they will feel they are entitled to have it too. People who respect themselves but do not respect others are tyrants; people who respect others but do not respect themselves are people with no worth. Self-respecting people will not take advantage of others with the feeling that they are taking advantage of them, and the feeling that they are not taking advantage of others will change after they have considered their reasons. Conversely, self-respecting people will not allow others to take advantage of them if it is unrighteous or force do not them, but they can accept losing the advantage if it is allowed of their own volition. Both people who take advantage and people who allow themselves to be taken advantage of denigrate themselves.

If we do not know who we are, we cannot respect ourselves. People are many things, but one of the most important things we are is "citizens." In the modern world it is difficult to get away from being a citizen, being a member of the state, not just a member of the community. The state has a form for determining the rights and duties of its citizens. Self-respecting people must have a basic knowledge of the mechanisms of the state, the economic system and

the political system. They must know their duties and their rights. Self-respecting people must fulfill their duties and protect their rights. People who do not fulfill their duties see themselves as having a higher value than others, while people who do not protect their rights see others as having higher value than themselves. Neither of these characteristics is that of a self-respecting person, who sees himself and others as of equal value.

These rights and duties are a form established by the state for the people to practice, but they are changeable. This is something we should also teach the youth. A good citizen should keep abreast of political developments. Forms and standards must change with circumstances. A democratic system which relies on the voice of the majority establish rules and regulations, while it may have many weaknesses, is nevertheless a system in which people govern themselves, and that is a most important factor. People who are conforming to laws enforced on them by others are slaves, not free people. We could not call someone a self-respecting person if he has no say in the issue of the laws he has to abide by. That would be living under someone else's mandate, not one's own. We play a part in laws made by others if we agree with them and are not forced to abide by them. Laws we do not agree with but which are made by the majority must also be taken as laws in which we have played a role in the making of. However, if the laws issued by the mandate of the majority violently opposed his conscience, a self-respecting person would not abide by them and would accept the consequences of not abiding by them.

We must train our youth to be ready to accept leadership roles in the future if they are right for them. We should not intentionally set out to form our leaders only from one particular group because such a leader can easily become a tyrant. We should rather train the youth on the whole to have the general qualities [required for leadership], for example, to have the confidence to make decisions,

to view communal activity as a highly honorable activity, to be bold enough to accept responsibility, to be circumspect, seeing how problems do not arise of themselves but in close relation to other problems, to be able to distinguish between personal doctrines and beliefs and policies of the state which must be applied to all people, etc. In fact good citizens in general should have these characteristics , and we should try to teach the youth as a whole to possess them as much as possible. From such a fertile ground, leaders will sprout of their own accord, without our having to try to build them.

It is a general trait of people to want to stand out. We can stand out from others in many ways—through wealth, honor, and power. If these things arise rightfully, as a result of abilities, and are used rightfully, then they are desirable, but a society in which the majority of people are money-crazy or power-crazy is not likely to be a very comfortable one.On the other hand,a society full of people crazy for honor would not seem to be particularly dangerous. Our stress should be on teaching young people to search for honor without despising wealth or power, because in any case it would be difficult or well-nigh impossible to do so. Honor is a material object (*āmisa*), but it is an *āmisa* that is very light and involves very little harm to others. To do things with no thought of personal reward whatsoever is a high ideal that is very hard to make a reality. It would be easy to teach people to do things mainly for wealth and power , but the society would be not particularly peaceful. Honor is the middle way, an appreciation of which should be firmly implanted.

Self-respecting people do not boast on account of honor, but they are also not too self-effacing. Boasting is denigrating others, but self -effacement is denigrating oneself. We should teach the youth to have a sense of pride, but also stress that their pride should be in their own achievements, not in their possessions. Praise of good people is a worthy thing, but praise from bad people is something to

be wary of. Words of disparagement, if not true, should be responded to with displeasure through means and on a level that are appropriate, but not reacted to heatedly with an immediate emotional response. Anger should not be bottled up inside for long nor should it be immediately thrown off. An appropriate expression of displeasure is the course of action fairest to oneself.

In a democratic system what once existed can be abolished and what was not there before can be instituted. These changes can arise from commentary, and commentary will be effective when there are people who dare to comment and who dare to listen to the comments of others. Self-respecting people must fit in with society to a necessary extent, but they should fit in even more with what is right. The phrase "people who dare to comment" does not mean that people must criticize each and every thing, turning them into fusspots. Self-respecting people must be able to distinguish between matters that are important and those that are not, and their comments be given equally to people they like and people they do not like, because it is not people that are being commented on but thoughts and actions.

We must teach our youth that people are not mere biological and social beings, but also human beings who have their own world. People have physical needs, which are met by the material things around them; they have desires to obtain the happiness given them by other people in society, such as honor and warmth. But human beings are also capable of experiencing a happiness that they can give to themselves, such as sacrifice, doing good works for their own sake and forsaking evil actions even at the loss of material and social happiness. This is real self-respect because it lies within one's own power, not within the power of material objects or society. If this kind of happiness is developed to higher levels it culminates in its consummation, which is Nibbāna.

Self-respecting people, who possess the traits mentioned above, can be called "good worldlings." I believe that people of this kind can fit in with the kind of society I have been proposing, and if they are disillusioned with worldly happiness, they may turn their lives to the ultimate truth. Life in the world holds many paths for them to choose from, two at the very least: 1. they may choose to do community work, to be a politician or a civil servant, and walk this path to becoming a senior statesman. 2. they may choose to be ordinary people, good citizens, making an honest living, taking an interest in political developments, and seeking material pleasures and other kinds of personal happiness in rightful ways. Thus, once we have built the youth into self-respecting people, they may choose to lead one of these kinds of life: a life that leans to political happiness, which is honor; a life that leans to economic happiness, which is a comfortable standard of living; and a life of happiness in the Dhamma, which is peace of mind, and which, if pursued long enough, may lead to the life of the arahant. An arahant is necessarily a self-respecting person, but self-respecting people need not be arahants.

3. Approaches to organizing education

The ideal society and the ideal person proposed above are not the final or ultimate objectives of Buddhism, but they do not oppose Buddhist principles, and they are starting points for embarking on the journey to the ultimate objective. In fact it may be possible to propose ideal societies and ideal people in different forms, but I believe the forms I have proposed are ideally suited to the present condition of Thailand, and I will use them as a framework for proposing the approach to organization of education.

3.1 *Equality in education*

In industrial and industrially-developing societies education has become a tool for dividing people into different economic

categories. In England, where people are officially divided into six economic levels, results of research conducted at Oxford University in 1972 showed that almost 90% of the people who finished university went to the two highest [economic] levels.[7]In Thailand, even a cursory glance reveals the same kind of results: people who have high education have opportunities for better careers and higher incomes than those with lower educations, with few exceptions. If everyone had equal opportunity to advance to higher levels of education, but due to other factors only some of them did and others did not, this would be considered fair and equal by most people, but research shows that most or almost all of those who enter the higher places of learning are the children and nephews of well-to-do people. This has caused many people to feel that inequality has arisen in our education.

Let us suppose that there was a society with a social system unlike any other, in which the level of education was not an instrument for dividing the people into different levels, in which those who had higher education did not have higher standards of living than those with low education, and that other factors distinguished people's incomes. Would we still feel that inequality had arisen in education when the children and nephews of underprivileged people had less chance to a high education than people of well-off families? Would there be competition in education? In old Thai society the temples (*wat*) were the places of education for the people at large. Everyone had a chance to go and learn there, and they could learn as much as they wished. But there does not seem to have been any competitiveness in learning, because in those days education played no part in determining how high people's incomes would be. Thus there was no problem of inequality.

The truth is that the problem of educational inequality is merely

7 David Rubenstein, ed., *Education and Equality,* Penguin Books, 1979, p. 69.

an offshoot of the problem of social inequality. People who are fighting for educational equality are in fact fighting for social equality. If people with little education had just as much or even more opportunity to a comfortable standard of living as those with much education would those people still be demanding equality in education? The problem we must consider is, are we creating greater educational equality in order to bring about greater social equality, or creating greater social equality in order to bring about greater educational equality?

The latter method is not complex if a government exercises absolute power. One thing such an absolute government may do is abolish the market mechanism, and determine wages for all kinds of work rather than allowing free trade. People who do mental work receive a similar wage to those who do manual work, and for all work the state is the employer: the directors and managers would receive a salary not much different from the clerks, and doctors could not demand what they want from their patients. Exercising a little less absolute power, the state may use indirect means, whereby it does not do the employing, but instead imposes extreme progressive taxation, so extreme that the income derived from work that demands high learning is not worth the expenditure in terms of physical, mental and financial effort put into education. If either of these two methods was employed, competitiveness in education would certainly decrease, but the problem of inequality in education would not arise. Only a few people really interested in learning—i.e., who felt that learning was of value in itself—would want to pursue a high education. But such absolute governments are too suppressive of freedom, and such methods should not be used if the problem of educational inequality is not too extreme.

The first approach to solving the problem is that adopted by liberal democracies. They have looked for a way to allow the underprivileged to obtain higher educations so that they can have

more equality with others. Most people would probably feel that it would be unfair to have the managers and directors earn the same wage as the clerks, but at the same time, not a few would feel that it would not be fair if the clerk had to be a clerk simply because he had no chance to get a good education because his parents were poor. Thus we should find ways to increase opportunities for these people. There are many ways to increase opportunities for the children [and nephews] of poorer families, such as, for example, educational institutions not taking fees for their services, distributing text books and other learning equipment free, having free midday (and perhaps also morning and evening) meals, free travel to and from schools. Many societies would find even this impossible to do, but if we wanted to create greater equality we could also reimburse money to poorer parents who would normally have to have their children go out to work to increase the family's income.

Even were it possible to do all the things proposed above, this would not guarantee true equality in education because there are still other areas of inequality, such as motivation. Middle and higher class families tend to instill in their children an awareness of the importance of education more than poorer families. Thus children have different levels of motivation and application. The physical environment of their homes is not equal: the convenience in the home of the affluent families is more conducive to learning than the homes of poorer families. Children of affluent families have better access to education aids than poorer children, and even were the government to organize an equal distribution of these things (which is well-nigh impossible), inequality has arisen from the moment the child takes conception in the mother's womb: children born to affluent mothers have better opportunities of physical development, which affects intelligence, than children born to poor mothers.

Were we to correct even these inequalities, there are further

inequalities, such as biological structure: children are born different not only in their physical structure but also in terms of emotions and intellectual abilities. Suppose we were able to remove all inequalities discussed above, is it possible to solve the problem of congenital intellectual inequality? There is an answer on one level: to give more attention to children of inferior intellectual capacity than to children of superior intellectual capacity, to provide them with special educational aids, special teachers, etc. But this can only be done up to an extent: in the end some children will always learn better than others, in spite of equal effort. Thus congenital intelligence becomes the final remaining determinant over who has the right to higher education; i.e., better opportunities in life, than others.

Not a few people would think that this is fair, but what if we were to ask them why A. has more right to enjoy happiness than B. on the basis of A. and B. differing only in their unequal congenital attributes? If it were to be conceded that it is fair to distinguish people's social standing on the basis of congenital attributes (in this case, intelligence), then we must also concede that the parents' social standing is a fair criterion for distinguishing people's social standing, because the parent's social standing is also something existing from the time of the child's birth. But most people would feel that C.'s having a higher education than D. and thereby obtaining a higher standard of living is inequality if C.'s parents were of a better social standing and both C. and D. were of equal congenital intelligence.

The problem of inequality is not as simple as people think. The problems I have detailed here are theoretical. There are many more practical problems, which I would like to pass over. In fact the fairest method of all is drawing lots, but this would go against the feelings of most people and may lead to problems in other areas.

Of the various points that may bring about equality of opportunity in regard to higher learning, which ones will be addressed depends on the social philosophy of the country in question. But here we have the problem of social equality to consider. Social equality can be looked at in two ways: in terms of opportunity, and in terms of the actual results. The former group sees that opportunities should be provided as equally as possible. If the result that arises is that people are unequal then that is that. The latter group feels that there are many problems involved in organizing equal opportunities, and that we should rather look at and organize society so that equality actually results.

In my view these two ideas do not necessarily contradict each other, and in Thailand we should use both. As far as resolving inequality of opportunity, we may simply have free education in state educational institutions, free distribution of necessary education aids, scholarships for bright students, government interest-free loans for studying—and absolving the necessity to reimburse the full amount for those who, having finished their studies, take up public welfare work—and establish more open universities to cover every region, because this would involve little expenditure but have a far-reaching and deep result. It is a certainty that, even were we to do all these things, opportunities for education would still not be equal, but educational equality will not be the most valuable thing in the society, at least no more valuable than equality of living standards.

If the objective of increasing educational opportunities for people as a whole is to create greater equality in people's living standards, why not then use the money and resources to increase the equality of living standards? I feel we should do both. Sometimes we may use the resources for equalizing educational opportunities directly for social welfare, and this may better lead to equality of living standards, but we cannot neglect educational opportunities

altogether because even in a modern society education will be the essential tool for bettering the living standards of the people who do study. Education also has a value in and of itself, but our appreciation of this value should not make us blind to the value of social equality.

3.2 *Freedom in education*

At present in Thai society the state is the organizer and supervisor of education. The private sector is free to organize education, but it must be under the supervision of the state. Before we consider whether the present state of affairs conforms with our proposed social philosophy or not let us review some other approaches. One possible approach is for the state alone to organize education and the private sector to have no part in it. This is the method of the absolute government, which has some kind of fixed political ideal, and the education system is used to cast the youth into this mold. How much the youth are dominated by this depends on how much and in what areas the state allows variety and in what areas it will enforce conformity. The method of absolute government is not entirely bad: an absolute government with an ideal of promoting equality may better be able to achieve it than a free democracy, but there is also the danger of the absolute government having a different ideal. Another important consideration is that while the state may successfully bring about equality forcibly, the total neglect of freedom is unacceptable. Our proposed social philosophy can allow social inequality to a certain extent, so that a certain level of freedom is achieved.

Another approach is for the state to not organize or supervise education at all, to make it entirely free. If Thailand continues to develop via the market system as a mechanism of exchange, allowing unrestricted competition and opening the country fully as it is now, equality both in terms of education and in terms of society

are certainly going to decrease. The affluent will purchase all kinds of extravagant consumer goods, both imported and local, and ordinary people will have to find the money to follow suit. Fields of academic learning for which the society offers high financial rewards will find preference, and the private sector will open competitive venues of education with the highest quality services. This will require high expenditure and therefore necessitate high fees. Only the children of affluent families will be able to go there and the gap between the haves and the have-nots will continue to widen. Thai society will split into two, and tension is bound to arise.

Actually in olden Thailand the state did not organize or supervise education. The education of the ordinary people took place in the wat, which is not a state institution. But in those days education was not an agency for effecting differences in living standards, so the problem mentioned above did not arise.

If the state left the private sector to organize all education, it would be impossible for social development to follow any social philosophy other than extreme liberalism. But in fact extreme liberalism contains no ideal in concrete terms, only in terms of form, because it holds that anyone can do anything as long as they do not infringe on the rights and freedoms of others to do what they want. An extreme liberal state has no interest in equality because it holds that once people have agreed voluntarily to an exchange, that is in itself equality.

Our proposed social philosophy is moderate consumption, self -reliance, balance between individualism and collectivism, and between equality and freedom. These are concrete ideals. If a state does not become involved in organization and supervision of education, these ideals will be hard to uphold. The only ideal such a state will uphold will be that of freedom. For example, in order to achieve the ideals of self-reliance and moderate consumption we

require a kind of knowledge that differs from the knowledge that a society holding different economic ideals would want. If the state does not organize means for obtaining this kind of knowledge, the private sector would be little likely to take any interest in doing so. The private sector, as already stated, is interested only in the needs of the market. Even though in present-day Thai society equality in education and in society have not reached levels many people want to see, if the state ceases to organize education, allowing things to proceed as they are at present, equality will be even less. Individual freedom is a good thing, but society has certain needs that differ from those of the individual. These needs can only be realized when the people as a whole have certain knowledges and skills. The private sector has no desire to teach this knowledge because no reward can be seen for it. People may not want to learn it because no immediate fruit can be seen arising from it.

Thus compulsory education is still a necessity, at least to a certain level. It is useful both to the individual and the state. That part that is useful to the state, if properly organized, will also be of indirect benefit to the individual. The diversity that arises from individual freedom is a good thing, but if there is only diversity without any unifying core to support it, even diversity will be unable to arise. In Thailand, where most of the underprivileged have little social awareness, if the state does not become a "good father" individual freedom will lead to diversity only for a minority. Appropriate organization of education by the state, rather than the state ceasing to be involved in it, can solve these problems.

However in order not to neglect the issue of freedom, once the state has compelled people to obtain a certain level of education, it should then allow some freedom. Education beyond the compulsory level should in part be organized by the state, in order to allow the social ideals to materialize, but the private sector should be allowed to freely organize education also, as long as it does not conflict with

the social ideals that are the state's objectives.

3.3 *Curricula*

On the subject of curricula there are a number of important matters to be considered. For example, do we have the right to use a compulsory curriculum? What should the curriculum contain in order to conform with the social philosophy and the type of person we want?

In an extreme liberal society, it would not be easy to justify forcing people to study subject matter defined for them by others. While children are naive, their parents should have more right to determine the subject matter of their study than the state, but in our proposed semi-individual semi-collectivist society the state has the right to be the father up to an extent. In such a society people have certain common ideals on the concrete level, not just the level of form. In order to achieve these ideals it is necessary to have a very broad framework so that people can walk the same direction. Once an objective is established, there must be some things that aid and some that obstruct its realization. Compulsory education is thus necessary. However, compulsory education, which serves the needs of the state, also indirectly serves the interests of people in general. Moreover, compulsory education also directly serves the needs of children. In the modern world there are certain kinds of knowledge (such as reading, writing and arithmetic) lacking which a person will find it difficult to develop his or her potential to the required level, regardless of the form of society he or she lives in.

All children on the primary school level should learn the same things. Reading, writing, and arithmetic must be learned but they need not be given great emphasis. When children are a little older these things can be pushed. There are other things children should know and which do not require the ability to read. The knowledge we should teach children is the knowledge of themselves. Self

-knowledge can be divided into three aspects: 1. knowing one's relationship with others in society; 2. knowing one's relationship with the physical world; 3. knowing one's relationship with oneself.

It is possible to teach children to know their relationship with others by organizing activities and discussions. Sports and group activities will help the children to realize that people cannot live alone, and in order to live together with others it is necessary to accept certain rules. These rules can be in the family, the school room, in sport, society and the state. The children will thereby learn the necessity of membership of something greater, and in order to be members everyone has to become smaller. In return everyone can obtain some satisfaction from being good members.

Human beings have certain physical needs. We can serve these needs by understanding the physical world around us. We can teaching children to understand nature not only through the printed word, but through nature itself. We need not fear that the children will not gain much knowledge. In learning directly the children will gain experience which will help them to understand new truths that they discover for themselves. Children can be trained to plant trees, raise animals, saw wood, cook food and other kinds of work involving the hands and material objects—the main objective of these kinds of training lies not in allowing the children to make a living, but in knowing their own bodies through material activities, as one from of self expression.

Not only do people have to live with other people and with nature, but also with themselves. Human beings have minds which express themselves in various forms, such as the arts, religion, morality and works which have no direct practical benefit. This is another world children (and all people) have, an inner world, a personal world, in which people can celebrate their being human. We should teach children to know of this world and teach them to

imagine, to aspire and then to turn around and look at reality. They will thus realize that they are not mere biological and social animals.

On the level of primary education there should be no subjects of choice, but if variations in different localities suggest a choice of different subjects, they must be chosen from the one group, choosing, for example, one particular sport from the sports group, or one particular kind of manual labor from the work group. The choice must not lead to discrimination between general education and technical or other groups of education. The important point is that the stress is not on academic or general knowledge, it is not on going out and earning a living, but on manual work, joining in with group activities, sports, arts, and morality. There will still be examinations, but the stress will not be on competition with others but on competition with oneself, seeing how much one has developed.

A problem that may arise is that children who study according to this curriculum will not be academically strong, but a society in which there is moderate consumption, self-reliance and a less than fully open door in regard to competition with other countries will not need citizens who are particularly strong in academic learning. Our semi-collectivist society requires people with an awareness of living with others more than people strong in academic learning who are full of the desire to compete. There is already a great quantity of this kind of stimulus naturally within people, and education should be looking for ways to slow it down. Another problem is that if the entrance to secondary and tertiary education institutions is based on examinations of academic scholarship as it is at present, private schools and some state schools will stress academic learning to enable their students to gain entrance into good schools or universities. Thus it will be necessary to adjust entrance examinations for higher learning institutions, which we

will discuss later.

All children should have the chance to finish secondary school with help from the state. The secondary school curriculum should be the same for all students with no choice between ordinary and technical school education or between the sciences or the arts. The secondary school curriculum will not give stress to general knowledge and will not be a preparation for studying at university. Subjects taught in primary school will continue to be taught on higher levels to deepen the understanding of students and enable them to analyze their own problems. Importantly, all students must learn a certain number of vocations and be able to do work which requires a median level of knowledge. These vocations should occupy one third of all the curriculum. The teaching of vocations will not lay stress on expertise in any particular field, but teach only the basics so that students can put them into practice in their own lives and with a little adjustment and extra training use them to make a living.

Most of the children who complete this curriculum will not be particularly strong in academic learning and will probably not be ready for the higher learning of universities, but that is not what we want. A society that seeks self-reliance and moderate consumption wants more middle class people than people with high levels of knowledge. Most of the work created by the society will be mid -level work, using "appropriate" technology, i.e., making use of a middle level of knowledge in order to convert the resources of the country into objects of moderate consumption, which are accessible to all people, rather than using high-level knowledge to produce high-level goods which only a small portion of the population can attain, as is the case at present.

An important problem in Thai education is that while the state has been successful in encouraging the masses into a modern

education system, it has not been successful in encouraging the masses into a modern economic system. In developed industrial societies there is a great demand for a high-level labor force. Secondary schools prepare people for this level of work. In Thailand most of the population lives in a backward economic system, but our secondary education prepares people for an advanced economy. Thus our secondary education is redundant. Only a small portion of the people can manage to push themselves up to the progressive economy. The curriculum I have proposed is suitable for Thai society if we bring the majority of the people into a mid-level economic system, but if we do not do so the curriculum would be useless, like the mixed secondary education system project which has already met with failure.

On the level of tertiary education, the curriculum is not designed to produce "high-level" careerists. Vocations higher than secondary school level should be taught by technical colleges. This is in preparation for raising the level of consumption to a higher level. Higher level consumption is not bad in itself. It is bad if there is no self-reliance and if it is not accessible to the majority of people. This does not mean that technical colleges will give only vocational training. The subjects that help people to know themselves, which have been learned from the level of primary school, should still be taught to some extent, with some change in content.

Universities are necessary for a society with moderate consumption, but not highly so. However, when the chance arises to raise the level of consumption, their necessity is increased. Universities will not be places of vocational training, but will teach basic academic subjects, or the pure sciences, be they physical sciences, social sciences, or humanities—i.e., study and research for the understanding of nature, society and humanity in various aspects—with no expectation of immediate application, but they may be used to indicate future directions when a problem arises.

Universities are the places for people interested in knowledge for its own sake, the sources of academic learning that broadens world views to reveal different dimensions of life, society and the world, such as science, economics, social studies, literature, arts, and religion.

This being the case the number of universities will probably be reduced, or at least not increase. What we need to increase is the number of open universities. We need not fear the great number of people who finish their studies at these places not being able to find jobs, because universities, both closed and open, are not there for teaching higher vocations, but for teaching "pure" sciences. Open universities may not be aptly suited to teaching scientific subjects, but that is no problem, because they will mostly be there for students who have finished their high and technical school studies to broaden their world outlooks and understand things better, which in turn will help them to understand themselves better. Open universities have only a small capital outlay, so it is convenient for students to learn there, with small costs. Such universities play a part in human development.

There is one subject that I feel should be included in the curriculum from the upper secondary level to the university level, and that is meditation practice. This does not mean training the mind to attain mysterious states invisible to ordinary people, but teaching meditation so that people know how to analyze themselves. The great number of unenlightened beings deceive themselves, either knowingly or unknowingly. Sometimes just a moment's reflection reveals that we have deceived ourselves, but in many instances it is not so easy. Desire, aspiration, pride, depression, selfishness, and other factors are all capable of blinding human beings to their true selves. Meditation practice may help people to peel away these states layer by layer until they find their true selves, a vision that will well lead to self-respect. Moreover, the

practice of meditation can help improve mental health and may help to prevent and treat mental disturbances. It is unfortunate that research into the use of meditation in such areas is still very limited.

If education proceeds according to these proposals, the number of people who wish to study at universities may become smaller because the market mechanism, which will still be in existence to a certain extent, will incite people to study more at technical colleges where there is more material reward to be gained. In fact there may be more people wanting to learn there than can be accommodated, so that entrance examinations into technical colleges may be much the same as they are today for universities. The solution is to close the country to a certain extent, no longer importing many kinds of extravagant goods. The role of money in people's lives will be reduced somewhat, and so the incentive to learn higher vocations as a pathway to money will be partly reduced. Study in universities in the "search for knowledge" will be attractive only to some people, who, once they have finished their studies, will not have as high incomes as those who finish studies at technical colleges.

Entrance examinations to technical colleges must change. All students who complete secondary education and pass examinations for the established criteria have the right to learn higher vocations. The standard examination paper will contain questions on all secondary-level subjects, not just the fundamental subjects required to learn vocations in technical colleges. If more people pass these examinations than can be accommodated, a quota system for students from each secondary school should be arranged, based on the proportion of students passing the examination criteria in each school against the whole, thus: if there are places for 10,000 students, and 20,000 students fulfill the examination criteria, and school A. has twenty students who passed the criteria, then ten students with the best pass mark from that school should be accepted.

Certainly this method will not produce the "cream of the cream," as does the present university entrance examination system, but the question is, "What do we do with this 'cream of the cream'?" If we want to develop Thai society into a high consumption society, the present system of selection is suitable. Again, this system is "fair" in a society of liberalism and extreme individualism. However, if we desire a society of moderate consumption, a society balanced between collectivism and free individualism, and a society halfway between total self-reliance and reliance on others, and if we want society to be the "father" protecting those of lesser status in order to create a certain level of equality, the method I have proposed is suitable. The method of selecting people for higher education is one of the most important indices of a society's social philosophy.

3.4 *Teaching*

The Buddha was one of the greatest teachers in the world, and he had many teaching techniques. Many have already written on this subject from different perspectives.[8]Here I will discuss a number of characteristics of Buddhism which will be implemented into the general principles for teaching youth.

There are three important features and positions of Buddhism which I would like to call the "spirits" of Buddhism: the spirit of inquiry, the spirit of reform, and the spirit of openness. These three characteristics are the fundamentals of the "self-respecting" person already described. Thus they should be instilled into the youth.

The teaching given in the *Kālāma Sutta* is well known: when we hear a teaching from someone, we should not simply believe it because it has been upheld for some time, because it is rumored, because it is written in the texts, because it is logical, because it can be inferred, because it is reasonable, because it accords with our

8 Such as Sumon Amornvivat, *Teaching by Instilling Faith and Wise Attention*, Tiranasarn Press, Bangkok, 2528.

theory, because it seems credible, or because our teacher said so. We must rather believe only when we have tested it and put it into practice and seen the results for ourselves. The *Kālāma Sutta* tells us not to believe others too easily. This does not mean that we do not believe them at all, but rather that we first question what we have heard, then test it out for ourselves.

Incorporating the principles of the *Kālāma Sutta* into teaching, we must teach children to question, and children on different levels should be taught to question in different ways. We cannot, for example, teach children in kindergarten to question everything in the texts and everything the teacher tells them. We must acknowledge that new members of society will be indoctrinated to an extent with experiences, knowledge and values by the older members of society. On the secondary school level, we must begin o teach children to question, but not to question everything. One nethod a teacher may try is to question something written in the texts, or the words of a famous person, showing different perspectives that can be seen in it. This will be encourage students to question in higher levels. Doubt must be stressed more than belief, the children showed that the world has developed because of change. Change comes about as a result of the arising of doubt. The Buddha himself invited people to question his teaching. But we must be careful not to lead the students into thinking that doubt has a value in and of itself: doubt is merely a way to the truth. As long as we cannot find a point of doubt about any given subject, we must believe it for the time being. Belief has no less value than doubt, because if we do not believe in anything, we cannot do anything.

The Buddha had the spirit of reform. He was trained in a Hindu society, but after he went forth to homelessness and sought the truth for himself, he became doubtful of some of the Brahmanist teachings, and in the end he saw that them, such as the teachings on God, on the castes, on sacrifice, and on occultism, were not in

accordance with the truth. The spirit of reform is the mind to change things that are seen to be wrong or incorrect. Such changes should not be brought about violently, but be of the nature of compromise. The Buddha refuted outright some of the teachings of Brahmanism, such as that people of the brahmin caste were born from the mouth of Brahmā [god], but on some of them he made a compromise by giving them new meanings.

To change society for the better it is necessary for people, especially those people who have received high educations, to possess a spirit of reform. Reformers may initially be looked on as "outsiders" because they think differently from others. But we must teach students to be self respecting, to believe the things they have considered or tested for themselves and to act in accordance with what they believe. We must teach children not only to fit in with society, but also to change society—but with the spirit of reform; that is, having both the heavy and the light. If they are entirely heavy, they may not be able to change anything, while if they are entirely light they will not change anything either.

Buddhism has a spirit of openness. Open-minded people have two important features: they are able to live with people with different beliefs and ways of life; and when their beliefs and ways of life are criticized by others, they can listen without being offended and do not respond aggressively but with reason. Whether their critics agree with them or not is another matter. Buddhism has both of these characteristics, and Buddhism's broad-mindedness is well known. On one occasion the Buddha's disciples came to him to protest that the leader of another sect had criticized and insulted the Buddha and his teaching. The disciples were furious and wanted to refute that sect-leader's remarks. The Buddha replied: "If we are merely answering out of anger, how can we take the time to consider their remarks and see whether they are true or not? We should look at ourselves to see whether we really are as they say we

are, and if we are not then we should point this out to them."

It would be difficult to find a religion as broad-minded as Buddhism. Buddhists should teach this heritage to their youth. Broad-minded people have self-confidence, not out of stubbornness, but with reason. Broad-minded people must have self-respect, and they will still respect themselves even if others do not respect them. Even so, in worldly life broad-mindedness must have limitations. When we have rationally consider the criticisms of others and seen that we are not what they say we are we must point this out to them. Having pointed it out, if they still insult and disparage us we must show our displeasure. We should not teach our children to passively accept injustice even when they know it is injustice. The same applies to living with people of different beliefs and ways of life than us: if they differ in ways that violate the rights and freedoms of others, or that obstruct social equality, we must teach children to adhere to the spirit of the reformer; that is, find a way to initiate change, not just simply sit and endure it.

Change will arise when action takes place. Knowledge on its own does not have the power to initiate action. A person may know that questioning is useful, broadmindedness is good, and reform should be carried out, but if he or she does not have the added factor of mental power action will not arise. Buddhism is well aware of this. Buddhist education therefore contains three factors: morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). This is the path leading to the ultimate truth (*paramattha dhamma*), but it can be incorporated into education. *Sīla* is the framework within which the individual must contain himself in doing any action—even in learning to play music, where the aim is free expression, one must begin by confining oneself to a certain framework. *Paññā* is understanding. *Samādhi* is training mental power to be resolute, constraining feeling within a desired form. People do things out of emotion or feeling and find reasons to justify it later. Good

education must train people to keep their emotions under the control of reason, at least enough to be a good person in the world.

The knowledge of the teacher is an important factor. How important it is depends on the how important is the knowledge of the students. In a society with moderate consumption and which seeks self-reliance without placing people's happiness at the mercy of competition with other countries, academic learning is not as important as character and kindness. The self-respecting people we wish to create do not need to be of exceptional academic learning, which is important only on a certain level. Development of character and training of the mind should not be given solely through speech. Indirect teaching, such as in sports, arts, and activities, is a better way. The stress on vocation in secondary schools curriculum will also be of help in this direction.

There is one problem related to teaching which must be considered if our proposed philosophy of education is to be based upon Buddhist lines. Buddhists believe that the Buddha discovered the truth (*saccadhamma*). This truth is fixed and certain. It existed from the first and is not subject to anyone's thinking. Even if no one were to discover it, the truth would still exist. Since this is the case, it means that all problems must have a fixed and certain answer. In that case, does this not mean that knowledge is closed? Then what use would it be to teach children to question, to doubt, to discuss and to search for answers for themselves? If there already is a fixed answer, teaching through such activities seems to be denying that answer, and is like opening up to any reasonable answer that may be given. The teachers and the students are searching together for answers. If they already know the answer, would it not be better just to tell the students outright?

The answer to this is that the fixed and certain truth of Buddhism involves very broad, general principles, such as the principle of

conditionality (*idappaccayatā*) and the four noble truths. The former deals with the causality of all things, the latter with the truth in terms of human life, regardless of where, when or in what society human beings arise. That is, suffering is the universal human problem. Solving suffering requires the same method in every case, but this refers to the suffering on the most fundamental level, and that suffering is a suffering that all people must experience. However, people living in different times and places and different societies may experience suffering on different levels. Thus the solving of problems requires different kinds of knowledge geared to specific times and places. These kinds of knowledge may be called "worldly knowledge." They are merely systems of thought in the head. Debate and discussion is the gauging of which of these systems of thought best answers people's needs, and what is acceptable today may not be acceptable tomorrow. Worldly truths are not fixed. Such knowledge is called in Buddhism *sippa*. It is open knowledge and contains no fixed, definite answer. Thus it should not be taught by statement, but by discussion, questioning and encouraging doubt.

As for the principle of conditionality, it simply states very generally that when something arises, something else arises; when that thing does not arise, then the other does not arise. If we are talking about the problem of what causes suffering, which is a universal human problem, the answer is universal and fixed, and that is what the Buddha discovered. But the Buddha encouraged questioning. As for the problems that may be called scientific, which seek to find the causes of specific phenomena, these are open questions. They have no fixed answer. They should be taught via discussion, experiment and questioning.

3.4 *The school and the community*

In olden times the wat was held to be the school of ordinary

people. In those days education were every closely associated with the people because wats were the centers of almost all kinds of communal activities. Later when schools were established on Western lines, the schools became more distanced from the people because they were the government's instruments for producing civil servants and good citizens suited to the changing society. Nowadays the schools are even more remote from the people. Their role is to produce an economic work force. It is sometimes said that schools are alienated from the community. This is true because the entire Thai education system, from kindergarten to university, is a geared to preparing and producing people for entrance into the modern sector which sits in the upper echelons of Thai society and which is a distinct minority. The majority of the Thai community is not sufficiently modernized to accommodate people who have completed their studies in the modern education system with any real function. Thus education is producing people who are alienated from the community because of the incongruity between what is taught in the schools and what the general community (which is not yet modernized) wants.

If Thai society is to develop in the direction of self-sufficiency and moderate consumption, the subjects taught in schools must change as we have proposed, and if they do so change the schools will become community schools. Thailand will become a society that needs only a moderate level of technology, but one that manifests in all communities, not, as at present, a high level of technology for a small percentage of the population. Secondary schools will be producers of moderate-level technology for the community, and they will be the ones to apply the moderate level of knowledge to adjust production and consumption based on the resources that exist within the community. Secondary schools, as already stated, will spend one third of their time teaching academic subjects. The other two thirds will be taken up by study of the mechanics of

society and study of the self in order to develop the potential of the individual in religious, artistic, cultural, athletic and other spheres, so that students may become community leaders on various levels.

According to these proposals, secondary schools will belong to the community, and will transform people from the community into people who can serve the community. They will be centers of learning, culture, sport, and other social activities. In terms of knowledge, schools will be community resources when a problem arises. If the problem is one the school cannot solve, then it will be sent on to the technical college. Technical colleges will not only teach, but also conduct research in order to adapt technology to make it more suitable, but in general secondary schools will be the spearhead of Thai social development.

[Translated from the Thai version by *Bruce Evans*]

BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU AND THE THEORY OF DHAMMIC SOCIALISM

Tavivat Puntarigvivat

In the midst of Thailand's rapid social changes, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (BE 2449-2536), Thailand's leading Buddhist reformist, interpreted Buddhism not only from a religious viewpoint, but also from social and political viewpoints. After spending most of his life reforming Buddhism in Thailand, Buddhadāsa believed that it was necessary to discuss political issues from a Buddhist viewpoint. As a result, during the decade of 2510–2520 BE [1967–1977] he presented his first political thought in the form of "*dhammā dhipateyya,*" an idea that social and political structures should be in accordance with Buddhist doctrine. Later, amid the revolutionary atmosphere led by Thai student activists between the incidents of 14 October 1973 and 6 October 1976, he presented the intriguing political concept of "dhammic socialism."

"Dhammic socialism" theory begins with the concept that nature is a state of balance for the existence of mankind, creatures, plants and world ecology. In the natural state, all living beings produce at their capacity and consume only what they need, without collecting "surplus" for themselves. Buddhadāsa calls this natural state of balance "socialism." However, once human beings began to secure surplus resources in a way that forced others into scarcity, troubles began. According to Buddhadāsa, human beings should return to the state of balance of natural socialism, producing some surplus, but distributing it thoroughly for the benefit of all. Buddhism would be the ethical tool for apportioning those resources righteously.

"Dhammic socialism" is based on the philosophy that people should not take more than they really need and should share surpluses to the needy. Social problems basically stem from greed. In other words, greed is the cause of hunger and scarcity. The explanation of economic and social problems in such an individual approach—the idea that social problems can be solved by teaching individuals to adhere to moral conduct and practice generosity —reflects Buddhadāsa's Theravāda view. It may be questioned, however, whether Buddhadāsa's idea could be applied in solving poverty and scarcity under the present world-market economic structure. This article offers a structural and comparative analysis and criticism of Buddhadāsa's dhammic socialism theory.

Buddhadāsa in the context of Thai society

Buddhadāsa was one of the most important Buddhist reformists in Thai history. His interpretation of Buddhism is considered to be part of an ongoing attempt to reform Buddhism in Thailand begun earlier by King Rāma IV. Buddhadāsa interpreted Theravāda Buddhist teachings and the tradition of Thai Buddhist practice with wisdom and rationality which is a result of present-day scientific advancement and the expansion of the middle-class in Thai society, which includes professionals and scholars. The result is that Buddhadāsa created a framework of alternative social and political theories. From a religious point of view, his emphasis on studying the Tipiṭaka and interpreting Buddhism with intelligence and rationality made his teachings the representative of "wisdom" in Thai Buddhism.

His series "Dhammaghosa," which compiled his lectures into more than fifty volumes, may be considered the largest corpus of thought ever published by a single Theravāda thinker in the entire history of the tradition.[1] After the compilation and publishing

1 Donald K. Swearer, Introduction in Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, *Me and Mine*, edited

process is completed, this series could be even longer than the Tipitaka itself. Donald K. Swearer, an American expert on Thai Buddhism, has evaluated the role and status of Buddhadāsa in the history of Theravāda Buddhism as follows:

> History may well judge him as the most seminal Theravāda thinker since Buddhaghosa, and may evaluate Buddhadāsa's role within the Buddhist tradition to be on a par with such great Indian Buddhist thinkers as Nagārjuna with whom he has been compared.[2]

Some of Buddhadāsa's lectures are related to political, economic and social problems from a Buddhist point of view, and this ultimately led to his "dhammic socialism" theory.

Dhammic Socialism

The Thai term "*sungkomniyom*" (socialism) is a Thai word with a Buddhist meaning. The word "*sungkom*" (society) is rooted in the Sanskrit word "*saṅgha*" (community), while the word "*niyom*" is derived from another Sanskrit word, "*niyama*" (restraint and patience). Therefore, according to the root terms, "*sungkomniyom*" means restraint and patience of community members for the benefit and well-being of that community, and "dhammic socialism" refers to socialism which contains Dhamma. In Buddhadāsa's view, "*saṅgha*"— the community of "*buddhaparisa*" (the four assemblies of Buddhists) consisting of monks (*bhikkhu*), nuns (*bhikkhuni*), male lay followers (*upāsaka*), and female lay followers (*upāsikā*)—is the Buddhist paradigm of the socialist life and community. In this community, "*sīla*" (normalcy) is an important basic teaching, dealing with self control. Buddhadāsa presented the theory of "dhammic socialism" on the basis of his understanding of nature,

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with Introduction by Donald K. Swearer, State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 2.

2 Donald K. Swearer, "The Vision of Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa" in Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa, *Dhammic Socialism*, translated and edited by Donald K. Swearer, Thai Interreligious Commision for Development, 1986, p. 14.

the Buddha's teachings, and the tradition of Buddhist practice.

a) *Dhammic socialism and nature*

According to Buddhadāsa, socialism is rooted in nature. The pure natural state is an example of pure socialism. He states:

> The entire universe (*cakravāla*) is a socialist system. The countless stars in the sky exist together in a socialist system; they are all correct according to the socialist system, and that is how the universe can survive. Our solar system has the sun as its chief, and the planets, including the earth, as its retinue. They exist within a socialist system, but they are not so crazy as to collide.[3]

Buddhadāsa developed his thoughts on the "state of nature" by combining the Western evolution theory with Buddhist doctrine, particularly "*idappaccayatā*" (the principle of conditionality) and "*paṭiccasamuppāda*" (the principle of Dependent Origination). He believed that after the earth was separated from the sun and gradually cooled down and hardened, soil and minerals took shape on the surface of the earth with the passage of time. Within this process nothing existed independently of its own accord.

The primordial waters gave rise to the first single-celled organisms, and this was the beginning of life. Over time these single-celled life forms evolved into multi-celled forms and then into plants and animals.[4] This entire process of nature was interrelated and interdependent. Buddhadāsa says:

> Even a single atom exists in a socialistic relationship between interdependent parts. Within a molecule there is the socialist idea: many atoms make up a molecule; many molecules make up the tissues that combine to form flesh and skin, or leaves or whatever. It is all a socialist system.[5]

3 Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa,"The Socialism that can Save the World,"in Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa, *Dhammic Socialism*, p. 117.

4 Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, "Socialism according to Buddhism," in *Ibid.*, p. 65.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 124.

Buddhadāsa makes the observation that there was not one kind of being in that natural world that took more than its share. Among living things of all the various levels, there was not one that consumed more than it needed. Single-celled beings take in only what their simple cell structures require to survive. Groups of cells consume only enough to nourish the group. When plants evolved, each plant consumed only what it needed to maintain itself. When animals evolved—be they fishes, birds, or whatever—all consumed only as much as their systems required. A bird will eat only as much food as its own belly and its nestlings require, taking nothing more than survival demands.

According to Buddhadāsa, during the entire process of evolution, from single-cell creatures to the birth of the first human being, the natural world essentially maintained a socialist core. Nature gave no tools of any form to store any more resources than were needed for survival and development. Buddhadāsa says:

> Look at birds: they consume only as much as their stomachs can hold. They cannot take in more than that. They have no granaries for hoarding. Look at the ants and insects: that is all they can do. Look at the trees: they can take in only as much as their trunks will allow. Thus, this system, in which no being was able to trespass upon another's rights or hoard what belonged to others, is natural and automatic, and that is how it has been a society and continued to be one, until trees became abundant, animals became abundant, and human beings became abundant in the world. The freedom to hoard was controlled by nature in the form of natural socialism.[6]

Buddhadāsa points out that stones, pebbles, sand, as well as trees and insects, can exist in a condition of normalcy, without any need for a theory or social system to direct their interrelationships. They exist in a pure natural state of balance, or pure socialism. He gives an example of the body's physiology in support of his explanation:

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

> Within one person there is the socialist intention. That is, there must be many, many parts functioning interrelatedly and inseparably. Those who study anatomy or medicine are able to understand this well. The eyes are connected to the ears, the ears to the nose, the nose to the mouth. There is not one part that can exist autonomously.... All organs, big and small, must work together, performing their functions properly according to the truth (*dhammasacca*) of bodily components, in order to survive. Thus, the spirit of socialism exists within everyone : it is the necessity of living together in a proper relationship.[7]

Buddhadāsa believes that when the first generations of human beings lived on earth in jungles and caves, they did not have barns to hoard food. They ate only to survive, going out to gather food for their daily needs. Buddhadāsa claims that in this first period no one person or group hoarded surpluses, so there were none of the social problems that we face nowadays. The first people lived in a natural socialism for hundreds of thousands or millions of years. Mankind has survived until now because nature has maintained a socialist balance throughout the long process of evolution. In Buddhadāsa's view, the natural balance was threatened when some human beings, who were "unnatural," began hoarding for themselves more than what they really needed. This hoarding caused trouble and scarcity for other people and consequently led to contention and competition instead of cooperation. Human beings have employed their intelligence to find ways to hoard resources such as rice, foods, and other things, and to hoard wealth and power to gain the advantage over others. Buddhadāsa says:

> Nature would have us use no more than we actually need. But people have failed to heed nature, competing with one another to take as much as they can, causing the problems that we live with to this day. Everything is in excess. If we were to take only what is

7 *Ibid.*

enough, none of these problems would arise, contention would not arise, and exploitation would not arise.[8]

The question here is how much is enough? Buddhadāsa suggests that there is no fixed rule. It varies depending on the factors of time , place, and situation. A constant theme is that nowadays there is no moderation. There is a Buddhist saying: "Even an entire mountain or two of gold would not be enough to satisfy the desires of a single person." Human desire increase day by day. The more our desire increases, the more we persecute others. When there is hoarding, the problem of injustice follows. With the passage of time these problems develop. The leaders of the various groups try to hoard for the benefit of their own groups, and so fighting between them is unavoidable. To control society and limit human defilements (*kilesa*), laws and moral standards were developed.

According to Buddhadāsa, it will be possible for justice to arise in society if human beings "return" to the balanced state of natural socialism. For him, socialism is based on principles that follow the natural way, which states that we should take no more than what we really need and share our surplus to those who have less. All of us have the natural right to possess as much as we need, but no more. All people in the world should learn to share with others, even what they see as necessary for themselves. Such sacrifice is a moral principle in which everybody benefits. This does not mean we do not produce surplus: human beings have the right to produce more than their own needs, and this is a good thing if it is done for the benefit of others.

From his religious viewpoint, Buddhadāsa is trying to argue that morality exists within the state of nature, and that is balance and normalcy, which are the heart of natural socialism and the "intention" of nature. People existed in this condition for ages until

8 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

they lost the balance of natural socialism as a consequence of ignorance (*avijjā*). Nature therefore imposed a punishment on humanity, and this was the beginning of sin (*pāpa*). For Buddhadā sa, socialism is not a human invention, but a primordial natural condition which encompassed both the human and animal worlds. Social problems arose when humans opposed Nature's original intention until eventually there arose class distinctions and it got to a point where it was necessary to construct a socialist system because people had so separated themselves from Nature.

According to Buddhism, the core of nature is "*sacca*" (*dhamma*). All things in nature exist together under the principles of socialism. Everything exists interdependently, and there is nothing that can exist independently. Buddhist socialism does not refer only to human beings, but also includes other beings and the entire ecological system. Buddhadāsa claims that if all human beings exercise their rights within the limits defined by Nature, the world would be as prosperous as if it were in the era of Ariya Metteyya Buddha. Nature is therefore the root of his dhammic socialism theory.

Buddhadāsa's view that the natural state of human beings, animals, and plants is socialism is a profound intellectual interpretation. However, it may be argued that it is not possible to interpret the systems of the universe and of atoms as socialism because the movements of stars in the universe and of atoms in molecules are controlled by mechanics, and do not reflect any social or moral values. Neither does the functioning of the cells and organs of a living body. Buddhadāsa probably uses the term "socialism" in a broad sense, covering many things on many different levels. His perception of nature, however, is somewhat similar to the Theory of Evolution of Charles Darwin, who states in his work "*The Origin of Species*":

> It might be a comparison to say that within the natural selection process there is a most minute process of choice and discrimination going on every minute all around the world, rejecting bad specimens and protecting good specimens. It works silently and invisibly whenever and wherever the opportunity presents itself, to improve all forms of life, in cooperation with the conditions of life, both organic and inorganic. We cannot perceive the gradual progress of these changes until the hands of time mark a change in eras, and with our limited vision we look back into the geological past, and can see only that present forms of life differ from those of the past.[9]

However, what is behind Buddhadāsa's state of nature is different from Darwin's Natural Selection Theory. Darwin believed that human beings not only evolve, but evolve through natural selection. The principle of natural selection states that the world is always changing, but these changes are headed toward no specific destination or goal. In other words, Darwin's Theory of Evolution does not have what Buddhadāsa called a "plan" or "intention" of nature. According to Darwin's Natural Selection Theory, all living beings are in a state of "struggle for survival" in which only the fittest specimens can survive. Some Darwinian scientists, however, have found that certain plants and animals "help and support one another" for survival, for conservation of species, and for evolution to higher stages. Elaborations on survival of the fittest made Darwinism compatible on one level with Buddhadāsa's view of nature as a co-operation based on "socialism."

Darwin's concept of the struggle for existence and survival of the fittest reminds one of the social and political theory of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) on the "state of nature." Hobbes believed that nature created all human beings equal in body and mind. In terms of body, even the weakest has the strength to kill the strongest by various means. As for the mind, all human beings, given the opportunity and time to train, can be equal in terms of intelligence.

9 Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, W. W. Norton and Company, 1975, p. 47.

Hobbes claimed that equality of ability and similarity of wants, in the end, bring human beings into conflict. If any two people desire the same thing which cannot be possessed by both of them, they become enemies. In "*Leviathan*" Hobbes says:

> If one person plows, sows, builds, or possesses a comfortable place, it can be expected that other people may try to take it from him and force him away from there, not only for the fruit of his labor, but also for his life, or liberty. And the invader again is in the like danger of another.[10]

Hobbes finds three principal causes of contention among human beings: competition, insecurity, and glory. The first makes men invade for gain, the second for safety, and the third for reputation. He also notes that:

> Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man.[11]

And also:

> To this war of every man against every man, this also is consequent ; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law: where no law, no justice.[12]

Hobbes is of the opinion that the motivations that incline human beings to peace are fear of death, desire for a good life, and a hope to attain that good life through industry. As a result, human beings drew up agreements and laws to achieve the goal of peace. Hobbes' theory is therefore diametrically opposed to Buddhadāsa's. While Hobbes believes that the natural state is one in which human beings war on each other, and that laws, tranquility, and peace were

10 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Basil Blackwell, 1960, p. 81.
11 *Ibid.*, p. 82.
12 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

human creations, Buddhadāsa sees that human beings are naturally socialistic, united in action and spirit, and lived in peace, while war is what human beings have created from unnatural desires for "surplus." While Hobbes discusses the natural human state from social and political viewpoints, Buddhadāsa's theory gives a more general view that encompasses the entire natural world, be it the universe, trees, animals, or human beings.

Buddhadāsa's theory provided a useful foundation for solving today's global ecology crisis. Thomas Berry,an American theologian, writes:

> We are starting to move from democracy to biocracy, to a participation of a greater community of lives. In our decision making process ... we need to understand, now, that our well being can be achieved only if the entire world of nature around us is in a healthy condition.[13]

As the world is facing a number of environmental crises such as destruction of tropical rain forests, pollution damaging the ozone layer, and the extinction of a great many animal and plant species, Buddhadāsa's dhammic socialism theory has become one of the most progressive visions on ecology.

b) *Dhammic Socialism and Religion*

Buddhadāsa believes that the essence of the world's religions is socialism. Buddhism is especially socialist, both in principle and in practice. Lord Buddha was born in this world to help all beings, not for any specific being, or even for the Lord Buddha himself. If we examine the Buddha's kindness and compassion to all beings, we will see it is the highest form of socialism. The socialistic ideal of Buddhism finds expression in the concept of the *bodhisatta*. The *bodhisatta* is one who not only helps others, but sacrifices himself, even his own life, for their sakes.

13 Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, Sierra Club Books, 1988, pp xii-xv.

According to Buddhadāsa, all religious founders unanimously maintain that they were born into this world for the happiness and welfare of all beings, and all of them proscribed consumption beyond necessity. Buddhadāsa claims that every religious founder wanted people to live by socialist principles for the benefit of society as a whole. Every religion is founded on the basis of love and compassion to all beings. This attitude leads to equality, liberty, and a feeling of the unity of all lives. In this sense, all religions are socialist.

By Buddhist doctrine, the fourfold assembly of Buddhists —composed of monks (*bhikkhu*) female monks (*bhikkhunī*), male lay followers (*upāsaka*), and female lay followers (*upāsikā*)—must consume no more than its share. Overconsumption is a wrong and also a defilement. Buddhadāsa claims that true Buddhists unknowingly have a socialist spirit. The socialist ideal exists both in Buddhist doctrine and in the practice of Buddhists from the Buddha's time down to the present. He cites the past:

> If we were to go back about 2000 years we would meet the finest socialist system, and it has existed in the very flesh and blood of the Buddhist community down to the present day—so much so that if we hold ourselves to be Buddhist we will have a socialist disposition in our very being, that is why we see our fellow humans as friends in suffering, in birth, in old age, in sickness and in death—friends in every way, so we cannot abandon them.
>
> When I say this everyone should be able to understand. The older people, in particular, may remember how our forefathers taught us, to consider the feelings of others, to be altruistic, to see others as friends in birth, aging, sickness and death. This is a pure socialist ideal, and it was really put into practice, not just talked about or done in a political way: lying and deceiving to protect one's own interests, citing this and that and lacking all sincerity. Thus it is fitting that Buddhists become familiar with the socialism inherent in the Buddhist community, using it as a weapon against the bloody forms of socialism of the dogmatists

(*saccābhinivesa*), who themselves commit wrongs and then put the blame on others.[14]

The meaning of socialism in Buddhadāsa's perception is to take no more than one's own rightful share and to consume only what is necessary so that the remainder can be used to benefit others. Teachings in both the Suttas and the Vinaya specify that Buddhist monks must subsist on only the four supports. The Doctrine teaches us to be satisfied with what we have. True Buddhists must be satisfied with the four supports which are the necessities of life. Anything that is not a necessity should be left for the benefit of the community. Buddhadāsa talks about Thai society in the past:

> In the past morality (*sīladhamma*) was in humanity's very flesh and blood. All Buddhists, for example, seemed to have honesty, gratitude, patience, and forgiveness as an integral part of their very being. No one had to be taught these things. Children had only to observe their parents. Since the parents lived in this way, morality was passed on to the children ... This practice was upheld by countless generations of our ancestors and became a central part of their home and national culture.[15]

Buddhadāsa observes that when villagers in his neighborhood went out to tend their paddies, gardens or fields, they recited this little verse as they planted the seed: "If birds eat it, it is merit; if people eat it, it is charity." Villagers thought that if birds ate their fruit they would receive merit, and if a hungry person stole the fruits of their plants, that would be their charity. Thus they tended to plant enough, allowing for birds and hungry people.

Buddhadāsa felt that dhammic socialism is the state of balance of all things. When human beings lack this natural balance, they have to experience suffering in the form of social injustice, tension, and anxiety. Therefore, social problems are indications of lack of natural

14 *Ibid.*
15 *Ibid.*

balance. He also believed that "Life is sustained by the Dhamma, not by food." It seems that according to Buddhadāsa good society is society rooted in religion, which is not very different from the monks' society.

Buddhadāsa's dhammic socialism could probably be a good society if it was all voluntary and occurred naturally. However, if monastic regulations were enforced on worldly society as a whole, problems would occur. Louis Gabaude, a French scholar of religion, observes:

A civil society is composed of members who did not choose to get into it, who do not want to get out of it, and who do not have the same ideals. A society of "renouncers", such as the religious disciples of the Buddha, is composed of members who chose to "get out" of civil society and to live according to a given ideal embedded in precise rules. Is it valid to assume that the principles of a community of "renouncers" apply to the society from which they want to leave?

In present-day society,if Buddhist teachings about *sīla* (morality), *vinaya* (discipline), *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *dāna* (giving) were to be willingly observed by Buddhists both within and outside of the monastic institution, that would be good and acceptable for everyone. But if these monastic standards were enforced in lay society, it would be a violation of people's religious rights. People should have freedom in choosing to accept or reject regulations of a religion or tradition. To impose standards observed on a voluntary basis by members of religious community onto a worldly society would cause problems because it would cause a modern society with its rapid changes,such as present-day Thailand, to become static. Moreover, it is simplistic to assume that the monastic lifestyle could be applied to a complex and diverse modern country like Thailand at present.

c) *Dhammic Socialism and Social Ethics*

Buddhadāsa distinguishes between socialism and individualism. He feels that social or community service work must be based on the principle of "social preference," otherwise it becomes "individual preference," serving the interests of individuals. In his view, socialism must focus on the welfare of people in every sector of society and on examining and solving social problems on all levels. In a society in which individual interests were given more importance that the public interest, it would be very difficult for social problems to be solved accurately and effectively. Buddhadāsa criticizes "individualism," which is the basis of democratic society in general, as incapable of providing a foundation of well-being for the majority of people in society because it aims for individual interests more than the public interest. Dhammic socialism, in contrast, focuses more on the public interest, and can save the world from self destruction through individualism and material development, which promote consumerism, selfishness, and destruction of natural resources and the environment.

According to Buddhadāsa, social problems arise with the formation of society. When human beings lived isolatedly or in small groups, as in the Stone Age, social problems did not arise, or only in small number. As the human population increased and assembled into larger groups, social problems began to emerge. As society grew and expanded, human beings began to persecute one another, and problems developed into crises. Buddhadāsa's concept of urban society differs from the theory of Emile Durkheim (1858 -1917), a German sociologist, who, in *The Division of Labor in Society,* states that the ability of human beings, as social animals, to divide labor is what caused civilization to progress. Durkheim's main idea is that population volume and density are causes of labor division, which result in the progress of civilization. He defines "population volume" as the number of people living in a certain

area, and "population density" as intensity and speed of social interaction among people in a society. Durkheim perceives that population volume and density have compelled human beings to develop specialized skills in their work for better survival in new environments. Division of labor was the cause of progress and civilization. Buddhadāsa agrees with Durkheim that volume and density of population in a society are causes of social tension. However, while Durkheim suggests that such tension diversified the division of labor, and consequently led to progress of civilization, Buddhadāsa sees the tension as leading to conflict and social crisis, which must be solved by returning to the dhammic socialism's values of kindness and sharing. In brief, Buddhadāsa seems to be suggesting that we should return to the kind of society that existed before capitalism.

Buddhadāsa suggests that any system which is to be applied in society must be based on the principle of public interest rather than private interests. He perceives the essence of society as the community, not the individual. Even the necessity of bearing children is a social matter. Survival of mankind therefore relies on mutual cooperation and support. His emphasis on public interests indicates that Buddhadāsa does not agree with capitalism on the matter of personal possession. In this respect Buddhadāsa's view resembles that of Karl Marx. According to Marx, Adam Smith did to political economics what Martin Luther did to religion. While Luther transformed an external theology into an inner human essence, Adam Smith transformed external assets into personal possessions. Marx calls Adam Smith the founder of "the religion of personal possessions." Personal possessions have already become a part of human beings, and human beings have become the core of personal possessions. Marx observes:

> Just as Luther went beyond external religion by making religion into an inner core of the human being, as in his rejection of the idea

> that monks are separate from laymen by placing monks in the heart of laymen, so wealth as something external, free, acquired and kept exterior, has also been canceled. That is, the boundary of lifeless objects has been canceled by allowing them to be part of human beings and by accepting that human beings themselves are the core of personal possessions. But that is leading mankind into the realm of personal possessions, just as Luther led mankind to the realm of religion.[16]

It is amusing that while Buddhadāsa did not agree with Adam Smith in turning external assets into personal possessions, he found himself in the same status as Martin Luther in that Luther internalized Christian doctrine and put the monkhood inside the human being. Buddhadāsa has also internalized Buddhist Doctrine and turned Buddhist symbols into psychological entities.

Buddhadāsa looks openly into history and suggests that in order to bring peace to all mankind, we have to *return* to the way of Dhamma, which is the harmony of natural socialism. Any social service must always be on this basis. Buddhadāsa sees that the highest form of social service one could perform in the present time would be to enable people to return to what is right. People nowadays have gone so far off the track that it looks like the world is heading towards disaster. "Nowadays people have gone so far off the track that we are about to fall into an abyss, if we have not already gone over the edge."[17]

From Buddhadāsa's point of view, the return to what is right is an admission that all human beings face the same basic problem: overcoming dukkha or suffering. This basic problem is not a materialistic matter, such as the problems of overpopulation or poverty, but more a matter of the mental defilements, craving and ignorance, within human beings themselves. The right approach to

16 Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, Vintage Books, 1975, p. 342.
17 Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa, *Socialist Democracy*, p. 4.

solving social problems must therefore be directed to these internal causes of suffering. As a result, real social service for the well-being of mankind is to help one another overcome this suffering. He reflects:

> It is almost laughable simply to speak of solving the problems of hunger, illiteracy, and illness. These are not the real problems at all; they are only symptoms. The root of the problem has not been addressed. The root of the problem is that people have no morality (*sīladhamma*), have no religion (*sāsanā*) and have strayed beyond the bounds of religion.
>
> If we were to solve these problems—illiteracy and hunger—would people be happier? There are many people who have never learned to read and who are happier than the most literate among us.[18]

Buddhadāsa criticizes modern attempts to solve social problems as mostly being for personal interests or fame. Thus the solutions have not been effective.

Nowadays, for instance, they try to solve problems but never succeed: how can the same selfish people who created the problem possibly solve it? No matter how many selfish people get together to form how many world organizations, since those organizations are full of selfish people, how can they solve the problems of the world created by selfishness?

As a religious leader, Buddhadāsa condemns killing, war, and preparations for war. The catastrophe of war has threatened all forms of life. Even animals are affected by the brutality of mankind, albeit unintentionally. He advises that we return to the basis of kindness and compassion (*mettā* and *karuṇā*).

> People today are so cruel that they are willing to drop a special bomb which they know can annihilate people by the hundreds of thousands... This is the extent morality (*sīladhamma*) has deteriorated

18 *Ibid.*, p.14.

> ... If we want peace we must choose the path of peace. Killing others can only lead to being killed. If we are to be harmoniously united with one another, we should act out of mutual kindness and compassion (*mettā* and *karuṇā*)... We should overcome evil with good, not with evil.[19]

For Buddhadāsa, social problems need to be solved by social ethics. We should act for the benefit of the community, avoid excessive consumption, and share what we have with others. If people follow this course, solutions to political, social, and economic problems can be found.

While Buddhadāsa believes that the essence of society is human interrelationship, not just many individuals being together, and he supports 'social preference' rather than 'individual preference,' his methods are quite individualistic in that he sees the greed of the individual as the root of social problems, regardless of the social system. If we do not apply morality to ourselves and to all people in the society, we will fail to solve social problems. Buddhadāsa's individualist method could be effective in societies with simple structures and which stand on tradition, as in societies of the past and rural societies, but it would not be effective with complicated societies like modern Thailand, which is moving and changing according to world market changes and under the influence of capitalism.

d) *Dhammic Socialism and Capitalism*

Dhammic socialism and capitalism differ fundamentally in their economies, their political ideologies, and the qualities of their leaders. Buddhadāsa has pointed out some important differences between "capitalists" of the present time and "*setthi*" (wealthy persons) in the Buddha's time. In his opinion, capitalists are those who accumulate surplus belongings for their own benefit.

19 Ibid., p. 27.

Conversely, *setthi* according to Buddhism are those who spend their surplus wealth on building alms houses to help others. An alms house is a place where the poor can get items of necessity that they lack. The status of *setthi* in those days was determined by the number of alms houses a person had built. If a person had built no alms houses, he was not considered to be a *setthi*, while the more alms houses a person had built, the more of a *setthi* he was considered to be.

Buddhadāsa claims that even slaves or servants in the Buddha's time had some socialist connotations. He talks about the past ideal when even slaves did not want to leave their generous *setthi* masters, in contrast to laborers in the present time who hate their selfish capitalist bosses. He says:

> Buddhist *setthi* treated slaves like their own children. All worked together for a common good. They observed the moral precepts together on Buddhist Sabbath days... Slavery in a socialist state need not be abolished because the slaves themselves would not want to leave such masters... The kind of slaves which should be abolished are the slaves under the capitalist system, who are treated like animals, beaten and whipped. These kind of slaves are always wanting to be free... [slaves] under a socialist system would not be endangered, they would be looked after with love, compassion, and care.[20]

Buddhadāsa claims that Buddhists, be they kings, *setthi*,or slaves, were socialist since ancient times, and most slaves were content with their lot, even though they were not allowed by the monastic discipline to ordain as monks. However, in the Thai Buddhist tradition, the worst situation that could happen for a Thai man was to be deprived of his right to go forth as a monk. Thus, it is difficult to agree with Buddhadāsa's view in this regard that men would be satisfied with their lot, deprived of the right to ordain as monks. His view of slavery seems too favorable and idealistic. He has

20 Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa, *Socialism according to Buddhism*, pp. 79-80.

completely overlooked the negative aspects of slavery: parents selling their children as slaves to redeem their debts, particularly those incurred from gambling; children born to slaves forced to be slaves all their lives; slaves being beaten up and tortured unreasonably, etc.

According to Buddhadāsa, without mutual kindness and compassion and alms giving, the rich are mere capitalists accumulating wealth and power for themselves. They will maltreat laborers for their profit and reinvest these profits for further profits. Buddhadāsa puts great emphasis on personal morality in the rich without questioning how fair existing social structures or systems are. Economists may argue that it is rational for the rich to make profit and reinvest the profit under an economic system where moral responsibilities are replaced by market mechanisms, production criteria and efficiency. For instance, Adam Smith might have argued that the free market would turn personal evil into public benefit and turn greed into production efficiency. He claims in *The Wealth of Nations* that in pursuit of profit, those who have funds and power in making economic decisions will in the end help the poor through economic activities, even though they may not intend to do so. He states:

> He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest , nor knows he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.[21]

Adam Smith is of the opinion that human beings are rational and calculate on matters of their own interests. Therefore, it is fitting to allow consumers under the free market system, who care about

21 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, The Modern Library, 1973, p. 423.

their own interests, to judge rival producers. In the end, outputs would be of the best quality at the lowest prices possible.This system transforms personal greed into an efficient economic power.

This vision is totally different from that of the economic system in dhammic socialism. Buddhadāsa proposes that *setthi* in a dhammic socialist system would employ people in production for the welfare of the public. The rich should not be capitalists who accumulate their own wealth and at the same time oppress laborers, but should be *setthi* who employ their social and economic status in bringing benefits to workers and the poor. In contrast to Adam Smith, Buddhadāsa paints an image of the desirable economic system that is relatively stable, involving no free market or competition, but focusing on high social security based on the personal morality of the *setthi*. However, he does not address the question of how legitimately those *setthi* obtain their wealth.

Buddhadāsa points out clearly that in present-day capitalism human beings are destroying natural resources and the world's environment. He complains that natural resources are being spent wastefully and uselessly, often in uncreative ways such as manufacture of weapons. He adds:

> If we were to use the earth's resources according to what Nature desired or allowed, we would not need to use as much as we do now. There would be plenty for everyone for years to come, even indefinitely. Nowadays, however, we are squandering the earth's minerals so destructively that before long they will be gone. This is contrary to the Dhamma, to religion, to God. If we were to use them as we should, according to the desires of Nature, or of God, there would be plenty.[22]

Buddhadāsa sees that to hoard resources more than is necessary will cause scarcity, which consequently leads to poverty. Therefore, taking or consuming no more than is necessary is a solution to the

22 Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa, *Socialist Democracy*, p. 11.

problem of poverty. On this point it seems that Buddhadāsa has a contradictory vision. If it is wrong to possess a lot of assets, how can there be generous *setthi* who work for the public benefit in dhammic socialism?

According to Buddhadāsa, human beings have oppressed and destroyed Nature so much that many species of animals and plants have become extinct. Even human tribes have vanished because of selfishness and oppression among human beings. He explains that possessions in themselves are neutral, neither good nor bad. However, selfishness has become a cause of the injustice that causes one person to become richer and another to become poorer. The rich should therefore work hard to help relieve the suffering of the poor, while the poor should improve themselves by working harder and avoiding vices (*apāyamukha*) that lead to poverty. Buddhadā sa's analysis of social classes is based mainly on personal morality and does not address the economic and social structures that create classes.

Buddhadāsa agrees with the use of technology if it is for the benefit of society as a whole. He supports the use of technology for producing surplus, but those surpluses must be partly allocated to the needy, not for the profit of individuals. He believes that if people used technology to produce necessities, and *if there is sharing,* people would easily have enough to live on. If those products were used in the field of dhammic socialism, he believes, peace would arise quickly in our world. In contrast, wasteful technology only encourages defilements and destroys natural resources and the environment. However, he does not go into details as to what is the appropriate use of technology and resources. Moreover, he does not suggest any measures to justly apportion surplus production apart from voluntary alms giving by the rich.

e) *Dhammic Socialism and Democracy*

According to Buddhadāsa, real politics is the struggle with misunderstanding, wrong view, and infatuation with power. World politics is at present only a tool for taking advantage of others. Politicians say only what serves their interests. This has tainted the meaning of politic. Buddhadāsa advises us to look on politics as a matter of morality. When politics becomes a matter of morality, it will be able to help the world. He says:

> Upon reflection you will see that the correct application of politics is a moral matter. If it is moral it is natural truth, Dhamma. It is rather dishonest politics that are not morality, that are inconsistent with natural truth and cause people to destroy each other.[23]

Buddhadāsa connects "politics" to "religion" by suggesting that "politics" is a moral system based on the united action and spirit of the people to solve the problems incurred by having a lot of people together as a society. In his view "dhammic socialism" is more moral than any other political system, because it is based on the benefit of the common good and because it returns the society to normalcy. As for "religion," it is the highest condition of morality. Since the core of a political system is morality, politics and religion cannot be separated. He explains:

> The social sciences should be seen as basically a moral enterprise. The term *sāstra* originally meant something sharp ... When *sastra* is applied to society as *sangham-sāstra* (social sciences), it means something sharp for cutting through problems. Thus the social sciences are something sharp for cutting through social problems, bringing together all aspects of society as social sciences, such as politics, economics, culture, or even religion. Politics is one social science which can cut through social problems very effectively.[24]

And:

23 Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa, *Socialism that can Save the World*, p. 126.
24 Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa, *Socialism according to Buddhism*, pp. 50-51.

> Nothing is excluded from morality *[sīladhamma]*, and all things must be concerned with it. There is nothing that can be separated from morality, and as soon as something is separated from morality it immediately falls away from the true meaning of "social science" (*sastra-sangham*), leading, for example, to dirty politics which is in fact not politics at all.[25]

Concerning "democratic" government, Buddhadāsa feels that the system can in some cases be a tool for seeking personal interests and destroying others, but it can also be a tool for creating peace. In terms of society, democracy may lead to economic wealth, personal liberty, and human rights, but in spiritual terms, rights and liberty which are dominated by defilements are the rights and liberty of delusion in materialism. In this sense, democracy leads to consumerism, and consumerism will inevitably destroy the Buddhist teaching which emphasizes the common good.

Buddhadāsa divides democracy into two kinds: "libera democracy" and "dhammic socialist democracy." Liberal democracy is the kind known in the West. In theory it promotes equality,rights, and freedom of the individuals as well as materialistic wealth. In Buddhadāsa's view, the latter has never satisfied endless human desires, and also destroys natural resources and the world's ecologies. He states:

> Liberal democracy gives full freedom. But it does not define what this freedom is, so that people's defilements (*kilesa*) take the opportunity to have some freedom of their own. Once the defilements have power, they control how freedom is used. Though the ideal of freedom is philosophically beautiful, it cannot be put into practice. The philosophy does not have the power to resist the strength of human defilements. ... Thus this kind of democracy is not safe, because people with defilements will give defilements the chance to forge their own ideals.[26]

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.
26 *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

Buddhadāsa also argues that the western concept of "freedom" or "liberal democracy" has become individualism, with the attention shifting from the public interest to personal interests. Emphasis on individual freedom by unenlightened beings,who still have defilements, contradicts the fundamental meaning of the word "politics," which deals with the collective welfare of society. A political system that does not focus on this is considered immoral.

Conversely, dhammic socialist democracy promotes mutual kindness and compassion. According to Buddhadāsa, materialistic wealth in a dhammic socialist economic system will be apportioned fairly through generosity and sharing. The Buddhist concept of alms giving will bolster the spiritual wealth of the people while reducing the significance of consumerism. He says:

> Liberalism emphasizes the person, the individual, each with his own freedom. Socialism cannot do this, because it focuses on social utility ... Liberalism cannot [provide a basis for social utility] because it promotes selfishness: liberalism opens the way for selfishness, with its objective of the individual rather than society... Only a socialism that has Dhamma can help the world.[27]

Buddhadāsa criticized constitutional democratic government as an institution that encourages people to seek material wealth at the expense of the common good. He claims that dhammic socialist democracy considers the public interest as first priority. By not allowing individuals to possess surplus resources for themselves, dhammic socialist democracy is the principle of natural balance and respect for the rights of all living beings.

Buddhadāsa's perception of democracy is clearly very different from that of the West. While Buddhadāsa encourages distribution of incomes based on the Buddhist ideals of kindness, compassion and alms giving, political scientists may argue that true distribution of

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

income must be done through legal procedures and democratic political institutions. John Locke, a strong supporter of political freedom, gives the view that human beings are born with perfect freedom and full natural rights, and they have equality. By nature, human beings have not only the power to protect their lives, their possessions, and their liberty from others, but also have the right to judge and punish others for their transgressions. When human beings come together to form societies, all members of the society hand over these natural rights to the community under common laws and justice procedures. Locke states:

> Human beings by nature possess liberty, equality, and freedom in themselves. No one person can be excluded from these rights and fall under another's political power without his consent. The only way for everyone to voluntarily give up his natural liberty and live under the obligations of civil society is by agreeing to live together with other people as a community in order to have a comfortable, safe, and peaceful life together, to be able to enjoy their wealth safely and free from the threat of others who are not its rightful owners. ... When a group of people agrees to form a community or government, they have come together under one common political institution.[28]

As with Adam Smith's arguments on economics, John Locke argues on politics that human beings have handed their natural equality, freedom, and administrative power over to society, conceding to legal authority, with the intention of gaining better protection. Locke believes that a legal administrative system and inspection of power will be the guarantees of rights, freedoms, and equality of everyone in society. Conversely, Buddhadāsa does not place his belief in political systems or institutions, but in the moral conduct of the individual, as the means for solving the collective problems of society. He employs an individualistic approach rather than a structural or systematic approach to solving social problems.

28 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Pall Mall Press, 1960, p. 166.

f) *Dhammic Socialism and Political Leaders*

According to Buddhadāsa, a just government arises from a leader who is moral and takes more interest in the public well-being than his own. He cites the theory of the origination of the political leader given in the Tipitaka (*Aggañña Sutta*), where it is stated that in the ancient past people lived together in jungles and did not have cultures we know today. With sufficient resources for their needs, they lived peacefully.

This primordial condition of socialism prevailed until human beings began to hoard, steal, and quarrel on account of greed (*kilesa*). They took advantage of one another, and troubles spread all over the country. King Sammatirāja (the Appointed One), the very first king in the world, appeared to bring about peace and order. He was strong, clever, and just. He brought contentment to all groups of his subjects, ending disputes and instructing the people, satisfying them, punishing wrongdoers, and rewarding good people.

Buddhadāsa explains:

> One day people uttered "contented,contented," which in Pāli is *rājā* [king]. Raja translates as "contented" or "satisfied"... This word was from then on used to refer to that person who was appointed (*sammati*) to be king.[29]

Political leaders in Buddhadāsa's view should be "*dhammarājā*," kings who fulfill the *dasabidharājadhamma,* the Ten Royal Precepts, which are:

1. *Dāna* (sharing). A ruler should not be deluded by his wealth and property, but should share it for the welfare of the people.

2. *Sīla* (morality). A ruler should never destroy life, cheat, steal or exploit others. He should not commit adultery, utter falsehood, or

29 Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa, *Socialism according to Buddhism*, pp.69-70.

involve himself with intoxicants. That is, he must at least observe the Five Precepts.

3. *Pariccāga* (sacrifice for the common good). A ruler must be prepared to give up all personal comfort, name and fame, and even his life, for the benefit of the people.

4. *Ājjava* (honesty). A ruler must perform his duties free of fear or bias; he must be sincere and not deceive the public.

5. *Maddava* (benevolence and gentleness). A ruler must possess a humble nature and not be arrogant.

6: *Tapa* (effort to be rid of defilements). A ruler must lead a simple life, and not indulge in a life of luxury. He must have self -control.

7. *Akkodha* (non-anger). A ruler should refrain from resentment, envy and malice.

8. *Avihiṁsā* (non-violence). A ruler should harm or exploit nobody, should promote peace, and should avoid war, aggression and destruction of life.

9. *Khanti* (patience, forbearance). A ruler must patiently endure hardships, difficulties and insults without losing his temper.

10. *Avirodhana* (non-deviation from righteousness). A ruler should establish himself in righteousness and not oppose the will or measures that are for the welfare of the people.

Leadership qualities are important in Buddhadāsa's dhammic socialism. If a ruler is good, the system will also be good. Conversely, a bad ruler would make the entire system unacceptable. Administration under dhammic socialism therefore depends almost entirely on the virtue, responsibility, and decision-making of the leader. Buddhadāsa gives as examples of moral rulers in legend and history such rulers as King Sammatirāja (the legendary first king in

the world), Emperor Asoka of India, and some Thai kings from the Sukhothai and Ayudhaya kingdoms. He says:

> Let us look at an example, such as King Asoka... If we take a look at Asoka's edicts we will see socialism in every word ... Asoka was not a tyrant, because he did everything for the welfare of the society. For example, he constructed wells and assembly halls, and ordered mango and pikul trees planted, and anyone who did not plant them was punished. ... King Asoka was a Buddhist who preserved the ideals of a Buddhist despotic socialism.[30]

Elsewhere he writes:

> For example, look at King Ramkhamhaeng. Was he despotic, was he socialist? Upon careful study we will see that he was surprisingly socialistic, looking after his people the way a father would look after his children. Such a system should be revived today.[31]

The models mentioned by Buddhadāsa may have been effective in ancient realms, but in the complex structures of present-day society we may require efficient systems for examining authority to maintain social justice.

An interesting question here is that of "the public interest." Who is to decide what is and what is not for the public interest? In modern society, there are still many controversial ethical issues relating to public interests on which no final word has been found, such as abortion. In the case of King Asoka, it may be easy to look back and say what he did was for the public interest. Thus his punishing those who disobeyed him seems to be right. It is easy to create idealistic impressions of the past when we do not belong to those times, and it is easier to make generalizations about the public interest by turning back to the past than to make decisions on present-day problems. Buddhadāsa's vision of political leaders lacks the structural perspective of complex modern society. He

30 Bhikkhu Buddhadâsa, *Socialism according to Buddhism*, pp. 76-78.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

claims:

> If a monarch is a tyrannical despot, an absolute monarch, then of course such governments should be done away with. But why should we abolish a monarch who is endowed with the Ten Royal Precepts, who is a source of socialism?... True or righteous socialism would not create such teachings (as the capitalists and the workers). It would create only systems that are righteous and proper, such as systems that did not allow anyone to amass private wealth.[32]

Louis Gabaude makes the observation that Buddhadāsa's choice of vocabulary tends to be a problem, in that he often uses common, widely known words in special meanings of his own. Gabaude claims that Buddhadāsa's political leader cannot exist in the modern world:

> "Socialism","democracy","dictatorship" have commonly understood meanings connected to the historical implementations of their ideals. These words are not only used to refer to a precise set of ideas, but also to actual experiences. Buddhadāsa's new sets refer only to principles, to ideas and to dreams. As for experiences or facts, a Jātaka King, a 3rd century BC ruler like Asoka, or a 13th century AD Sukhothai ruler like Ramkamhaeng, can hardly be realistic models for ruling our complex societies and our independent citizens.[33]

Buddhadāsa is of the view that democratic procedures take time, and communities often lose opportunities. He therefore adds the concept of "despotism", not tyrannical but benevolent and protective of public benefits. According to him, despotism has two meanings. As a political ideal, in military totalitarianism for example, dictatorship is certainly not desirable, but as a means for attaining a desirable objective, it means being able to handle things expeditiously. His concept of dictatorship emerged during the period of political strife between 1973 and 1976. At that time democracy seemed unable to resolve the conflicting political

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

33 Louis Gabaude, *Thai Society and Buddhadāsa: Structural Difficulties*, p. 220.

ideologies of the right and the left. He therefore proposed the approach of "righteous despotism" to end the hatred and strife and restore peace to society. He explains:

> In fact, 'despotic democracy' is the right and best term, but people hate the sound of 'dictatorship' because they are so infatuated with liberalism... If the people are fully socialist or fully democratic, when problems seem to be taking too long to solve, they should hand them over to the dictator. It is a despotic democracy, a despotic population. This would be better... We must rise up to a dhammic socialist democracy, and use the despotic method... Our own country is currently in great turmoil, and we do not know how or where to resolve the crisis. If we had a despot who was righteous, we would be able to solve our problems quickly.[34]

In general, Buddhadāsa's approach to despotic rule is problematic because it gives importance almost solely to the moral qualities of the ruler. Buddhadāsa seems to believe that, with the Ten Royal Precepts, a political leader would never institute a mistaken policy. However, forcing people to do what the leader sees as for the public benefit is like using the end to justify the means: one person has the authority to judge what is for the benefit of all, and to force everyone to follow. This is politically doubtful because it opens the way for fraud and abuse of power resulting from human weakness and caprice. Moreover, the question may arise of whether personal ethics can guarantee administrative effectiveness? Who is to examine the ruler's morality? Who will judge whether a ruler lacks these moral principles? When should a ruler cease to have power? And what happens if a ruler refuses to step down? Moreover, what should next-in-rank leaders be like? These were questions raised by Louis Gabaude, who also recounted Europe's experiences with dictators as follows:

34 Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa, *Socialism according to Buddhism*, pp. 59-60.

Buddhadāsa understands that, when society lacks a common ideal, dictatorial power is necessary to rule according to the Dhamma. The problem is to define what actually, precisely, fits with the Dhamma and what does not. He trusts the dictator to decide, in a rather Manichaen way, what and who should be "dhammic" and what and who should not. Europeans still remember that, between the two World Wars, their rejection of both liberal democracy and communism opened the way for the dictatorships of the "Caudillos", "Il Duces" and "Fürhers" who were even sometimes supported by religious groups in the very name of social order, morals, and efficiency.

Buddhadāsa summarizes his political idea as a religious socialist democracy composed of dhamma and a dictatorial method of operations based on the Ten Royal Precepts(*dasabidharājadhamma*) which Louis Gabaude says would be difficult to implement in the real world because no one can imagine how the three main components of his utopian regime— dictatorship, Dhamma and socialism—could possibly be integrated in present Thai society.

Donald Swearer proposes that Buddhadāsa's dhammic socialism has three fundamental principles: the first is the principle of public benefit, which encompasses politics, the economy and social structure. The second is the principle of restraint and compassion, which encompasses personal conduct. The third is the principle of respect and goodwill, which defines the correct attitude toward all forms of life. He claims that Buddhadāsa's vision is a critique of both capitalism and communism and provides the groundwork for a political philosophy that could help guide Thailand to a more just and equitable social, political and economic order. However, Louis Gabaude differs, stating that Buddhadāsa sees only good in his "despotic dhammic socialism" and sees only bad in liberal democracy and communism. Gabaude points out that the difference is that liberal democracy and communism are real, actual, factual

states, while dictatorial "dhammic socialism" is a projection or mental construction.

Buddhadāsa's political leader is reminiscent of the philosopher king in Plato's *Republic.* In Plato's socialist republic, he classified citizens into 3 classes: the philosopher king, warriors, and merchants (which include all kinds of workers). The philosopher king is the ruler of highest morality and wisdom. He is similar to the "*dhammarājā*" who adheres to the Ten Royal Precepts in Buddhadāsa's dhammic socialism. Even so, Plato's Republic was criticized by his own outstanding pupil, Aristotle, who preferred democratic government. In the fourth volume of "Politics" Aristotle explains four forms of government: monarchy, oligarchy, democracy, and aristocracy. He adds, "but there is a fifth form... Government under constitution can broadly been explained as a combination of oligarchy and democracy. However, this term usually refers to a government that inclines to democracy." Aristotle's constitutional government clearly differs from the political leaders of Plato and Buddhadāsa.

Modern criticism of hierarchical government powers comes from Michel Foucault, a contemporary French thinker, in his book *Power /Knowledge.* Foucault claims that the universal theory concerning "power" has been causing problems throughout human civilization, and points out:

> Where Soviet socialist power was in question, its opponents called it totalitarianism; power in Western capitalism was denounced by the Marxists as class domination; but the mechanics of power in themselves were never questioned.[35]

Foucault suggests that what we want is not a political philosophy based around questions of sovereignty or around mechanism of laws and prohibitions, but a political theory that supports

35 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, Pantheon Books, 1980, p. 116.

elimination of central power. He analyzes the mechanism of power as a cyclic or a chain-like structure. It has never been anywhere or in anyone's hands. Power is exercised through organizations which act like nets. The power in individuals' hand is only a form: it exists only in practice. Individuals are vehicles of power. They are results of power and are parts of its visible expression. Foucault concludes that we need to go into a historical inquisition, starting from the lowest level of how the mechanism of power works. With this new theory about power, Foucault has challenged not only the structure of hierarchical power but also the structure of power in democratic institutions. The best form of government in Foucault's opinion is probably the one with the most decentralized power, which, like Buddhadāsa's dhammic socialism, has never existed.

In conclusion, Buddhadāsa's "dhammic socialism" is a reaction that reflects a Buddhist point of view on the rapid changes that have taken place in modern Asia. As a thinker in search of an ideal world, Buddhadāsa always refers to "golden ages" of the ancient past, be they the societies of the Buddha's time, Asokan India, or the kings of Sukhothai, Ayudhaya, and early Rattanakosin. He idealizes those past societies as full of generosity and the spirit of "dhammic socialism" in which the leader is endowed with the Ten Royal Precepts and people lived morally, gave alms and observed precepts on regular basis. Any society in which the majority of people attach to traditional and customary practices will be made up of people who have close relationships and are strict in their religious observance. However, Buddhadāsa does not sufficiently deal with the historical facts of those periods, such as slave trading, gambling wives and children into slavery, annual recruitment of forced labor, cruel and inhumane legal punitive systems, and the slaughter of entire clans in quest of the throne.

Buddhadāsa's theory of "dhammic socialism" is a Buddhist ideal world outlook. Without a revision of structural interpretation either

from the political, economic, and social perspectives, it would be difficult to solve Thailand's real problems. The significance of Buddhadāsa's political approach is that "dhammic socialism" is a critique of modern western economic and political thinking by a Thai scholar within a Thai way of thinking and intelligence. Another of Buddhadāsa's benefactions is his concept of the balance and harmony of all things in nature as real "socialism," which may be an important philosophical foundation for solving the environmental and ecological crises that humanity is faced with at present. As an important Thai thinker, he also lays the moral foundation for other Thai thinkers to use in creating new political philosophies, in order to find approaches that may be truly used to solve Thailand's problems which are based on a Thai intellectual and cultural foundation.

[Translated from the Thai version by *Bruce Evans*]

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