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The Battle Hymn of the Republic, Updated

Mark Twain

Mine eyes have seen the orgy of the launching of the Sword;
He is searching out the hoardings where the stranger's wealth is stored;
He hath loosed his fateful lightnings, and with woe and death has scored;
His lust is marching on.

I have seen him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded him an altar in the Eastern dews and damp;
I have read his doomful mission by the dim and flaring lamps—
His night is marching on.

I have read his bandit gospel writ in burnished rows of steel:
"As ye deal with my pretensions, so with you my wrath shall deal;
Let the faithless son of Freedom crush the patriot with his heel;
Lo, Greed is marching on!"

We have legalized the strumpet and are guarding her retreat;*
Greed is seeking out commercial souls before his judgement seat;
O, be swift, ye clods, to answer him! be jubilant my feet!
Our god is marching on!

In a sordid slane harmonious Greed was born in yonder ditch,
With a longing in his bosom—and for others' goods an itch.
As Christ died to make men holy, let men die to make us rich—
Our god is marching on.

* NOTE: In Manila the Government has placed a certain industry under the protection of our flag. (M.T.)

The **Battle Hymn of the Republic, Updated** (also known as **The Battle Hymn of the Republic Brought Down to Date**) written in 1901 by Mark Twain in the same tune and cadence as the original **Battle Hymn of the Republic** is a parody of American imperialism, in the wake of the **Philippine-American War**.



Editorial

Since early February, the Sri Lankan media have been obsessed with the UNHRC session in Geneva in March 2014. That a hostile resolution was due was widely expected with the degree of hostility a matter of speculation. Yet, one should have been seriously deluded to suggest the toppling of the government by the UNHCR resolution, however harsh. The West certainly resents the Rajapaksa regime. Had it an opportunity to depose it, it would promptly have. But prospects for regime change have receded since the last presidential election, when the US pinned its hopes on the former army commander.

The Sri Lankan regime is by no means defiant of imperialism. The government, while turning a blind eye to the anti-imperialist sabre rattling by certain ministers of little consequence and making the occasional anti-imperialist utterance here or there for the benefit of its Sinhala nationalist support base, dares not defy the West where it matters. The West through the World Bank and the IMF guides the economic policy to suit imperialist interests. The government meekly accepts their visions for the country to make the economy increasingly rely on service industries and selling its labour, both skilled and unskilled, in the international market. The country is also pushed to carry out structural reform undermining public services and to undertake infrastructural development at the expense of industrial and agricultural development.

The West knows that, despite the surge in Chinese investment in Sri Lanka in the past few years, the latter's dependence on Europe and the US for its exports militates against its turning hostile to Western economic, political or military interests. Yet the West, the US especially, resents the growing influence of China in Sri Lanka, as it hinders its plans to isolate China. US resentment of the Sri Lankan government is thus not based on the latter's record on human rights and war crimes but on growing reliance on China, economically as an investor and politically a defender of Sri Lanka in international matters.

The UNHRC theatre in Geneva is also about competing regional interests of the US and India in the region, conditioned by what each perceives as the Chinese threat. The Sri Lankan government and its critics know this well. Yet there is a rising tendency to portray the UNHRC resolution against Sri Lanka in Geneva as the result of pressure brought upon the UN by its High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay and upon the US by the Tamil diaspora and the Tamil nationalists at home. This false impression is nurtured by Sinhala chauvinists as well as Tamil narrow nationalists, for conflicting purposes, but to achieve the same end, namely the erosion of goodwill between the two nationalities.

Existing evidence of violations of human rights and war crimes is too strong to dismiss lightly, and there is a strong case for credible inquiry. But with the "International Community" being what it is, an international inquiry will not be the way to address the issues, as it will yield little by way of solving the national question while strengthening the chauvinists and further polarizing the Sinhala and Tamil nationalities. The chauvinists and narrow nationalists need to be isolated as their opportunism threatens the unity of the country as well as its democratic institutions.

The left forces in the country are best placed to demand a credible independent inquiry. By putting forward a concrete proposal for a meaningful inquiry defining the basis, scope and terms of the inquiry, and prescribing a composition of the inquiring body and measures to ensure the fairness of the process as well as protection for the witnesses and their families that will secure the confidence of all affected parties, the left will be able to challenge and expose the dishonest and mischievous elements responsible for the present impasse in the national question.

Since the national question is the main contradiction of the country, the left, by reasserting its secular role and taking the moral high ground, could contribute to understanding among nationalities and reclaim its historic role in defending democracy which is under a growing fascist threat.

The Sri Lankan National Question

Comrade SK Senthivel

Sources of the problem: Sri Lanka's national problem can be traced to the turn of the 20th Century when Sinhala Buddhism revealed itself as Buddhist revivalism in response to Christian proselytizing. Revivalist moves also existed among Tamil Hindus and Muslims. But it was business rivalry that triggered the anti-Muslim riots of 1915. Opening up the Legislature to Sri Lankans by setting up the State Council initiated caste and ethnicity based rivalries among the elite. Sinhala Buddhism, however, was not a political force challenging colonial rule. Ethnic identity helped to the extent that it enabled members of the elite of each community to further their self and class interests. Political parties with ethnic identities came into being in the first decade of the State Council. Yet caste did transcend ethnicity even in elections to the Legislative Council that preceded the State Council and afterwards.

The Donoughmore Commission responsible for the State Council and the Soulbury Commission responsible for the post independence parliamentary government encouraged ethnic identity politics as well as failed to protect minorities against majoritarian discrimination. The consequences were self evident in the decade since Independence in 1948.

Feeding the national conflict: Planned colonization of the Eastern Province with an overwhelmingly Tamil and Muslim population with Sinhalese, to alter the ethnic distribution in the Eastern Province was initiated well before independence in 1948. It was followed by the Citizenship Act of 1948 — an unprecedented undemocratic and inhuman act that deprived the Hill Country Tamils (then known as Indian Tamils)

who comprised around 10% of the country's population of their citizenship and right to vote. It was only the Left that solidly stood by the Indian Tamil leaders in opposing that draconian legislation. The Tamil nationalist Ilankai Thamilarasuk Katci (better known as the Federal Party) was born as a result of the letting down of the Indian Tamils by the then main Tamil Party, the Tamil Congress. The matter was painfully resolved after the Nehru-Kotelawala Agreement of 1954 against forced repatriation of Indian Tamils; the Sirima-Shastri Pact of 1964 under which a sizeable proportion of Hill Country Tamils were to be granted Indian nationality; the Sirima-Indira Gandhi Accord of 1974 which found agreement on outstanding issues of the Sirima-Shastri pact; and finally prolonged mass protests for citizenship that led to the parliament agreeing to citizenship for Tamils of Indian descent in 1988 and finally to all Tamils of Indian Origin in 2003. Yet the Hill Country Tamils have still not been granted the right to land and housing and continue to suffer communal harassment.

The Official Language Act of 1956, commonly known as the Sinhala Only Act, was introduced in an insensitive way denying the Tamils their language rights. Amid protests by Tamils and encouraged by the Left, the then Prime Minister SWRD Bandaranaike acted to correct the mistake by negotiating with the leaders of the then main Tamil political party, the Federal Party, and came to an agreement called the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact (B-C Pact) that addressed to some degree the questions of language rights and Sinhala colonization as well as offered devolution of power at district level. But Bandaranaike was forced to retreat by Sinhala Buddhist extremists within his party as well as by the right wing opposition forces. The Left defended the Pact but the Federal Party failed to appreciate the delicate situation of the premier and act appropriately to defend the Pact. Bandaranaike, however, passed the Reasonable Use of Tamil legislation in 1958.

The extremists who scented blood after the scrapping of the B-C Pact stirred anti Tamil feelings which led in 1958 to the first nationwide communal violence in post independence Sri Lanka. Chances to heal the wounds were missed as the UNP, the SLFP and their Sinhala

nationalist allies did not want to forego the benefits of communal politics to electoral performance. Likewise, the FP too acted to isolate the Tamils from mainstream politics and saw the left as a threat to their dominance in the Tamil areas.

It should also be added that discrimination against Tamils in state employment also built up in the wake of the Sinhala Only Act. Tamil recruitment to the army was minimal and that to the police declined alongside falling recruitment to administrative services. Much of this was justified by chauvinists in terms of the dominance of white collar jobs by Tamils under the British, which was more a result of Tamils of the North paying greater attention to education than other communities.

The assassination of Bandaranaike by a Buddhist priest with a senior priest and a few Sinhala Buddhist personalities as accomplices temporarily arrested the surge in Sinhala Buddhist extremism but electoral political considerations led to its revival in the mid-1960s. Its explicit manifestation as a political force occurred this century in the form of the Jathika Hela Urumaya and affiliated social terror groups.

Transformation into national crisis: The FP having failed in its satyagraha campaign in 1961 to resolve the language problem and associated discriminatory manifestations chose to cooperate with the right-wing UNP to form the government in 1965. The agreement between the two parties known as the Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact to improve on the Reasonable Use of Tamil Act of 1958 and to set up District Councils to devolve power to Tamil-speaking areas failed to materialise owing to opposition from the SLFP and its left allies, the LSSP and CP, as well as resistance from within the UNP.

The FP, which by 1970 antagonized the SLFP and its allies, was politically weakened by the SLFP-led alliance sweeping to power in 1970. The government's attitude towards the FP was one of indifference accompanied by acts to undermine the credibility of the FP, and the FP's response was confrontational. The course of events since the election of 1970, intentionally or otherwise, led to the worsening of the national

question. The decision of the government to “standardize” media wise the results of the GCE(AL) examination on which university admissions were based, the republican constitution of 1972, the Language of the Courts Bill of 1973, and the tragic death of nine Tamils on the public event in Jaffna to mark the last day of the Fourth International Tamil Research Conference in 1974 were prominent among issues that alienated the government from the Tamils as well as contributed to narrow Tamil nationalist sentiments. The insensitive handling of militancy in the north and police excesses following the assassination of former mayor Duraiappa in 1975 helped to strengthen Tamil militancy, which was encouraged by the FP.

Capitalising on the mood of frustration and bitterness among the Tamils and in view of impending elections in 1977 as well as pressure from militants, the FP formed the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in 1976 to call for the formation of the separate state of Tamil Eelam. Interestingly, the UNP was an ally of the FP at the time and even encouraged the secessionist bid. Marxist Leninists challenged the TULF in public, but after successive exposure of fault lines the TULF shunned public debate.

Unforeseen turn of events since 1975 led to the LSSP and CP splitting with the SLFP and to the reversal of fortunes for the UNP which came to power in 1977 with an unprecedented majority.

Executive presidency and deepening of conflict: The expectations of the TULF that the UNP will act to address the grievances of the Tamils were dashed in a little over a month of the UNP coming to power. The government refused to declare a state of emergency to deal with the anti-Tamil violence in August 1977 sent armed forces to Jaffna to deal with Tamil militancy besides legislating to ban some Tamil militant organizations and passing into law the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1978. This allowed arbitrary arrest and detention on suspicion, and an inevitable escalation of conflict.

The constitution of 1978 authored by the UNP government introduced an executive presidency, which had harsh implications for the trade union movement, the opposition parties as a whole and the minority nationalities. The oppressive and vindictive approach of the government led to the escalation of militancy in the North and to military harassment and killing of civilians and violent reaction by Tamil militants who were still a weak force.

The rise of the militants also marked the decline of democratic politics in the North. The failure of the TULF to honour its pledge of struggle for Tamil Eelam and settling for a District development Council with less authority than a local body gave the militants the pretext to silence all opposition to their separatist agenda. They particularly targeted the Marxist Leninist and Trotskyite left which opposed to the division of the country. The parties survived by not yielding to the LTTE or other militants and standing up to the oppressive government, while the TULF was reduced to an impotent by-stander.

War and Peace: The anti-Tamil violence of 1983 July which caught the attention of the world was also a key turning point. The role of the state as an accomplice brought discredit to the country. Tamil militants gained considerable public support as a result but chose not to take the people into confidence and relied on weapons and armed youth. They took refuge in India taking advantage of the hostility of the Jayawardane government towards the Indira Gandhi government. But internal and inter-movement rivalry and internecine killings took their toll on rival movements as well as on the prospect of a united liberation force. Much of the energy of rival movements was spent on fighting off rivals, and the LTTE emerged as the strongest, but undemocratic, force with minimal tolerance of political differences. Yet its ability to defend people against the armed forces earned it a popular support base.

It was Indian intervention that brought the Sri Lankan government to peace talks starting with Timpu and the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987. The Accord and the 13th Amendment which brought into being the

North-East Provincial Council were opposed peacefully by the SLFP and very violently by the JVP leading to the killing of more than 60,000 Sinhalese youth. The left generally welcomed the 13th Amendment, despite reservations about its adequacy to address the national question. Nevertheless, it is thus far the only act of legislation since independence to address the Tamil national question as a whole as well as put in place an elected statutory body to represent the minorities. The 13th Amendment was weakened from the outset by a combination of forces including the LTTE which helped the President to dissolve a Provincial Council (PC) at will to the more recent Supreme Court action by the JVP and JHU to break up the NE Provincial Council. The war became the pretext for not devolving key powers to the PCs, but it is the unwillingness of successive governments that are to blame.

Resumption of war: The implementation of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was opposed in the North-East and the South for different reasons. However, the overall outcome has been almost continuous war with brief spells of unsuccessful negotiations. Mutual distrust has been a key element and the failure to find middle ground between secession and a unitary state without devolution of power has been the cause of failure of all negotiations. Tragically, the most successful peace effort facilitated by Norway that enabled a ceasefire agreement not only failed but also led to intensified war, unprecedented loss of civilian lives and denial of livelihood for hundreds of thousands. Besides the brutality of the government's war effort, it was the lack of democracy and stubbornness of the LTTE that blinded it to reality and brought not only the LTTE but also many civilians to a tragic end in May 2009.

Without going into details of the failure of various peace efforts, it could be safely said that the failures were the result of putting parochial interests above the interests of the people. There has been an excessive reliance on external players and military strength and therefore more attention being paid to preserving military advantage rather than seek a political solution.

The post-war scenario: Even after the end of the war, the opportunity for rebuilding inter-communal harmony has been ignored by the government. Opportunities existed for resolving the national question by devolution of power based on the 13th Amendment, 13+, 13++ etc. But the government has failed to grab its chance by sliding into a chauvinistic agenda capitalizing on the war victory.

This failure has encouraged Tamil narrow nationalists (the diaspora in particular) to take a vindictive approach towards the government of Sri Lanka. War crimes and abuses of fundamental and human rights cannot be ignored or go unpunished. But clamour for an international inquiry will only harden attitudes.

Firstly the Sinhalese people should be informed that serious crimes have been committed and that the culprits should be exposed. But what matters is to view the offences in context and without covering up particular offending parties, and emphasize reconciliation between the communities over punishment as revenge. However, no reconciliation is possible by burying the truth. The truth has to be brought out so that such events do not recur. It is remarkable that most of the exposures of war crimes had former Sinhalese military personnel as sources. Thus the correct approach would be for the Tamil people to persuade the more sensible elements among the Sinhalese the need for a credible inquiry. That demand patient political work and a more secular approach especially for the leaders.

It is not possible for me as an individual and even for an organization on its own to come with a comprehensive package for solving the Sri Lankan National question. Yet there are some matters that I think deserve serious consideration.

- There is a need for a Tamil leadership capable of addressing the national question in the broader context of the oppression of other nationalities and toiling masses of all nationalities as well as issues of democratic and fundamental rights of all people.

- Progressive and secular forces among the Sinhalese need to be more aware of the impending threat of Sinhala Buddhist fascism to democracy and be more assertive in their democratic demands as well as in addressing issues ranging from democratic rights to national oppression in a connected fashion.
- Leaders of the Tamil diaspora and their Sinhalese counterparts should act in more responsible ways and not create situations that will be detrimental to the resolution of the national question.
- Tamil sentimentalists in Tamilnadu should be more alert to the consequences of their actions. Threats and acts of violence against Sinhalese, especially visitors to India, only weaken the cause of the Tamil people.
- Given the intransigent attitude of the government it is more likely that international pressures cannot always be productive. Thus it is dangerous for Sri Lankan Tamils, the diaspora and Tamil sentimentalists in Tamilnadu to identify themselves with moves by foreign players without understanding the implications.

India has a long historical relation with Sri Lanka that has become complex as a result of the Sri Lankan national problem. India can play a useful role in resolving the national question only through winning the confidence of sober elements on both sides of the conflict. It is not for us in Sri Lanka to dictate Indian policy, but for the progressive and secular forces to enlighten public opinion especially in Tamilnadu so that India will be able to contribute positively without falling prey to the opportunism of sentimentalised politics.

[The above is a summary of the talk intended to be delivered by Comrade Senthivel on 2nd February 2014 in Chennai at the seminar 'The Tamil Question in Sri Lanka and the Indian Approach' organised by the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Red Star. Comrade Senthivel could not attend and the summary was read out to delegates.]

Workers' Education: Matters of Priority

Comrade Siva Rajendran

The essence of labour is the basis of all products in the world. The present form of the human body is a product of toil. It is thus essential to develop, empower and advance the abilities of the work force that is the source of such power. It is thus essential for social activists, trade unionists and educationists to act together to develop workers education which will provide the necessary knowledge, skills, attitude and enthusiasm necessary for the workers to understand contemporary political, economic, social and cultural situations on social-scientific and theoretical bases, and enable themselves accordingly to enhance their ability to work, secure their rights and achieve equality.

The social transformation initiated by the industrial revolution created the worker-capitalist structure. The invention of the steam engine, the establishment of mills and urbanization led to the creation of hundreds of thousands of workers. Exploitation of their labour by the big capitalists who owned the mills yielded massive profits for the capitalists. On the other hand, as a result of hard labour, lack of appropriate wages, slavishness and ignorance, among other factors, subjected the work force to great misery.

Trade unions emerged to unify the power of the tormented workers and to secure their demands. The creation of trade unions was made possible through the dedication and sacrifice of the workers. The first

trade union in Great Britain was established by John Doherty in 1830 and the International Secretariat of Trade Unions was established in Denmark in 1902. History records events across the globe where huge prices have been paid to win even small demands.

Albert Mansbridge (1876-1952) was the first to propose workers' education to induce them to think scientifically. Subsequently, Frances Jane Pringle (1876-1958) initiated education for Workers.

Initially attention was paid mainly to industrial safety of workers, workers' health, and nutrition, basic facilities, working conditions, freedom, wage rise and other such issues. The importance of addressing workers' welfare related matters was emphasised. Yet, the practicality of these matters in agreements made with mill owners was restricted.

The basis of workers' education was broadened in course of time as a result of intense struggles by trade unions with capable and dedicated leaders and by the workers. Extensive demands were put forward concerning safety in workplace, wage rise, working hours, child workers and women workers.

The number of workers joining trade unions rose as a result of severe repression and exploitation of labour by the capitalists. The workers became more powerful. When they undertook more intense struggles the capitalists resorted to extending police repression, military action, firing and imprisonment. A good example of this is the violence unleashed by the authorities of Illinois on workers and their leaders who assembled in the Hay Market in Chicago on 1st of May 1886 and the imprisonment and hanging of workers' leaders. It was because of such workers' and trade union struggles that in later years workers were able to win 'eight hours of work, eight hours of leisure and eight hours of sleep'.

The service rendered by trade unions to secure trade union rights for workers and to provide education for the workers is magnificent. Trade unions have been identified as 'the life, flesh and blood of the workers'. The role played by trade unions in securing wage increases, working conditions in a good working environment, collective agreements and

regulations in the interest of the workers, due promotions and welfare measures is very valuable.

Trade unions play a vital role in providing education for the workers in the sense that it makes possible for the workers what seems impossible.

Activities of multinational companies in the current environment of globalisation have created fresh environments of exploitation in new forms. The World Trade Organization in its report of 2007 has acknowledged that changes in industrial technology and undemocratic government are among factors that have led to a rise in child labour and HIV/AIDS.

In the current context, it is important to provide workers with Trade Union Education and Labour Education on a political and theoretical basis, as outlined below.

1. Compiling information including fundamental, educational and other needs of the workers' movement
2. Organization through collective effort of all parties who could provide workers' education of matter relating to educational needs, resources and implementation.
3. Determining methods for providing education to workers and designing curricula
4. Establishing closely knit networks with providers of education at both national and international levels
5. Implementation of workers' education and expediting research and development
6. Enhancing workers' power through education and re-education and building a culture of learning

The above aspects may be considered the bases for providing workers' education in the current context.

Dan Cunningham in 2007 identified matters that need to be borne in mind when providing workers' education as follows.

- Trade unions should be such that they can face the challenges of globalization while at the same time encourage independent democratic activities.
- Workers' education should be based on equality and in order that it enables the establishment of efficient trade unions that will strengthen the workers.
- Besides using modern technological devices in undertaking education, the scope of workers' education should be broadened.
- In women workers' activities, emphasis should be placed on leadership and participation.

It is essential that workers' education includes political theory and practice, critical outlook and a proactive approach. It is important to enable the struggle for social change and proletarianizing political practice through these means.

Workers' education carried out through trade unions while expanding and broadening in scope should be delivered with a view to securing their egalitarian rights. It is important that the education imparted to them empowers them and gives them the ability to enlarge their activities for political change through establishing links at regional, national and international levels.

If workers' education could be expanded in scope in a way that it would facilitate the mobilization of workers, peasants and the lower middle classes, its results will be of benefit to all.

The Post-War National Question and the Sri Lankan Left

(Part 1)

Imayavaramban

1. Preamble

A tragic end befell the three decades long armed struggle led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on 18th May 2009 on the banks of Mullivaikal, Mullaitheevu, on the east coast of Sri Lanka. The turn of events stunned the Tamil community at home and abroad, as well as many political observers, irrespective of their attitude towards the LTTE and its armed struggle. The mainstream Sinhala and English media in Sri Lanka echoed the sentiments that dominated the Sinhala political landscape and celebrated as victory over 'terrorism' the decimation of the LTTE, which they had consistently presented as merely a terrorist outfit with a secessionist agenda. Neither the LTTE nor its supporters have done much to alter that image among the Sinhalese or to explain that their struggle was for the salvation of an oppressed nationality. The media also repeated, loyally but with less conviction, the government's claim that the war resumed in 2006 was a humanitarian operation that liberated the Tamils from the grip of the 'terrorists'.

Tamil responses to this military victory over the LTTE have mostly been driven by narrow nationalist perspectives and failed to objectively assess its impact on the struggle of the Tamil nationality for greater rights and its implications for holistically resolving the Sri Lankan national question. There have, however, been remarkable analytical and

political studies in wake of the LTTE debacle, to engage with and reflect on the national question and the armed struggle.

Increasing denial of democratic and fundamental rights, concentration of power in the hands of a few, strengthening of the role of the armed forces in the affairs of the state, and surging religious intolerance with state patronage are blatantly visible fascist trends. Given the government's continued and emphatic use of its 'anti-terrorist' credentials to tighten its grip on power, the resolution of the national question is now even more closely bonded with countering the challenges to democracy.

It is here that the Sri Lankan left, although weaker than the nationalists, has a major role to play in the resurrection of democratic and fundamental rights and finding a solution to the national question. The left is important at this juncture in view of its eight decades long political history which, despite the serious failings of the parliamentary left, shows it up as a more credible secular as well as democratic force than its bourgeois political rivals. It should also be emphasized at this stage that it has only been the left — despite its splits, faults and political weakening — that has historically adopted a non-sectarian approach to national oppression. The left, from its beginning, was non-sectarian and had offered a truly national and secular perspective of Sri Lanka in sharp contrast to the ethnocentric Sinhala and Tamil leadership that vied for position under the colonial masters without daring to challenge the basis of colonial rule. Thus, it has been the left ideology that had the potential to address positively the national question which initially found expression as parochial attitudes targeting minorities and later yielded to nakedly aggressive chauvinism.

Thus it is important to understand how leading political actors from the Sri Lankan left with a long history of engagement with questions of minority rights and the national question have historically addressed the Tamil struggle and what their current stands are on the national question. Key events in the history of the left movement are documented fairly consistently despite strong differences among the left parties and factions about their interpretation. Hence this essay will contain only a brief overview of the role of the left in the context of the national question,

bearing in mind the relevance of the national question to class struggle and therefore left politics.

This essay is thus predominantly a comment on the Sri Lankan left's historical perception of the decades old Tamil struggle and the national question and the current position of the left in the context of the defeat of the LTTE, with particular attention to how the 'war victory' is read by the left parties and their respective proposals for repairing ethnic relations and achieving reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka. The essay also accommodates views of some of the radical Tamil critics of the LTTE, writing from a broadly left perspective, explaining the failure of the LTTE-led struggle and offering prescriptions for Tamil national rights, reconciliation and justice in post-war Sri Lanka.

2. The Left and the National Question (1935-1964)

2.1 *Early principled positions*

The left in Sri Lanka, with its roots in the anti-colonial "Sooriya Mal" campaign of 1931-35 had an impressive record of anti-communal politics. Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism since its first serious violent anti-Muslims outbreak in 1915 remained relatively subdued until after the end of direct colonial rule. Even when dormant, Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism sustained its strong anti-Muslim and anti-Christian sentiments.

The next target was the Indian Malayali immigrant worker population located mostly in Colombo. During the economic depression of the 1930s, Sinhala chauvinists led by AE Gunasinghe, founder leader of the local labour movement in the tradition of the British Labour Party, claiming that the presence of Malayali workers was the cause of unemployment, instigated violence against them and demanded their repatriation.

This was the first challenge that the left movement, then in its formative years, had to face from Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism. The left confronted the challenge from a class perspective and succeeded in rallying the working class in support of its firm and principled stand supportive of the Malayali workers targeted by Gunasinghe. It also led

to the eventual isolation of Gunasinghe who was thoroughly exposed as a chauvinist ally of the reactionaries.

It cannot be said that the left, especially the Trotskyite Samasamaja tradition, addressed the national question based on the recognition of the country as comprising more than one nationality and therefore the rights of nationalities the national rights. The Trotskyites were, however, secular in approach and stood for the rights of the minorities. The Communist Party, on the other hand, recognized Tamils as a nationality as early as 1950 and called for the granting of autonomy to traditional Tamil homelands. But there was no follow up to this principled position until need arose to address the national contradiction which found strong expression as the language question in the general election of 1956.

The next chauvinist move against Indian immigrants had two targets: the thriving South Indian business community and, politically more importantly, the plantation workers. The United National Party (UNP), to which the departing colonialists handed the reins of power, legislated in 1948 to deprive Indian immigrants of their franchise and citizenship. The left, with a significant parliamentary presence (18 out of 95 contested seats) shared among the Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP), the Bolshevik Leninist Party (BLP) and the Communist Party of Ceylon (CP), along with representatives of the Hill Country Tamils (then known as Indian Tamils) and a section of the Tamils of the North and East (known as Ceylon Tamils) opposed that unjust act, which was nevertheless passed into law by the UNP government with the support of a sizeable section of Tamil and Muslim parliamentarians.

The left — regrouped in 1951 as the LSSP, the Viplavakari Lanka Samasamaja Party (VLSSP, meaning Revolutionary LSSP) and the CP — although electorally weakened in 1952 by the disenfranchisement of the Hill Country Tamils was boosted by the success of its strike action (Hartal) of 1953 which politically weakened the UNP. Its hopes for greater electoral success in the next parliamentary elections (due in 1957 but held prematurely in 1956) were dashed by a Sinhala nationalist coalition, the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP, meaning People's United Front)

led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led by SWRD Bandaranaike who had left the UNP in 1951, cleverly combined a Sinhala nationalist agenda with public disaffection in order to win the elections. The hopes for the left were also hurt by the VLSSP joining the MEP coalition that formed the government in 1956. The Trotskyite identity of the VLSSP soon gave way to a Sinhala nationalist identity fringing on chauvinism.

Thus, this and other subsequent failings of the left, especially the parliamentary left, on the national question could be correctly understood only in terms of its pragmatic approach based on electoral politics, with adverse implications not only for the national minorities but also the interests of the working class, which provided the political base of the left from the outset.

The LSSP and the CP, while they endorsed the limited anti-imperialist and social welfare policies of the SLFP-led alliance and even defended it against attacks from the right, were apprehensive of the Sinhala nationalist agenda and the associated chauvinist tendencies of the SLFP. The LSSP and the CP, besides voting against the Official Language Act of 1956 that made Sinhala the sole official language, also strongly denounced the 'Sinhala Only' legislation as discriminatory and divisive, within and outside Parliament.

The Official Language Act, as feared by the left, proved to be divisive, and caused Tamil nationalism to strike root among the Tamil public. The inherently anti-left Tamil nationalist leadership, especially the Federal Party, mishandled the language issue by appealing to sentiment rather than reason, and thereby further strengthened the forces of Sinhala chauvinism, which launched a vicious island-wide anti-Tamil violence in 1958.

The Official Language Act also led to the perception of the national question as merely a language issue, although the Sinhala nationalist agenda (which subsequently became a Sinhala Buddhist agenda) had other more important aspects to it. The Federal Party, founded in 1949, was partly aware of this and its manifesto demanded, besides parity of status for Tamil, an end to planned Sinhala colonization in

predominantly Tamil areas, restoration of citizenship to Hill Country Tamils, and a federal form of government.

In practice, however, language related issues dominated electoral politics and the federal state sought for the Tamils failed to address problems faced by the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils. Thus the 'language problem' remained central to the national question and decided the way in which it was understood and addressed, although the question of Sinhala colonization was addressed to some degree in negotiations and political settlements between the FP and the government.

The result was that the Communist Party which recognized Tamils as a nationality in 1950 also was confined to addressing the national question in terms of language; and the LSSP which did not recognize Tamils as a nationality and refused to see the national question in such terms approached the national question in terms of rectifying injustices committed to the Tamils based on the discriminatory language legislation.

2.2 Responding to reality

Sinhala as the main official language may not have seemed the offensive proposition that it was had it not been for the phrase "Sinhala Only" which suggested the exclusion of Tamil. The Bandaranaike government, amid strong protests by the Tamils, was quick to recognize the need to respect the language rights of Tamils. Negotiations, based on retaining Sinhala as the official language, followed between the MEP government and the FP to address Tamil grievances and granting Tamil administrative status in the predominantly Tamil speaking North and East. The outcome was positive since, besides conceding essential language rights, the government also agreed to set up regional councils with power over alienation of land among others.

Against this background, the CP — which in 1957 accepted Sinhala as official language as *fait accompli* — persevered in its call for the language rights of Tamils. Also, given its stand which recognized Tamils as a

nationality entitled to autonomy, the CP came out in strong support and defence of the agreement between the government and the FP (commonly known as the Banda-Chelva Pact, after the names of the respective leaders SWRD Bandaranaike and SJV Chelvanayakam) offering substantial language rights and a significant degree of devolution of power to the proposed District Councils. The LSSP, which was firm in its declared position of parity of status of for Sinhala and Tamil, at least until 1964, but was approving of the B-C Pact.

The UNP, with the aim of recovering lost ground among the Sinhalese in the 1956 elections, organized a mass protest march from Colombo to Kandy to mobilize opposition to the Banda-Chelva Pact, but the attempt was thwarted by effective counter action by progressive elements in the government. Opposition to the Pact nevertheless continued to build among Sinhala chauvinist supporters of the government, especially the influential sections of the Buddhist clergy. Among other factors that facilitated the resistance to the Pact was the failure of the Federal Party to be cooperative with Bandaranaike at a time when he needed the fullest support for implementing the Pact, and its indifference towards forces, including the left, who were defending the Pact.

Bandaranaike yielded to chauvinist pressure and abandoned the Pact in January 1958. This failure encouraged the chauvinists, and what started in April as a campaign to obliterate Tamil letters in signboards ended up with country wide anti-Tamil violence in May. Bandaranaike's failure to act promptly was partly responsible for the escalation of the violence, which was eventually controlled by the declaration of a state of emergency and a curfew and the use of the armed forces to restore order. In August 1958 Parliament passed the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act allowing the use of Tamil in education, public service entrance exams and administration in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Tamil nationalist indifference, if not hostility, towards the left involved considerations of class as well as electoral political concerns, especially since the left had a strong support base among the working class and

people oppressed by caste. Centralization of the language problem by the Federal Party and its whipping up of emotion hurt the left in the electoral politics the North, despite its substantial political base there. The language issue served the FP well until it became partner in government in 1965.

2.3 Reaction to rising Tamil nationalism

The VLSSP, having adopted a Sinhala nationalist line but still with some claim to a left identity, fell out with the SLFP in the course of conflict with the right wing of the SLFP, and the MEP coalition fell apart amid the political chaos in the wake of the assassination of Bandaranaike. W Dahanayake, the interim Prime Minister, dismissed most of the cabinet, dissolved parliament and fielded his own list of candidates in the general election in March 1960. The VLSSP adopted the name MEP to contest the election and won a fair number of seats in a field dominated by the UNP and the SLFP.

The minority government of the UNP was unsustainable and the UNP called for a snap election. The MEP, partly out of over confidence and partly spite, rejected an electoral pact with the SLFP, and was humiliated in the general election of July 1960 by an electorate that rallied towards Sirima Bandaranayake, the widow of SWRD Bandaranaike, who led the SLFP to electoral success. The LSSP and CP, as in 1956, entered into an electoral pact with the SLFP and thereby ensured their parliamentary seats.

The general elections of 1960 confirmed to the left the message of the general election of 1956 that there was little prospect of the left securing a parliamentary majority. The years that followed witnessed heated debates on political line and strategy within the two remaining left parties, namely the LSSP and the CP, leading to major splits in both parties in 1964, but for different reasons. The LSSP split as a result of a majority decision to become partner in government with the SLFP and abandon its earlier demand for parity of status for Tamil and Sinhala. The minority faction organized itself as the LSSP(R) and denounced these moves as opportunist and in breach of Marxist principles. But political expediency prevailed over principle in the LSSP.

The split in the CP over the choice between the parliamentary and revolutionary paths to socialism coincided with the schism in the international communist movement based initially the question of Stalin followed by differences on 'peaceful coexistence' with imperialism and the peaceful path to socialism. The net effect of the two splits was the weakening of the left and a decline in the moral stand of the parliamentary left on key issues including the national question.

The left, as a whole, saw the FP as a representative of the reactionary and conservative Tamil elite. With language still dominating electoral politics, the FP showed little interest in issues of social oppression or workers' rights. The one and only occasion on which the FP sided with the left was the Hartal of 1953, when the FP was relatively weak and needed the support of the communists in the north to defend itself against the violence of the more conservative All Ceylon Tamil Congress (TC). Things changed since 1956 when the FP replaced the TC as the dominant Tamil political party. The stand of the FP on international issues lacked morality with the FP, growingly hostile to the left, invariably finding itself on the side of imperialism, as in the case of its objection to the removal of British naval and air bases and the, nationalization of foreign-owned oil companies in Sri Lanka and siding with the US in the Vietnam War.

It was remarkable that both the LSSP and the CP, despite reservations about the FP, were supportive of the Satyagraha campaign led by the FP in 1961. The CP, it should be noted, was critical of the parochial attitude and the weak strategy of the FP. The collapse of the campaign following the declaration of a state of emergency by the government led to increased bitterness of the FP towards the SLFP. The FP, however, by voting with the UNP to defeat the parliamentary bill for the take-over the Lake House, the most powerful print media organization at the time, and noted for its cynical anti-left agenda, caused the fall of the SLFP-LSSP government. That move by the FP, seen as an expression of support for the UNP, further strained its relations with the SLFP but also the LSSP and the CP.

3. Shifting Stands amid Surging Nationalism (1964-1983)

3.1 *The national question at the fore*

The UNP-led government that came to power in 1965 had the FP as its major partner among six coalition parties. The UNP-FP alliance was based on the understanding that the government will grant language rights to the Tamils, which it did only in part by passing in parliament the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Regulation of January 1966, which only reaffirmed the language rights contained in the *Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958*. The bigger promise of establishing District Councils with some degree of autonomy and power over land and land settlement was not delivered. Although out of electoral political considerations the FP left the coalition in late 1968, its affinity for the UNP remained intact.

Anti-left attitudes had already hardened within the FP by the time the SLFP-led coalition with the LSSP and CP as partners swept to power in 1970. The relationship between the FP and SLFP has since 1965 been based on mutual suspicion, and matters were further aggravated by a series of events starting with the government's decision in 1970 to apply a procedure of medium-wise standardization of GCE (AL) examination performance for university admissions in a way that strongly discriminated against Tamil medium students and provoked much anger among the Tamil youth, especially in the North.

That was followed by the constitution of 1972, which renamed Ceylon as Sri Lanka and commendably declared it a republic but was discriminatory against the Tamils. The accidental killing of seven persons at the Fourth International Conference of Tamil Research in 1974 for which the police were partly to blame provoked public anger and some leaders of the FP encouraged Tamil youth to resort to acts of political violence. The assassination of the popular but pro-government ex-mayor of Jaffna by a small group of Tamil militants led to a police witch hunt which led to further incidents of violence and insensitive police repression.

The FP, with covert encouragement from the UNP, formed the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in 1976 and adopted a secessionist agenda, more as a ploy to restore its fading political fortunes in the North and East. It also encouraged the Tamils living in the south to support the UNP in the elections in 1977. But the calculations of the FP went haywire after the UNP won an unprecedented majority and thrust forward its liberal economic and pro-West foreign policy by consolidating its power under a new constitution with an all powerful executive president and unleashing repression against the working class and the Tamil nationality. The anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 was a highpoint in communal violence but nothing was learned and successive governments have done little to resolve the national question which culminated in the tragic war that lasted until 2009, but leaving the underlying issues unresolved.

3.2 Responses and consequences for the left

Although it cannot be said that the LSSP and CP adopted a chauvinist stand *vis a vis* the Tamils, there has been a clear shift since 1964 in their attitude towards the national question and problems faced by the Tamils. Their pursuit of parliamentary seats led to growing indifference towards addressing the national question since their Tamil voter base was weakening, with little prospect of a left MP being elected from the Northern and Eastern Provinces, after the election of P Kandiah from Point Pedro in 1956.

In 1965, parliamentary political opportunism and politics of bitterness got the better of the two left parties which resented the FP supporting the UNP in the 1965 general election and joining the UNP in government. That bitterness found expression in communal taunts uncharacteristic of leftists inside parliament as well as in their opposition to the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Regulation of January 1966.

More significantly, the LSSP and CP joined the SLFP in its mass protest demonstration against the Regulation. The demonstration was attacked by the police, leading to the killing of a Buddhist priest, which only

helped chauvinist politics. The unprincipled conduct of the LSSP and CP was denounced by the Marxist Leninist faction of the CP as well as by the Trotskyite faction that split from the LSSP in 1964.

The parliamentary left was again put to the test between 1970 and 1976 when they SLFP, LSSP and CP when they shared power with the SLFP. The parliamentary left failed to criticize standardization, although, it subsequently played a role in replacing standardization with a district-wise admission quota basis, which still discriminated against students in certain districts, especially Jaffna and Colombo, but helped students from educationally backward districts. The real beneficiaries, however, were the relatively well to do sections of the students in such districts.

Its indifference on a number of sensitive issues, including the harassment of Tamil youth by the police, further isolated it from the Tamils. It was, however, its role in the drafting and passage of the new constitution of 1972 which removed the formal safeguards that existed against discriminatory legislation, reasserted the chauvinist language policy and granted Buddhism a special status in the constitution that brought shame to the parliamentary left.

The electoral humiliation of the SLFP and its estranged left allies in the elections of 1977 led to grave changes under the UNP. Its policies of economic liberalization and privatization, an openly pro-West foreign policy, and a new constitution which gave the directly-elected executive President almost dictatorial powers plunged the country into a political and economic abyss.

The UNP regime aggravated ethnic tension and transformed the national question into war in 1983. This chauvinistic agenda of the UNP was designed to divert the attention of the Sinhala masses from the adverse impact of the open economic policy. The left as a whole suffered setbacks as a result; and it was only in the early 1980s that the parliamentary left made up with the SLFP and made its political presence felt. The parliamentary left, although not upholding the Sinhala chauvinism of the SLFP, its dominant political partner, has consistently failed to endorse the right of Tamils to self determination.

The Marxist Leninist faction of the Communist Party, calling itself the Communist Party of Ceylon — as opposed to the name Communist Party of Sri Lanka used by the parliamentary faction — also referred to as CP (Peking Wing), and its successors — the Ceylon Communist Party (Maoist) and the New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party — held on to their stand supportive of the rights of the Tamils on a whole range of issues including “standardization” and police excesses against Tamil youth.

The Marxist Leninists took the initiative to expose the opportunism of the FP/TULF in calling for a separate state of Tamil Eelam by challenging the TULF to public debate on the issue. The debates caught on among the public and posed a political challenge to the TULF, which promptly ordered its members to avoid any public debate on the subject. Although the Marxist Leninists rejected secession as a solution to the national question, they stood for the national rights of the Tamils and have since amended their position to recognize the right to self determination for the Tamil nationality.

The more significant among the Trotskyite factions that broke with the LSSP like the Socialist Equality Party (SEP, which split in 1964, and the Nava Samasamaja Party (NSSP) and the United Socialist Party (USP), which broke off in 1977 in the wake of its electoral debacle, recognize Tamils as a nationality with the right to self determination. It is commendable that these political parties which function among the Sinhalese amid violent threats from chauvinists have held on to their respective positions in support of the national rights of minorities.

3.2 The JVP phenomenon

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, People’s Liberation Front) is said to have been founded in 1965. However, its founder leader Wijeweera, a youth league leader of the Marxist Leninist Communist Party, was expelled from that party only in 1966 following due inquiry into his support for and participation in the anti-Tamil Language Provisions demonstration in January 1966 in contravention of the party’s stand.

JVP's understanding of Marxism has been shallow from the outset and its commitment to Marxist ideals dubious, as the JVP started with an anti-working class and Sinhala chauvinist positions, claiming that the youth were the only revolutionary social force. Its chauvinism, which has persisted to this day, has since manifested as stubborn opposition to any form of devolution of power to the minority nationalities.

The success of the JVP in attracting Sinhala youth can be ascribed to the failure of the old left to stand up to the SLFP and the UNP as a left alternative and partly to the creeping growth of Sinhala chauvinism in the South following the emergence of narrow nationalism as a political force across the linguistic divide. The JVP learnt little from the adventurist mistakes of its 1971 April insurrection, and in fact made a deal with the UNP in 1977 for the release of its leaders who had been sentenced for their role in the insurrection. In 1978, the LSSP (Revolutionary), a Trotskyite faction of the LSSP, secured recognition for the JVP from the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, a recognition that was subsequently withdrawn more than two decades later in view of the chauvinism of the JVP.

The JVP entered the electoral fray in the 1980s with little success but, with much of its rural support base intact, it was a stronger force than any left party, and until recently it has been seen as the only left option by a substantial section of Sinhala youth. Although several factions broke with the JVP before and after the insurrection of 1971 on ideological grounds, none survived as a political party, although there remain individuals and groups with a Marxist outlook who have been consistently critical of the JVP's chauvinism, its adventurism and current opportunism.

JVP's chauvinism has repeatedly given the lie to its pretences to being Marxist, and its persistent hostility to any form of devolution of power can only be traced to its chauvinist political origins.

3.3 "Left tendencies" among Tamil militants

The main Tamil militant groups were all successors to the Tamil nationalist politics of the Federal Party, with a track record of hostility to the left, and to Marxist Leninists in particular. There were some groups with founder members who were once associated with left parties and others which attracted deserters of left parties in the wake of the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983. However, whatever left ideology that any group claimed to adhere to was secondary to its nationalist agenda. It should be noted that several Tamil militant leaders of leading militant groups with genuine left leanings were systematically targeted and physically eliminated by right-wing forces within and outside the group.

External factors too played a role in determining prospects for left orientation and an international perspective. For example, the affinity that developed between Tamil militant groups and the Palestinian Liberation Organization in the late 1970s led to the training of militants in guerrilla warfare in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But this tendency faded after 1983 when India chose to play patron to all major Tamil militant groups. Since then, internecine rivalries and manipulation by India ensured that the policies and practice of movements which relied on its patronage and protection were trimmed to suit the interests of Indian state.

It is true that the desire of the militants for armed struggle was inspired by the role of armed action in the Marxist Leninist Communist Party led mass struggle against caste oppression in the latter half of the 1960s. The militants failed, however, to learn the important lesson that politics should command the gun and not the other way round, and that the people should be the masters and the liberation forces their servants. As each organization grew in strength, its attitude became typically that it was the master and the people its subjects, an attitude that found its strongest manifestation in the LTTE.

Thus, while seemingly left tendencies within leading militant groups became secondary to narrow Tamil nationalist politics and not antagonizing the Indian government, the smaller groups with declared

Marxist positions, but lacking in a working class base, despite swearing by their commitment to a separate Tamil Eelam were easily sidelined by the bigger players. The escalation of the war and the rising dominance of the LTTE in the North and East forced the leading personalities out of the country.

However, there are, mainly among the Tamil diaspora, individuals from some of the main militant groups and the marginalized left-oriented groups who show considerable left leanings but have failed to organize politically. One difficulty that seems to dog them is the inability of many individuals to break free of the poorly informed but dominant Tamil nationalism among the diaspora to adopt a left perspective with a vision for the future.

It is also unfortunate that Tamil adherents of the parliamentary left, as a rule, and especially since 1970, played a passive role within their respective political parties and failed to challenge their parties when they erred on the national question. Tamil nationalists of all shades have taken advantage of this failing to brand the entire left as slaves to Sinhala hegemony or as traitors to the Tamil cause.

(to be continued)

Politics of War Crimes and the Future of the Tamil People

Aswaththamaa

Introduction

Sri Lankan politics has of late been clouded by the term 'war crimes'. The brutal end of the thirty-year civil war by military victory has also generated charges of war crimes. The United National Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has over the past few years, taken note of it, especially since an internal review on UN actions in Sri Lanka at the end of the conflict. The report commissioned by the UN Secretary General and authored by Charles Petit has clearly stated that the UN had failed miserably in Sri Lanka and had, as before, kept silent while everything was unfolding. The conduct of the UN, now talking about justice, brings to mind Kofi Annan's belated statement on Rwanda. UN peacekeeping forces were stationed in Rwanda when the Rwandan genocide was unfolding and Kofi Annan was the head of UN. The UN did not do anything to stop the genocide, and 10 years on he has apologized to the people of Rwanda on behalf of the UN.

On the other hand, the US and the West are now posing as champions of the cause of an independent international investigation in Sri Lanka, while they themselves provided sophisticated arms and ammunition to the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) during the conflict. The Tamil polity and the Tamil media imagine that an independent international investigation will help the Tamils to regain the rights in Sri Lanka and insist that the future of the Tamils in Sri Lanka is in the hands of the

UNHRC and depends on the mercy of the West. The politics of war crimes in Sri Lanka is being played, both locally and internationally, for self interest and strategic reasons. This article reflects on the history of war crimes and the politics surrounding it. It also exposes how the Tamil people are being used as a tool in playing politics based on war crimes in Sri Lanka.

War Crimes: Scope and Agenda

The definition of war crimes is contested. According to Manfred Lachs (1945) "A war crime is any act of violence qualified as crime, committed during and in connection with a war under specially favourable conditions, created by the war and facilitating its commission, the act being directed against the other belligerent state, its interests, or its citizens, against a neutral state, its interest, its citizens as well as against stateless civilians, unless it is justified under the law of warfare".

The International Tribunal for the Far East was established in 1946 after the Second World War (WW2), and prosecuted superior officers, Japanese and German, whose crimes were not limited to a specific location. Nuremberg and Tokyo remain to a great extent the symbol of international justice imposed by the victors on the vanquished (Bass 2000). The victorious Allies did not initiate many prosecutions against their own soldiers who had committed what would today constitute war crimes, and usually considered their conduct to have never been as evil as that of the Axis Powers. The selectivity of the prosecutions after WW2 coupled with the need to create an effective mechanism to enforce individual responsibility for war crimes, as well as the need to update the old-fashioned content of the laws of war, encouraged states to negotiate and adopt four conventions on the laws of war, namely the 1949 Geneva Conventions (Jones 2002, Moghalu 2005).

Since the Nuremberg trials, it is common to classify international criminal law into three categories where war crimes constitute one of three main categories of crime, alongside crimes against humanity, and crimes against peace (Broomhall 2003, Clark & Sann 1996). The main

reason seems to be that such tactics were thought to be inhumane or dishonourable since they were unfair or caused unnecessary suffering, even when they otherwise appeared to be necessary for achieving a certain military objective. The area of international criminal law that we are considering is often called "Humanitarian Law," because it concerns the violations of what is thought to be humane treatment during war (Thakur & Malcontent 2004).

Over the years, the scope of war crimes has widened and the agenda set based on world power balances and political bargaining. War crime allegations have acquired fresh political bias with new theories to justify imperialistic actions. Noam Chomsky (2010) notes that "The vulgar politicization of the concept of genocide, and the 'emerging international norm' of humanitarian intervention, appear to be products of the fading of the Cold War, which removed the standard pretexts for intervention while leaving intact the institutional and ideological framework for its regular practice during those years. It is not surprising, then, that in the post-Cold War era, just as the guardians of 'international justice' have yet to find a single crime committed by a great white northern power against people of colour that crosses their threshold of gravity, so too all of the fine talk about the 'responsibility to protect' and the 'end of impunity' has never once been extended to the victims of these same powers, no matter how egregious the crimes." The history of war crimes since the end of the cold war bears clear witness to its political nature.

The Politics of War Crimes

The politics of war crimes trials surrounds us, and is major league. The US Congress passed a law authorizing military invasion of the International Criminal Court at the Hague if it indicted and put any American soldier on trial (Simpson 2004). Saddam Hussein, the former president of Iraq, was put on trial before an Iraqi war crimes tribunal for genocide and crimes against humanity, following his capture in the controversial US-led war that forced him from office. Slobodan Milosevic, President of Serbia following the collapse of Yugoslavia and referred to

as the “butcher of the Balkans” by the West, died at the Hague before a verdict in his trial at the Hague Tribunal— the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. (Sewall & Kaysen 2005, Hagan 2003). Charles Taylor, ex-President of Liberia and a career warlord, is on trial at the Special Court for Sierra Leone for crimes against humanity and war crimes during the country’s deadly, decade-long civil war in the 1990’s. Why are defeated leaders tried as war criminals for genocidal crimes in their own countries, when in centuries past such atrocities were “internal affairs” that barely lift neighbourly eyebrows? Something is amiss in international law and world politics.

Since the international war crimes trials held in Nuremberg and Tokyo following WW2, war crimes trials were held only after the collapse of the Soviet Union which dramatically and fundamentally changed the arena of international politics (Beigbeder 1999). Many things, including war crimes trials, have been said and done in world politics in the name of international law. But what is international law, and does it really matter? The answer to this question has serious implications for war crimes justice. Since war crimes trials are claimed to be held to enforce international humanitarian law, it follows that war crimes trials can only be understood in context.

The Case of Sri Lanka

Undoubtedly, the Sri Lankan state headed by Mahinda Rajapaksa is answerable for the war crimes committed in the final stages of the war, where it is estimated that nearly 40,000 civilians were killed. In a sense, the GoSL could be accused of genocide. The issue, however, is whether the GoSL alone could be held responsible for the war crimes. Are not countries which supported the act by providing arms, ammunition, technical and intelligence support responsible for the war crimes? What right do these countries have to bring up war crime allegations on Sri Lanka? It is also clear that the countries which back an independent international investigation are doing so out of self interest and for geopolitical reasons, and not in the interest of the Tamil people. Yet, at

present, everything is done on the latter pretext with the US and West posing to bring justice to the Tamil people in Sri Lanka.

Had the GoSL been more pliant with the West, would the West have considered bringing justice to the Tamil people? I doubt. The Tamil people are being used as tools for other agendas, and that is where their rights are at stake. The Tamil people need to be extra cautious of things unfolding on their behalf. The question facing them at the moment concerns the scope of the UNHRC resolutions on Sri Lanka. It is known that the UN and its umbrella organizations are neither independent nor autonomous. Decisions made in these fora are political by nature and not intended to bring justice. Mass killings of civilians have in the past been forgiven in these fora for political reasons. So we should be clear that the UNHRC resolution is not about justice but about political interests. On the other hand, GoSL is answerable for crimes committed and justice needs to be served. The point here is that, to understand the UNHRC resolution, one should seriously examine whether a UNHRC resolution can serve justice to the people in Sri Lanka, especially the Tamils.

The premises on which the GoSL arguments are based are important here. GoSL insists that it carried out a humanitarian exercise to protect its citizens from the clutches of terrorists. In practice, the distinction between war, counter-insurgency and genocide is blurred as all three affect civilian populations. In the era of nationalism and nation-states, state power and its adversaries identify with entire nationalities, whether defined racially, ethnically or religiously. Yet, the regime identified with the international humanitarian order clearly distinguishes between genocide and other kinds of mass violence. International legal norms tend to tolerate counter-insurgency as integral to the exercise of national sovereignty and war as a standard feature of international politics — but not of genocide. The point of the distinction is to reserve universal condemnation for only one form of mass violence — genocide — as the ultimate crime and thus call for 'humanitarian' intervention only where 'genocide' has been unleashed, while treating both counter-insurgency and war between states as normal developments, one in the internal functioning of nation-states and the other in the international relations

between them (Mongoto 2004). Even if not made explicitly, the point is clear: counter-insurgency and inter-state violence is after all what states carry out. Genocide is violence gone amok, amoral, evil. The former constitute normal violence, and it is the latter that is bad violence (Stover and Weinstein 2004). The depoliticizing language of humanitarian intervention serves a wider function, whereby 'humanitarian intervention' is not an antidote to international power relations, but its latest product.

Against this backdrop, the GoSL insists that US and the West are planning a 'regime change' in Sri Lanka. That claim serves the GoSL well through its appeal to their local masses and the consequent gain in popularity and votes. But in real politics 'regime change' seems a remote prospect at present. The intention is more to 'correct' the 'waywardness' of the GoSL in the conduct of its foreign affairs. The issue of human rights merely provides the pretext for the US to exert pressure on the government, whereas it is the unwillingness of successive governments to find a solution to the national question of Sri Lanka, based on autonomy for the nationalities and the principle of the right to self determination that has been at the root of the national crisis.

The vulnerability of the government to US pressure has been amply demonstrated by the actions of the Sri Lankan government such as its plea to the EU for the restoration of GSP+ and behind the scenes deals with the IMF. The country is moving towards a fascistic authoritarian state. The state, to achieve its goals, has become increasingly repressive and controls the public sphere and freedom of speech.

What the Tamil People Want

Every time, the annual Geneva Human Rights Sessions in March brings renewed interest and optimism for the Tamil people, thanks to the Tamil media, the Tamil diaspora and the local Tamil politicians, Geneva has been phrased as the place for redemption. But the voices of the Tamil people living in the villages, who have lost everything as a result of the war, speak differently. They talk not about war crimes or international

investigation but about the daily struggle, their militarized lives, desire to know what happened to their love ones who went missing or surrendered to the armed forces after the end of the war. They have many unanswered questions. For them their daily life itself is a struggle. Diplomatic bargaining and outcomes in Geneva will bring nothing for the Tamil people. Thus the question of what the Tamil people want takes centre stage. Today Tamils as any other minority in the country are under the threat of Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism.

What is needed now is a united struggle. Tamils should understand that they are an oppressed community. They have failed to see themselves as oppressed. Tamil nationalists, including the LTTE, failed to support liberation struggles of the oppressed elsewhere. They chose to side with the imperialists and oppressors. The Tamils still do not consider themselves as an oppressed community. The faith that Tamil nationalists have in India and the West derives from this flaw. Almost five decades ago, the Federal Party denounced the Vietnam struggle as communist trouble making and its militant successor, the LTTE avoided denouncing the oppression of the Palestinians or US aggression anywhere. LTTE theoretician Anton Balasingham went to the extent of denouncing the struggle in Kashmir as trouble making. These were acts designed to please India and the West. They should not recur. Tamils must come to terms with the reality that they are an oppressed people. Tamil narrow nationalism like Sinhala chauvinism is doing more harm than good to the Tamils of Sri Lanka. Narrow nationalism and chauvinism which uphold conservatism and pro-imperialist politics, while they appear to be hostile to each other, act to serve similar interests.

Many Tamil intellectuals declare that a regime change though international intervention will help the Tamils to win their rights. But a regime change in today's context will only replace one oppressor with another one. A dictatorship replacing another will certainly persist with the oppression of its predecessor; and superpowers and hegemonic forces will not be troubled by any oppression by a regime that abides by their wishes. But what is certain is that no regime change will bring about a democratic government. The options that the West seeks are either a

right-wing regime with a democratic facade or a military dominated government. The feasibility of such options is enhanced by the continued increase in defence spending even after the end of the war nearly three years ago. The concerns of the US and the West for human rights do not include the growing role of the armed forces in the country's affairs.

Conclusion

At present Sri Lanka is at a critical juncture. Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils who comprise the oppressed nationalities should bring together their struggles for national rights and self-determination as well as unite with struggles against domination and exploitation by imperialism, regional hegemony and big capitalists, which affect the entire country. Likewise, the Sinhalese should unconditionally support all just struggles of the minority nationalities for their rights so that they can join hands in the struggles against imperialism, regional hegemony and big capitalists. These are the challenges that face the people in the immediate future.

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The Sri Lankan Scene

Geneva Games

For the third year running, Sri Lankan politicians and the media, the newspapers especially, are greatly agitated over the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) sessions in Geneva in March 2014, although the outcome seems a foregone conclusion.

A resolution critical of the Sri Lankan government for its human rights record and alleged war crimes has been on the cards months before the government declared the end of the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on 18th May 2019.

A team of countries led by Mexico acting at the behest of the US (not a member of the UNHRC at the time) put together a resolution critical of Sri Lanka for adoption at a special session of the UNHRC in late May 2009, just days after the end of the war. The Sri Lankan government turned the tables on its detractors by pre-empting that resolution with its own resolution commending Sri Lanka for successfully ending its war against terrorism, which was passed with an impressive majority. But that did not mean that the US would give up.

Where the Sri Lankan government failed was in not taking advantage of its military victory over the LTTE to find an interim solution to the national question as well as act to heal the wounds of war. The government chose to strengthen its chauvinist political power base rather than address the genuine grievances of a war affected population.

The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) set up in May 2010 by President Rajapaksa had a limited mandate which excluded inquiry into war crimes. Its critics justifiably accused the LLRC of lack of independence and deplored the manner in which it conducted inquiries in the North. The LLRC report submitted to the President in November 2011 did not address the national question. However, its recommendations on good governance in general and on restoration of civil administration in the North and East were widely welcomed. But the government was slow if not hesitant to implement them, giving the

impression that the LLRC was just a means for it to deflect US-led pressure to investigate war crimes and human rights abuses during the final stages of the war.

The US, when it made its next move in the UNHRC in 2012 March, had plenty of ammunition by way of reports of human rights organizations and other revelations of war crimes, especially by Channel 4. The failure of the government to act on the LLRC recommendations too became cause for criticism. Significantly, India, on whose support the Sri Lankan government counted, voted for the resolution. But, in reality, by agreeing to vote with the US, India had helped to tone down the resolution. The pattern recurred in 2013 March with a few more countries voting against Sri Lanka; and that is likely to be the case in March 2014, despite the hope of the Sri Lankan government that the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) of November 2013 would have created a favourable impression of Sri Lanka with some African countries.

The government's response to the charges of human rights violations and war crimes and to calls for a credible inquiry was outright rejection. This show of defiance, designed to impress upon the Sri Lankan public that the government is defending the country's sovereignty against a US-led imperialist conspiracy, cuts no ice with the West and is inadequate to persuade Third World countries vulnerable to pressure from the US.

Some imagine that the Sri Lankan government is pitting China against India to persuade India to support Sri Lanka. The government knows well that the populist politics of Tamilnadu conditions Indian policy towards Sri Lanka, at least superficially, especially in the run-up to an election to parliament or to the state assembly of Tamilnadu. It also knows that India had on the two earlier occasions helped to soften the US-sponsored resolution. If any country is troubled by Sri Lanka's growing economic ties with China, it can only be the US with plans to isolate and encircle China.

Thus, what needs to be understood about the US sponsored resolutions in the UNHCR, including the one due in 2014 March, is that they have nothing to do with the Sri Lankan national question. As elsewhere, the US is raising human rights issues to persuade the Sri Lankan government to adopt policies that serve US interests. The US is

not fully approving of Sri Lankan foreign policy and the rising influence of China. It resents India's growing dominance in South Asian affairs and its role in Sri Lanka since India undermined the US-backed peace talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE with Norway as facilitator.

The US likes a bigger say in Sri Lanka. In many ways it already has a big say. It has through financial arm-twisting persuaded Sri Lanka to trim its economic and social welfare policies to suit the imperialist neoliberal agenda. But it wants more. However, an announcement of economic sanctions, like the ones slapped on countries ranging from Cuba (more than 50 years ago) to Ukraine (very recently to facilitate the toppling of its president), are not in the agenda, nor is the much touted international inquiry into war crimes. It is, however, possible that Sri Lanka could come under pressure to have a UN Human Rights Secretariat on its soil with implications for other countries in the region as well.

The impressions that a majority of the Sinhalese and Tamils have of the respective roles played by the US and the Sri Lankan government are highly subjective. It is true that the US would prefer the United National Party or someone like the former Army Commander Sarath Fonseka to rule the country. But it knows that only a mass uprising — which is no guarantee of a regime change acceptable to the US — can remove Rajapaksa from power in the foreseeable future.

Rajapaksa, meanwhile, uses the stand of the US and its allies on the issues of war crimes and human rights violations, to posture to the Sinhala electorate as the defender of the sovereignty of the country against a US-led conspiracy in collusion with the pro-LTTE Tamil diaspora. This bogus anti-imperialism still has buyers among a population that not long ago lived in fear of terrorist attacks and sees the Rajapaksa regime as the one that brought relief by defeating the LTTE.

Behind the scenes, the Rajapaksa regime has been meekly submissive to imperialism where it matters and lets the IMF and World Bank dictate economic policy. It pursues with even greater vigour the policies of open economy, liberalization and privatization which the UNP government introduced in 1978. With the country deeply in debt and the economy relying heavily on exports to the West, there is no prospect of its breaking

out of the control of the West. Thus its anti-imperialist bravado only targets the electoral base on which the government and its ultra chauvinist allies depend to keep themselves in power.

Over the past several decades and especially since the end of the war, the two main Tamil nationalist alliances have repeatedly exposed their political bankruptcy. They, like the chauvinists, are fearful of the prospect of a progressive alliance comprising members of all nationalities taking up the cause of the oppressed nationalities alongside the struggle against imperialism and class oppression. They work overtime to convince the Tamil people that the "International Community" is their saviour, demand an international inquiry, and make public calls for intervention by the "International Community", knowing well that the US and its allies use the pretext of war crimes and human rights violations against Tamils during the closing stages of the war to exert pressure on the Sri Lankan government to serve their own agenda and not out of love for the Tamils or a wish to solve the national question.

The Tamil narrow nationalist rivals know only too well that the "International Community" has consistently let down the Tamil people in the past. But being incapable of showing a way forward for the Tamil people they seek an easy way out of their predicament by asking the Tamil population to pin its faith on the West.

They are also under pressure from the elitist leadership of the Tamil diaspora that is actively lobbying American, British, Canadian and Australian politicians to prop up their separatist agenda. Added to this is the clamour from the opportunist political parties of Tamilnadu, some of which, besides urging the central government to adopt a hostile stand towards Sri Lanka, indulge in senseless violence on Sri Lankan soft targets including Buddhist and Christian pilgrims.

The net effect is that the Sinhala chauvinists gain the upper hand by claiming that Tamil separatists at home and abroad are working hand in hand with the West to persecute Sri Lanka. It also helps the Rajapaksa regime to consolidate its position among the Sinhalese.

Politics of Poaching

Poaching by Indian trawler fishermen in northern Sri Lankan waters seriously threatens the livelihood of the fisher folk of the North, especially the Jaffna Peninsula and the north western coast. The fisher folk of the North suffered much during the armed conflict between the government and the LTTE. Sri Lanka Navy used the pretext of conflict to restrict fishing or altogether prevent the fisher folk of the North from going to sea. There was not much relief even during the short spell of peace between the Ceasefire Agreement of 2002 and its effective collapse in 2006.

The nature of Indian fishing changed in the 1980s with large trawlers entering the picture. Their fishing methods, including the use of fine mesh fishing nets and trawling close to the seabed, has already depleted fish resources as well as damaged the fragile eco system along the south-eastern and south-western coast of India, which was also a victim of increased dumping of toxic industrial and agrochemical pollutants into the sea. With severe depletion of fish population in Indian waters, the Indian fishing industry, especially that of Tamilnadu, turned to Sri Lankan territorial waters. But for the occasional conflict with Sri Lankan naval patrol boats carrying out security operations, poaching by Indian vessels continued unhindered and had no impact on the livelihood of the Northern fisher folk denied of the opportunity to go to sea.

Things changed since the end of the war. Although the Sri Lankan Navy still places restrictions on Tamil fishermen going to sea in parts of the north, restrictions have mostly been relaxed in the Jaffna Peninsula and along the north-western coast. The Sri Lankan Tamil fisher folk of the North found to their dismay that their catch was severely affected by the activities of Indian trawlers which cross the maritime boundary with Sri Lanka to move close to the northern coast. The Sri Lankan Navy reported the sighting of 45,167 Indian trawlers in 2013, based on direct sightings and satellite images. The actual number is likely to be considerably more. The trawler owners have not only been greedy but also callous in their conduct. Besides trawling close to the seabed, destroying large quantities of fry and fingerling as well as other marine life near the seabed, the trawler operators also resort to cutting

the fishing nets of Sri Lankan fisher folk either to steal the catch or out of malice.

This problem needs urgent addressing and can only be resolved by the two governments acting in thorough consultation with the fisher folk concerned on both sides. What should be done immediately, however, is preventing unauthorized crossing of the marine boundary by large trawlers (in this case it essentially concerns Indian vessels entering Sri Lankan waters) and the use of fishing methods and equipment that adversely affect marine life close to the coast and the seabed. There is no acceptable reason why the two governments cannot concur on issues which come within the purview of international laws on fishing.

It is proper for the Sri Lankan Navy to drive away or arrest and detain fishing vessels and crew unlawfully entering the Sri Lankan waters, but it is unlawful and cruel to kill or to resort to violence. However, on every occasion on which the intruders had been arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy — and on one occasion the fishermen of Jaffna peninsula — the Indian government has exercised undue pressure on the Sri Lankan government to secure the release of the Indian vessels and crew. India has also used other bullying tactics including the detention of not only Sri Lankan fishermen who stray into Indian waters but also those who travel afar to fish in the Arabian Sea.

It is undeniable that there is a humanitarian aspect to the problem. Based on the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement of 1974, whereby the barren island of Kachchatheevu was ceded to Sri Lanka, agreement was also reached prohibiting fishing outside one's country's territorial waters. This had adverse implications for the fisher folk of southern India and northern Sri Lanka since traditionally they used to cross the strait to fish owing to seasonal variations in local fish population. That practice persisted despite restrictions under the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement of 1974. The present crisis is the result of overfishing by Indian trawlers that has harmed fish and other marine life populations in Sri Lankan waters. The war situation since 1983 favoured the Indian trawler owners who transformed the nature of the fishing industry in South India from one

mainly comprising fishing by small operators of fishing boats to one by hired labour for owners of fleets of trawlers.

There is deliberate attempt to confuse the interests of the wage-earner fisher folk with that of the trawler owning capitalists. The conflict of interest between trawler owners and traditional fishermen has been there for some decades with the former ruining the livelihood of the latter along the entire southern coast of India. Interestingly, it is the voice of the trawler owners in both countries that has been heard in recent discussions, and not that of the fisher folk affected by the unlawful practices.

With the Indian government and the state government and major political parties of Tamilnadu effectively defending poaching by Indian trawlers, poaching continues regardless of various pledges by the Indian government; and media in Tamilnadu propagate the myth that the issue at stake is the racially motivated attacks on Indian fishing crews by the Sri Lankan Navy. This version of events helps the political parties in Tamilnadu to couple the problem with the sentimental issue of national oppression of Tamils in Sri Lanka to achieve political mileage.

The impoverished fisher folk of the North remain helpless, with an indifferent government on one side and a cynical Tamil nationalist leadership on the other. The Tamil nationalist parties which miss no opportunity to pass resolution upon resolution demanding international inquiry into war crimes and to plead for foreign interference to solve the national question rarely has time for problems of the working masses be they Tamils, Sinhalese or Muslims, if it risks offending imperialist or Indian interests. Poaching by Indian trawlers in the North and the seizure of fertile land by the government to enable India to set up a coal-powered thermal power plant are two issues that seriously harm the lives and livelihood of the Tamil people in the North and East. Yet, the Tamil nationalists who wax eloquent about defending Tamil territory against planned Sinhala colonization have refrained from defending the interests of the Tamil people in both issues.

A most cynical manipulation of the fisher folk was witnessed in early February when several associations of fisher folk, frustrated by the lack of political backing, decided to launch a massive demonstration protesting poaching by Indian trawlers. It was agreed that placards will highlight the right of the fisher folk to go to sea unhindered, protection at sea and, most importantly, ending unlawful fishing by Indian trawlers in Sri Lankan waters. This move, timed to coincide with ongoing talks between the governments, had wide support within the fishing community as well as outside. A Tamil nationalist front which saw in it an opening to build its support base among the fisher folk volunteered to co-organize the event. Just days before the demonstration, it decided with the backing of an NGO-funded group of fisher folk to turn up with placards calling for a strong resolution against Sri Lanka in Geneva and pleas for foreign intervention. This angered the fisher folk associations and other supporters including the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party. With their withdrawal, the demonstration turned out to be a damp squib.

The tragedy was that what should have been an effective mass protest that could have secured a voice for the affected fisher folk in negotiations got short changed by a group of narrow nationalists. The hope is that the fisher folk have learned their lesson about Tamil narrow nationalism and its class loyalties and they will not allow the initiative to fall into the hands of forces with conflicting class interests and loyalties. The fisher folk of Sri Lanka and Tamilnadu should take the initiative to find a solution to the problem of fishing in the Palk Strait in a way that issues of livelihood are resolved amicably. It will also be a positive move on the part of the Sri Lankan fisher folk to link their struggles with the struggles of the fisher folk of Tamilnadu, especially on the question of the nuclear reactor in Koodankulam and illegal mineral-sand mining in adjoining coastal areas.

International Affairs

Prospects for the South American Left

Much has been said about the "Pink Tide" in South America in the context of left-oriented political parties coming to power in most of South America. Although it does not mean that South America is going socialist, it is an indicator of the strength of anti-imperialist feeling and desire for social justice across a continent which has suffered some of the worst consequences of imperialist globalization and the neo-liberal economic policies that accompanied it. The "left-of-centre" governments, with the sole exception of Venezuela, have not lived up to the expectations of the people. This essay examines the reasons for the shortcomings and briefly assesses the prospects for the left in South American in countries with "left-of-centre" governments. Emphasis will be on the performances of the governments of Venezuela and Brazil which represent the two ends of the spectrum of commitment to a left agenda.

The Impact of Globalization

Globalization, when it took root in Latin America, led to a moderate economic growth 1980s. As a result, the deregulation of the economy and the wrecking of the social security system did not provoke public protest, except in Chile where the economic crisis of 1982 triggered a wave of mass protests which lasted between 1983 and 1986. Although the protests faded out, their impact lasted and Pinochet lost the plebiscite on his presidency in 1988 and his party was humiliated in the elections that followed in 1989. The beneficiaries, however, were the centre-left and liberal democratic parties which have ruled Chile since 1990.

The global decline in commodity prices in the first half of the 1990's led to economic stagnation and further deterioration of social security, while capitalist profits soared amid privatization and foreign takeover of state enterprises. By the latter half of the 1990s, with the social security system left in tatters by two decades of free market policies, Argentina,

Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela faced the worst of the economic and financial crises aggravated by low commodity prices and the vulnerability of the economies to the recession in the US. However, social movements grew throughout the region with increasingly radical demands, including fundamental structural changes and, by 2005, these countries were free of their neo-liberal regimes.

The Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) led massive land occupation movements throughout Brazil. In Bolivia, uprisings by workers, peasants and indigenous communities led to the fall of two elected governments in quick succession. In Ecuador, mass protests forced neo-liberal regimes to step down in 2000 and again in 2005. Mass upheavals in Argentina led by unemployed workers and impoverished middle class in 2001-2003 led to the resignation of a succession of neo-liberal presidents. In Venezuela a mass popular mobilization with military allies reversed the outcome of the attempted coup of April 2002 and restored President Chavez to power. While they were mighty expressions of popular will, none of them was a mass rebellion with a programme for social transformation.

While the sharp rise in global commodity prices between 2003 and 2008 enabled economic recovery and growth so that the centre-left regimes partially restored social security, social movements receded politically. This phase was interrupted by the global recession which started in 2008 leading to sharp decline of economic growth and a decline in commodity prices. However, the financial systems of South America endured the recession, thanks to the capital controls put in place early in the century. But there was a rise in poverty and unemployment. The social movements revived to launch protests but not challenge state power.

Hopes for Socialist Recovery

It is hard to initiate discussion on the prospects for socialism in South America without reference to Chavez. There are those who swear by Chavez's vision for Venezuela as the global prototype for "Socialism in

the 21st Century” and there are those who dismiss the achievements under Chavez as populist welfare measures based on massive oil revenue. Such limited views not only blur the true significance of Chavez for socialism in South America but also harm the development of a socialist strategy for the region.

Neither is socialism progressing unhindered in Venezuela nor are achievements under Chavez too insignificant to disregard. Capitalism is still alive in Venezuela and wields influence in society through its control over sections of the media as well as well funded imperialist agents. It has off and on proven its ability to create social and economic disorder and incite mob violence; and events since January this year comprise a well orchestrated campaign to weaken and isolate the government of Maduro who succeeded Chavez.

Venezuela has seen landmark achievements in education, public health, alleviation of poverty, hunger and homelessness, and undertaken land reform in earnest. The economy is stable and growing although shortages of consumer goods are not unusual. Chavez was acutely aware that for the Bolivarian Revolution to succeed it could not merely rely on his popularity and charisma. Considerable effort has been put into transforming the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) as a mass political party as well as into building grassroots democracy.

Yet, the fact that Maduro won the presidential election in 2013 only by a slim margin is an indication of the vulnerability of the ruling party and the government. The strong performance of the government in the municipal elections of December 2013 dashed the hopes of the opposition for electoral success in the near future. Two months later the Venezuelan right took to the streets in protest, allegedly about the real issues of economic scarcity and insecurity, but actually to demand the removal of Maduro from power. The protests thus reflect the weakness of an opposition badly divided by its last electoral defeat. Significantly, right wing hardliners associated with the failed coup attempt of 2002 and with little patience for the electoral process have induced provocative violence. In the process, opposition's presidential candidate Capriles who has faith in the electoral process was carefully sidetracked.

The Western media, including some of the moderate left and centre liberal media, are consciously creating an impression of the government using state violence to put down genuine mass discontent, whereas the protests, confined to the wealthiest neighbourhoods of Caracas, are by middle class participants raising mainly middle class issues. It is unlikely that the opposition will have its way as long as the government stands firm and strengthens its programme of empowering the people. But the threat will remain as long as capitalism is alive in Venezuela and the opposition has the backing of US imperialism.

The anti-US imperialist wave in South America had been there for a decade when Chavez was elected in 1998. But it was Chavez's Bolivarian project that gave it fresh impetus with far reaching political consequences for the region and beyond. Venezuela's role in reversing the advance of the IMF in South America and initiatives like the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) — founded in partnership with Cuba in 2004 and with nine members now — and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), founded in 2011 bringing together the 33 nations of the region to the exclusion of the US and Canada are important anti-imperialist milestones. Since the struggle for socialism is inextricably tied with freeing the economy from imperialist domination, an immediate task for the left is to reinforce the anti-imperialist movement in South America by encouraging a regionally integrated national economy, but free of illusions about the interests and loyalties of the local bourgeoisie.

Bolivia and Ecuador, which are important partners in ALBA and politically close to Venezuela, claim to be committed to socialism and adopt clearly anti-imperialist positions on international issues. But their economies are still under imperialist domination owing to their continued reliance on export of primary goods, mainly petroleum and minerals. The imperialist burden has not been significantly eased by the nationalization of resources. Such failings have to be understood in the context of the process of reprimarization of the economies that accompanied imperialist globalization.

Analysts with different outlooks have studied the case of Brazil in great depth and, whether approving or disapproving, they concur on the direction in which Brazil has been heading under Lula Da Silva and his successor Dilma Rousseff.

The election of Lula was a sign of hope to many anti-imperialists and socialists based on the circumstances and the forces that brought him to power in a post-military electorate that was polarized between a liberal, free market, agro-mineral elite allied with imperialist multinational corporations on the one hand and a worker, peasant, rural worker and lower middle class nationalist bloc, intent on promoting public ownership, social welfare, redistribution of income and agrarian reform on the other.

Between 1984 and 1994 the residual statist capitalism of the previous military regime vied with emerging "free market" capitalism. With the impeachment of President Collor the statist sectors yielded to the alliance of agro-mineral and finance capital linked to overseas markets, which enabled the election of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, an ex-leftist academic turned free market enthusiast, as President.

Cardoso denationalized and privatized the economy and promoted reprimarization of the economy so that income and land concentrated in the hands of a few and strategic sectors were increasingly in foreign hands. His neo-liberal policies opened the door wide for foreign capital to take over critical industrial and banking sectors. During his tenure (1994-2002) foreign investment flowed in with foreign-owned agro-mineral companies leading the foreign owned companies. The opening of lucrative sectors in agriculture, mining and energy also led to the decline of manufacturing, technology and skilled services, and thereby labour earnings as a percentage of GNP. Thus Cardoso's economic "reforms" hurt industrial labour, public ownership, farmers and rural landless workers and provoked widespread strikes and land occupations.

The Unified Workers' Central (CUT) and the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), respectively, representing militant labour and landless

peasantry joined the middle class to support the Workers' Party (PT) to elect Lula. What was suspect was that while many left intellectuals, politicians and NGO activists hailed Lula as a progressive, international financial institutions, heads of imperialist governments, and mainstream global media praised him as a "pragmatic leader".

Brazil is the most populous country in South America and militant movements opposing imperialist globalization propelled the Workers Party and Lula to power. Hence, left and progressive forces placed much hope on President Lula. But Lula, initially to the shock of his supporters, and his chosen successor Dilma, less surprisingly, have surpassed Cardoso in subjecting the Brazilian economy to reprimarization and neo-colonial dominance by willingly accepting extractive capital as the driving force of the economy. This demonstrates the enormous power that finance capital and Multinational Corporations (MNCs) wield in Brazil and the lack of will on the part of the elected leaders of the left to challenge them.

Reprimarization and Re-colonization

"Reprimarization" of the economies in South America which accompanied globalization continued to gather pace in this century, even after left leaning governments replaced pro-Western regimes in most of South America. By and large, the policies pursued by the "left" governments are not guiding the economy towards the intended economic independence owing to the incapacity of the private and state sectors to develop a national industrial economy in the face of the immediate attraction of opportunities, high prices and access via 'partnerships' with MNCs to the lucrative market in Asia.

Those familiar with the conduct of national bourgeois and "left-of-centre" governments in South Asia will not be surprised by the accommodation of South America's left-of-centre regimes with imperialist globalization and its implications, since even major left political parties have acceded to such compromise.

By the latter half of the 1970's, the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist will of the national bourgeoisie of the former colonies and semi-colonies began to weaken as they were unable to develop alternatives to the imperialist dominated economy without relinquishing at least in part their dominance over the toiling masses. The national bourgeoisie in much of the Third World either willingly compromised with imperialism or ceded power to the comprador bourgeoisie. Many left parties which could through mass political work deter such submission to imperialism weakened themselves through resorting to parliamentary opportunist politics; and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism in Russia, China and other socialist countries removed the last major barriers to neo-colonial control. Thus reprimarization became part of pragmatic politics, whereby the neo-colony, while claiming to be anti-imperialist to its electorate, would submit to imperialism under various pretexts.

The extractive capitalism that we witness today is not the same as that of the colonial era where predatory capitalism had unlimited access to the natural resources of the colonies which it used to obtain a steady supply of mineral, agricultural and other primary goods. Today's process has a strong voluntary component, with governments of former colonies acting as willing or reluctant junior partners who collect royalties — in the form of taxes or a share in profit — for the exported primary goods. Reprimarization has become a means of sustenance for the ensnared state which is forced to export more to keep the economy afloat and in the process borrow more from extractive capitalist investors. Thus, irrespective of the intention of the state in reprimarizing the economy, the country pays a heavy price by way of indebtedness, environmental damage, lopsided economic growth and growing social disparity.

Resistance to reprimarization in South America has come mainly from indigenous people who dislike the penetration of extractive capital. Their concerns cannot be readily rejected in the name of economic development. Extractive capitalism does not exist in isolation and, along with it come infrastructural requirements and demands from the lending agencies which challenge the interests of the indigenous people and their

environment. Those who see modernization as an end in itself, including some on the left, are insensitive to the needs and rights of the tribal and indigenous populations. It will be well to remember that resistance from tribal and indigenous people to the perceived effects of 'development' as part of the scheme of globalization arises out of actual struggles for control over and access to their land, knowledge, and resources.

Thoughts for the Revolutionary Left

Election of left-of-centre governments and nationalization of resources do not imply meaningful redistribution of income and wealth, let alone transforming society. The Latin American national bourgeoisie have more political influence than their comprador bourgeois predecessors, and the left-of-centre governments of South America, in the process of serving bourgeois interests, are often at odds with revolutionary mass movements on policy matters. Although some governments claim to build socialism through incremental reforms, past international experience is that it is not possible. In reality there is compromise, and while the left loses credibility with the masses the bourgeoisie have their way.

To achieve social change, the revolutionary left should politicize and mobilize the people for mass political action. To some degree, the PSUV attempts it in Venezuela. But it is not easy, given the way class forces are balanced and with continuing US meddling through subversive agencies like the National Endowment for Democracy. Those who expect Venezuela to steadily advance to socialism in the existing political setting ignore the reality that capitalism and socialism cannot co-exist for long and that sooner than later one will prevail over the other. As the enemies of socialism are also sworn enemies of democracy, forces of socialism need to strengthen institutions of mass democracy or people's democracy to prevail over bourgeois democracy whose failure risks fascism.

Those who desire socialism in South America should take an objective view of the situation. Limited socialist goals are attainable in Venezuela, by the politicization and activation of the masses. Yet, the revolutionary

left can relate to the left-of-centre governments only on the basis on unity and struggle. Unqualified rejection of a left-of-centre government is as much folly as unconditional support for it. Support can be unconditional in specific issues like resisting attacks by imperialism and local reaction. Support for the government's social programmes need to be conditional and issue based, while encouraging the government to politically empower the masses.

A nominally left-of-centre government acting against the interests of the people should be criticized and corrected; and, on occasion, the revolutionary left would have to play a key if not leading role in mass mobilization to defend the interests of the people. There is, however, need for caution in handling such contradictions. Reactionary forces, especially when in opposition, do steal the slogans of the left in the name of public interest and even hijack left-initiated campaigns. It is thus important that the progressive forces always keep the initiative.

The approach of the revolutionary left is based on class and class struggle. The attitude of the left towards a state without proletarian identity can only be based on the democratic relationship of the state with the people; how the state addresses the needs of the people and defends them against their oppressors and exploiters; how it protects national independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty from imperialism; its policy on conservation of resources; and its care for the living environment, among others.

Based on the above, the stand of the revolutionary left may vary from qualified support for the Venezuelan government to strong criticism of the Brazilian state in defence of the oppressed masses. The stand taken by sections of the 'radical left' — not only certain anarchist and Trotskyite groups but also some claiming to be Marxist Leninist — on Venezuela is unwise under prevailing conditions. Their dismissal of the entirety of the government-led mass political projects in Latin America, even to the point of siding with the right in rejecting the governments of Ecuador and Venezuela, is unacceptable, although they are right to criticize defects and argue that the processes do not constitute socialist transformation. But an indiscriminately negative approach in place of constructive

criticism isolates them from the masses. Dogmatic sectarianism — which in the past unconditionally rejected trade union activity, issue-based struggles and united front work — did not help the left in any way but instead enabled the right to reverse the gains of working class and mass struggles.

What is needed today is to reactivate the trade union movement in the context of an expanding informal sector. The trade union movement along with the left should play a proactive role in organizing non-unionized labour. The left should creatively tap the revolutionary potential of communities affected by the penetration of extractive capital, who have been at the forefront of class struggle in the early 21st Century. It also needs to be the agent for reconciliation among nationalities, national minorities and other socio-ethnic groups, whose differences are now increasingly exploited by imperialism to undermine national unity and obstruct solidarity among the oppressed.

Imperialism seems to have learnt more from history than the left movement as a whole in dividing and weakening the main enemy: it forms alliances with potentially progressive forces while much of the left falls victim to sectarianism and opportunism, when what is needed is a strong anti-imperialist united front, nationally and internationally. The left should also recognize that each country is unique and that conditions could vary within countries so that there is no universal revolutionary strategy despite a common ultimate goal.

On the positive side, globalization has not ended class struggle but has only altered the way it manifests itself and, in fact, has sharpened class contradictions. Globalization is not a strategy that imperialism devised from a position of strength but from a position of internal weakness. Neoliberal regimes have been successfully challenged in South America and globalization is seriously challenged in southern Europe. Capitalism with Chinese characteristics while trying to join the ranks of imperialist powers is internally challenged as the global economic crisis slows down economic growth in China.

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Capitalism is in crisis and neo-liberal economics and the strategy of globalization cannot rescue it. The crisis can only deepen from here on, but revolutions do not occur spontaneously when conditions mature. Economic crises trigger protests but protests by themselves do not bring about political change. The move from protest to political change demands good organization and concentrated effort. It was organization and mobilization of social forces and the creation of alliances to isolate the main oppressor that enabled social upheavals in the past century.

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(Drafted on 5 March 2014)

Confrontation in the Ukraine

The Regime Change Theatre

The collapse of the Soviet Union gave US imperialism the chance for global domination. Revival of capitalism in the former socialist countries of Europe was no guarantee of US hegemony and the US lost no time to ensure that the Soviet Republics which abandoned socialism also cut loose from Russia. The US invested in numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in each country to cultivate the “colour revolutions” which brought about regime changes to its liking. It spent five billion US dollars over 20 years in Ukraine to lure it towards the US and EU. That price tag for regime change is trivial compared to the combined cost of more than six trillion dollars in Iraq and Afghanistan with the job still unfinished.

The US resorts to regime change only to replace the rulers it dislikes with minions of its choice so that the new order fits with its aim of regional or global hegemony. Things, however, can fail to follow plan and, although events in Ukraine initially unfolded according to the US foreign policy agenda for the former Soviet Union, they went wrong halfway. Its latest manoeuvre lost its way when its handpicked puppets lost control of the protests to armed fascists with Nazi links. Now there is scramble to fix things before they spin out of control. The Western media indulged in a damage limitation exercise by hastily admitting, after earlier vehement denials, the role of Ukrainian neo-Nazis in the protests.

The protests that started in November 2013 were all through confined to the capital Kiev and the government was always willing to negotiate. Shortly after the violence of 20-21 February left dozens of protesters and 15 police officers dead, President Viktor Yanukovich and opposition leaders signed an agreement on 21st February — witnessed by the foreign ministers of Poland, Germany and France and the special envoy of Russia — whereby a special law would immediately restore the Constitution of 2004, constitutional reform would be in place by September 2014 and presidential elections held before December 2014, new electoral laws

passed with a new Central Election Commission, recent acts of violence investigated under joint monitoring by the authorities, the opposition and the Council of Europe, the authorities will not impose a state of emergency, and both sides will refrain from violence and carry out serious efforts to return life to normality. But the very next day, parliament impeached Yanukovich, who was forced to flee Kiev by the violent street actions of the openly racist, anti-Jew, Hitler-worshipping Svoboda party, now a major partner in government.

On 5th March it came to light that Ukraine's pro-Western leaders had a hand in the killings of both police and protesters by using hired snipers, but by then the conspirators had fulfilled their purpose. This matter demanding urgent and serious investigation by the US, the EU and Russia will not be addressed while the attention of the West is on dealing with the Russian challenge, despite the new regime in Kiev likely to be a liability to the West.

The Russian Response

Since the end of the Cold War, the US has escalated its encirclement of Russia by building base after base, setting up missile site after missile site, and seeking new locations including in Ukraine. NATO brought into its orbit not only the former Warsaw Pact allies of the Soviet Union but also former Soviet Republics, while assuring that the moves had nothing to do with an increasingly sceptical Russia.

The US also made rapid advances in Central Asia. But the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) comprising China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan reversed US gains in Central Asia. The US, however, retains its air bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on the pretext of the Afghan war amid growing objections.

Of late, it intensified efforts to bear pressure on Russia along its western fringe. Russia recognized the serious strategic threat posed by the EU-NATO bid for Ukraine, and it responded firmly with the declaration that it will not be a passive observer of the US and EU backed coup to

overthrow a democratically elected friendly government and install a puppet regime on its border. Russia promptly moved troops into Crimea, where it has the right to retain 25,000 troops to defend its military base in the peninsula, and moved troops to the Ukraine border in readiness to protect the people in the east and south of Ukraine, where the coup is unpopular.

Russia learnt some foreign policy lessons the hard way. Its every concession was taken advantage of by the US to fulfil its global ambitions. Russia and China, fully aware of US intentions to encircle and isolate them, did not stand up to the US in the UN Security Council when it pushed resolutions against Afghanistan and Iraq because they thought that it would placate the US. Their lapse granted legitimacy to the unlawful wars of the US and its European allies, at least nationally. Russia and China erred again on Libya, and it was only when Syria was targeted that they awoke. Russia realized its far reaching implications for not only Iran but also itself. By firmly defending Syria, it deterred an impending attack on Syria by the US and its NATO allies.

The imperialist West used eastern Europe twice in the 20th Century to invade Russia, killing and wounding tens of millions of Russians. Hence Russian response to developments in the Ukraine will be more assertive than to events further away. Russia did not bluff in Georgia some years ago when the West was up to mischief, and is not bluffing in its defence of the right of autonomous Crimea to hold a referendum on secession from the Ukraine and applying to join the Russian federation. Its warning to intervene in the Russian speaking regions of Ukraine is as serious.

Although the military and economic threats against Russia by the West cannot force Russia to retreat, they cannot be dismissed lightly in the context of US recklessness and disregard for humanity. It should be noted that amid US threats of sanctions, Russia is already under attack in the finance sector with foreign investors pulling their money out of Russia. Thus an escalation of the battle of nerves is likely in the short run.

Prospects for Ukraine

Ukraine includes historical Russian provinces in the east and south and Crimea, granted to it in 1954 by Nikita Khrushchev — a Ukrainian himself — during his rise to power. A significant economic factor for Ukraine is that if the coup and the US-EU bid to take over Ukraine lead to its secession, the economically stronger east and south could rejoin Russia leaving the poorer west at the mercy of predatory Western bankers and corporations. On the other hand, the US, to deflect attention from the humiliating secession of Ukraine will provoke confrontation, which could lead to limited war. Ominously, Ukraine's interim Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk announced on 7th March that he has invited the NATO Council to Kiev and has travelled to the US for "high level talks".

The US can push for sanctions against Russia because, unlike Ukraine or Europe, it will not face the consequences. Russia's strong weapon in the Ukraine has been gas, which could be directed at a hostile West Ukraine receiving 60% of its gas as well as the EU receiving 30% of its supply from Russia, most of which passes through Ukraine. Russia could thus strike back at the EU, whose economic woes are far from over.

Ukraine has more to lose not only by way of a risk of secession of its east and south but also by losing out economically by coming under the umbrellas of the EU — with little to offer to its poor members besides prescriptions for austerity — and of NATO, which will place Ukraine under greater military threat than its members on the west.

Concluding Remarks

As in Syria, the regime-change conspiracy was planned in the US, and the links with the neo-fascists, although an embarrassment in the context of their dominance, were not entirely by oversight.

US officialdom is echoed by the loyal media in denouncing Russia for "invading" Ukraine. But it is a lie — like earlier lies regarding Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya — to cover up the role of the US in the coup. The Russian presence in the Crimea is legitimate and within the legal limit of

up to 25,000 troops in the country. Russia has only warned that it may act to protect civilians if threatened by the neo-Nazis.

While painting a picture of Russian build-up in Crimea, the US has escalated military build-up in the region. The US and EU have imposed sanctions and travel bans on Russian officials and initiated a campaign to demonize Russia as fascist while endorsing the membership of the fascist Svoboda party in the provisional government of Ukraine.

The coup in Ukraine was motivated by NATO's plans for expansion, based on the overall scheme of global hegemony of the US as well as by the interests of US oil companies seeking to curtail fuel exports from Russia in order to boost their own profits. The priorities of the US are clear from its cutting back of SNAP food assistance for hungry families by 8.7 billion dollars blaming shortage of funds but only weeks later pledging ten billion dollars in assistance to the new regime in Kiev.

The people in the south and east of Ukraine are resisting the coup as do many in the west because memories of Nazi rule during World War II have not faded in Ukraine which suffered over four million civilian deaths in the hands of the Nazis. But right wing coups backed by US imperialism and its allies are hard to reverse. Resistance will persist, nevertheless, and the failure of US imperialism to control Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya shows that the US aggressor will be defeated in the long run.

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IACenter.org

(Drafted on 10 March 2014)

NDMLP Diary

NDMLP Statement to the Media

18th March 2014

Oppose Arbitrary Arrests

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on the recent arbitrary arrests and detentions and the recovery of the skeletal remains of a person who went missing last year.

Balendra Jeyakumari and her daughter Vibushika have been arrested at their home in Tharumapuram, Kilinochchi by the Prevention of Terrorism Division of the Police. It is said that they are being investigated under detention order. Following this, human rights activists Ruki Fernando and Rev. Praveen Mahesan were arrested by the same police force. Meantime, the skeletal remains of science teacher Karthigesu Niruban who went missing in September last year were found in Mankulam, and identified and confirmed as his by relatives. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly condemns these violations of human rights and the ongoing militarily oriented chauvinistic state oppression in the North. The Party urges the immediate release of those arrested, due inquiry into the disappearance and recovery as skeletal remains of the science teacher Niruban, and the identification of the culprits.

Arbitrary arrests, detentions, disappearances and recovery of skeletal remains are not new to Sri Lanka and not limited to the North-East. They have occurred plentifully in the South. The recent incidents of Kilinochchi and Mankulam are mere extensions of a pattern whose echoes that are heard in Geneva today. Amid this, the Mahinda Chinthana government is unwilling to give up its arrogance of chauvinist oppression, owing to which it persists in its acts of planned vengeance.

No mother can bear to see her son's name on a list of missing persons. Likewise, how can individuals who have lost a husband, brother or

sister live with peace of mind? Balendra Jeyakumari and her girl child Vibushika are among the thousands in such conditions. Calling for justice for a son or a brother cannot be considered wrong. It is clearly true that the arrested activists have been victimised for being the voices of thousands of mothers. Hence the Party urges the immediate release of those arrested and an urgent inquiry into the case of the science teacher Karthigesu Niruban who went missing and later found as skeletal remains.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP Statement to the Media

8th January 2014

Usurious Banking Practices

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Party in connection with the immediate crises faced by the peasantry.

Banks which lent money to peasants claiming that they were helping them are now breathing down their necks for repayment of capital and interest. The peasants had already suffered heavy losses owing to damage to their potato and onion crops and other subsidiary food crops due to heavy rain. The peasants were stunned the subsequent damage to their rice crop owing to drought during the main cultivation season.

It is despicable that the lender banks are resorting to threats and harassment of the peasants who are in a state of daze and loss of direction as a result of their heavy losses. Some cultivators have been pushed to suicide and attempted suicide. Hence the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party urges the government on behalf of the peasants that it should intervene in this matter to write off the agricultural loan as well as provide other necessary relief.

The Mahinda Chinthana government which boasts that Sri Lanka is an agricultural country is ignoring the peasantry as a whole; and the peasants of the South clad in loincloths gathered in protest in Colombo to distribute leaflets explaining their woes. Under these conditions, the

plight of the war-affected peasants of the North-East is one in which they have no relief whatsoever. Peasants who have been affected by the stationing of the army, denial of resettlement, land encroachment and planned colonization face loss of crop owing heavy rain, severe drought and mist caused by climate change. Although they struggle against these hazards to produce some crops, their produce does not fetch a fair market price.

Amid the decline in prices caused by various factors, the peasants are unable to even recover their costs owing to the actions of middlemen. Besides, the plentiful import of onions, chillies, potatoes and other subsidiary foods cause a fall in market prices. How could the peasants who thus suffer blows from several directions repay their loans? In particular, thousands of peasants from the five districts of the Northern Province who received bank loans are today destitute. The bank loan on the one hand and the rising prices of essential goods and the soaring cost of living on the other are tormenting the peasants. Hence the government should come forward to write off the agricultural loan and to provide other necessary forms of relief.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party calls upon all political parties and public organizations to join hands to provide cooperation and support to the peasants in this grave problem that confronts them.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP News Release to the Media

11th March 2014

Imperialist Intentions in Geneva and the Desperation of Tamil Nationalists

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party addressed a meeting for the youth held at the Jaffna office of the Party. The following is an excerpt of his address.

The US has exposed its imperialist ulterior motives by releasing the draft text of the resolution that it intends to bring up at the United

Nations Human Rights Council Sessions in Geneva. Not knowing that, the US-loyalist Tamil nationalist leaders conducted false propaganda among Tamils that the Geneva resolution would turn out to be a great blessing to the Tamils. Now they are moaning and groaning that they have been let down. This is an expression of their short-sighted narrow politics with loyalty to the White maters with little understanding of imperialism. What we witness today is an expression of the politics of foreign loyalty of the Tamil leadership which is unable to make out whether the wolf is shedding tears out of its own hunger or out of pity for the goat getting drenched in the rain.

From the last century to this day, members of the so-called Tamil leadership have been loyal stooges of British colonialists and then the US imperialists. But the Tamil people have not been rewarded with any political returns for all the submissive loyalty shown by the Tamil leadership. The British and later the Americans have always been on the side of the ruling Sinhala Buddhist ruling class elite.

To readily forget on whose side Britain, the US and India were in the closing stages of the war — during which war crimes and human right violations are said to have occurred — and to hope for a resolution on an international inquiry into war crimes to emerge from Geneva through their initiative is as comic as asking the person who provided the stick to strike with to give evidence in support of the victim.

What the US and the countries of the West want are not the North and East or the Tamil people. They want the whole of Sri Lanka in their global hegemonic grip. Since the Rajapaksa brothers do not offer the absolute compliance that they desire, they are flinging ropes from Geneva in order to either tame the Rajapaksa brothers or replace their regime with another to the liking of imperialism. It is for this purpose that the draft resolution for Geneva has allocated time to discuss Sri Lanka in the 26th and 27th Sessions of the UNHCR. By portraying the US and Britain which conduct themselves in such fashion as the saviours of the Tamil people, the Tamil leadership's is only seeking to deceive the entire Tamil people.

Periodic declarations by the Tamil political parties such as "there comes the pressure" "here comes the mechanism" "the Internal Community is watching intently" and "an international inquiry is due" by pointing to Chennai, Delhi, Washington and London have been acts of political deception. The Tamil people, especially the younger generation, should reject such political falsehoods and superstitions and come forward to take the road of clear and far-sighted politics for the people. Otherwise, once again, the people will receive only disappointments and losses.

Answering the question "Why did you participate in the awareness campaigns organized by the Tamil leadership the past?" raised during the discussion, Comrade Senthivel said that the Party participated in those struggles for two reasons. One is that the Party has strongly condemned the political, economic and military oppression imposed on the Tamil people by the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist regime even after the end of the war. Workers, peasants, fisher-folk and women continue to be severely affected. The Party, therefore, has participated in these awareness campaigns to emphasize its own demands. The Party participated in the campaigns to take up the issues of resettlement of the people in their own areas, encroachment of land by the military, planned colonization, the release of political prisoners, due rehabilitation for those who have been resettled, civil administration, normal life, democracy.

Secondly, the Party has meanwhile urged the Tamil political parties on those issues as well as a common programme for a political solution. In particular, the Party emphasized the need for progressive Tamil nationalism. But the Tamil political parties carry on with the attitude that such things cannot be expected of them and that they will continue with their domineering elitist political line. While the parties of the Tamil National Alliance lack unity and solidarity, they pursue votes, positions, power and political domineering. Under the cloak of Tamil nationalism, they continue to show the Tamil people a narrow political path.

Meantime, those in the Tamil National People's Front are seeking to go along the road of Tamil Eelam by pushing a 'two nations theory'. Their Tamil narrow nationalist position is rich nutrition for the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists and the regime of the Rajapaksa brothers;

meanwhile the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist projections and practices undertaken by them in the South nourish the Tamil leadership. Under these conditions, the Tamil leaders have no practically feasible policies or programmes to guide the Tamil people. As a result, they are surrendering to and pleading with the rulers of the US, Britain and India, kissing the feet that kicked them.

There is a need to move away from this state of affairs and advance along the path of mass struggle among the Tamil people for democracy and a political solution to the national question based on the right to self determination. That should reflect the aspirations of the Tamil people and the fundamental problems of the workers, peasants, fisher-folk, women and those oppressed by caste. Such a stand should be reflected among the ordinary toiling Sinhalese people of the South and create an understanding among them about the case of the Tamil people for a political solution.

It is therefore that the Party has continued to emphasize that the Tamil political parties should transcend ballot box politics aiming at posts and portfolios and come forward to join a common programme for winning autonomy for all nationalities of Sri Lanka within a United Sri Lanka, based on the principle of the right to self determination. Comrade Senthivel pointed out the importance of the young generation taking these matters into consideration.

(Reported by: Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary, NDMLP)

News Report

21st March 2014

An awareness campaign organized by the Ceylon Teachers' Association denouncing the murder of science teacher Niruban and demanding due judicial inquiry took place today in Jaffna. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party expressed its fullest support for this campaign and participated in the well attended demonstration.

Conversation with Comrade Lenin

Vladimir Mayakovsky

Awhirl with events,
 packed with jobs one too many,
 the day slowly sinks
 as the night shadows fall.

There are two in the room:

I

and Lenin

a photograph
 on the whiteness of wall.

The stubble slides upward
 above his lip

as his mouth
 jerks open in speech.

 The tense
 creases of brow
 hold thought
 in their grip,
 immense brow
 matched by thought immense.

A forest of flags,
 raised-up hands thick as grass...

Thousands are marching
 beneath him...

 Transported,
 alight with joy,

 I rise from my place,
 eager to see him,
 hail him,

 report to him!

“Comrade Lenin,
 I report to you

(not a dictate of office,
 the heart’s prompting alone)

This hellish work
 that we’re out to do

will be done
and is already being done.
We feed and we clothe
and give light to the needy,
the quotas
for coal
and for iron
fulfil,
but there is
any amount
of bleeding
muck
and rubbish
around us still.
Without you,
there's many
have got out of hand,
all the sparring
and squabbling
does one in.
There's scum
in plenty
hounding our land,
outside the borders
and also
within.
Try to
count 'em
and
tab 'em
it's no go,
there's all kinds,
and they're
thick as nettles:
kulaks,
red tapists,
and,
down the row,

drunkards,
 sectarians,
 lickspittles.
They strut around
 proudly
 as peacocks,
badges and fountain pens
 studding their chests.
We'll lick the lot of 'em
 but
 to lick 'em
is no easy job
 at the very best.
On snow-covered lands
 and on stubbly fields,
in smoky plants
 and on factory sites,
with you in our hearts,
 Comrade Lenin,
 we build,
we think,
 we breathe,
 we live,
 and we fight!"
Awhirl with events,
 packed with jobs one too many,
the day slowly sinks
 as the night shadows fall.
There are two in the room:
 I
 and Lenin
a photograph
 on the whiteness of wall.

(Written in 1929)

Our March

Vladimir Mayakovsky

Beat the squares with the tramp of rebels!
Higher, rangers of haughty heads!
We'll wash the world with a second deluge,
Now's the hour whose coming it dreads.
Too slow, the wagon of years,
The oxen of days — too glum.
Our god is the god of speed,
Our heart — our battle drum.
Is there a gold diviner than ours/
What wasp of a bullet us can sting?
Songs are our weapons, our power of powers,
Our gold — our voices — just hear us sing!
Meadow, lie green on the earth!
With silk our days for us line!
Rainbow, give colour and girth
To the fleet-foot steeds of time.
The heavens grudge us their starry glamour.
Bah! Without it our songs can thrive.
Hey there, Ursus Major, clamour
For us to be taken to heaven alive!
Sing, of delight drink deep,
Drain spring by cups, not by thimbles.
Heart step up your beat!
Our breasts be the brass of cymbals.

(Written in 1917)

Words

Ahmad Shamlou

You must keep silent
if your message is nothing
but lies.

But

if you have the chance to moan
in freedom

then thunder out the message
and power it with your life.

(from "The Banquet")

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