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## Malcolm Caldwell

The Editorial Board of *Journal of Contemporary Asia* records with great sorrow the murder in Phnom Penh, Kampuchea, of its co-editor and comrade Dr Malcolm Caldwell. Malcolm Caldwell was at the forefront of the struggle against US aggression in South-East Asia, in the course of which a unity was forged between national liberation movements and Western socialists, a unity between peoples that stands unshaken. Whoever murdered Malcolm Caldwell is an enemy of that unity.

For two and a half decades Malcolm Caldwell participated widely and actively in the cause of socialism and national liberation struggles against imperialism, especially in South-East Asia. He became one of the most influential spokesmen in support of the heroic struggles of the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and national liberation movements in South-East Asia – Malaya, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines – on whose behalf he worked unremittingly both through his writings and lecturing for which he travelled extensively in Britain, Europe, North America and Australia as well as most South-East Asian countries, to explain their cause and get world support. He was also in close contact with Third World intellectuals and students' organizations, particularly those of Indonesia, Malaya, Singapore, Thailand and Philippines and it is, we believe, much to Malcolm's credit that he was banned by the reactionary governments of these countries and had been threatened with legal sanctions in England for 'slandering' Lee Kuan Yew whose goals are full of our comrades. He campaigned vigorously on behalf of political prisoners and their families in these countries (and elsewhere), a cause on which the establishment press is shamefully silent even while uttering hypocritical platitudes about human rights. He was in fact a target for vicious attacks by the reactionary press, in particular the *London Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* (even after his death) and was denied the right to reply to sustained attacks.

Asia was not his only interest. Malcolm was also active on the British political scene, as a member of the British Labour Party in which he continued to struggle and, for two decades, in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. He was, for a time, Chairman of CND. He also supported passionately the aspirations of the people of Scotland for national political expression and self-government. He was planning to write a book on some aspects of

Scottish history. He was also much concerned with the ecology movement in Britain.

Malcolm Caldwell's ideas were firmly and also creatively grounded in the Marxist theoretical tradition and were enriched by a close study of problems and experiences of revolutionary movements, especially in Asia. For Malcolm an open, in contrast to narrow minded, and honest, in contrast to evasive, discussion was essential for both academic and political progress which went together. For him there was no contradiction between open-mindedness and a firm political standpoint; this was demonstrated and exemplified by his own contributions in fields of political activity and the field of scholarship. Malcolm's analysis of imperialism in the contemporary world led him towards relocating the problem in a radical reconsideration of problems of world development as a whole and a deep concern with radical ecology and questions about proper and equitable use of finite natural resources, such as fossil fuels, on a global scale. In extending his ideas in these new directions, in an attempt to come to grips with problems that have been brought into focus only in recent years, he searched for concepts and ideas embedded in other (and earlier) traditions of social thought and his ideas were thus leavened by influences from such writers as Georgescu-Roegen, John Ruskin and William Morris. But this was not done with nostalgia for a golden past but a realistic involvement with the demands of the present and potentialities for the future.

Malcolm's writing was thoughtful and searching. But it was also passionate. He published numerous articles and books. Amongst those published in recent years is a book that he co-authored on Cambodia, *Cambodia in the South-East Asian War* (Monthly Review Press, 1973), which is regarded as a classic work, one of the very few that adequately explains the complicated history of Cambodian politics in this century. He had just completed a book on the aims and aspirations of the *Kampuchean Revolution* which he was to update following his visit to Kampuchea – he was killed on the last day of that visit. The book is being published in its original form by Spokesman. He has also co-edited *Malaya – The Making of a Neo-Colony* (Spokesman, 1977), *Thailand: Roots of Conflict* (Spokesman, 1978) and *Planning and Urbanisation in China* (Pergamon, 1977).

Malcolm's most recent published work, *The Wealth of Some Nations* (ZED Press 1978) written as an introductory volume

for a study of problems of development, is an important, challenging and provocative work. It is illuminating and stimulating (and for people with a restricted outlook "controversial") and may well be regarded in some ways as a culmination of his work for in it he synthesises his ideas drawn from his extensive study of colonised societies as well as that of the parasitic growth in the Western World.

A general proposition that underlies the work is that the inflated growth and consumption levels in Western capitalist world and its 'over-development', and the entailed ecological damage, are parasitically and necessarily at the expense of the under-developed primary producers of the Third World. He points out that any assessment of feasible mineral and energy resources rule out the *physical* possibility that the Third World can ever realise the levels of industrialization of the West. Therefore the national liberation of Third World countries and their development cannot ultimately be realised without a radical transformation at the global level; it must necessarily entail a restructuring of patterns of production and consumption *all over the world*, on the basis of an ecologically sound and equitable use of available world resources. It was this problem, that pre-occupied his mind, that attracted Malcolm particularly to a serious study of the Kampuchean experiment, a conception of self-reliant development rooted in the countryside. The challenge here, in Malcolm's view, was not that of turning away from the use of new technology but one of searching for new technologies that are different from those generated in the course of capitalist development dominated by the interests of imperialism which are thus premised on pre-emption of finite critical resources by a privileged few so that such a development can only be realised if the vast unprivileged majority continues to be denied them.

Malcolm was an intellectual of considerable calibre and a committed scholar. His defiant spirit flourished in the inhospitable climate of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London where, (as elsewhere), his colleagues and acquaintances, as well as friends, will nevertheless recall his immense personal charm and remember him with affection and respect. He was Lecturer in Economic History at SOAS and students from many parts of the world were attracted there by his presence. However, despite his very considerable scholarly accomplishments and standing, Malcolm would not have liked to

have gone down in history as an academic in the usual sense of the term. He would want to be remembered as an activist on the British Left and an anti-imperialist fighter. It was as a part of that enterprise that he initiated the founding of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* for which he took on considerable burdens and was a tower of strength. His many books and articles combine theory and practice in a way that will inspire readers and supporters for many years to come. It is a tragedy for the Left that his assassination, at the age of 47, has now cut off this stream of ideas.

*Editorial Board  
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