

NEW Democracy

Quarterly Theoretical Organ of N.D.P, Sri Lanka

Left Unity in sri Lanka

On Self-Determination

***On the question of nationhood and
the right of self-determination***

Targeting China

Indian Economic domination

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A Step Forward

Where is this country going?
What are we receiving?
What are we losing?
What will we achieve in the next century?

These are the questions
that every socially responsible individual
who cares for the country and its people ask.

The country is being gobbled up by an imperialist scheme known as globalisation. Liberalisation and privatisation are being accelerated. Pressure is brought upon everything from individuals to the whole of the society to take this poison..

One part of the country is being consumed by the fire of the war due to the unresolved national question. The North-East is being reduced to ashes by the flames of war. But the heat of this fire are also permeating the rest of the country and affecting everything.

It is only the political gamblers and bourgeois intellectuals who claim that imperialism, liberalisation, privatisation and chauvinism have no connection with the war. The chauvinistic warmongers, the reactionary ruling class and their masters need war, since war serves their existence and their class interests .

At the same time, the war is causing destruction and serious dam

age not only to the Tamils, the Hill Country Tamils and the Muslims but also the Sinhalese.

The resolution of the national question is an essential precondition to ending this war, and the solution of the national question has to be through complete autonomy on the basis of the principle of self-determination. The problems of the Hill Country Tamils and the Muslims too need to be resolved on the basis of the unique features of their identity and on the basis of the principle of self-determination.

It is wrong to approach the question of self determination from the arrogant point of view of chauvinism or from the point of view of an aggressive narrow nationalism. Any such approach will only provide prey for the forces of imperialist expansionism. The recent events relating to the Kosovo province of Yugoslavia serve as a good example.

It is an important duty of Marxist-Leninists and other forces of the left to identify in the light of the objective reality the contemporary dimensions of the national question in the Third World countries. It is absurd to cling stubbornly on to dogmatic formulae for self-determination or to reject self-determination as undeveloped and sterile.

Thus it is essential to initiate open minded and healthy debates on the subject of self-determination. Such discussion should serve the purpose of defeating imperialist plans for a unified global capitalist system and take forward the demand of historical development in line with the proclamation that "Countries want independence; nations want liberation; and the people want revolution".

New Democracy is published to support the journey towards the above goal along the path shown by Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong

Thought. It will serve as the political and ideological forum of Marxist-Leninists and forces of left-wing democracy.

We are proud and joyous to bring out the first issue of New Democracy to mark the occasion of the twenty-first anniversary of the founding of the New Democratic Party. We have in the past published journals in English with the titles Red Banner and New World, and are bringing out New Democracy to meet the needs and necessities of today.

This issue places special emphasis on finding a solution to national question on the basis of the principle of self-determination in view of the urgency of the matter and carries three important articles on the subject. It also carries an article on imperialist attempts to bully China, with a view to counter the campaign of lies by the imperialist dominated media and emphasise the need for the progressive forces to take an objective view of China and separate subjective criticism of China from responding to the objective realities of international events. Comments are also made on some important international events of the past few months.

We believe that the articles that will be carried in this journal will contribute to constructive debate and education in the field of political theory. We also look forward to the views and especially to constructive criticism from the readers to enable us to improve the quality and content of the journal.

The state is a machine for maintaining
the rule of one class over another.

Lenin

LEFT UNITY IN SRI LANKA

By Comrade **S.K.Senthivel**

The General Secretary of New-Democratic Party

The imperialist program of so-called globalisation is being rapidly pushed forward.. This scheme has as its central purpose the neo-colonial plunder of the Third World through the establishment of capitalism in its new dimensions. The Third World countries are being squeezed from within through devices such as aid, pressure, bullying and threat, and Sri Lanka too is suffering this plight.

As a result of persuasion and pressure from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank and the World Trade Centre, the doors have swung open in this country during the past two decades for the implementation of the 'open economic policy'. The entry of multi-national companies along with privatisation in a way that suits them has been made the main trend of the economy of the country. State corporations and plantations which have been taken over from foreign and local sharks have now been handed back to foreign and local wolves. Large areas of land including fertile agricultural land are passing into the hands of multi-national companies.

It was during the past two decades during which multi-national infiltration and privatisation were implemented that the national question in the country was developed into a war. Consequently, Sri Lanka is struggling amid a civil war, out of which it is unable to find its way. The architects of this war are not only the local chauvinists but also the foreign imperialists and their local lackeys.

The subjugation of the country to neo-colonialism is being concealed from the masses by the continuation of the war. All manner of rackets including those involving the sale of weapons are going on be-

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hind the curtain of war. Above all, it has been made possible to prevent the people from recognizing the basic contradiction that is associated with the oppression of the people of the country. Although the national question has been propelled into the position that it is the main contradiction today, the situation continues where the local ruling classes and the forces of imperialism do not like to resolve this contradiction through negotiation. Thus, the liberal economic policy, privatisation, war and narrow nationalism are inter-related and support each other. This reality is becoming increasingly clear from our experiences in everyday life.

As a result of the prevailing situation, the country and its people have to confront severe economic difficulties and burdens. The people are being choked by the increase in the prices of essential goods and the escalating cost of living. The people are also suffering from problems of unemployment, homelessness, poverty, disease and the fall in quality of the educational and health services. They are tormented by the loss of life and property and displacement, resulting from the continuing pursuit of war. At the same time there is an upsurge in social decay. Systematic violence against women, including planned murders and rape, is on the increase. Drug abuse and sexual abuse of children have been found to be on the increase. There is a proliferation of gambling dens and brothels. Forces of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism, which show not the least care or concern about these social problems, instead unleash communalism and campaign actively on its behalf.

The former UNP government had a major part in the systematic cultivation of the above trends. They safeguarded their big bourgeois, chauvinistic power for seventeen years and looked after the needs of the ruling classes by denying the basic democratic, trade union and human rights and the use of oppressive methods. Through that they provided opportunities for the forces of foreign imperialism to fulfil

their wishes.

The succession of events that followed revealed that the people who removed the UNP from government and elected the People's Alliance in its place had been deceived. Nothing was done by the PA to put an end to the liberal economic policy or privatisation or the war initiated by the UNP. They were being carried forward in the fashion of continuing the policies of the previous government, and are still being carried forward in the same way. Consequently, the whole country and its people are taken along the road of gloom and darkness. The people are bitter about both the parties of the ruling classes. The people need an alternative political force and an alternative political path.

Under the circumstances, the responsibility and duty of providing the people with the correct political direction and leadership lies with the genuine Marxist-Leninists and other forces of the left. This is so because they are capable of understanding clearly the Marxist world outlook and through it the situation in the country and the positions taken by the forces of the various class. They have thus the ability to take proper account of the objective realities of the current situation and put forward the correct political programme and direction.

The Marxist-Leninists and other forces of the left in Sri Lanka are, however, seen to be in a position of weakness. The above weakness resulted partly from the temporary setback suffered internationally by socialism and partly from the wrong political line taken by the parties of the left and their being subject to a series of organisational splits. The forces of the ruling classes and the imperialists are dreaming that they can exploit this situation to eradicate the left movement. They are actively engaged in major efforts to use new techniques at the ideological level to prevent the revival of a vibrant, Marxist socialist revolutionary movement.

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Under these circumstances there is a great challenge ahead of the each Marxist-Leninist and every honest political party of the left, and that is the question of whether one carries forward the revolutionary movement and the left movement or one retreats from it. During every stage of the one-hundred and fifty year long proletarian revolutionary movement based on Marxism, the revolutionary movement has gone through setbacks, hard times and failures only to emerge more vigorous than before.

As far as we are concerned, the majority which includes the working class, the peasantry, other toiling masses, oppressed nationalities, women, youth and intellectuals is in need of a social change. It is not something that can be achieved immediately. The thoughts and deeds of the ruling classes are characterised by the brutal suppression of the uprising of the youth in the South and the imposition of war on the Tamil people living in the North-East by denying their just and legitimate rights. Let us not forget, however, that not only the political lines of the forces that led these struggles but also the strategies of struggle adapted by them helped to strengthen the hands of the ruling classes.

It has thus become necessary for the Marxist-Leninists and other forces of the left to act with farsightedness in designing the long-term strategy, developing the political line and devising the tactics of struggle. Today, we cannot take the position that the revolutionary struggle for social transformation can be carried forward by building up a single Marxist-Leninist party and through that alone. While efforts to build up such a party should go on, there is also the inevitable need to build unity with other Marxist-Leninist groups and leftist political parties on the basis of a broad-based common political programme. That is also the wish of the entire working people.

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But the building up of such broad-based left unity and the gradual widening of mass struggles through it is not an easy task. The history of the Sri Lankan left movement goes back to the 1930's, and it was only for a short period that it functioned as a single organisation. Although the left movement was fundamentally Marxist in ideology, its development was on two different bases since the 1940's. One section of the movement was guided by Trotskyism and the other developed along the lines of Marxism-Leninism. The Lanka Samasamaja Party represented the former and the Communist party the latter. The working class, the toiling masses and oppressed people mobilised behind both. But there was a fundamental difference between the way in which each of these movements acted in matters of development of policy, organisational method, and approach to problems. Consequently, the Samasamaja party and Communist parties were always prone to waging ideological war with each other. As a result, left unity on the basis of a common programme was not possible to achieve. The occasional unity observed among trade unions too failed to last long. It was the workers who were most affected by this. This contributed to the emergence of a situation in which the working class became isolated from the left movement and ended up rallying behind the ruling classes.

Thus, even though the Samasamaja and the Communist parties were strong until the 1960's, it was not possible to develop left unity with a firm political base. In the early 1960's, leaders of these movements engineered their own downfall and went one after the other behind the SLFP. Their position shifted from the use of the bourgeois parliament to total immersion in that mire, and descended to levels even lower than that of a social democratic party. By this they betrayed the working class, the toiling masses and the oppressed nationalities. As a result of their treachery the entire left movement was subject to insult and abuse.

New forces of the left did emerge, and they totally rejected the stand taken by the parliamentary leftists who kow-towed before the forces of the ruling classes. These new forces too developed on the bases of the two already established bases of Trotskyism and Marxism-Leninism. Of these, the Marxist-Leninist party under the leadership of comrade N. Sanmugathan emerged as the most effective movement. While that movement led several mass struggles, it is important to note that it made serious mistakes in developing and applying its policy in a way that suited the changing reality. The New Democratic Party came into the left political scene as the revived political party which rectified the errors of the past by criticism and self criticism on the basis of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. Its earlier name, the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (Left) was changed to the New Democratic Party at the Second National Congress of the party.

The Third Congress of the New Democratic Party, held in 1997, analysed the current situation of the left movement and its strengths and weaknesses. It pointed out that a single leftist party alone cannot on the basis of its policy for the whole country have the organisational strength to launch powerful mass struggles, and drew attention to the need to unite the various left organisations functioning as political parties, groups, trade unions and individuals on the basis of a common programme. The New Democratic Party emphasised the need for the unity of all sincere left forces outside parliamentary politics, the programme emerging from such unity and the mass struggles that are needed to be carried forward for its success. Similar views existed among other left parties as well, and talks were gradually on the way for the formation of a united front.

The New Left Front is a united front formed by uniting the forces which could be united initially on the basis of a minimum programme. It comprises six organisations, namely the New Democratic Party,

The Nava Samasamaja Party, the National Democratic Movement, the United Socialist Party, the Diyasa organisation and the Muslim United Liberation Front. Again, while these organisations are fundamentally Marxist, their identity is either Trotskyist or Marxist-Leninist. As a result, there has been the need to confront ideological and practical problems in moving forward the united front. But at the same time the front is clear about the need to oppose the war, privatisation and communalism and to oppose and expose imperialist infiltration. The New Left Front also emphasises the need for autonomy on the basis of self-determination to solve the national question of Tamils, and has put forward a clear policy of opposing chauvinism to win the rights of the Muslims and the Hill Country Tamils.

At a time when the New Left Front has stated its initial position on the basis of a minimum programme, the claim by the JVP that it is the 'alternative left force' has attracted the attention of many. But there is no evidence of the JVP having taken any steps to rectify through firm criticism and self-criticism the serious strategic errors of political struggle that it has made. On the one hand it claims that Sri Lanka is a country without capitalist development while on the other it also claims to be Leninist and talks about socialist revolution. It talks too about setting up a leftist government within the existing parliamentary system and about making 'appropriate use of globalisation'. On the national question it simply offers as its solution the formula that all will be fine under socialism, so that it may not antagonise the forces of chauvinism. The JVP denies the fact that today's war permeates every affair of the country and dismisses it as a war of the communalists, thus equating the oppressor and the oppressed nationality. Buoyed by the size of the vote that it received in the recent elections to the Provincial Councils, the JVP has started to dream about exercising 'remote control' in the next parliament. This in essence seems to be a renewed form of the politics of parlia-

mentary bargaining practised by the traditional left parties.

Above all, the JVP, given its past experience, is still unprepared for a united left front on the basis of a common programme. Its politics of charisma still has the youth at its centre. The JVP merely acts out the politics of promises when it says that it will win everything for the workers, peasant and other toiling masses if only they would follow it. The very existence of such an attitude in the JVP is harmful to the broad based unity of the forces of the left. Yet, the JVP has a need to transform itself in order to assert its leftist image and to generate fresh popular faith in it. If the JVP changes, that will strengthen the Sri Lankan left movement which seems to be in a weak state. If not the JVP will traverse the path trodden by the traditional leftists.

The belief that all sincere left forces, including the Marxist Leninists, can unite and advance on the basis of a common programme is getting stronger by the day, and the experiences of the year since the founding of the New Left Front support this view. Its minimum programme and the mass struggles launched by it on the basis of that programme have generated fresh confidence among the masses. This is evident from the votes received by the New Left Front in the recently concluded Provincial Council elections, particularly in view of the fact that its campaign was explicitly anti-chauvinist. It is also important to note that the New Left Front campaign was aimed to increase political awareness among the masses and to thrust forward broad mass struggles rather than to gather votes using the politics of promises.

The New Left Front as it is stands cannot be said to be a revolutionary left front. It has to go much further to achieve that status. There is a need to expand the present minimum programme from a political and ideological point of view, and transform it into a maximum

requires that each member organisation strengthens itself through its own activities. This will enable the generation of fresh confidence among the working class, the toiling masses and the nationalities. Such expansion and confidence will make it possible for those within the present united front to link hands with genuine leftist forces outside it

The New Democratic Party has its own ideological base, a political programme founded on it and an organisational structure for it. At the same time, it recognises the importance of a united left front and participates with sincerity in such a united front. It will do whatever it can for the growth of such a united front, and apply the approach of unity-struggle-unity for the advancement of the united front. The New Democratic Party sees this as its historic duty at the present juncture.

**Marx discovered the law of evolution in human history;
he discovered the simple fact...
that mankind must first of all
eat and drink, have shelter and clothing,
before it can pursue politics, science,
Religion, art, etc.....**
Engels

programme. The future of the New Left Front depends on the honesty, dedication, understanding and accommodation among its member organisations. It is thus all the more important to have the correct political approach towards the extent to which the bourgeois parliamentary electoral politics can be used and, above that, the mobilisation of the toiling masses by the working class through carrying forward mass struggles. Without such an approach, the New Left Front faces the risk that it could degenerate by following the route of the traditional leftists.

There is a need for unity as well as struggle within a united front. Left extremism and right opportunism will always raise their heads and personality cults, electoral politics and domination by one party are not altogether unlikely. Thus there is a need to launch ideological struggles against such trends. While affirming the freedom and equality of status of every member organisation, there is also a need to act on the basis of willingness to accommodate, mutual understanding and goodwill. Cliquism, craftiness, personal arrogance and domination by one organisation are dangers that can wreck a united front. It is important to learn from the experiences of the failure of left unity in the past. The New Left Front can achieve and strengthen a broad left mass movement only through carrying out with sincerity mass struggles aimed at its main goal. Confidence should be built among the betrayed working class, toiling masses and nationalities by carrying out practical struggles and taking the correct organisational approach. It should always be remembered that when organisations work as a united front, the mistakes of one member organisation affect the entire united front and, conversely, the mistakes made by the united front affect every member organisation.

Thus the New Left Front has tasks before it which involve great responsibility, and this should be recognised by every member organisation. The strengthening of the New Left Front fundamentally

ON SELF- DETERMINATION

(An essay in two parts)

by *Imayavarampan*

1. Understanding Self-determination

The national question has in one way or another become a major political issue and cause of conflict in more than a few countries of the Third World. The satisfactory resolution of this question is important not only to political stability and economic development but also to issue of democratic and human rights in the Third World. Sri Lankans, for certain, need not look too far for evidence.

The nature of the national question has change considerably since the days of colonial rule. Although the class nature of nationalism remains unchanged in substance and nationalism still preserves its two faces, one progressive and liberating and the other reactionary, narrow and oppressive. The progressive mode of nationalism which linked hands with the politics of egalitarianism to unite the people under colonial oppression in their struggle for liberation has gradually given way to chauvinism and national oppression. This transformation was not sudden, and the Third World, especially within the non-aligned movement, played an important part in opposing super-power and imperialist domination of the world. The inability of the ruling classes in the Third world countries to stand up to imperialism led to the weakening of the national leadership in most of these countries and to the effective collapse of the non-aligned movement as a body to defend Third World interests.

The failure of the leadership of most of the Third World countries in safeguarding political and economic independence was not surprising, since it represented the native exploiting classes and did not want to transform their social system. Some regimes were reformist only to the extent that reforms helped to keep off revolution. (In subsequent years, some of those reforms were reversed by right-wing governments with the blessings of the guardians of democracy and human rights

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in the West). Political independence in the colonies increased the social and political awareness of the masses. This meant that the poorer sections of the population wanted a fair share of the wealth, and the working class posed a challenge. The ruling classes found it expedient to use contradictions among the people to divide them, a lesson that they learnt from the most successful colonial masters. Race, religion, language, caste, tribe and every conceivable difference was exploited in politics, electoral and otherwise. This was effective in deflecting the attention of the masses from the more pressing problems, at least for a short time, but harmed the economy, undermined political stability and made the ruling classes increasingly dependent on the imperialists for their survival.

Poverty and indebtedness have got worse in the Third World and imperialism through its agencies, including the World Bank and the IMF, is able to dictate economic and social policy to the poorer countries. It is able to destabilise any government that fails to toe the line, create conflict and cause civil war. Overall, in many ways, the situation is worse for the people of the Third World than it was under colonialism. Under colonialism the people had a clear view of the enemy. With neo-colonialism the enemy is invisible. The ruling elite classes are incapable of showing the way out of the mess, and for their own survival are betraying the interests of their countries and the people.

It takes a lot of courage and foresight to face the reality of the national crisis in the Third World countries and seek just and lasting solutions. The exploiting classes have time and again shown their reluctance if not inability to solve the national problem, unite the people and lead the country out of the political and economic mess. Governments that represent the exploiting classes have sought to benefit from national oppression and from dividing the people in every possible way except those that threaten the existence of the social system that preserves the interests of the upper classes. Thus, valid solutions can come only from the forces of progress and social justice. They recognize the need of uniting the oppressed masses nationally and internationally to overcome imperialist domination.

It is in this context that it will be useful to discuss the concept of nationhood and self-determination. There is a tendency among some, unfortunately including a number of 'leftists', to cling too strongly to definitions. I do not deny the importance and value of definitions in understanding matters. Definitions are more valuable in an explanatory sense than in a restrictive sense. A definition of a nation helps us get some idea of what a nation could be but not always as sufficient means to legislate whether a particular group of people can constitute a nation. The definition can help one develop guidelines in dealing with a political problem but when applied rigidly and dogmatically can only have disastrous consequences.

Nations do not wait for definitions to validate their existence. While common factors such as race, language, tribe and culture can bring a people together as a nation, a nation remains, above all, a product of history. Thus we have nations that cut across racial, linguistic, cultural and tribal barriers, and we also have situations where major common features have failed to bring together different nations as one.

When dealing with the question of the right of a nation to secede, we come across the question of feasibility and more often that concerning the right of a people to nationhood. The ability of a nation to survive is a more important issue than the award of the license to nationhood by some definition. Size is important both territorially and demographically, but not critical. What is most important in the making of a nation is the ability of the socio-political system to unite a people and give them a sense of belonging. Cuba has united people black and white more successfully than any other country, and the mighty U.S.A, despite its economic and military muscle is more divided than ever despite its reputation as the great melting pot. What united India and gave Indians the feeling of 'Indian nationalism' at one time has ceased to be, and India is today a jumble of nations and a prison house for some nations and nationalities. The rigid approach of Nehru towards the demands of the Sikhs for a state of their own, using the argument that states cannot be formed on the basis of religious identity not only hardened attitudes but also strengthened Sikh nationalism and militancy. What

are threatening the unity of India are the concentration of power at the centre, the growth of Hindi-Hindu chauvinism and the continuing domination of the upper castes.

Nations emerge as a consequence of socio-political awareness and often as a result of oppression. This is particularly true of the emergence of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka. The 'Tamil nation' in Sri Lanka is not in any way a successor to the Jaffna Kingdom of four centuries ago, nor is it composed of all the Tamil speaking people living in the island. What transformed the awareness of the Tamil identity into nationalism was a sequence of events since pre-independence days. It took more than the Citizenship Act, the Official Language Act of 1956, the continuous planned colonization of the north and the east, the notorious standardization of 1971 and anti-Tamil violence on more than one occasion. The vote for the TULF in 1977 was as small an endorsement of the demand for a separate state as was the vote for the Federal Party in 1956 an endorsement of the demand for a federal state. It was the deception since 1977 combined with the violation of the right of the Tamil people to survive even on the soil that constituted their traditional homeland that pushed the Tamil nationality into the current struggle for national liberation.

Efforts to deny the Tamil people their identity as a nation and hence their right to self-determination come mainly from Sinhala chauvinists who argue that Sri Lanka can have only one national identity, namely Sinhala (preferably Sinhala-Buddhist). The denial of the existence of a Tamil homeland in the north and the east of the country is historical mischief, and negative arguments about the feasibility of the Tamil nation-state often fringe on dishonesty. Whether a separate Tamil state is a desirable thing is an issue different from the feasibility of one. There are many who believe that a united Sri Lanka is in the best interests of the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. But this unity cannot be imposed on the minority nationalities, especially in the wake of the events of the past few decades. Preservation of the integrity of Sri Lanka as a united country is conditional upon dispelling the fears of the minority nationalities about the prospects of their being treated as equals by the majority. The Tamil people of the north and

east of Sri Lanka have asserted their nationhood, and to deny this is to reject reality. A united Sri Lanka can only be a union of nations and a stable union needs to be voluntary and hence incorporate the right to secession. Self-determination does precisely this.

Self-determination means the right to secede but not necessarily the act of secession. It can be compared with the right of divorce, which does not mean that every marriage should be dissolved. Without the right of divorce, marriage is like a prison and the denial of that right does not guarantee the survival of marriage in reality. The right to part company makes the relationship more equal and stable than one without that right. The right to secession makes the members of a union of nations feel more secure and enables them to explore the best possible way in which they could coexist within the union as equal partners.

Strangely, some Tamil nationalists who have had little to do with the struggle of the Tamil people against a government that has waged war upon the Tamils in the North East think that self-determination has only one meaning, namely secession. They even accuse the LTTE of betrayal when it is willing to negotiate a settlement within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. This is as mischievous as the position taken by the Sinhala chauvinists.

It is the duty of the progressives among the Sinhalese to explain the full implications of self-determination to the Sinhala masses so that they are not misled by the chauvinists. The people have the right to know that self-determination means more than the right to secession. It should be explained to them that it also means, very importantly, the right of the nationalities concerned to seek solutions to the national question within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. Whether the answer is a federal state, regional autonomy or self-government of another form within a unitary state is a matter for discussion and decision. It may also be useful to emphasize that the stability of the solution will be strengthened by the maximum possible devolution of power so as to strengthen democracy.

If the progressives fail to explain the meaning of self-determination as a matter

of free choice by the nationalities and as the only way of achieving a lasting, stable and just solution to the national question, they will only be helping to destroy the prospects of a united Sri Lanka. This will be even worse than the mistake of the parliamentary left in the years between 1956 and 1977, when these learned men and women kept quiet while Sinhala nationalities in the UNP and the SLFP chose to interpret the demand for a federal state as one for a separate state. The opportunism of the parliamentary left benefited the SLFP and more significantly the UNP. If the left has not learnt the lessons of the seventeen years of UNP rule since 1977, it is doomed to relive the past sooner than it would ever like to.

2. Expanding the Scope of Self-determination

Self-determination is widely interpreted as the right of a nation to choose its mode of existence as a socio-political entity. It implies the right of the nation to statehood and, where applicable, secession. It also enables nations to come together or stay together on a voluntary basis within the framework of a multi-national state.

The association of the nation of self-determination with nations has often led to the restriction of the underlying principle to groups of people that can be defined or recognized as nations. It is partly because of this that there is a tendency among popular movements struggling to protect their identity and preserve their existence as a distinct social group to assert that they are a nation and not just an ethnic minority within the structure of a nation state.

The question of ethnicity is widely discussed today. There are those who argue that ethnic groups should be allowed, if not actively encouraged, to preserve their identity as a distinct social group for as long as they wish. There are others who consider such preservation of a distinct identity to be harmful to national unity and advocate the integration of minority ethnic groups into the mainstream, if not their assimilation by the majority. Interestingly, there are right as well as left-wing arguments in support of these opposed views. Despite all good inten-

tions, one should not lose sight of the reason why a group of people choose to assert their ethnic or any other social identity, and it is not a good thing to deny an ethnic group its right to preserve its identity like in the case of any other social group such as a minority nationality or the majority.

Ethnic minorities are often treated as social groups with less right to preserve their identity as distinct social groups than are nations. This is perhaps the consequence of approaching the right of any group of people to preserve its identity from the point of view of the nation state and the right to nationhood. The concept of the nation state belongs to the era of capitalism and European in origin. The national question of today is a little more complex and needs to be treated as something more than a matter of co-existence of nations. More importantly, the principle that underlies the right of a nation to choose its mode of existence as a distinct entity cannot be restricted to people who can somehow be identified as a nation and needs to be extended to ethnic groups which, despite their strong ethnic identity, cannot form a nation.

Nations are not made by definitions but by historical processes. There can be little that is rational or sensible about what makes a particular group of people a nation. The national awareness of group of people, both individually and collectively, is historical and contextual. Any form of ethnic or national consciousness is in itself not the driving force in the action of a people to assert their nationhood and create a nation state of their own. More often than not, it has been national oppression that has been instrumental in the emergence of new nation states.

Oppression by an exploiting class which uses nationalism as its ideology naturally provokes resistance and struggle by the oppressed people to safeguard themselves and preserve their existence as a socio-political entity in its own right. No ethnic group waits for a license in the form of its right to secession, and the denial of that right can only strengthen the resolve to struggle to secede. In this sense, self-determination as something applicable only to nations is more or less redundant. The real value of self-determination lies in its ability to bind na-

tions together into a voluntary union of equal partners with a right to part company when the union ceases to be a happy relationship.

Limiting the concept of self-determination to groups of people who can be considered to constitute a nation has harmful implications for the interests of many ethnic groups all over the world, in some instances with populations exceeding those of some nations. The rights of the native American races and tribes who have been reduced to refugees on their

own soil are being continuously eroded in the 'greatest democracy on earth' in the north as much as in the lesser democracies of the south. The aboriginal people of Australia have been made homeless on their own soil. The carving up of Africa by the colonial rulers has complicated the national problems of that continent and has had an adverse effect on the way of life of the nomadic people who have never known national boundaries. The Gypsies and Jews of Europe have been at the receiving end of nationalism for centuries. The problem of the tribal people of India, once highlighted during the Naxalbari uprising and the decade that followed, has returned to haunt Indian politics in more than one way.

Most of the oppressed people listed above cannot constitute nations, in the sense that the establishment of a nation state consisting of any of these people is almost out of the question. Does this mean that they are not entitled to self-determination? If self-determination is understood as the right to secession, that right cannot be exercised by these people. If that alone is seen as the criterion for their disqualification, one is perverting the spirit of self-determination. Self-determination when applied to nations includes the right to secession because that represents the highest level at which a nation exercises its right to choose its mode of existence. Where such an option is not available, a people must have their choice, subject to the socio-political and geographic constraints which rule out secession.

It is the denial of self-determination to the tribal people of India that has prompted the hill tribes of north-eastern India to demand the carving out of a 'Jharkhand'

for themselves. The tribal people cannot constitute a nation in a strict sense of the word because they comprise a wide range of tribes speaking many different languages, representing different cultural traditions and without a common socio-political heritage. But one may not fail to notice some similarities between the factors that prompted the demand for an Islamic state on the sub-continent early this century and those relating to a tribal homeland today. The viability of a tribal homeland is an issue separate from the issues underlying the demand, which are not likely to go away in a hurry.

There are some ultra-leftists in India who insist on the disintegration of the union and advocate secession even where the nationality concerned is least interested in it. There are, on the other hand, Indian nationalities, and unfortunately this includes a number of Marxists, who are oblivious to the reality that India is a multi-national state that is currently unable to meet the aspirations of its minority nations, tribes and other ethnic minorities as a result of the rise of Hindi-Hindu chauvinism and capitalistic greed. One cannot forget the fact that India has the world's most complex mixture of nationalities and ethnic minorities. Carving up the sub-continent into a multitude of nation states is not necessarily a good solution. But the stability and the unity of India, however desirable it may be, is not possible unless the national question is addressed on the basis of equality of national, tribal and other ethnic populations.

There is no need to remind ourselves of the dual nature of nationalism with its liberating and oppressive features. Interestingly, we come across situations where a nation struggling for its self-determination resolutely denies that right to minorities within the national boundaries it lays claim to. This has been true of Sinhala chauvinism from early this century and equally true of Tamil nationalism since its embryonic stages. Tamil nationalism meant Jaffna Vellaala upper class interests until recently, and the Federal Party and the TULF attempted to conceal the separate identity of Muslims and Hill Country Tamils under the cloak of Tamil-speaking people, while in reality their politics was essentially Jaffna-centered. None of the major nationalities have cared about the identity of the aboriginal people of the Island, the Veddhas, and their traditional homelands

lost to development. Our gypsies and the Rodiya people, have been traditional outcasts in the Sinhala south.

The tribal population of India is rapidly losing control of its traditional lands, partly as a consequence of development as advocated by the elite of India and partly as a result of capitalist greed. They have little say in matters that affect their way of life and livelihood and are certainly not the beneficiaries of any development project carried out at the expense of their traditional grazing, farming and hunting lands. Some see this as development and some others as a process of bringing these people into the modern era. But environmental groups, quite correctly, see it differently. Some feminist groups in India too adopt the same view. In fairness to the 'Naxalite' movement of the late '60s and early '70s, it should be noted here that they stood by the tribal people in their struggles against urban capitalist greed. But, little has been achieved so far in relation to the right of these ethnic populations to choose both the path and the pace of their transformation into a modern society, if they ever want to become one. The plight of the tribal population in many Asian and Latin American countries is hardly different from that of the tribal minorities of India. There is far more awareness of these issues today but not enough to bring about change. Issues of human and democratic rights do not matter to imperialism unless they can be used to bully states that challenge their domination of the world, and the oppressed people can depend on themselves alone for their emancipation. This is an important reason why issues of class, race, national liberation, women's struggle for equality and environment have to be interlinked and unity on the widest possible scale forged among the victims of imperialist exploitation and plunder. Extension of the principle of self-determination to ethnic groups besides those recognized as nations is an important step towards achieving that unity.

The advocates of highly centralized state power and large and powerful states do not like the idea of devolution. Their notions of economic integration of the world, like their ideas about science, technology and development, are flawed. Mankind cannot be united on the basis of the negation of the identity of any people and the rejection of different forms of human knowledge merely uphold a

limited vision of scientific truth. Such views of knowledge are as arrogant as those of the partronsing missionaries of a few centuries ago. The struggle of the oppressed people of the Third World is somehow inseparable from that for devolution and self-determination in a broader sense. It is a struggle for global democracy in the ultimate sense.

The practicality and feasibility of the extension of the principle of self-determination is likely to be called into question by the advocates of global integration as one happy family, at least for now, under imperialism with multi-national companies as the agent. There are two interesting instances in recent history where ethnic minorities with very small populations have been encouraged to preserve their identity and take control, although in a somewhat limited way, of their affairs. China with a population of 600 million, now topping a billion, has recognized well over fifty national minorities with some of them having populations of the order of 100,000 or less. There are autonomous regions for many of the larger ethnic groups and, in some instances, the interests of several ethnic groups are served by a single autonomous unit.

What is even more exciting is the case of the relatively small Central American State of Nicaragua. The revolutionary government of the Sandinista alliance consulted the people during 1984-86 on the matter of constitutional reform, and the constitution of 1987 declared Nicaragua as a multi-ethnic nation and enabled the setting up of autonomous regions on the Atlantic Coast which was home to six ethnic minorities, the largest numbering 120,000 and the smallest a mere 800. The Autonomy Law ensured that no ethnic group exercised hegemony over another and Nicaragua became the first country of the entire continent to declare itself to be a multi-ethnic nation. Had not US Imperialism undermined the stability of Nicaragua and forced the overthrow of the Sandinista government in 1991, the Nicaragua experience would have been a great inspiration for the ethnic minorities of Latin America and a great example to many countries of Asia, including Sri Lanka.

These two instances point to how the principle of self-determination can be

extended to ethnic minorities that do not constitute nations. They do not represent in any way the extent to which the principle can be applied but are illustrations of its feasibility. The term self-determination has not been used, but the concept of autonomy goes fairly close to the exercise of self-determination by ethnic groups which cannot secede. What is important under such circumstances is the right of an ethnic group to autonomy, and devolution of power leads to greater democratization and therefore to a fuller exercising of the right of the ethnic group to take decisions relating to its existence as a distinct group.

Self determination does not exist in isolation from the international situation, and imperialism, while encouraging secession and civil war in the case of some nationalities, turns a blind eye to national oppression in its own backyard and in countries controlled by its stooges. It is therefore hard to separate the national question from the struggle against imperialism. The Third World has to redefine development and democracy in its own context and in the interests of the masses. The case for unity and closer collaboration between the peoples of the Third World is strong. Such unity is not possible with national oppression, and the expansion of the scope of self-determination to cover ethnic minorities will reinforce democracy, enable devolution of power and strengthen the struggle of the Third World for political and economic freedom.

"No credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them what I did that was new was to prove.

- (i). that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production.
- (ii). that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat.
- (iii). that this dictatorship (itself only constitutes the transition) to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.

Karl Marx

ON THE QUESTION OF NATIONHOOD AND THE RIGHT OF SELF - DETERMINATION

by Comrade **E. Thambiah**
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(A paper presented in the Seminar on the National Democratic Movement,
held at Nugegoda, Sri Lanka in December 1998)

The concept of nation is a myth, although a necessary myth in the era of capitalism. National identity is a political identity imposed on a people. Factors that enable the definition of a nation are real but their combination to define and determine a nation is historical and often a matter of political convenience.

Human existence is social and when people live as communities there is a material and emotional need to identify one is self as a member of a social group. This identity depends on context and is real only to the extent that it enables an individual to see or to be seen as member of a social group. For example, we find Sinhalese (or Tamils) who cannot speak Sinhala (or Tamil) and we find people who do not practice any religion identified by that religion. People find associations with regions from which they originated but have nothing to do with life in that region. Caste identity still exists even in urban situations where caste is irrelevant to the mode of social and economic existence. There is nothing that is more confused than race since there is no pure race. Still there is racial identity. In South Africa under apartheid we saw the irony of white skinned people being classified as coloured or black. There are a few black people in the US and Europe whose attitudes are more white than that of many whites.

Any of the above said identities becomes relevant only in the context of social conflict and oppression. If a group of people is persecuted on the basis of its identity, it is quite natural for that group to respond on the basis of that identity. It is in this context that nationalism has any meaning. Elsewhere it has histori-

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ON THE QUESTION OF NATIONHOOD AND THE RIGHT OF SELF- DETERMINATION

cally served as a device in the hands of the capitalist classes to serve its interests in the name a large group of people whom it does not really represent. Expansion of capitalist interests and beyond the boundaries of the capitalist interests beyond the boundaries of the capitalist state (the nation state) often involves armed conflict and Loss of life.

This is achieved by the capitalist class in the name of nationhood and national interest. Nationalism is also used within the state boundaries to resolve conflicts at between competing groups of exploiting classes - anti-Semitism is perhaps the best known example of this. Equally, today, we see racism and attitudes of hostility towards aliens within the countries of Europe which apparently seek to cut across the national frontiers of the past through a close European Union.

If we closely examine the structure of nation states there is not much is common between all of them although there are certain unifying features of which each nation state may possess all or some. All common features that are seen to contribute to the identity of a nation are practical matters, which enable a large group of people to share a common polity. A common language, geographic contiguity, history, cultural affinity and economy are things that bring a group of people together. But what is most important to the emergence of a nation state are historical circumstances, Nation in fact, are products of history facilitated by shared interests of groups of people.

Cuba despite its history of slavery is a united nation of blacks and whites and any division within Cuba is based on class politics, and encouraged by its big neighbour. The US despite its wealth is a far more divided society than many would like to recognize. The approach of China to solve its national question has been adapted and extended with great creativity by Nicaragua under the Sandinistas to create a multi-ethnic nation. In all cases of coexistence of diverse communities within the framework of a state, harmony and unity have been achieved only through the recognition of and respect for the identity of every distinct social group. It is in this context that the notion of nationhood has to be seen and not as same abstract ideal that exists beyond social reality.

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What emerged as national identity in Europe during the past two centuries have been used as models for defining, understanding and interpreting nationhood by many. The nation state boundaries that emerged within Europe were as much historical as those were in Asia, Africa and America, with the difference that the history of the non-European world was dominated by colonialism of one kind or another. Boundaries were drawn to suit the whims and fancies of colonial masters. It was the history of colonial rule that determined not only the boundaries of the nations of the Third world but also the nature of nationalism

India with a greater ethnic and cultural diversity than the whole of Europe ended up as one country, and the nature of the anti-colonial struggle this century ensured that Indian nationalism took precedence over any other identity until the British manipulated the contradiction between the so-called Hindus and Muslims to split the anti-colonial movement. It is the Hindu-Hindi upper caste chauvinists who are primarily responsible for the different nationalities for accentuating their ethnic identity over and above that of the Indian union.

On the other hand the Arab world, despite much in common by way of language and culture as well as religion, is divided among several nation. The Latin American nations built on the destruction of the civilizations and large sections of the population of native Americans came into being as a result of colonial history. It is not ethnic composition that determined the national boundaries in south or central America.

The concept of national boundaries has spelt disaster to many African peoples. Nomadic civilizations have increasingly become subject to restrictions of their movements carving up of Africa by the colonial masters has divided ethnic communities across boundaries and imposed new cultural identities because of the efforts of the masters to alter the way of life of the natives to suit colonial interests.

The concept of the nation emerged historically in the context of the nation-state

and nationhood and has been seen in terms of the right to existence as a nation state. The principle of right to self-determination has there fore been seen in terms of the right of such nations, which have been subjected to the rule of more powerful nations to be identified as part of an empire.

Marxists generally have had no difficulty in acknowledging the right of nations to self-determination. Right of self-determination was seen by Marxists as the right of any nation to statehood. Comrade Lenin was firm about this principle and, correctly, saw this as the best way to keep within Soviet Union the nations held inside the Russian Empire by brute force. Giving the option of secession to the oppressed nations made the union with Russia and other nations of the former expire a voluntary act. This right was supplemented by the right to self-governance and devolution of power except in matters concerning the collective interest of the union.

Social democrats and liberals have always vacillated in their position on the right of self-determination because of their class interests having things in common with the colonialist masters in power in their own country. With the expansion of the anti-colonial struggle, social democrats and liberals acknowledged the principle of the right of self-determination and the right of nations subject to colonial rule to become independent. Sometimes we see situations where colonial masters became the advocates of the right self-determination and demanding secession on behalf of people who are not interested in it.

The postcolonial era has created a new situation in the relationship between different social groups in the countries of the Third World. Wherever the reins of power have been handed over by the colonial masters to a bourgeois class, the interests of the bourgeoisie did not coincide with that of the masses. The nation that the bourgeois classes, however progressive and patriotic they may be, have about economic and social development are not the same as that of the oppressed toiling masses. There has, as a result, been a tendency to impose the will of this emergent capitalist class on the population as a whole and in a way that is insensitive to the sentiments of social groups who are in their eyes backward. In some ways this attitude is

something that the new ruling classes have inherited from the old colonial masters.

Nationalism comes to the fore in situations where resistance to bourgeois rule comes from the oppressed classes, contradictions between different ethnic groups, religious communities, castes and even regions are exploited in dividing the masses. National oppression assumes a new form and new national identities emerge as a result. People who saw themselves as a socio-ethnic group that formed a component of a multi-ethnic nation becomes compelled to assert their identity even to the point of claiming nationhood. The emergence of such nationalism, like that of nationalism in earlier periods, is a consequence of historical events.

The fact that there is nothing natural about nationalism is not to deny its existence. Ethnic nationalism will exist as long as people are oppressed on the basis of their ethnic identity. The ruling classes encourage nationalism and national conflict in order to divide the masses and prolong their domination. It is only when conflicts that they encouraged go out of control and threatens their economic stability that they talk of solutions. Even there they are not interested in dealing with the basic problems but seek to find patchwork solutions that serve the short-term interests of the ruling classes. The forces of communal hatred and mistrust that they have unleashed continue unchecked.

The reason why any minority ethnic group or nationality seeks the right to rule itself or have total control over its destiny is a lack of faith in the existing social and political system which has failed to safeguard the rights of the minority. The demand for secession cannot be seen as the problem. It is only a symptom of a more serious ailment. Secession itself may not sometimes be the best cure. The right to self-determination, like the right of a spouse to divorce, is only a device that assures a minority nationality that if co-existence within a union of nationalities threatens its identity and survival as a distinct ethnic group it may leave the union. Thus the nationalities are made to come together on a voluntary basis.

The concept of nation and nationality are often confused. As noted earlier, na-

tionalism and nationhood are historical. There are multi-ethnic nations where widely different socio-ethnic groups come together as a nation. Cuba and Nicaragua under Sandinistas rule are good examples. China sees itself as a multi-ethnic nation with a predominant Han majority. Asian, African and Latin American countries are almost without exception multi-ethnic. An ethnic group can see itself as a part of multi-ethnic nation as a distinct nationality depending on the historical and socio-political circumstances. In some instances, a nationality may be suitably placed to claim for itself statehood. When a nationality, identified by common features such as language, economy a common culture and political heritage, a contiguous territory or some of these features, asserts its right to have control over its own affairs, it is claiming nationhood. Control of a nationality over its destiny may be exercised in several possible ways and to do so is to exercise right of self-determination. Right of self-determination includes the right of a nation to secede. On the contrary it also includes the right not to secede and find other ways of coexistence with other nations and nationalities. To equate the right to secession with secession itself is absurd it is like saying that the right to divorce should necessarily mean divorce and every modern day marriage has to end in divorce according to this argument.

The right to self-determination has historically been seen and interpreted in terms of the right of nations subject to colonial rule and imperial annexation to secede. We will miss the fundamental principles underlying the concept of the right of self-determination if we see it simply as some form of sacred right of special group of people who have the privilege of calling themselves a nation. This means that any ethnic group however distinct or exclusive has no right to determine its mode of socio-political existence unless it qualifies to be a nation. This will be to subvert the spirit of self-determination.

If we approach the national question from the point of view of social groups and communities which like to preserve their identity and ensure their existence as a distinct socio-ethnic group free from domination by other militarily or numerically stronger groups. One need not be a Marxist to see the sense in granting a people this right as long as this right is not seen as the right of the ethnic group

to dominate others.

The above consideration becomes all the more important since there are no national boundaries which can claim to contain only one ethnic group to the exclusion of all others. Thus carving up the world into a patchwork of nations will still leave us with minority nationalities within each territory. Thus the right to self-determination has to be interpreted and exercised in a way that the right of any socio-ethnic group, however, small are safeguarded.

The right of self-determination as applied to nations and nationalities that can exist as nation states includes the right to secession. Its implementation can take the form of secession under circumstances in which the nation a nationality cannot co-exist with other nations and nationalities within the framework of a nation state. In other circumstances, co-existence is possible in various forms including regional autonomy, federation and even a unitary structure where there is a desire for one. Devolution of political and economic power is desirable right down to the level of the smallest social unit, since it ensures greater democracy for the people.

Many nationalities and ethnic groups cannot have an administrative structure in the form of a nation state for reasons like the lack of geographic contiguity and strong dependence on other nationalities and ethnic groups. Defining self-determination in the way it is for nations will lead us nowhere. Self-determination implemented in its spirit means that nationalities and ethnic groups are not only allowed but also encouraged to have socio-political and administrative units that will safeguard their right to existence as a distinct social group.

Some may argue in the name of progress, that autonomous units for ethnic minorities and nationalities will isolate them from the mainstream of development and prevent social advancement of 'backward' communities. Experiences in China and Nicaragua tell us that the exact opposite is true. Autonomous units enable a community to determine the pace at which it wants to develop or change its mode of social existence without outside interference. As a result, social change happens in a situation of harmony rather than conflict between communities.

Respect for traditional homelands and territory is important in dealing with any national question. To deprive a people of its right to its territory in the name of national unity is to violate a fundamental right of a people and therefore unity and friendship between nationalities and national minorities. Projects of greater national interest have to be carried out in consultation with minority groups and with their consent and in a way that they do not feel threatened.

What is particularly important about the above approach to extending the principle of right of self-determination is that it stands in direct opposition to that of imperialism, which implements a policy of assimilation in the name of so-called globalization and open market. Marxists, while rejecting nationalism as a form of false consciousness, recognize its existence in reality and its positive role in combating oppression and uniting people in anti-imperialist struggles. To respect the beliefs and sentiments of people, even when one does not subscribe to those beliefs and sentiments, is important to any revolutionary. To civilise 'backward' people has been the mission of colonialists in the past and is carried out with vigor by imperialism today. Chauvinism acts in very much the same way when it imposes its will on minority nationalities and ethnic groups.

The approach of chauvinism to 'national unity' is assimilation and leads invariably to conflict and national disunity. The Marxist approach is unity in diversity, and in the post-colonial era, it has to affirm the principle of the right of self-determination and extend its scope in its true spirit to nationalities irrespectively of size and distribution.

Targeting China

by S.Jegendran

Imperialism has not forgiven China for finally liberating itself from the clutches of the imperial powers in 1949. What is most unforgivable is the fact that China did not only refuse to compromise on issues of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity but also was an inspiration for the masses of the remaining colonies and semi-colonies to fight for national independence and greater social justice and human equality. China's role became more important after things went awfully wrong in the Soviet Union following the ascent to power by Nikita Khrushchov. Despite the fact that China is now neither what it was nor what it meant to the oppressed masses of the world in its first three decades or so, it is still a symbol of defiance to the US imperialists, and to the successors to colonial rulers of Europe.

It is particularly important at this juncture to remind ourselves of the historical events of the 20th century, especially that of the past half century, since history is again being rewritten by imperialism in a way that it would like history to be read by the generations to come. The domination of the media by imperialism in general and the ever increasing role of the visual media in providing information in particular mean that what will pass off as history for the masses will be doctored versions of history which glorify acts of aggression by imperialism as acts of benevolence and belittle mass struggles for liberation. In fact, many historical events have already been distorted, and with a little help from postmodernist intellectuals, it is even possible to negate the universality of any positive or negative experience of mankind in its struggle for freedom and justice. The language of reporting and news casting in the media controlled by the imperialist states and big capital are designed to make people associate capitalism with all what is noble and profound and communism with all what is evil and profane. Thus the ground is being prepared to justify any means to save mankind from all the 'evil forces' that stand in the way of the free market globalisation and liberalisation. Ronald Reagan's concept of the 'Evil Empire' did not vanish into thin air when the Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is

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still alive and in a more virulent form which is far more harmful to the people of the world than the one which had a specific target like the Soviet Union. Anything in the way of neo-colonialist expansion through multinationals and international money lending agencies is readily identified as an enemy of progress and freedom. And any collective action to halt the advancement of the imperialist cause is labelled as terrorism or subversion and dealt with accordingly.

It is in this context that the hostility of imperialism towards China has to be studied and lessons drawn for the anti-imperialist struggles of the world. China has been the target of imperialism on three major territorial issues, namely Hong Kong, Tibet and Taiwan. China was also denied its rightful place in the United Nations for almost a quarter of a century, simply because the United States chose to continue to recognize the government set up by the reactionary Chiang Kai-Shek in the Chinese island of Taiwan after he fled the mainland when the communists liberated it. China is still denied its rightful place in some international bodies, more than a quarter of a century after taking its seat in the UN, occupied until then by the Taiwan-based regime with the backing of the US government. The excuses for keeping China out have since changed, but the intentions remain essentially the same. Although it is very cynical of the imperialists and their media to use human rights and democratic reforms to criticize their enemies, they have been consistent in one thing, that is the use of double standards. Let us first look at imperialist meddling in the territorial matters of China before looking at meddling in the internal affairs of China.

The 100 year history of Hong Kong is the history of naked colonial aggression. British imperialism has always been reluctant to part with stolen goods, and the war over the Falklands in 1982 is only a minor example. The reality that Britain had more to lose by trying to hold on to Hong Kong beyond 1997 was seen by the ultra-rightist Margaret Thatcher who made a deal with the Chinese government about the handing over of Hong Kong to those to whom it lawfully belonged. But under the reportedly more liberal government of John Major, Chris Patten, who was rejected by his electorate only to be made the last Governor of Hong Kong by Major, was hell bent on ensuring that China had as much trouble

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as possible in Hong Kong after the handing over. Democracy was a weapon used by Patten to hurt China. and universal franchise was introduced for the first time in the colony after more than nine decades of occupation, and totally ignoring the fact that in 1967 mass demonstrations for democratic rights were brutally suppressed by the colonial regime in Hong Kong. The introduction of a 'democratically elected' assembly for Hong Kong was carried out in breach of the agreement made with China and without due consultation of the Chinese government. The firm stand taken by the Government of China led ultimately to the humiliation of Patten. Patten did succeed in creating some problems for China, but only at a cost to British interests in China, including Hong Kong.

The ploy of offering genuine British passports to the people of Hong Kong, who were already entitled to a second class British passport with which they could not travel freely to Britain, was designed to persuade the wealthy to take their wealth and investments out of China to Britain. The embarrassment caused by the unwillingness of the British immigration authorities was a more significant outcome of this mischief than any tangible benefit to Britain. A few British companies left Hong Kong, and that included the notorious Jardine's who made their wealth through the opium trade, but British companies are now turning once again to China for more business, after having lost some ground to their rivals in the US, Japan and Europe.

Another aspect of British and western imperialist attack on China in relation to Hong Kong was the media war. Everything was done to persuade investors in Hong Kong and elsewhere that China will not honour the agreement it made with the British government on Hong Kong once the territory was returned. There were two purposes at play in this campaign. One was to destabilise the economy of Hong Kong and the other was to create a situation in which China could be faulted for any step it takes to assert its sovereignty over Hong Kong. The latter is particularly useful in using Hong Kong as base to destabilise China. But very nearly every prophecy of doom about Hong Kong after 1997 was proved to be false by the events that followed. In fact, Hong Kong survived the economic disaster that struck the region in 1997 far better than Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea, let alone Indonesia.

The problem of Tibet is partly a consequence of British imperialist policy in South and East Asia. British efforts to bring Tibet under their control were not entirely successful and China for several centuries exercised sovereignty over this region. Tibetan statehood was never an issue until recently, and even the Dalai Lama chooses to be ambiguous on the issue, despite prodding by his imperialist paymasters. Evidence of Indian designs on Tibet includes the way Jawaharlal Nehru dealt with China. It was reported in the US news magazine *Newsweek* in April 1999 that the CIA persuaded Nehru to bypass red tape to give refuge to the Dalai Lama who fled Tibet after the abortive rebellion in 1959 organized by the feudal landlords, of whom the Dalai Lama was one, in response to the proposed reforms which included the freeing of the serfs in Tibet. Evidence has also emerged that Tibetan insurgents were trained in the US during the Dwight Eisenhower regime (1952-60) and the policy of interference in Tibet continued even afterwards with John Kennedy as President. The facilities afforded by the Indian government to Dalai Lama to use India as a base for his anti-China activities was a contributory factor besides the intransigence of the Indian government, and Nehru in particular, in the eruption of the long standing Sino-Indian border dispute into a war. (Facts confirming that China's claims to disputed territory in the North-western Sector are more consistent than Indian claims with earlier British maps have only recently received some publicity in India. A useful article by A.J. Noorani appeared in the Indian news magazine *Frontline* in March 1999).

The Dalai Lama took full advantage of the Sino-Indian border dispute, but the strengthening of the ties between India and the Soviet Union in the context of a shared hostility towards China and the weakening but still close relationship between the US and Pakistan made it difficult for the US to put the Dalai Lama to full use against China. By the late 1970's and particularly after the weakening of the Non-Aligned Movement, the US exercised greater influence in India and was able to exploit him to the full as a 'god man' and potential head of a quasi-government in exile. The 1970's also witnessed an upsurge in interest in the religions of the orient, Buddhism in particular, in the west and well funded organisations were busy developing an anti-Marxist alternative in Buddhism. Many

of them are still busy campaigning against China and pushing the Dalai Lama's political cause in the name of religious rights.

It is conveniently forgotten by western commentators on Tibet that the Dalai Lama was a slave owner and a partner in power with the Tibetan Feudal class. The image of peace, goodwill and tolerance built around the Dalai Lama was, however, punctured in 1996 by the ban that he placed on certain religious cults within Tibetan Buddhism and the violent methods used by his supporters to implement them. This is not surprising when the man had resorted to chicanery in the search for the spiritual successor to the Panchen Lama, a more progressive Tibetan leader who supported the anti-feudal reforms in Tibet, who died over a decade ago. It was quite amusing to find rational individuals endorsing the witchcraft used by the Dalai Lama to discover the 'reincarnation' of the Panchen Lama. The Chinese government was quick to respond. It argued that the procedure used by the Dalai Lama was in breach of tradition and used Tibetan Lamas living in Tibet to discover their Panchen Lama. All attempts by the agents of the Dalai Lama to smuggle his Panchen Lama out of China failed so that the coup by which he would have had in his control the most serious challenger to his religious authority was frustrated.

Much of the information from Western media about population control in Tibet, lack of religious freedom, suppression of Tibetan culture and national oppression is manufactured. Little attention is paid to the reality in Tibet, except for what fits the image that the western news media likes to present, and the Chinese government's point of view is entirely ignored, as in the case of many other matters. The fact that the one-child rule for families in China is not applied to the national minorities including the Tibetans is never mentioned. If the national minorities are encouraged to preserve their culture and work in their language, that is shown as an attempt to keep them backward, and if advanced education and technology is provided in Mandarin that is interpreted as an attempt to destroy them culturally. It is strange that such criticism should come from European and US sources, since linguistic and cultural rights of minority nationalities have been denied for centuries in Europe, and quite recently the US has legislated to deny the linguistic rights of the Hispanic people.

Chinese policy on Religious freedom has been based on the right to believe as well as not to believe and on the practice of religion as personal faith but not as a political device. Firm action against certain religious establishments was necessary in the early years of the People's Republic since these establishments had for long taken sides with the reactionaries and the imperialists. It is true that excesses were committed during the some stages of the Cultural Revolution, but steps to rectify these errors were taken even before the Cultural Revolution was declared to have been ended. What the Dalai Lama seeks to restore in Tibet is political power of the feudal class and the restoration of feudal privileges in the name of Tibetan Buddhism. The media images of peace and serenity in 'old Tibet' are smoke screens that conceal the reality of a cruel slave society to which reforms since 1959 put an end. The existence of forces loyal to Dalai Lama in Tibet and the encouragement that they receive from vested interests do not mean that there are no genuine grievances among the Tibetan people. What is not acceptable is imperialist meddling in the internal affairs of China in the name of religious freedom. The cause of imperialism cloaked as the Tibetan cause is pushed in several ways by imperialists directly and through NGOs. Magazines like the New Internationalist (UK), posing as progressive but non-Marxist, indulge in double standards when they treat Tibet as a country occupied by China while they would not apply the same logic to Northern Ireland or to Scotland, or for that matter Kashmir.

American hypocrisy is most transparent in the question of Taiwan. Until China took its seat in the UN, the US never doubted that Taiwan was part of China. The problem then concerned the legitimacy of the government in the mainland. When the US realised that they cannot restore Guomintang rule on the mainland, they did everything in their power to keep Taiwan under their control. The 'Two Chinas Policy' and the 'One Taiwan - One China Policy' encouraged by the US and forces loyal to it in Taiwan were designed for this purpose. It is in view of such conspiracies that the Chinese government has always insisted on the recognition of the People's Republic as the sole legitimate government of China and has risked breaking diplomatic relations with several countries. It is, however,

true that American policy makers have been divided between continued support for the old nationalists of the Guomintang and encouragement of 'Taiwanese' nationalism.

The US has done much to boost the economy of Taiwan to project it as a 'capitalist paradise' in contrast to the 'communist hell' in the mainland. It will for a long time need Taiwan to prop up its plans to contain the 'communist menace'. Thus the reunion of Taiwan with the motherland will be that much harder than in the case of Macao, where the Portuguese government was very co-operative, or Hong Kong, where the British establishment realised, however reluctantly, that the colony was not theirs forever. Some liberals have pleaded the case for national self-determination for Taiwan without taking into account the historical circumstances that concern the case for 'Taiwanese nationhood'. The question of Taiwan is a political question concerning the whole of China and not a national question concerning Taiwan. Resolving the Taiwan issue in a way similar to that of Hong Kong is feasible and will be just. Secession of Taiwan in the international political context of today and against the background of the events of the past 50 years means an insult to the Chinese people as a whole, and the Chinese government cannot compromise with imperialism on this issue.

The question of human rights found a place on the foreign policy agenda during Jimmy Carter's presidency. But what human rights meant to US policy makers is another matter. It is interesting to note that the US which is the biggest warring state in the entire world and a perpetrator of the worst possible forms of direct and indirect violence against humanity should be the champion of international human rights. The US denies the most basic rights to livelihood, education and health to a sizeable section of its population, but refuses to see it as a violation of human rights. The crime rate in the US is not a matter of national pride and its record of treatment of Blacks, Hispanics and Amerindians is disgraceful. Despite the few gains resulting from the Civil Rights Campaign of the late 1950's - early 1960's, the more violent Black protest in the latter half of the 1960's, and the continuing campaign by Black activists, the plight of the Blacks is substantially the same, and the US is still a white supremacist state. But that

does not stop the US from preaching to the world and teaching other nations a few lessons on the rights of the minorities.

Democratic reforms have only one meaning to the US and its allies: uncontrolled capitalist exploitation. The economic weakness of the Soviet Union was evident during the Leonid Brezhnev era, and the reversal of the fortunes of the non-aligned movement and the failure of the leadership of the Third World to stand together against imperialist plunder and exploitation only compounded the crisis. When the Soviet Union negotiated the control of nuclear weapons with the US in the 1980's, it did so from a position of economic, but not military, weakness. Without a coherent and genuine Marxist-Leninist alternative, the Soviet Union was doomed to collapse. The invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and more seriously that of Afghanistan in 1980 did not save the Soviet union from crisis but worsened its problems and hurt the international communist movement. The main beneficiary of the collapse of the Soviet Union was US imperialism which started to talk about replacing communism with democracy, really meaning monopoly capitalism.

With its main rival for global control out of the way, the US was ready to remove the obstacles, which were largely its own creations, to peace in Southern Africa and to sponsor peace talks between the Palestinians and their Israeli oppressors. It could even afford to lose the dictators who did the dirty work for it in Latin America and parts of Africa. Thus it was, overnight, able to pose as the defender of human freedom, while continuing to violate it wherever its interests were affected.

China is a still Third World Country and will remain so for at least another decade. The emergence of China as the leading political, military or economic power in Asia is still seen as a threat to US interests in the whole of the Asia Pacific region. Thus, despite the changes to the Chinese economic system initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, the US has been keen to undermine the political stability of China. While it is not right to claim that the unfortunate events around Tien An Men in 1989 were entirely the result of an American conspiracy, it is folly to

ignore the hand of the US in the various events that finally led to the tragic death of two hundred or so. While the fact that a model of the US Statue of Liberty was on display among the crowd of protesters at the Tien An Men Square is symbolic, there is more than circumstantial evidence for American encouragement of individuals to make trouble. It was revealed later in 1989 that there was funding through Taiwan for some of the protest groups.

Every June since 1989, much fanfare is made about the 'Tien An Men massacre' and the 'brutal suppression of the democracy movement'. There is a lot to be sad and angry about the events of 1989 as the bloodshed could possibly have been averted. The confrontation between the Chinese government and the protesters itself is in part a consequence of the failure of the Chinese leadership to put politics in command. The need to continually provide political education to the youth had been long ignored since 1978. Many policy makers saw economic performance in isolation from social issues, and the lessons of the struggles of the past was forgotten by many. The important international role played by China in providing moral and material support for anti-imperialist struggles was gradually abandoned. The unprecedented level of corruption was a matter of serious concern for many. Also, many genuine Marxist-Leninists and other progressives within China were unhappy about the change in direction of the economy and about the new direction of the Communist Party. Thus, it is not correct to brand all the protesters as reactionaries or people misled by mischievous elements. The significance of the protests cannot be ignored either. But what the so-called leaders of the protest had in mind was something else.

In contrast to what the western media say, the Chinese government was willing to talk to the protesters about the issues. But like any legitimate government it refused to discuss changing the political system or the government with a small group of protesters. The protests were held in the historically most important part of the Chinese capital and tolerated for eight weeks, which was much longer than any such demonstration would have been in any western bourgeois democracy, including the US, the biggest, and the UK, the oldest alive. The demonstrators also sought to cause the maximum possible embarrassment to the Chinese

government by mobilising a large crowd in the Tien An Men Square on the occasion of the visit of the then Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov. The government did nothing to disperse the crowds or to suppress the demonstrations prior to the visit. All of this was seen by the leaders of the protest as signs of weakness and they became more militant.

The Chinese government realised rather late that it had allowed things to drift too far and that there were already people within the party who were using the protests to strengthen their position within the party and propel the economy faster towards a capitalist market system. Although the decision to disperse the crowd was taken, the Chinese state did not have at its disposal the means for effective crowd control. Tear gas, water cannon and the sometimes lethal plastic bullets, besides police batons and the guns of the American police, are common devices used in the West. China has had little need for any of them since liberation and, even during the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution, the state machinery acted with restraint.

It should also be remembered that the violence around Tien An Men Square or elsewhere in Beijing was not initiated by the Police or the People's Liberation Army. The decision to bring in the PLA was to minimise any possible violent confrontation, and the PLA showed much restraint. This too was seen by the protesters as a sign of their own strength. It was only after groups of protesters damaged several army trucks, killed several soldiers and wounded many more that the PLA responded to their attack. The number killed in the conflict was severely exaggerated and placed at several thousand by the American dominated media. Our local media, as usual, was pleased to repeat the stories from the global 'news industry'. The Chinese authorities were quick to give the correct figure at around 200 of whom around 30 were students. These figures were later accepted as correct by several independent observers, although the western media now chooses to say that the real figures may be 'substantially more' than the official figure so as to preserve the myth of thousands being killed.

The imperialists have been looking forward to the tenth anniversary of the Tien An Men incident to embarrass China, but the day passed without incident, much to the disappointment of the imperialists and their media mercenaries. The 'pro-democracy' demonstration to mark the occasion in Hong Kong received much publicity internationally, although the fact that the 'repressive' Chinese regime did nothing to stop it did not receive media attention. The imperialists want instability and chaos in China, but sadly for them the Chinese government would not oblige, and certainly not in the way they the imperialists want.

Any chance to embarrass the Chinese government and insult the Chinese people is not spared by the imperialists. Where the opportunity does not exist, it is created. The American public has for decades been brain-washed by its media into believing that it is the US that can save democracy and human rights in the world so that, even when the US invades a country or bombs it out of existence, it is seen to be doing the victims a favour. The common belief that the US is helping China by expanding trade exists is fully exploited by the extreme right wing of America. The fact that the US has as much, if not more than what China has, to lose by denying the most favoured nation status (MFN) to China is not mentioned by the media, but the loss to China is. Recent accusations about China stealing nuclear technology secrets is sheer fabrication. Much of the evidence is speculative, and if anything is proven it is simply that there have been major security lapses in the way classified work is carried out in the US. What is forgotten is that the US steals scientists and technologists from the Third World, which includes China, through the brain drain. It is the unequal world economic system which enables the rich countries to cream off the scientifically skilled personnel from the poor countries which have spent a substantial part of their resources to train these men and women.

The recent US dominated NATO bombing campaign against Serbia was resolutely opposed by Russia, China and many important Third World countries. The NATO establishment which claimed pin-point accuracy of all its targets dismissed the deliberate bombing of the Chinese Embassy by US aircraft as 'accidental'. It took a lot of protest and mass anger in China before the President Bill Clinton

thought that an apology was in order. Yet, to this day the US has refused to conduct an inquiry. But it is hardly surprising since it has always been one rule for the US and another for others. What were even more cynical were the media interpretation of public anger in China as 'state orchestrated' and attempts to warn China that if the demonstrations were allowed to go on they could turn against the Chinese government and cause political instability. This is not just wishful thinking but blatant contempt for the offended party.

The main lesson of the events of the past decade is that imperialism has become far more aggressive than in the colonial and the early post-colonial era. The US is all out to create a mono-polar world dominated by US imperialism. While there is competition between the US, Europe and Japan, the Third World is their common victim. The main contradiction in the world today is that between US-led imperialism and the oppressed people of the world. To forget this is to forget class struggle. It is in this context that 'leftist' critics of China have to see the clear distinction between criticising China for its failings as socialist system and its failure to support revolutionary struggles on the one hand and repeating uncritically the imperialist lies against China as a violator of human rights, oppressor of minority nationalities and an aggressor.

It is true that today we are flooded with information from imperialist controlled media. It is also true that access to alternative view points about world events is hard. But is that not the real challenge before a revolutionary? Extracting the truth from not only facts but also distorted information is an essential task for any mass organisation which wants to lead the masses towards eventual victory. If one were to believe the media, Marxism should be a spent force in history, but it is alive and well and is nurtured by those who dare to defy and dare to struggle. Defending Marxism includes defending China, Cuba, Korea and Vietnam against imperialist attack, despite whatever reservations a Marxist-Leninist or any other progressive may have about the political direction in these countries.

Comments on Global Events

Turkey

The mock trial of Abdella Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) is now over. Whatever the final outcome of appeals to higher courts of law, the Turkish reactionary regime is not likely to let Ocalan out of its clutches. Ocalan's arrest was enabled by a US backed conspiracy in which Israel played a major role. But if the Turkish and US authorities think that the continued detention or the killing of Ocalan will end the armed struggle of the Kurdish people, they should be prepared for some surprises. Those who habitually see any armed uprising of oppressed masses as terrorism, unless it is sponsored by imperialism or its agents, cannot, of course, see the just nature of the struggle led by the PKK.

What is significant about the reporting of the trial by the Western media is that they have from day one of the trial done everything in their power to cast Ocalan in the image of a villain who has 'buckled' under stress. They also sought to read in the position taken by the PKK a conflict of interests between Ocalan and PKK militants. Ocalan's offer to end violence and to start negotiations was portrayed as a cowardly and desperate move of a terrorist to save his skin. The militant stance of the PKK was shown as a rejection of Ocalan by the militants. The media have carefully concealed the fact that the PKK was always willing to negotiate an end to the armed struggle and that the demand for Kurdish self-determination did not mean that the PKK saw the secession of the Kurdish region of Turkey as essential to the settlement of the Kurdish national question. The background to the problem itself, namely that successive Turkish chauvinist regimes have for centuries rejected the Kurdish national identity and denied the Kurdish people the right to use their language in public affairs and to preserve their culture, has received scant attention from the media.

Hardly ten years ago the US shed crocodile tears for the Kurds in the north of Iraq and the Marsh Arabs in southern Iraq, who were, undoubtedly, victims of

the oppressive Iraqi regime. It used the oppression of the Kurds and the Marsh Arabs by the Iraqi regime as the excuse for controlling Iraqi air space in the north and the south of Iraq. Once the US aggressors had their way, the question of national oppression in Iraq was forgotten. The case of the PKK was, however, different. The PKK is a Marxist-Leninist liberation organisation which the US detests and likes to get rid of. Also, there is no serious political alternative for the PKK to plead the Kurdish cause in Turkey. To the US there is no option but to annihilate the PKK. The problem for the Turkish government is that it needs to improve its 'human rights record' to enter the European Community, but there is no one to negotiate peace with if there is no dialogue with the PKK. Eliminating Ocalan will only make the prospects for peace and stability in Turkey worse.

Ocalan's arrest has brought the Kurdish problem into sharp focus in the international political scene. It is the duty of all progressives to protest against the Turkish government about its treatment of the Kurdish people and demand the immediate release of Abdella Ocalan.

Bombing Serbia

The US, being the only global superpower, has to demonstrate its ability to dispense American style justice wherever it chooses and whenever it chooses. It insists on being appreciated for its role as international policeman. It also insists that the rest of the world should pay the bills for its folly and that the innocent victims of its rash actions asked to pick up the pieces.

It does not take a brilliant mind to realise that the US has left Serbia in ruins and the Kosovo Albanians in a worse plight than they were before the US chose to protect them by bombing Serbia, and the prospect of Serbs and ethnic Albanians living in harmony in Kosovo is in ruins. Clearly, the Kosovo refugee problem was a direct consequence of US bombing, and the nature and scale of the assistance from the US and Israel to the KLA militants in escalating the crisis in Kosovo is common knowledge. Serbia has been bullied into submission by the US, but the problems in Kosovo are not yet over, and worse may be yet to come. The US is

being commended by the powerful nations of the West for what the people of the Third World condemn. The US and its NATO allies want to punish Milosovic for his war crimes, but who will punish the US imperialists for crimes against humanity in every part of the world? For example, the victims of Union Carbide's negligence in Bhopal remain uncompensated, fifteen years after the tragic event, and the offenders are still at large. Vietnam is still being penalised for successfully defeating US aggression, and Cuba, Libya, Iran and a long list of countries have paid and are still paying dearly for daring to defy the diktat of US imperialism.

No progressive can hesitate to condemn US aggression be it in Iraq or Serbia, and a principled stand against US aggression is important since foreign, and especially imperialist, meddling in the internal affairs of nations is unacceptable and harmful to the interests of the oppressed masses. Does this mean, however, that an oppressor can be condoned just because he is a victim of US attack? Let us not forget that it was the violation of the fundamental rights of people by certain oppressive regimes that provided the US with excuses to commit aggression in the name of justice, while its real motive was pure expansionism. Failure to criticise an oppressive regime for its actions against its masses, including the minority nationalities, robs a progressive of the moral right to criticise US aggression.

The contribution of Serbian chauvinism to the disintegration of Yugoslavia is more significant than that of any other internal factor. The continuation of the very same chauvinistic policies again helped to precipitate the crisis in Kosovo. What is being emphasised here is the fact that the US used the grievances of ethnic Albanians to destabilise Serbia does not mean that Serbian chauvinism is above blame. Thus it is important not only to object to foreign meddling and aggression against a sovereign state but also to stand for the rights of the oppressed, irrespective of whether the oppression on the basis of race, religion, caste, nationality or language. Some 'leftists' in Sri Lanka object strongly to US aggression, defend Yugoslavia as a 'socialist' state and refuse to criticise Serbian oppression of national minorities. They may have other sinister motives

such as pandering to Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism for this. But as far as Marxist-Leninists are concerned, the stand taken by one on Serbia is a good indicator of how progressive one is.

Kashmir

The real issues in Kashmir have for long been clouded by the Indo-Pakistani dispute. India gained control over the most populous part of Kashmir in 1947 without the consent of the population, through a combination of deception and aggression. Successive Indian governments have refused to respect the feelings of the people of Kashmir about staying within the Indian Union. Kashmiri territory was divided between its two neighbours since the war over Kashmir in 1947, and the Indian rulers have done everything that they can to avoid consulting the people of Kashmir. Jawaharlal Nehru did not hesitate to throw Sheik Abdulla into prison for demanding autonomy for Kashmir, as he did again to Master Tara Singh over the national question in Punjab. Indian intervention in Pakistan which led to the secession of Bangladesh also provided India with the opportunity to strengthen its grip on Kashmir. But that has in no way solved the national question in Kashmir.

The Muslim majority in Kashmir, like the Muslim minority elsewhere in India, began find that their status as a distinct social group was threatened by the tendency of the dominant political parties to cater increasingly to Hindu chauvinist sentiments. The Indian National Congress, with a reputation, not necessarily matched by substance, for secularism acted in a way that it would not be accused by the forces of communalism as a defender of the religious minorities. Although the vast majority of the people of Kashmir have since 1947 resented Indian domination and wanted greater autonomy, if not independence, the rise of militancy was a consequence of the mishandling of the national question.

What are at stake in Kashmir are two issues: one concerns the conflict of interests between India and Pakistan and the other the demand for self-determination by the Kashmiri people. For historical reasons, the two issues have become intertwined and, as long as the emphasis remains on the Indo-Pakistan dispute,

it will be easy for the Indian ruling classes to continue oppressing the Kashmiri Muslims in the name of national security. The pile of charges and counter charges by India and Pakistan about the recent conflict in Kargil should not let us stray from the main issue, namely the self-determination of the people of Kashmir. The question of Kashmir, as long as it is allowed to be seen as a matter of deciding whether its ownership is Indian or Pakistani, will remain a bloody wound, no matter who is in control in New Delhi or Islamabad.

Although Hindu chauvinism is instrumental in the escalation of armed conflict inside Kashmir, secularism alone is insufficient to deal with the problem. What is necessary is the recognition of the fact that the Kashmiri people want self-determination, and no government of India which takes the rigid stand that Kashmir is forever an integral part of India can find a peaceful and lasting solution for the problem.

Indonesia

The Indonesian elections are over and the slow release of the results are, as many suspected, due to the need for the armed forces and the officialdom to minimise the scale of humiliation of the Golkar party founded by the fallen dictator Suharto. This may not be sufficient to halt the election of Megawati Sukarnoputri as president in the forthcoming presidential elections, but is certainly useful to safeguard the interests of those who rode rough over the masses of Indonesia and plundered the wealth of the country.

Thirty four years of misrule founded on the mass murder of communists and their sympathisers numbering over half a million have also encouraged the growth of forces of communalism, religious extremism and intolerance. These forces are likely to tear Indonesia apart and the former rulers will do whatever they can to destabilise the new regime if they see any signs of a threat to their stolen wealth and social position.

The question before Megawati is similar in some ways to the one that faced Sukarno in the early 60's, but far more serious. How does she hope to stand up

to the forces of reaction and their imperialist backers? If she cannot mobilise the masses behind her and rely on them to deal with the forces of reaction, it will not be long before another Suharto, if not his political successors, will return to power in the name of restoring law and order and economic stability. It is therefore the duty of the progressive forces of Indonesia to strengthen unity and provide leadership in the struggle against the continuation of imperialist domination and the revival of crony capitalism.

East Timor

The annexation of East Timor in 1974 by the Indonesian military dictatorship led by Suharto led to a struggle for independence. The perseverance of the East Timorese people in armed struggle contributed to the downfall of Suharto. The changes in Indonesia have helped the prospects of autonomy, if not independence, for East Timor. But the armed forces and the local pro-Indonesian militia which have been nurtured in East Timor are doing everything possible to deny the people of East Timor a free choice. Every effort to deceive the East Timorese people is doomed to fail and will only worsen the fears of the minority nationalities and ethnic groups of Indonesia, thus weakening the unity of the country.

It is worrying that the rivals for power in Indonesia fail to see the problem of Timor as a matter of the right of a nation subject to armed invasion and occupation for independence and self-determination. Failure to respect the right to self-determination of East Timor by the future rulers of Indonesia will only encourage the forces of chauvinism within Indonesia and jeopardise the unity and stability of Indonesia. In fact, the imperialists may like it to happen to an Indonesia which they cannot exploit in the way they did in the past three decades or so.

Important Events

International Seminar on Mao

The International seminar on Mao and Peoples war in celebration the 105th birth anniversary of Comrade Mao Zedong was successfully held in the Netherlands in December 1998.

The seminar was convened by the Communist Party of India (ML)(People's war). The Communist Party of Philippines and the Communist Party of Turkey (ML) and the participants were parties upholding Marxism- Leninism-Maoism or Mao Zedong Thought and waging people war and other parties supporting people's war.

The objective of the seminar was to pay tribute to comrade Mao Zedong for his teaching on people's war and to uphold the significance and necessity of these in advancing, the national liberation movement s, the broad anti-imperialist movement and the world proletarian revolution.

At the conclusion of the seminar the communiqué of the seminar was signed by the participants and of a general declaration on Mao and People's War was also adopted .

*" A revolution is
not a dinner party or writing an essay
or painting a picture, or doing embroidery;
it cannot be so refined.
So leisurely and gentle, so temperate,
kind courteous, restrained and magnanimous.
A revolution is an insurrection,
an act of violence
by which one class overthrows another."*

- Mao-

Lenin's Birthday Commemoration

On 22nd April 1999 the birthday of Comrade Lenin was observed in the Red Square, Moscow. To mark the occasion there were many programmes held throughout that day in Moscow. The important feature was that a mass gathering was organized at Red Square jointly by the All Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, the Party of the Russian Communists and the Russian Workers Communist Party.

After the mass gathering a procession marched to the Lenin mausoleum where the body of Lenin was laid to rest and the Party leaders who participated from inside and outside paid revolutionary homage to the great leader of the proletariat and placed wreaths.

Many Parties including Socialist Unity Centre of India participated in the event.

International Communist Seminar

An international communist seminar was held in Brussels, Belgium from 2nd May to 4th May 1999 as has been done for the past several years .

The theme of the seminar was Imperialism Means War which was subdivided into four headings, namely Current danger of imperialist war, People's struggle against war, Military strategy of imperialism and Peace movement.

The seminar started with the opening speech by Comrade Ludo Martens, Chairman of Workers Party of Belgium (PTB).

In the first session under the heading of 'Current danger of Imperialist war', the views of the Communist party of Bulgaria, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, the Communist Party of Greece, the Communist Party of Slovakia and others were presented.

In the second session under the heading of 'Peoples Struggle Against War' the Workers Party of Korea, the Worker's Communist Party of Cuba, the Communist Party of Philippines, the Communist Party of India (ML)-Janasakti, the Socialist unity centre of India and others presented their views.

In the third session under the heading of 'Military Strategy of Imperialism' the Socialist Labour Party of Great Britain, Ray of Light group of USA, the Japan Communist League, the Workers Party of Norway, the Forum dei Comunisti of Italy, the Kommunistische Partei of Deutschland, Workers World Party of the USA, the Coordination Communiste of France, the TIKB of Turkey and others placed their views.

In the fourth session under the heading of 'Peace Movement' the Communist party of Sweden (left), the Algerian Party for Democracy and Socialism and others presented their views.

In all 69 Communist and Workers Parties representing 48 countries participated in the Seminar. A resolution strongly condemning the barbarian aggression of NATO against Yugoslavia was also passed in the seminar.

Indian Economic Domination

A statement by the Politburo of the New-Democratic Party on the Free Trade Agreement between India and Sri Lanka, was released on 1st January 1999. The contents of the statement are as follows:

The New-Democratic Party expresses its grave concern about the signing of the Free Trade Agreement between India and Sri Lanka. Considerable reservations already exist among some members of the SAARC about the speed with which the region should be converted into an economic Zone and about the introduction of free trade. These concerns are understandable in the context of the efforts of successive governments of India to propel India to the forefront of international power politics by exercising domination over the South Asian region. Besides long outstanding border disputes with its neighbours, India has annexed Sikkim in 1974, continued its domination of the affairs of Bhutan and has a strong presence, part of it military, in Nepal, very much against the wishes of the people and has already demonstrated its purpose by its military intervention in the internal affairs of its neighbours. The ambition of the Indian ruling classes has become even stronger since the collapse of the USSR.

International experience has shown that bilateral free trade agreements between countries are mutually beneficial only when trade can occur on an equal footing. Agreements between unequal partners have always favoured the stronger at the expense of the weaker. As a result of the present agreement, India will be able to expand its market for industrial goods in Sri Lanka by gaining unfair advantage over its Asian rivals. More seriously, the damage to the fragile remnants of the national industrial sector which have survived the blow delivered by the erroneous economic policies since 1977 will be great and it would mean total extinction of the local industry.

Equally important is the potential threat of Indian agricultural goods flooding the Sri Lankan market and undercutting the local producers. Agriculture in Sri Lanka is already in a serious predicament as a result of the disastrous economic policies pursued since 1977, and unlimited imports would severely undermine the agricultural sector and transform Sri Lanka into a dumping ground for the surplus produce of India.

The present agreement can force the pace of transforming the SAARC region into a region of free trade, which in the present context will only mean Indian economic domination of the region. This cannot, however, do much good to peace, harmony and co-operation between countries in the region.

The New-Democratic Party therefore appeals to all patriotic and progressive forces in the country to express their strong objection to this betrayal of the interest of the people of this country and demand that the Government of Sri Lanka annuls the agreement. This demand should be linked to the campaign by the progressive forces for peace, and against the ongoing process of privatisation and globalisation.

The above statement was signed by S.K.Senthivel General Secretary and E.Thambiah National Organiser on behalf of the Politburo of the New- Democratic Party.

NDP view of the National Question

THE FUNDAMENTAL CONTRADICTION

Our social structure is both semi-feudal, big capitalist and neo-colonist. In such a social structure, the feudal forces, big capitalists and imperialist multinationals have linked hands to form a bloc. Against this bloc are ranged the workers, peasants, intellectuals, nationalities, women and the toiling masses who are subject to economic exploitation and political repression. The contradiction between these two blocs is the fundamental contradiction in the social structure of Sri Lanka.

This social structure and the fundamental contradiction inherent in it give rise to the manifestation of various contradictions which are manipulated and utilised by the prevailing social structure to serve its own needs and safeguard the status quo. This fundamental contradiction continues to be a class contradiction, with 90 percent of the people ranged against the ten percent propertied ruling class.

The inequalities evident in Sri Lanka's social structure are clearly rooted in class. Despite some differences between them, the UNP AND SLFP fundamentally represent the class interests of the propertied and exploiting classes; both have striven to preserve the status quo. Though internal differences of race, religion and language have arisen, such differences have been transcended by the political parties which have emerged among the Tamils and the Muslims, which gave pride of

place to the interests of the propertied upper classes among the Tamils and the Muslims. Consequently, when the need arose they had no difficulty whatsoever in joining hands with the ruling class. Political parties do not exist merely to serve or fight for the common interests of all the people. The social reality is that parties reflect the interests of particular classes. New fangled theories cannot hide this stark truth.

Viewed from the perspective of a social structure which is full of inequalities and contains a fundamental contradiction between the haves and have nots, the ruling class political parties have acted in the interests of big capitalist and imperialist forces. This situation continues even today. At times, Sri Lankan history bears out that these parties have, under the guise of benefiting the majority community's language, religion and race, actually intensified the conflicts among the various nationalities to an alarming degree in order to protect their class interests.

'THE MAIN CONTRADICTION

Besides the fundamental contradiction, there are also secondary and tertiary contradictions of race, caste and gender. However, the contradiction between nationalities, which had up to now remained a secondary contradiction, has for the last two decades become so acute as to climax in a full-scale war. In today's situation this has become Sri Lanka's main contradiction relegating all, else to the background. Though this contradiction between nationalities does not possess the fundamental elements of a class contradiction, the feudal capitalist and imperialist forces have contrived to thrust it into the position of a primary contradiction. It is worth noting that under the cover of the acute intensity of the national contradiction these forces are protecting their property and class interests and ruling class power while at

the same time this contradiction conveniently allows the penetration of foreign imperialist forces. This national contradiction while diverting the attention of vast majority of the Singala, Tamis and Muslim masses also helps to conceal from them the roots of the fundamental class contradiction and its ramifications.

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On the Sands of Jaffna

by Ragala Panneer

(Translated from Tamil by Mani)

Cry not, cry not Krishanthi*
You aren't an orphan Krishanthi
A crime so cruel was allowed to happen
On your way to school Krishanthi
The state that turned the oppressor
An evil deed took place Krishanthi
They stripped you at the point of a gun
You lost heart at the sight of the gun
Did you weep till both your eyes did swell
Or shed tears with only God to tell
The tall palmyra saw it all
The sound of your sobbing made tears fall
Konesvari* and Manamperi*
Lost their lives like you Krishanthi
On the sands of Jaffna you will arise
As a soul of wisdom Krishanthi
The earth will tremble when you set foot
You will destroy those that destroyed you

** Krishanthi was a school girl raped and murdered by members of the armed forces in Jaffna in 1996. Konesvari a young mother raped and killed reportedly by members of the armed forces in Batticaloa in 1997. Manamperi, known as the Kataragama Beauty Queen, was stripped naked, forced to march, raped and killed by members of the armed forces in 1971.*

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