

KATHLEEN GOUGH

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In meetings members of *JCA* had with Kathleen Gough we discovered three major strands in her outlook, all very congenial to us politically.

First, she believed that we should take an intense interest in reforms and policies which could ameliorate the condition of the working peasant or workers in industry in rural areas: exploitation should be exposed, as should trends which denied the labour movement a just share in what economic growth *did* occur as a result of land reform, "green revolution," new capital investment, etc.

Secondly, she had the perspective that while we need to understand that a given social system is a fact of life in the short run and has to be taken as a starting point for analysis and reform, the continuing objective is to overthrow a social structure which has its origins in colonial times and even earlier during the Asiatic Mode of Production.

Thirdly, Kathleen insisted that Vietnam is a country which has suffered all the problems characteristic of the Third World *plus* a genocidal intervention by the biggest power ever known. Vietnam deserved our support and it deserves our continuing support in the period of its social reconstruction due to the cruel legacy of the War and U.S. blockades and intrigues against the peoples of Vietnam.

Concerning the first of these points we refer to Kathleen's arguments in her book *Rural Society in Southeast Asia* (1982) which Dr. C.A. Gregory reviewed in the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 16(2):267-270.

The empirical data she collected in the Tamil Nadu villages of Kumbapettai and Kirripur was, as Gregory noted, of high quality.

It was this solid data base which allowed her to make judgments each time she returned (1951-53; 1976) concerning the effects of the green revolution and of Tamil Nadu's land reform legislation. Judgment required Marxian theory to be applied to the data—concepts applied were class and caste structure, differentiation among peasants and regions. Furthermore (as noted by Gregory), Kathleen Gough had the intelligence to use oral traditions, government

records and family documents in order to "set the background," to have a good idea of the historical balance of forces in the region.

On the second issue of longer-term goals for the Left in relation to Third World struggle her arguments, as in her "Socio-Economic Change in South East India" (Gough 1987), boiled down to the observation that a way has to be found of helping those who are bullied by the rural elite and those who control the district's economy. She observed that a *new kind* of rural elite with different kinds of political connections was emerging in the 1970s by comparison with the political scene of the 1950s. The forces that could be united included some of the middle peasants, the large number of former village serfs and the people working as washerman, barber, oilmongers, builders, toddy tappers, smiths and peddlers. Communist organization of labour unions, formerly quite strong had, by the 1970s, been weakened by splits and personality clashes over strategies. There had developed a strong economism to the neglect of land struggles. This severely weakened what should be the long-term goal—to unite the peasantry, the urban workers, the petty bourgeoisie in a revolutionary struggle to overthrow the whole set of social relations by structural change and establishing a new form of state power.

Since Kathleen saw class struggle, national liberation, women's liberation and socialist transformation as interlinked, she visited Vietnam with a keen eye to all these issues. The results of her observations were set out in her book *Ten Times More Beautiful: The Rebuilding of Vietnam* (1978). She reports in detail on the improvements Socialism brought—not to the bourgeoisie but to those at the bottom end of the income pyramid. She mentions problems for women arising from traditionalist pro-family beliefs in State and Party, which had recognized the need to expand women's opportunities but tended to respond only when women insisted on extension of their rights. Although encouraged by the prominence of women in the work force and middle-level politics, she saw the need for women to develop a continuing struggle for more participation. Finally, coming from long acquaintance with agricultural areas in south India even poorer than those in Vietnam, she was able to perceive what solid progress had been made in Vietnamese agriculture. This was by contrast to the writings of visitors from Western countries previously acquainted only with more affluent conditions who were genuinely shocked by low living standards in the Indo-Chinese countries.

Finally, one should note that Kathleen Gough sincerely regretted the political fall-out from the great Sino-Soviet clashes of the 1960s. This led her, as someone who saw a certain degree of opportunism in Indian communism, to wonder why Vietnam thought that the U.S.S.R. had been a necessary condition for their successful expulsion of U.S. imperialism from Indo-China. While such a hesitation was understandable in one long immersed in village problems where people had little stake in a moribund system of exploitation,

Kathleen Gough respected the political judgment of Vietnamese political leaders and refused to fall for the Pol-Pot propaganda against Vietnam that influenced quite a few “concerned Asian scholars” among American academic researchers.

References Cited

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