

CUP AND JINGOISM

T G Jacob

The world cup in soccer played out in different cities of the erstwhile West Germany illuminated many interesting characteristics of the present day globalized economics and politics. It also gave concrete indications of the schisms between the various European countries in spite of the growing European Union and Euro. To put it mildly the world cup brought forth in sharp focus the extreme levels of narrow nationalism and national jingoism which is the reality in the Europe of today. Soccer became a cathartic occasion for the open manifestations of this basic characteristic of Europe. Wild celebrations on the streets and utter sullenness marked the vicissitudes of the world cup 2006. The maximum number of teams represented European countries and for this very factor it was mainly a European affair in its emotional and social content. And this emotional and social content loudly proclaimed narrow nationalism as the potent creed that is exercising great influence in the different countries.

Economically Europe is a deeply divided place and the growth of inequalities between nation states and within nations is proceeding at an accelerated phase. Unification of Germany and the demolition of the Berlin Wall have within a short time exposed the utter hegemony of the developed western part over the poor cousin. The economic expansionism of the western European monopoly capital along with the US multinationals has found an extremely fertile ground in the countries of Eastern Europe. Cheap labor is imported to the metropolises and there is an increasing trend of relocating industries because of the great cost advantage. This trend in turn is generating increasing unemployment in countries like Germany, France, Italy and the UK. Youth revolts against the economic conditions are simmering and France has already shown the way as a beginning.

Many years after the reunification, youth from the eastern part are now compelled to hide their place of origin from their western brothers and sisters because, otherwise, employment chances may dry up. Social and economic discrimination towards the erstwhile East Germans is reportedly routine in the advanced part of the country. Globalization and reunification and European Union do not seem to have done much good for the youth of Europe. The workers from East European countries fare even worse though their labor along with those from countries like Turkey is the cheapest and they are ready to perform any sort of labor for any wages for sheer sustenance. These workers are surely an easy source of super profits for the multinational corporations.

Any global sports meet is now a huge commercial proposition. Billions and billions of dollars are the outlay and many more billions are the profits. Moreover, hosting of any such global jamboree has very much come to indicate the relative power and status of the host country in the world. This is equally true of Germany or China which is going to host the Olympics. Such sports meets have come to symbolize the economic and political might of the host country which can easily be a powerful outlet of narrow nationalism and inflated patriotism. This aspect becomes even starker when the countries concerned are facing serious contradictions, especially internally. Germany's case is very clear on this count. Growing internal disparities, rising unemployment and the economic compulsions behind relocating industries and other outsourcing all show the developing nature of the contradictions. China's case is no different. If tomorrow India is going to host something like the Commonwealth Games or Asian Games it will again reflect hyperbolic national jingoism. So is the case of every country that goes in for such extravaganzas. Globalization is essentially an economic

phenomenon of integration of markets but it by no means dilutes national jingoism or sectarianism. India-Pak cricket matches are another perennial victim of this misplaced nationalism.

Any such extravaganza like the World Cup or Olympics is supposed to bring the world together. But in reality, as is shown by the World Cup 2006, the opposite is the actual result and intention. Of course, such gala events put a gloss over the ugly realities like wars and unethical economic manipulations which are on an ever rising scale. Increasing starvation in the poor countries, global warming, suicidal environmental devastations, unprecedented capital centralization, and proliferation of wars and conflicts all can be swept under the carpet using such alibis like World Cup or Olympics. The media and advertisement sector will see to it that it happens so. Why not? After all they stand to gain enormously from such events. Not only they but the entertainment industry, airlines industry, national government of the host country, hotel industry, organized and freelance prostitutes, the liquor industry and real estate sharks are all gainers. It follows that all those who are not part of such circuits stand to lose. This political economy is fairly straightforward. What is not so straightforward is the ugly face of national jingoism (which is nothing but a form of sublimated fascism) coming out in the open. This World Cup showed it without any ambiguity.

An interesting sidelight was worth noting. When France defeated the celebrated Brazilian team in the quarter finals the youth who came out in large numbers on the streets of Paris indulged in “vandalism” through the night. One such vandalism was the smashing of McDonald’s on the Champs. France is yet to recover from the chaos seen during the protests against the proposed new employment regulations. Those protests also saw similar vandalism on an extensive scale. Is it really vandalism or expression of widespread simmering discontent rooted in serious social and economic issues confronting the people at large? Looking at the developments in France since the past several months one is liable to take the latter view.

Before the Second World War there was the infamous Munich Olympics of 1933 presided over by Hitler. That Olympics reflected the national arrogance of Germany which had already finalized plans for a career of conquests and global bloodshed. It was a naked carnival of catharsis of uncouth national pride and power. In this World Cup the canvas was broader with the uncouth national pride of several industrialized nations coming on the screen. The real disunity of Europe in spite of all the claims and rhetoric to the contrary came out in the open, at least in a powerful symbolic manner. The undercurrents working in these powerful nations are not very pleasant and the World Cup is certainly not an answer. But they tried it because it was good corporate economics too. 