

# THE WAY OUT FOR THE TAMIL SPEAKING PEOPLE

V. KARALASINGHAM

INCLUDING

**Post script**:1977

INTRODUCTION

V. SATCHITHANANDAM

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*By*

**V. Karalasingham**

.....Show not the *goal*  
But show also the *path*. So closely interwoven  
Are path and goal that each with other  
Ever changes, and other *paths* forthwith  
Another *goal* set up.

(Ferdinand Lassalle in *Franz von Sickingen*. Quoted  
by Leon Trotsky in *Their Morals and Ours*)

*Introduction*

**V. Satchithanandam**

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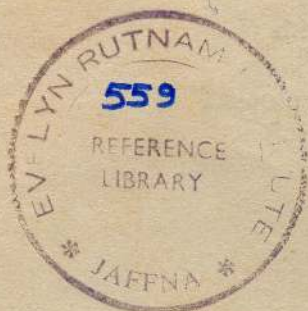
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*To*  
*INDRASEN*  
*CHAKRAVARTI*





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## INTRODUCTION

“What shall I say in my sorrow,  
on whom cry for help.  
As my brother beats me into the earth  
of the field we ploughed together?”

*Nalini Jayasuriya*

‘I do not have tomorrow’  
*Sunday Observer* 18.9.77

This echoes the anguish of millions of hearts in this little isle of ours. ‘The field we ploughed together’—yes. And why should I be beaten into that earth? And that too by my brother? Will these dark weeks of 1977 be repeated? Do I really have a tomorrow?

Comrade V. Karalasingham gives the answer to these questions in this little booklet. In the thirties of this century Ceylon threw up in the Left movement a band of educated, intelligent, and dedicated young men who were the envy of many a country both on this side of the hemisphere as well as on the other. Comrade V. Karalasingham is one of them. He is a Barrister-at-Law and had worked in the Left movements in England and India, and had edited the journal *Permanent Revolution* in Calcutta till he was arrested and deported in 1945 to Ceylon, where he was held in detention in the Badulla prison. He is one of those who has devoted his whole life towards the amelioration of the oppressed people.

The first six chapters of this booklet were published in 1963, after having been serialized in the journal *Young Socialist*, beginning in 1962. He is re-publishing these chapters without any alteration or amendment; the readers will observe that they have stood the test of time, and not one sentence in it is out of date today. Not so with the writings of communal leaders, which get belied even before the ink on the paper in which they are written dries up.

To illustrate this point, one has only to read the booklet *Minorities and Constitutional Reforms* by Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam in 1939. Not one sentence of it could be reproduced today without provoking mirth and ridicule. But another booklet *Communalism or Nationalism*\* published by the Jaffna Youth Congress in reply to

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\* Written by V. Sittampalam.



this booklet—also in 1939—has become a document for all times. The difference is between error and truth. The path of error leads to destruction. After 50 years of communal campaigning, what a pathetic admission by the TULF to state in their 1977 Manifesto that the Tamil Nation

“grope in the dark for identity and finds itself driven to the brink of devastation”?

The Tamil nation need no longer ‘grope in the dark’. This booklet illumines the path and shows them the way to live with self respect as equal citizens in the country. In the last chapter, written after the communal disturbances of 1977, the author has given in his inimitable style the reasons and the remedy for such tragedies.

Snappy headlines and sonorous slogans determine fateful issues today. They may produce record majorities in parliamentary elections, but the inexorable logic of all erroneous paths is that their victories are in fact their defeats. Thus in 1970, immediately after the overwhelming victory of the Federal Party, its leader Mr. Chelvanayakam exclaimed: “Only God can help the Tamils.” In 1977 too the TULF announced in their Manifesto that they would

“proclaim with the stamp of finality and fortitude that we alone shall rule over our land that our forefathers ruled. Sinhala imperialism shall quit our homeland.”

However immediately after gaining such unprecedented victory, the well laid plan of the TULF for the unilateral declaration of Tamil *Eelam* as a “finality” exploded like a bubble, at the first touch of reality. Now they have only to build up a fortitude to face the Tamil youths who had taken them seriously.

This important booklet is not written in a spirit of scoring any debating point, but rather in sorrow—in sympathy with the Tamil people—for the suffering and humiliation they have undergone, and in the hope of preventing a repetition of such tragedies. I commend this booklet to all in search of truth.

V. SATCHITHANANDAM



## THE PRESENT POSITION

IN the long and chequered history of the Tamil speaking people in Ceylon, never before have they faced so critical a time as the present. In rapid sequence successive governments of the UNP, MEP and SLFP have taken decisive steps against them. It is no exaggeration to say that the Tamil speaking people have been reduced to the position of an oppressed national minority. This oppression is manifest in all fields—in open legislation, in concealed administrative actions and regulations, and finally, in the direct connivance at, if not active encouragement by, these capitalist governments of pogromist activity against the Tamil speaking people.

In the legislative sphere the notorious acts of the Governments are: (1) the passing of the Indian and Pakistani Acts of the UNP government which at one stroke deprived nearly one million Tamil speaking peoples employed in the tea and rubber plantations of their political and civic rights; (2) the Sinhala Only Act of 1956 which denied to the Tamil language an equal status before the law and imposed on the Tamil speaking people the Sinhala language and (3) the Language of the Courts Act of 1961 which imposes on the law courts at all levels and in the wholly Tamil speaking areas of the Northern and Eastern Provinces the Sinhala language. In the administrative field the scarcely veiled effort of the UNP to pursue discriminatory land colonization policies in the Northern and Eastern Provinces is now the declared policy of the Government. The purpose, openly canvassed at less guarded moments, of such land colonization is the gradual reduction of the Tamil speaking people to a minority in these areas. Appointments to the public services and other public institutions are no longer on the basis of merit, and by an unwritten law, a quota system has been introduced to the grave prejudice of the Tamil speaking people. And where no quota system operates, there is flagrant and open discrimination against Tamil speaking people in the matter of appointments to and promotions within the public services. Even institutions of higher learning, as evidenced in the recent scholarship awards of the University of Ceylon are not free of such discrimination. Development projects are determined not on economic considerations but are so formulated as to exclude as far as possible the Tamil speaking people from their benefits. Again, governments have not hesitated to introduce vicious disparity in wages between equally qualified Sinhalese and Tamil speaking persons for



identical work—thus while a Sinhalese pundit is paid a graduate's salary, his opposite a Tamil pundit is paid on a much lower scale. The Tamil language (Special) Provisions Act, the so-called reasonable use of Tamil Act was intended to soften the harsh provisions of the Sinhala Only Act and was a sop to the Tamil speaking people. Even this admittedly show-piece legislation is proving irksome to the racialist elements, and accordingly the regulations framed under the Act completely negate even the limited objectives of the 1958 Act.

More ominous than legislative and administrative discrimination against the minorities is the resort to pogroms against them by the ruling class. The tragic events of 1956 in the Gal Oya valley and the communal disturbances of 1958 demonstrate that if necessary the capitalist class would even organize pogroms to further its reactionary aims. The dangers of pogroms lie not merely in the physical destruction and inhuman barbarities that inevitably accompany such action. Pogroms once used by the ruling class give rise among all minorities to a perpetual sense of fear and insecurity. Today all minorities, and in particular the Tamil speaking people live in terrible fear and uncertainty. They are haunted by the worst forebodings. The slightest political tremor sends them seeking safety in the nearest Tamil speaking area. And the tragedy is that the Tamil speaking people who reside in the predominantly Sinhalese areas do so out of economic compulsion. Whatever be the dangers to their lives and property they must necessarily maintain their employment or engage in other remunerative work since opportunities are so restricted in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The oppressed position of Tamil speaking people is so generally recognised that it is needless to enumerate specific instances. All parties which have any degree of popular support among them from the Federal Party and the Tamil Congress on the Right to the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party on the Left are agreed about the reality of the oppression. The recognition by the Tamil speaking people of their "second class" status is a step forward. In the words of Lenin, "a slave who has become conscious of his slavery and has risen to struggle for his emancipation has already half ceased to be a slave."\* But to achieve full freedom and equality before the law is another matter, and it is to this question that the Tamil speaking people must find an answer.

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\* Lenin: **Collected Works** Vol. 10 Page 84 (Moscow Edition 1961.)



## WHY HAVE THEY FAILED ?

It is worthy of note that all the parties that have hitherto gained the confidence of the Tamil people have done so on the basis of resisting the chauvinism of the majority community and securing for their people their legitimate demands. Nay more, because to these just demands were added the most bizarre claims, e.g. fifty-fifty, federalism, etc. But the period of ascendancy of the Tamil Congress, and later of the Federal Party, has signified to the Tamil speaking people not an increase but a diminution, indeed a sharp and precipitous decline of their fortunes. What heightens their tragedy is that their present plight cannot be attributed either to their apathy or their lack of support to the parties which at different times spoke for them. Apathy there never was on the question of minority rights. If anything, the politics of the last 30 years in the Northern and Eastern Provinces has revolved round precisely this question, to the exclusion of all others. The popular support for the traditional Tamil parties has been so enthusiastic and overwhelming as to incur the envy and jealousy of their rivals. Thus at the 1947 general elections, the Tamil Congress obtained 14 out of a possible maximum of 18 seats. At the 1952 general elections although the Federal Party now fought the Tamil Congress, the latter held its own conceding a bare 3 seats. The 1956 general election saw the virtual collapse of the Tamil Congress, and the emergence of the Federal Party as the political spokesman for the Northern and Eastern Provinces. This position was further strengthened in the Parliamentary elections of March and July 1960. At the last election in July 1960 the Federal Party won 16 of the 21 seats it contested. Impressive though these figures are of the wide support the Party has received from the Tamil speaking people, they are in a sense somewhat incomplete. To the Federal Party total of 16 seats must be added those of all other Tamil members of Parliament, including that of the sole representative of the Tamil Congress, since these men have not only voted with the Federal Party on every major question but have also no politics independent of the Federal Party. In the history of parliamentary democracy no other Party anywhere could claim the support which the Federal Party enjoys. Neither has this support been limited only to parliamentary elections. The



*Satyagraha* movement of January-April 1961 showed conclusively that the masses in the North and East were ready even to answer the FP's call for extra-parliamentary action.

The question inevitably arises why in the face of such over-whelming popular support, the actual experience of the Tamil speaking people is something altogether different from the promises held out to them. Indeed it would appear from the figures given above that the growth of the Tamil Congress, and later of the Federal Party, is in inverse proportion to the actual gains of the Tamil speaking people—the more these parties gained in support the less were the real rights resting with the people they claimed to represent and fight for. It is at best but a partial answer to say that this period also marked the steady growth of Sinhalese communalism, the natural accompaniment of “fifty-fifty”, and federalism. In reality this is no answer at all since the very formation of the Tamil Congress, and later of the Federal Party, was sought to be justified on the ground that only organisations of this type could resist the communalism of the majority community, and secure for the minorities, their just rights. Where the *raison d’être* of a party is its claim to overcome the communalism of one group, it is an open confession of defeat to say that this communalism has grown to the point where it directly attacks the people on whom the Federal Party rests for support. The support of the people was given on the promises, assurances, and claims of the Federal Party that it was the best agency for defending the rights of the Tamil speaking people against the growing forces of Sinhalese communalism. To plead the fact of the undoubted growth of Sinhalese chauvinism as an excuse is downright evasion of political responsibility for the failure of the traditional parties of the Tamil speaking people to defend effectively the rights of the minorities or to hold out a clear perspective for the future.

The failure of the conventional Tamil leadership to arrest the steady deterioration of the position of the Tamil speaking people cannot be ascribed to the subjective weakness of individual leaders. This is particularly so of the leadership of the Federal Party who are presently the undisputed political representatives of the Tamil speaking people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. They have resisted the enticements of ministerial office and have successfully withstood pressures from various quarters to deflect them from their declared goal.



But good intentions and deep seated loyalties—essential qualities no doubt—are a poor consolation for the rapidly shrinking position of the Tamil speaking people.

We now come against a strange paradox. The Tamil speaking people have been led in the last decade by an apparently resolute leadership guided by the best intentions, receiving not merely the widest support of the people but also their enthusiastic cooperation and yet the Tamil speaking people find themselves at the lowest ebb in their history. Despite all their efforts the people have suffered one defeat after another, one humiliation after another. How is one to explain this yawning gulf between the strivings of the people and the virtually hopeless impasse in which they find themselves?

In politics as in war it is not enough to have an honest leadership and a loyal following. While these are necessary, they do not win wars. The integrity of a High Command and the obedience of its ranks would ensure that there would be no surrender but they cannot assure victory unless the strategy of the commanding staff is superior to that of the enemy and the army itself is equipped with weapons adequate to accomplish the tasks before it. To put it simply, no army however brave its soldiers can win a war if it is equipped with bows and arrows, and if moreover, the strategic vision of the leadership is as myopic as the weapons are primitive it would be idle indeed to expect such an army to maintain morale let alone win a war under modern conditions. *And so it is in politics!* The strategic thinking of the Federal Party is so completely outmoded that any action on the lines of their plans is well nigh suicidal and the weapons which they employ are not merely antediluvian but are almost self-destructive. No wonder therefore a sense of demoralisation and frustration has now overtaken the people.

The fundamental flaw in the political strategy of the Federal Party is their conception that the fight for the rights of the Tamil speaking people is the responsibility solely of the Tamil speaking people themselves and that it is only the Tamils who can wage this fight and that they must do so as Tamils. Therefore it is necessary for the Tamils to build their own exclusive organisations to lead the Tamil people in their fight. There is of course nothing original in this view, since the Federal Party began its career as a splinter group of the Tamil



Congress which really was the father of this idea. But in fairness to the Tamil Congress it must be said that when its leader Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam originated this theory there may have been some justification. All bourgeois politics of that period, including that of Mr. D. S. Senanayake and Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, was bargaining with the imperialist overlords for this or that concession and within that framework of capitalist politics where British imperialism was the sole and final arbiter this method may have brought some crumbs. But to cling to this thinking under the conditions prevailing today where there is no overlord, a super-arbiter, holding the scales as between the different communities and dispensing favours now to one and then to another community is to lose touch with reality; and to base one's politics on it is to invite certain disaster which not even the good intention of the leadership can avert.

The basic weakness of the Tamil speaking people springs from the fact that they are a minority and this indeed is at the root of their problems. The strength of the forces arrayed against them derives from the fact that these elements are able to draw support from the community that is numerically more powerful. Besides the disproportion of numbers there is also the fact that a substantial number of Tamil speaking people live in isolated pockets in predominantly Sinhalese speaking areas. In this context it is obvious that to organize the Tamil speaking people under a communal banner like that of the Tamil Congress or the Federal Party is to expose them ultimately to unnecessary perils, and what is far worse, to sustain and strengthen the very forces which are opposed to their legitimate demands. But politics does not end with organisation.

Organisation of the people soon leads to some form of struggle for the attainment of even the most elementary demands and when this happens it must necessarily take place on a plane most disadvantageous to the Tamil speaking people. Under a Tamil organization and a Tamil leadership—the cry so dear to the Federal Party—the legitimate struggle for democratic rights is completely submerged and lost sight of and what comes to the fore and dominates the entire scene is primitive tribalism: Tamil vs. Sinhalese. At this level the lesser tribe must meet inevitable defeat. And as the principles of tribal warfare, and not the Marquis of Queensberry Rules and the Geneva Convention regulate the struggle, defeat is also accompanied by humiliation and



degradation. The bestial aftermath of May 1958 is the clearest proof of this. And the breast beating of the Federal Party hierarchy thereafter is of no avail since the whole course of preceding politics predetermined that outcome.

When the Federal Party next talked of extra-Parliamentary action at the beginning of 1961, the stress was on non-violence and *Satyagraha* as the means for achieving their goal. Although the first *Satyagraha* campaign has long since fizzled out, Gandhian posturing in the future is not ruled out and therefore it is worth examining whether *Satyagraha* is indeed the answer to the problem of the Tamil speaking people. Particularly because this word is so closely identified in the popular mind with the successful Indian independence movement it is essential to examine its applicability to the specific conditions in Ceylon.

It is well-known that Mahatma Gandhi advocated and popularized in India *Satyagraha*, non-violence and civil disobedience as the means of achieving Indian independence. Before doing so in India he had employed these means in South Africa and had attained a measure of limited success which however was short-lived. In due course the Indian National Congress which was in leadership of the anti-imperialist movement accepted the methods of Mahatma Gandhi and it was officially committed to *Satyagraha*, non-violence and civil disobedience as the means for achieving independence.

Now it is a debatable matter whether Indian independence was finally achieved because of these means, although to be sure their employment did bring about the awakening of the Indian people from centuries of submission to foreign rule. It is a matter of debate because one must not forget the impact of revolutionary mass action on the course of the events leading to the passing of the Indian Independence Act of 1947. These events are, briefly, the basically non-violent mass action of August 1942, the strike wave of 1945-46 with the INA demonstrations of the same period, culminating in the mighty Indian Naval Mutiny of 1946. The recapitulation of these revolutionary events is not intended to detract from the importance of the Gandhian methods of struggle. What is sought is to set events in their proper perspective and when this is done non-violence, *Satyagraha*, and civil disobedience find their rightful place as the great awakners of the Indian people to national consciousness. But the further movement from national consciousness to national liberation was achieved by revolutionary mass action.



Pre-Gandhian politics in India oscillated between the frustration of individual terrorism and the toadyism of the upper layer of Indian society, and each in its own way, strengthened the hold of British imperialism on the country. Thus it was that a civil administration of a few thousands, backed by an army of occupation numbering not very much more, was in absolute control of over 400 million people. Mahatma Gandhi rightly sensed that if the people were but roused it would be impossible for an alien army of mercenaries to rule a country so large as India. Accordingly by the non-violent mass struggles and individual *satyagraha* campaigns of the twenties and early thirties he sought to awaken the millions who till then were outside the pale of politics. Thousands upon thousands responded to his call, defied the law, filled the jails, and patiently submitted to the savage *lathi* blows and machine gun fire of the imperialist Police and military. They did all this and many more acts of immolation because of their supreme confidence that it was impossible for a hopeless minority of white sahibs to keep over 400 million in subjection. Even in the darkest period of repression this fact alone was sufficient to renew the courage of the weak and uplift the spirit of the faltering.

But what is the position in Ceylon? The struggle of the Tamil speaking people is not against an alien ruler resting only on his bayonets for support, as was the case in India. The Government of Ceylon, whether one likes it or not, rests on the support of a large section of our people and so long as this support is forthcoming, it would be the worst folly to adopt those methods which India had employed during one phase of her struggle against a regime imposed from above, completely isolated from the people and maintained and buttressed solely by the strength of its armed forces. The disregard of the fundamental difference in the nature of the regime in British occupied India and that in the Ceylon of today can only mean that *Satyagraha* in the conditions of Ceylon, far from achieving even the limited success it did in India, may well prove a death trap for the Tamil speaking people.

Even the Federal Party leadership has, at least by implication recognised that against a government enjoying a measure of popular support it is foolhardy to launch a *Satyagraha* movement, particularly in view of the experience of its own earlier "anti-Sri" campaign. That is why it restricted the *Satyagraha* movement of 1961 to the contiguous Tamil speaking provinces of the North and East, but in doing so



it made a parody of *Satyagraha*; and *Satyagraha* in its turn is but a parody of a genuine mass struggle. Such is the impotence of the Federal Party that what took place under its aegis as the "final struggle" turns out to be a parody of a parody.

If the struggle of the Tamil speaking people for basic democratic rights is to go forward, they must face the hard and unpalatable fact that no mass movement however broad and deep going it may be in the North and East is going to succeed if it is a movement only of the peoples of these areas. This is not to say that such movements involving only a part of a country are always doomed to defeat. The Bengali language spoken in East Pakistan attained parity of status with the Urdu language as one of the official languages of Pakistan after a mass struggle confined entirely to Bengali speaking Eastern Pakistan. How was this possible in Pakistan and why is such a struggle futile in Ceylon? Besides the uniquely advantageous bargaining position of East Pakistan in relation to its Central Government arising from (a) its separation from West Pakistan by over thousand miles of Indian territory and (b) the linguistic identity and close cultural affinity of East Pakistan with the adjoining Indian Union State of West Bengal, simple economic facts provide the answer. East Pakistan accounts for 85% of Pakistan dollar earnings, 65% of her exports and of well over 50% of her national income. Jute and tea, Pakistan's principal exports are entirely grown and processed in East Pakistan. These telling facts of East Pakistan's economic preponderance needed but the intervention of the Bengali speaking people to compel the Moghul rulers of Rawalpindi to accord parity of status to the Devnagri language of Bengali with the Arabic Urdu language of West Pakistan. However offensive it may be to the *amour propre*, the no less simple economic fact is that the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Ceylon are economically the most backward and peripheral areas, receiving rather than contributing to the national exchequer and totally dependent on the country's general prosperity to soften the rigours of Nature herself. In this situation not even the most intense localized pressure from these Provinces can move a Government to making any concession. Although they answered a call of duty in participating in the *Satyagraha* movement of January-April 1961, instinctively the masses too have realised the hopelessness of their plight. That is why unlike in India, where the first repression was but the prelude to greater effort on the part of the masses, the repressive intervention of the state also immediately brought to an end the *Satyagraha* movement itself.



It is not only in the fruitful field of extra-Parliamentary action that the political strategy of the Federal Party is completely barren of yield. The Party is no less sterile in the arena of Parliamentary politics. Its very character as an exclusively Tamil organisation renders it utterly incapable of fulfilling even the most modest obligations, let alone the more onerous duties, it owes the people on whose support it rests.

In terms of Parliamentary representation the Federal Party is restricted to a maximum of 21 seats in an elected House of 151 members. Even if all the Tamil speaking people rallied to a man round the Federal Party nothing can increase its Parliamentary representation. As a Tamil Party it cannot ever hope to win a seat in the Sinhalese speaking areas. So the hard facts of simple arithmetic—if nothing else—prevent the Federal Party from ever coming to power by obtaining a Parliamentary majority. It cannot even hold out the prospect of political power at some remotely distant date. But political power is the central question of all politics and in the case of the Tamil speaking people it assumes immediate urgency since only the wielding of state power can end racial and religious discrimination, restore the franchise rights of the Tamil speaking people of the plantations and introduce parity of status for the Sinhalese and Tamil languages. Clearly a Party which concentrates its agitational activity exclusively on these essential democratic demands but which by definition is incapable of ever acquiring power to realise its democratic programme forfeits its right to independent existence and becomes a parasitic organisation. The Federal Party is in this parasitic position since it sustains itself on the legitimate grievances of the people and is unable in its turn to give these very people anything by way of return.

The Federal Party sought to overcome its obvious Parliamentary impotence by an ingenious attempt at specious speculation. The issue arose at the Parliamentary election of March 1960 as to what it can accomplish through Parliament. The Party's spokesmen, tirelessly explained that no party would get an over-all majority and that the return of Federal Party candidates in substantial numbers would enable the Tamil speaking people through the Federal Party to have a decisive say in the formation of the new government. Even though the basic aim of the Party, that of enacting a federal constitution for Ceylon cannot be realised—for once they showed the Tamil speaking people a studied modesty—at least a satisfactory bargain could be reached with



one or the other of the parties vying for its support. If the formation of the new government ultimately depended on the precious votes of the Federal Party, which is the party that would not promise any thing in order to secure the requisite Parliamentary majority to rule the country? In any event the subsequent failure to honour a gentlemen's agreement can always be met by withdrawing support to the government at critical times, and this would be a sufficient threat to the government to be "fair" to the Tamil speaking people. An exuberant Federal Party leader, throwing caution to the winds, summed up the vital Parliamentary role the Party was to play in the following words: "We can make or break Governments!" And all that was required of the voters of the Northern and Eastern Provinces was the demonstration of their unity behind the Federal Party—a Ceylon variation of an old, disreputable and thoroughly reactionary slogan: *ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Fuhrer*

The appearance of a number of mushroom parties at the General Elections of March 1960 enhanced the superficial attractiveness of the argument of the Federal Party. The middle classes, only too willing to clutch at any straw that came their way, provided it held the promise of enabling them to maintain their miserable social dominance in the village, could not resist the simplicity of the arithmetical calculation which was to bring them immediate relief. They not only spurned the Left but rejected even traditional Tamil politicians like Messrs. G. G. Ponnambalam, and C. Suntheralingam as, this was the price which the Federal Party demanded for asserting its effectiveness in Parliament. And true enough, when the results of the March 1960 elections were known, not even the most ardent supporter of the Federal Party could have desired anything better. The final line-up of the main parties was as follows:

U.N.P.	50	L.S.S.P.	10
S.L.F.P.	46	M.E.P.	10
F.P.	15	C.P.	3

The political prophecy of the Federal Party election campaign was fully confirmed but that very confirmation was soon to explode a long standing myth of traditional Tamil politics.

Even the Federal Party's finest hour which followed the General Election of March 1960 achieved nothing. Although here was the very situation which was to enable the Federal Party to play a decisive



role in Parliament, yet not even in the light of this uniquely favourable constellation could one discern even a glimmer of its much vaunted role. Desperate though the U.N.P. and S.L.F.P. were for support, neither was willing to make any real concession to the Federal Party.

The UNP openly canvassed the support of the Federal Party and publicly admitted negotiations with its leaders. The life of its Government depended on the outcome of these talks and not even all the attendant risks of a second general election moved the UNP to find a common ground with the Federal Party. The maximum concession it made was a Delphic declaration of its leader, Mr. Dudley Senanayake, that he could be trusted to do the correct thing. Clearly the organiser of the opposition to the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact had not changed his spots.

The SLFP on the other hand was shamefaced about its talks with the Federal Party. To this day there has been no admission of talks between these organizations,\* although it is now an open secret that about the time of the FP-UNP discussions or soon after, parleys commenced between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the Federal Party. Since the UNP bid for Federal Party support was so ridiculously low (a single ministerial portfolio and a delightfully ambiguous statement of its leader), the SLFP was no less contemptuous in its bargaining with the Federal Party. The failure of the discussions with the UNP and the fact that its scandalously low offer was a direct discouragement to others had already sharply reduced the initial bargaining strength of the Federal Party. The SLFP was merely required to be lavishly vague in its promises. This is what the SLFP in fact did and when the UNP dissolved the Parliament elected in March 1960 and forced another general election in July of the same year, the Federal Party was already neatly tied to the SLFP's apron strings.

The Federal Party went into the second election taking the credit for the failure of the UNP to form a stable government. Borrowing the technique which the SLFP had used in its discussions with it, the Federal Party threw vague hints and suggestions of a secret *concordat* with the SLFP on the outstanding questions of the Tamil speaking people. This necessitated that the Federal Party must have the sole authority to speak for the people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces

\* This was written before the recent disclosures in Parliament and the national press. (Footnote in the 1st Edition 1963).



and, in any event, it must be in a position to "make or break" governments. Its Parliamentary representation increased by an additional seat but the line of campaign of the Federal Party, both in March and July, produced its inevitable reaction in the Sinhalese speaking areas. What according to the Federal Party was an impossibility was realised, and the SLFP was returned with an absolute majority. And therewith the plans of the Federal Party too collapsed like a house of cards.

Although in retrospect the experience of March and July 1960 is a study in frustration, it is not without important lessons for the Tamil speaking people. Indeed if these lessons are assimilated, even that frustrating experience will be but a small price to pay for the future.

The *mystique* of numbers, particularly in Parliamentary politics, has always had a peculiar fascination for the petty bourgeois intelligentsia. The leaders of the Federal Party have developed this into a cult in that their one obsession is to work out a permutation or combination which they think is most advantageous to the Tamil speaking people. The sum total of their Parliamentary strategy is to attempt by skilful manoeuvring the quixotic task of fitting events into a preconceived combination. This required unified political representation of the North and East under their leadership and the exclusion of all nonconformist politicians from these areas. Preposterous though this demand was, the voters virtually conceded it in two general elections. But the total lack of even elbow room for Parliamentary manoeuvre which the deadlocked Parliament of March 1960 so amply revealed has blown sky high the insidious theory that political monolithism under the Federal Party and a more or less evenly divided Parliament provide the ready talisman for the problems of the Tamil speaking people.

Political monolithism under the Federal Party is not only futile but positively dangerous. Its advocacy by a party whose political appeal and influence are wholly restricted to a minority is a direct and open invitation to another party which bases itself entirely on the majority community to adopt similar propaganda methods. Tamil political monolithism must sooner or later beget Sinhalese political monolithism and the first victims of the latter would be those parties and forces most sympathetic to the legitimate demands of the Tamil speaking people, just as the first victims of Tamil political monolithism were the



Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party. Herein lies the greatest danger of the Federal Party's bid for political monopoly. Without taking the movement for democratic rights one step forward, it may yet succeed in unifying and cementing the presently divided forces which are opposed to the Tamil speaking people at the cost of eliminating their real allies. In doing so it would be inflicting a grievous blow on the very movement in whose name it claims to speak.

The very electioneering of the Federal Party proceeded, not on the basis of the Tamil speaking people entering as equals in the national political arena, but strangely, on the recognition of their essentially subordinate role. It is superfluous to mention that equality was completely excluded by the very nature of the Federal Party itself. Being a party strictly confined to two Provinces and accounting for a bare 21 seats it would have been ludicrous in the extreme for the Federal Party to have given even the appearance of equal participation in national politics. It had a more modest, or more correctly, a somewhat sordid aim, a satisfactory bargain with whatever party that was returned with a substantial number of seats. And this quest for a bargain represents the very quintessence of Federal Party politics. As though the Tamil speaking constituencies are so many items of merchandise at an auction available at the highest price to all comers! And significantly nothing accentuates the political bankruptcy of the Federal Party so much as the fact that even at basement prices, no buyer was forthcoming.

The full import of the policy of looking out for potential patrons after every Parliamentary general election is truly disturbing since it signifies that the future of the Tamil speaking people is ultimately determined not on the strength or otherwise of the independent movement for democratic rights but on the vicissitudes of political parties and forces fundamentally opposed to the democratic movement of the Tamil speaking people itself. It is with these reactionary forces whose record in relation to the Tamil minority is most shameful that the Federal Party sought to consort. Although in the Parliamentary deadlock of March 1960, it commenced negotiations with the UNP this did not prevent the UNP from carrying on a viciously racist propaganda against the Tamil speaking people during the general election in July 1960. The other claimant for the votes of the Federal Party was the Sri Lanka Freedom Party whose secret parleys and secret



*detente* with the Federal Party in the halcyon days between March and July 1960 did not in any manner inhibit its Government subsequently from introducing the Language of the Courts Act 1961. It is with these wolves of chauvinism that the Federal Party lamb is driven, by the very logic of its position, to seek what is euphemistically termed a settlement. The Federal Party leadership is welcome to whatever masochistic satisfaction it may derive from an association with either the UNP or the SLFP, but the Tamil speaking people must no less be alerted to the true nature of the possible alliances inherent in the very politics of minority communalism. The dilemma of the Federal Party is that the alternative to such alliances is the wilderness of Parliamentary opposition.

The wilderness however is not the fate of other opposition parties in Parliament. Even in opposition these parties are in a position to record some progress which is denied to the Federal Party. The effectiveness of a party in opposition in Parliament is ultimately dependent not on the debating skill and talents of its personnel nor on the capabilities of its leaders but on the strength of the forces outside which it represents in the national assembly, and on the party's capacity to bring to bear some of this strength on the government of the day. No Government anywhere in the world does anything because of a devotion to an abstract principle. Governments do not act because they are for justice or equality nor because they believe in injustice and inequality. They act, initiate policies, bring legislation etc., on the pressure of social groups, classes and parties and these acts may be just or unjust, fair or iniquitous to one or the other of the forces pressing on a government. The party which exerts the heaviest pressure is naturally the largest group in Parliament and, by and large, the government's legislative work is a fair reflection of the dominant party's programme. But even a government fortified by the largest Parliamentary majority does not live in a hermetically sealed chamber. There are other influences at work and in particular the pressures and pulls of opposition parties. These organisations too, bending to the pressure of the masses supporting them, press on the government, and invariably this pressure is from the opposite direction. Not infrequently in the life of any Parliament, there are instances when under the pressure of opposition parties, the government is compelled to make some concession, however half-hearted. But to bring this about the opposition party must not only respond to the pressure of the masses who support



it, but also—and this is important—*be able to transmit this pressure on to the government of the day*. This imperative latter requirement the Federal Party in opposition has proved incapable of fulfilling and it is this incapacity which makes its life in Parliament so pathetic.

The tragedy of the situation is that the failure of the Federal Party to fulfil the elementary function of a political organisation, viz, to act as the transmission belt of mass pressure on the government is not due to any lack of effort on its part. What renders all its labours useless is the fact that all governments—whether UNP or SLFP—have been completely immune to the pressures of the Tamil speaking people. These governments had achieved this freedom by abandoning the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and concentrating their political activity in the remaining seven provinces where the majority of the Tamil speaking people are denied their franchise and confining their appeal even in these areas to the Sinhalese speaking people. It is well known that except for an isolated constituency or two in the Eastern Province neither the UNP nor the SLFP even nominates candidates for any of the other constituencies in the North and East. There are not even branch organisations of these parties in these areas. The immunity thus achieved is doubly ensured by the fact that the Federal Party's influence is limited solely to the two provinces abandoned by these parties and in the other provinces exclusively to the Tamil speaking people whose support is not even honestly sought by either the UNP or SLFP. In consequence there is not even the semblance of a channel for communication to government of the mass pressure of the North and East. What exists between the Federal Party acting for the Tamil speaking people and the Government is a vast void. That is why under the leadership of the Federal Party even the otherwise formidable combination of Parliamentary opposition and extra Parliamentary direct action leaves the Government completely cold and indifferent. And that is why *under the leadership of the Federal Party* even the most sustained effort of the Tamil speaking people becomes nothing more innocuous than shadow-boxing.



## MINORITY OPPRESSION—PRODUCT OF CAPITALIST DECAY

It is necessary to understand the true nature of the problem before the Tamil speaking people. An incorrect appreciation would lead to false conclusions. False conclusions result in wrong policies and wrong policies pave the way to disastrous adventures. If one were to believe the racial propagandists on both the sides the minority problem is something peculiar to Ceylon. This has been repeated so often that even honest socialists some times see in this "bedevilling" question the only obstacle on the road to power. Actually the minority problem is present in one form or another in every capitalist country in the world. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that one manifestation of the decline of the capitalist system is the intensified oppression of racial and religious minorities in all capitalist countries. To be sure, at its birth the capitalist class was the great champion of freedom and equality. In its struggle against the feudal nobility, the nascent capitalist class proclaimed all these principles and in fact achieved for the first time in man's history the equality of all citizens before the law irrespective of their racial origin or religious views. But the equality which it proclaimed in its constitution was soon a fiction and later in some capitalist countries, even juridically annulled.

Very early in its life the ruling capitalist class discovered that by skilfully playing on the racial and religious prejudices of the broad petty bourgeois and proletarian masses—prejudices which are themselves the indubitable products of the low level of culture which class domination imposes on the exploited—it could prevent the socialist movement against its rule from gaining cohesion and achieving unity. Hence it set up Protestant against Catholic, Christian against Jew, White against Black, Hindu against Muslim. To this day, even in the most democratic country, racism is part of the official ideology which the various agencies of capitalist opinion like the press, radio, schools etc., subtly or crudely spread. Thus in the official catechism is embodied the myth of the superiority of the "race" to which the dominant section of the capitalist class belongs, while the minorities by necessary implication are inferior people, so inferior that they have even to be referred to as "Niggers", "Yids", "Chinks" etc. But so long as capitalism was an expanding economic system the movement against



capitalist class rule was contained within the system itself by substantial concessions. The super profits from the colonial countries enabled the capitalist class to make peace with its working class movement. It was therefore not necessary for capitalism in this period to resort to the more outrageous method of racialist disruption, and racism accordingly lurked in the shadows.

But with the definitive decline of capitalism on a world scale—the imperialist wars, the loss of colonial markets, the rise of national liberation movements in the colonies, the wrenching of whole continents from the capitalist sphere, the development of a war economy as a permanent feature of the industrially advanced countries of the West—the class struggle even in the “peaceful” Western countries assumed a sharp and explosive character. The whole capitalist system at its centre was in grave peril and the natural development of the class struggle would have led long ago to the defeat of the capitalist class. The organic process had necessarily to be violently disturbed. The racialist wedge was driven deep into the mass movement in an attempt to separate the petty bourgeois masses from the socialist proletarian vanguard. The conventional capitalist politician too closely identified with the *malaise* of the existing social order was unequal to this task. Only a new type of demagogue, without the burdens of the past to restrain him, could find acceptability among the petty bourgeois masses. The latter’s general instability and known weakness to chauvinist appeals made the task of the new political adventurers feasible. Thus it was that, for all the differences in background and even methods, Mussolini in Italy, Pilsudski in pre-war Poland, Hitler in Germany and . . . Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in Ceylon had the same basic reactionary aim, namely the weaning of the petty bourgeois masses from the political influence and leadership of the working class and their complete subordination to the capitalist class, even though this was accomplished under cover of the “independent” role of the middle class.

It was in Germany, where the economic crisis was deepest and the class struggle sharpest, that the capitalist class developed the technique of racialism to near perfection in order to disrupt the anti-capitalist movement. Combining anti-capitalist demagogy and socialist phraseology with the crudest anti-Jewish propaganda and the glorification of Germanic tribal prehistory round the mythical legend of Aryanism,



much in the same manner as racialists in Ceylon compound "anti-capitalism" with anti-Tamil propaganda, the National Socialist Party of Germany (this was the name of Hitler's organisation) carried out the foul work for capitalism. Although other European countries did not travel so far—neither did the class struggle assume such threatening proportions as in Germany—nonetheless in all the advanced countries, the ruling class today lays great emphasis on racist propaganda and deliberately employs racialism to disorient and disrupt the anti-capitalist mass movement. Even in England, the last bastion of capitalist democracy, the insecurity of the coloured minority following the Nottingham race riots of June 1958 and the recent discriminatory immigration laws are the clearest evidence that capitalism cannot today exist without artificially creating a minority problem. Undoubtedly what impels the capitalist class to use racialism in a thorough going and systematic manner is the danger which arises from a united working class movement drawing in its wake the petty bourgeois masses and coming into head-on conflict with the capitalist class.

In periods of acute social crisis, when the fate of the whole system hangs in the balance, the minority question serves as a convenient diversion. Between crises, the very health of the capitalist economy requires some form of minority discrimination and oppression. A stagnant economy poses new problems, in particular the question of the distribution of the available goods and jobs. The stagnation is masked in the advanced countries by the fact that there is an apparent increase in economic activity but this increase is accounted for by an unproductive and exaggerated armaments and military expenditure. But the problem is transparent in a country like Ceylon where, according to the authoritative Central Bank review, the rate of economic development far from even keeping pace with the rate of increase of the population, is in fact lagging behind. It has been estimated that 250,000 enter the labour market annually but the avenues of employment are not much wider than during the days of colonial rule. To use the felicitous expression of Mrs. Joan Robinson, Ceylon has a "primitive birth rate with a modernised death rate."\* This, in the context of an underdeveloped and stagnant economy, must breed discrimination. The ruling class will seek to discriminate against those least able to make an immediate and effective protest—i.e., against linguistic, religious and caste minorities. This attack on a section of the masses chosen

\* Papers by Visiting Economists (1958) Government of Ceylon Publication.



either on a religious, linguistic or caste basis gives the ruling class a further advantage—the benefit of a mass base among the majority community.

There is also another benefit which accrues to one section of the capitalist class. It has been found that the level of wages in those sectors of industry which are predominantly manned by members of an oppressed minority is much lower than that prevailing in the economy as a whole. This means that an oppressed minority is a source of cheap labour for the capitalist class. In all countries this is true. Even in Ceylon, where statistical analysis is backward, a recent study in the *Bulletin of The Central Bank* establishes that the total earnings of plantation workers are much lower than those of workers in the rest of the country for comparable skills and grades.

One thing becomes crystal clear: discrimination against and oppression of minorities is inherent in the capitalist system in decay and that sooner or later the capitalist class must resort to it in an attempt to preserve its rule. The depth of the crisis alone determines the extent of the discriminatory measures. In comparison with the later efforts of 1948 and 1956—62, the first conscious attempt in 1939 to divide the masses on racialist lines now looks a rather tame and amateurish affair. The indecently discriminatory measures of more recent times directly flow from the aggravation of the economic crisis of capitalist Ceylon. The crisis itself has its roots in the failure of the capitalist class or its state to carry out in Ceylon capitalism's historic role, namely, the development of the productive forces and therewith the economic expansion of the country.

Minority oppression has nothing to do with the good or the bad intention of individual ministers or even of the Government of the day. That is why even the Government's only accomplished spokesman, Mr. Felix Dias, must descend to the language, and even adopt the policies of a lump like Themis or an upstart like Rajaratne. As political representatives of their class they are compelled to employ racialism, however distasteful it may be to their individual sense of justice or fair play. Clearly an excrescence so malignant as minority oppression cannot be eradicated in isolation. Neither can it be excised by the primitive witchcraft methods of the Federal Party as these merely serve to feed the cancer within.



## MARXISM AND THE OPPRESSED PEOPLES

This survey of the nature of national and minority oppression has served both to emphasise the gross inadequacy of the Federal Party and to indicate the broad outlines of the solution itself. The Federal Party simply has not an understanding of the problem and devoid of this, there can be no successful action. It is not only in medical science that correct diagnosis is the prelude to rapid and effective therapy. The rule holds good in politics as well. National oppression being the product of world capitalist decline and decay, the struggle of nations and peoples for equality necessarily links up with the world struggle against capitalism. It is among the leadership of the latter struggle that the Tamil speaking peoples will find the elements who can provide them that new orientation which is indispensable if their struggle for democratic rights is to go forward.

The conception of the Marxist Left as the leader of the struggle against national oppression and for minority rights may appear somewhat startling, particularly because people have been long conditioned to the insidious propaganda of the enemies of socialism that only a bourgeois or petty bourgeois (i.e. national) party could lead a national liberation struggle, or in the language of the Federal Party, that only a Tamil party can lead the Tamil people. And merely to underline the exclusive claim of the bourgeois to leadership of these movements, the petty bourgeois duly recognise and acknowledge the competence and claim of the Left to lead the anti-capitalist struggle. Even genuine friends of the Left fall victims to this deceptive line since the known internationalism of the Left is in their eyes a sufficient impediment in the way of Marxist consistency on the question of national oppression and discrimination. But this view whether put forward mischievously or held innocently is belied by the theory and practice of Marxism.

To begin with the historical record, it is a matter of common knowledge that the record of the LSSP in relation to the minorities in Ceylon is second to none. In the long years of its existence, the LSSP has consistently championed the just rights of all religious, linguistic, national and caste minorities. This is part of the recorded history of our country and all attempts from *whatever quarter* to erase from the



consciousness of the people the leading role of the LSSP in the legitimate struggle of the oppressed peoples are foredoomed to failure. The futility of such endeavour is underscored both by the history of the revolutionary socialist movement and the scientific theory which guides its revolutionary action.

The history of the LSSP bears ample testimony to the correct positions taken by the party in its attitude to the Tamil speaking people. The touchstone of principled politics in Ceylon is the attitude to the minority problem: specifically to the language rights of the Tamil speaking people and the citizenship rights of people of recent Indian origin. As far as the LSSP was concerned on these matters there never was any doubt.

Years before today's official leaders of the Tamil speaking people awoke to the realisation that the rights of the Tamil speaking people are as inviolate as those of their Sinhalese speaking brethren, the LSSP not merely recognised the legitimacy of the demand, but in fact first formulated it. The basic foundation document of the party issued in 1935 entitled *Fundamental Objectives* at clause 17 categorically stated: "The use of the vernaculars (i.e. Sinhalese and Tamil-Ed.) in the lower courts of law, in entries and recorded statements at Police stations and the extension of this use to all Government Departments." Thus at its very birth the LSSP was pledged to equality of status of the two principal languages of Ceylon. In making this declaration in favour of the equality of status of Sinhalese and Tamil the LSSP was merely giving effect to the principle enunciated by Lenin: "To the extent that the elimination of national oppression is achievable at all in capitalist society it is possible only under a *consistently democratic republican system and state administration that guarantees complete equality for all nations and languages.*"\* Thus it will be seen that the demand of the LSSP has an ancestry longer than the history of the LSSP itself.

On the question of the restoration of citizenship and franchise rights of persons of recent Indian origin, the position of the Left is well known. In 1948 when the Ceylon capitalist class disfranchised these persons, the Marxist Left resolutely opposed the discriminatory legislation, while the majority of the so-called leaders of the Tamil speaking

\* Lenin: *Selected Works* (Two Volume Edition) Vol. 2 page 53. (Moscow 1947)



minority in Parliament from the Northern and Eastern Provinces supported the UNP government in its reactionary measures against the plantation workers. On these and every other question that bears a discriminatory character against the minorities, and these questions have been many, the LSSP has not hesitated to declare its clear opposition. Mention may be made in passing of the Party's forthright protest at the racialist land distribution policies of successive capitalist governments, the discrimination in the public services, the exclusion of children of Tamil plantation workers from the benefits of the Free Education system, the use of emergency powers to suppress the extra-Parliamentary action of the people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, etc.

Impressive though the record of the LSSP is, this in itself would be an insufficient assurance for the future. What guarantees the future is the body of theoretical principles underlying the Party's programme. These are so inextricably bound up with the defence of the rights of minorities that the Party cannot abandon the one without at the same time rejecting the other. Indeed it is its very character as the revolutionary Marxist Party of the working class which, as shown below, inexorably compels it to oppose all oppression and discrimination and to support unreservedly all democratic movements of oppressed minorities, not on grounds of sentiment, but as the very axis of its own immanent development. That is why it can be stated as possessing the certainty of a Euclidian proposition that the best defender of the rights of the minorities is the revolutionary party of the working class.

The fundamental aim of the LSSP is the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry which regime alone in modern conditions can guarantee the transition to a socialist society. Such a regime can be achieved only by developing and sharpening the class struggle to the point of an open civil war when the organs of the old power would be overthrown by the new institutions created by the working class in revolt. This is the historic mission of the working class. And to accomplish this task the working class must be an independent and united force. Anything which weakens this unity and independence is a mortal enemy of the socialist movement. The biggest obstacle in the way of the socialist solidarity of the workers is the divisive ideology of the ruling class, its racialism, its jingoism, its religious *jehad* etc. As shown in an earlier



section, the ruling class deliberately resorts to these devices in an attempt to disrupt the anti-capitalist mass movement. Hence any genuinely socialist party, seriously interested in preparing the working class for its ultimate goal of capturing power, must decisively combat all forms of racialism. Combating racialism means, in concrete terms, irreconcilable opposition to all forms of racial or religious discrimination by the ruling class or its government and the merciless exposure of all moves, manoeuvres and diversionist activities of the class enemy that have for their real purpose the distraction of the working class from its historic goal and the disruption of the solidarity of the toilers united under the socialist banner.

Further, for a Marxist party support of a movement for democratic rights is something elementary. Revolutionary socialists advocate the overthrow of the existing capitalist order, however democratic and liberal the political set-up may be, because behind the facade of the "purest" democracy there exists the naked exploitation of the working class and toilers by the capitalists and landlords. Marxists, therefore, naturally go much further than the most liberal of bourgeois democrats since the socialist struggle transcends the limitations of bourgeois democracy. For all its importance the struggle of the minorities and oppressed nationalities is more limited since such struggle only seeks to democratize the capitalist political structure. For the LSSP therefore the support to any movement for democratic reform is something inherent in its general socialist standpoint, and hence the support of the struggle of minorities becomes an elementary duty.

But it is not only a sense of duty that impels a Marxist party in a colonial and backward country like Ceylon to support the struggle of minorities for their legitimate rights. It is well-known that in the original *schema* it was the working class of the advanced capitalist countries of the West that was expected to seize power first, a task made possible and feasible because it constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population in the industrially developed European countries. But historical reality proved otherwise and the working class of the backward countries—Czarist Russia, China, Cuba—where it was numerically insignificant came to political power earlier than the working class in the capitalistically more developed countries. These were not happy accidents but the working out of an important historical law—a law which operates in all backward countries where the weak



capitalist class has left unsolved numerous democratic problems. According to this law the leadership of the struggle for the solution of these problems passes to the other decisive urban class, the industrial working class of the cities. Even though a hopeless minority in a backward country, the prospect of power lies open to the working class by virtue of its direct espousal of the tasks of the democratic revolution and its leadership of the broad masses fighting for the fulfilment of their democratic demands. But once in power through the sweep of the democratic revolution, the working class is relentlessly driven to implement its own socialist programme, that is, the democratic revolution develops uninterrupted into the socialist revolution.

An examination of the realities of the social and political scene in Ceylon against the background of the theory outlined above would reveal how vital it is for the predominantly Sinhalese speaking urban working class to espouse, support, organise and lead the numerous democratic movements in the country for the realisation of its own goal: the establishment of its socialist power. It is precisely the numerical insignificance of the urban working class which is concentrated in Colombo and its environs that brings home in the sharpest relief the tremendous motive force of the democratic movement and its immense value as a powerful lever to raise the working class itself to power. The democratic movement embraces in the rural areas, among others, the struggle of the cultivators for full rights of ownership and of all oppressed castes for full equality.\* And since the transference of political power to the native capitalist class in 1948, two other democratic movements have emerged both latent with enormous revolutionary potentialities. These are the movements of the people of the North and East for their language rights and the struggle of the Tamil speaking plantation workers for political and civic rights. On their own, these movements can achieve nothing—even at their height they can but rise to the level of heroic local uprisings incapable however of seriously challenging the state power. They need the leadership of an urban class to centralize their scattered struggles and lead them in a determined onslaught against their oppressors. Neither can the urban working class on its own strength, notwithstanding its high degree of militancy, go beyond pure and simple trade unionism. For the overthrow of the bourgeois state, for the expropriation of the capitalist

\* This is not an academic question as many would like to believe, *vide* Mr. Asoka Karunaratne's letter of resignation as junior Minister of Justice. (Footnote in the 1st Edition 1963).



class, for the wresting of political power, for the creation of the new proletarian state and the suppression of the capitalist counter-revolution, the urban working class must clearly harness other forces to its aid. Where can it turn but to the tremendous reservoir of revolutionary energy that is the democratic movement of the oppressed peoples? Ineluctably two mighty historical movements converge—only under working class leadership can the movement of the oppressed minorities find adequate expression and only on their support can the urban working class itself reach out for political power in order to begin the task of the socialist reorganisation of society. The forging of this grand alliance which is the central strategic aim of the revolutionary vanguard organised in the LSSP will spell the end of the bourgeois order itself. Thus it will be seen that the very basis of the LSSP's claim to power rests on its capacity to unify under its banner the democratic movement of all the oppressed peoples and peasants and the socialist struggle of the working class.



## SUPERIORITY OF MARXIST LEADERSHIP

The close inter-relationship, indeed the organic unity, of the socialist struggle of the working class and the struggle of the Tamil speaking people for their just rights must convince all honest elements among the latter of the deep and abiding interest of the Marxist Left in their fight for equality and against discrimination. Incurable imbeciles among them who determine their politics by reference to the linguistic origin of the leaders of organisations will of course remain unconvinced, and as nothing will ever convince them of anything, they need not bother us. Still others may despair that their immediate pressing problem is linked with the Party's ultimate goal of the seizure of power by the revolutionary masses. This is hardly an objection, since the Federal Party which today speaks for the Tamil speaking people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces cannot even sketch a programme of action which could take it to its ultimate goal. The lack of such a programme means not merely that its ultimate goal is totally unrealisable but also that in the intervening period between the present and the promised future the Federal Party can offer nothing but frustration. But precisely because Marxism boldly outlines a programme that is realistic to the core in respect of the ultimate goal it is able even in the transitional period between today and the morrow to give the movement of the Tamil speaking people a purpose and direction, infuse it with enthusiasm and *elan*, and instil confidence and hope in the final success of their endeavour. A re-thinking is therefore indispensable—in fact an orientation in the direction of the Marxist Party. At the very least the first benefit of any new regrouping of their ranks is the casting off of the mill stones which the Federal Party leadership has placed round their necks.

The most burdensome of these is the communalism of the leadership. So long as the fight of the minorities is conducted under a leadership such as that of the Federal Party, their struggle is immediately given a communal character, however loudly such an approach may be disowned. Not only is the freedom of action of the minorities severely handicapped but a communal taint to the legitimate struggle of the minorities directly and immediately strengthens and feeds the communalism of the majority community. There is no way of breaking this vicious circle at the level of Federal Party politics, and as long as



the political leadership of the Tamil speaking people is in the hands of Tamil communalists. But the position alters completely when the voice of the Tamil speaking people is also the voice of the socialist movement. Henceforth the agitation of the Tamil speaking people for their language and franchise rights becomes a direct political struggle between *the socialist movement and the capitalist class and government*, and not as at present a dog fight between majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils. The struggle of the Tamil speaking people is then set in its proper perspective, namely, as a struggle for democratic rights. Transcending racial considerations, the dividing line now is between *socialists and democrats on the one side and reactionary chauvinists and capitalist agents on the other*. Owing to the dominance of the Federal Party this important aspect is completely blurred and the issue conveniently misrepresented as a fight between Sinhalese and Tamils.

Once the leadership of the Tamil speaking people passes to the LSSP, the fight of the Sinhalese chauvinists against the legitimate struggle of the minorities must thereafter be directed against the socialist movement, if they are to strike at the minorities. This is no easy matter, it is certainly immeasurably more difficult than countering the Federal Party. The latter presents no difficulty because it makes no appeal whatever to the Sinhalese masses. Indeed between them and the Federal Party there is an unbridgable gulf which the crude propaganda of the Federal Party only succeeds in widening. But the revolutionary socialist movement, real and pulsating, is part of the political life of the Sinhalese speaking people. It is futile to attempt to assess its strength in terms of membership of parties, trade unions, youth leagues, general political influence etc.—but it is sufficient to say that even though it is not the dominant tendency among them, the socialist movement is the spokesman of a substantial section of Sinhalese opinion. Whatever be the ebbs and flows, there has been in every Parliament a fair representation of socialist members from wholly Sinhalese speaking constituencies. This is the best evidence of the strength of the movement. It is this movement that the chauvinists must overcome in order to combat the just struggles of the Tamil speaking minority. They must engage actively against the strongly entrenched socialist movement in the predominantly Sinhalese speaking areas—a battle ground decidedly disadvantageous to them and against a foe of remarkable resilience.



Again it must not be forgotten that when LSSP leadership of the Tamil speaking people is an established fact, the task of agitating for their just demands is made easier. So long as the Federal Party is the spokesman for the Tamils, there will always remain an impenetrable barrier between the Tamil and Sinhalese people. The effect of Federal Party propaganda is to alienate even those who are uncommitted among the broad mass of Sinhalese speaking people, and it is not surprising therefore that its propaganda can never hope to wean any section of people even mildly under chauvinist influence. Further, the actions of the Federal Party—one is not talking here of their actions, however ill-conceived in relation to the demands of the Tamil speaking people—but their actions concerning wider national issues, even more than their propaganda, have widened the gulf. On practically every major question touching the people, the Federal Party has opposed the numerous measures of reform and in effect identified the mass of Tamil speaking people with the forces of reaction. Their opposition to the evacuation of British Naval forces from Trincomalee and other bases, the vote against the minimal agrarian reform represented by the Paddy Lands Act, and their open defence of Christian Missionary education in opposing the State take-over of Schools (a reform carried out by Catholic France as far back as 1789) are but a few instances of their political Rip Van Winklism, if not, the clearest evidence of the capitalist character of the party. Is it any wonder that when the Federal Party is the spokesman for the legitimate demands of the Tamil speaking people, the broad mass of Sinhalese speaking people should be deeply distrustful and on guard even in respect of demands that are fair and reasonable? But the position is otherwise when the LSSP is the spokesman for the Tamil speaking people in and outside Parliament. The LSSP has not merely been identified with every agitation for popular demands, but over the last 25 years, has been the leader and organiser of the masses in their day to day struggles. It has won the confidence of the advanced elements among them and is therefore best able to put across the just demands of the Tamil speaking people among those who matter—the mass of Sinhalese speaking people. But until such time as the Party is the accepted spokesman of the Tamil speaking people, the LSSP will lack the moral authority to do so effectively.

Even more promising would be the new methods of struggle available to the Tamil speaking people. Today's squandermania of invaluable mass energy in farcical *Satyagraha* campaigns, purposeless



exhibitionism, and futile "tar brushings" will be things of the past. Neither would the Tamil speaking people need to indulge in vain gestures like refusing to learn Sinhala as though this can ever solve *their* problem. A generation about to make its final exit and assured of its pension rights or living on the returns of investments made in traditional Sinhalese speaking areas can afford the luxury of such absurdities. But in relation to the new generation these stunts are criminal in that they bureaucratically deny it equality of opportunity in life's competitive struggle and arbitrarily ill-equip it to face the future, without in any way taking the struggle for the recognition of Tamil a step nearer the goal. The Federal Party must perforce sustain itself on such meaningless protests, while LSSP leadership will signify the proper utilisation of the resources of the Tamil speaking people in concerted mass action with the healthy and progressive forces of the rest of the country against the ruling class and its oppressive government.

Generally Parliament represents the Achilles heel of the Left. But the incapacity of the Federal Party in Parliament is so notorious that even in this thoroughly alien institution, the Left, though a minority, is better able to defend and further the interests of the Tamil speaking people. This is due principally to the fact that the Left in Parliament draws its strength from a mass movement based on the country as a whole and not from a territorially restricted area which is not even a sphere of government interest. Consequently the Left, even in opposition as the spokesman for the Tamil speaking people, is sometimes able by the correct combination of Parliamentary and extra Parliamentary pressure to make the maximum of the limited opportunities which Parliament presents. But mass expectation through Parliament is not only that of the role of a watch dog. The wide-spread illusions in Parliament has necessitated the formulation of a programme capable of realisation through it. For this reason the LSSP has sought and reached agreement with the CP and the MEP on a *minimum* programme for a specific purpose. For all the limitations, inevitable in such an electoral arrangement with other parties holding different views, the agreement marks an important step.

Undoubtedly on a number of matters including questions of language and citizenship the minimum programme of the LSSP-CP-MEP Parliamentary Bloc does not represent the traditional Marxist position. But what is of significance is that other organisations to the agreement have now taken positions which are an advance on the



views advocated by them in the past. Even more important than the gain of drawing the MEP to support a formulation that goes some way to meeting the demands of the Tamil speaking people is the fact that the implementation of the minimum programme in respect of language and citizenship would mark a distinct advance from the actual existing situation. Thereafter the very dialectic of this limited reform must compel those who today lack the necessary theoretical understanding to take further measures towards the final solution of the minority problem. This would not be the first time in history when declared opponents of a particular solution were driven by the inner logic of events to adopt the very measures they had opposed. It is well known for instance that Abraham Lincoln who was not an abolitionist of slavery when he assumed office was himself compelled to abolish slavery by the very exigencies of the fight against the Southern slave owners, although it was apparent to Marxists long before that the very development of American capitalism required the creation of a free labour market. Similarly, the very implementation of the economic sections of the minimum programme like the nationalisation of estates and banks and the resulting fight against the resistance of the capitalist class must necessarily create the conditions for the realisation of the legitimate demands of the Tamil speaking peoples since only on this basis is the socialist development of Ceylon possible.

What has been considered so far is the most favourable variant. But the evolution of events along this line is by no means assured. There are many counteracting factors not the least of which is that the solution is sought within the framework of Parliament which gives an undue weightage to hostile class influences and an exaggerated representation to backward areas. To these must be added the fact that the social base of the parties to the agreement is not wholly the working class at different levels of consciousness which is the case in the classical working out of the united front tactic. These alien, non-proletarian, and in some instances, even positively anti-working class elements will press on all or some of the parties to the agreement and seek to assert their interest through them, and to fashion them to serve their reactionary requirements. This *denouement* can be avoided only if the forces of the working class and the minorities, and of the latter, in particular the Tamil speaking people, throw their weight behind the Marxist parties. It is only to the extent that they rally behind the LSSP that they would be able to neutralize the reactionary opposing pressures and compel the LSSP-CP-MEP Parliamentary bloc to carry out the



promised reforms, and to get the bloc to go beyond its self imposed limits. If they remain aloof from the new regroupment, and specifically this means the LSSP, what they would in effect ensure is that the LSSP itself is but a prisoner in the bloc as far as their demands are concerned. It must not be forgotten that the ultimate effectiveness of the LSSP itself is directly dependent on the measure of support it receives from the working class and the Tamil speaking people.

Notwithstanding the potential danger—a danger let it be repeated which arises only if the Tamil speaking people are hesitant in their support to the socialist parties working among them—the Parliamentary bloc provides them yet another opportunity for direct participation in national affairs. Under the Tamil Congress they play second fiddle to the UNP, while under the Federal Party they roam the desolate expanse of despair. But under the Left, they enter as equals with their co-thinkers in the rest of the country, jointly to frame and formulate policy or unitedly to oppose the government of the day. Even while this would mark progress, the agreement also opens new possibilities in welding the broad mass of Sinhalese and Tamil speaking peoples in unshakeable fraternal unity. The pursuit of a common objective—the defeat of the SLFP and the UNP—under the common banner of the Marxist Left will for the first time bring the Sinhalese and Tamil masses together. From the point of view of the genuine interests of the Tamil speaking people the unity thus achieved is incomparably more important than any other fact since the confidence and mutual sympathy established in a joint effort is the ultimate guarantee that finally the majority of the Sinhalese speaking people themselves would come round to supporting the just demands of the Tamil speaking people.



**CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD**

For its own purposes, British imperialism accentuated the differences among the people of Ceylon—Low Country Sinhalese, Kandyan Sinhalese, Ceylon Tamil, Indian Tamil, Moor, Burgher, etc—and in the old Legislative Council gave limited representation on the basis of these highly refined distinctions. As the franchise was severely restricted and no power vested in the elected representatives, the centrifugal tendencies which were implicit in the official sub-divisions were slow to develop. But these received a powerful impetus with the introduction of universal adult franchise and the grant of limited powers under the Donoghmore Constitution. The native propertied classes, both Sinhalese and Tamil, with that sure instinct which is the necessary accompaniment of their proprietary interest, recognised in universal suffrage a powerful mass weapon directed against them and fiercely resisted the enfranchisement of the people. But this being a reform imposed by their own overlords they were powerless to do anything. However they have never reconciled themselves to it, and ever since 1931 their central political aim has been to prevent the cohesion of the masses as such cohesion is the precondition for the effective wielding of the new mass weapon. They have succeeded so far by exploiting the backwardness of the masses. In the first phase of universal franchise Sinhalese and Tamil vested interests in their respective electoral areas found in caste and religious cries a sufficient diversion from social and economic issues, and immediately, a convenient handle to beat their less fortunate bourgeois rivals who were competing for mass votes. But caste in particular was a double edged weapon in that it gave ideas to the oppressed castes. By the time of the second general election in 1936 Ceylonese Reaction found that the struggle against the "Tamil danger" in the Sinhalese electorates and the fight against "Pan-Sinhalese domination" in the Tamil electorates provided a wonderful overall unity of the capitalist front against the popular masses. The new slogans also had the advantage of involving the Sinhalese and Tamil petty bourgeois masses in an earnest chase after rainbows, thus securing their big capitalist property from these very pauperised masses.



Intensified Sinhalese and Tamil communalism—these are but two sides of one bourgeois coin—was the capitalist answer to the dangers of mass enfranchisement. Undoubtedly it has paid good dividends to the capitalist class, and in the early period, even the petty bourgeois hangers-on received their modest share. No wonder the middle classes found their new Messiahs in Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike of the Sinhala Maha Sabha and Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam of the Tamil Congress, the ideological precursors of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the Federal Party. But the historic process tolerates no Messianism and soon, retribution overtakes all who attempt to violate her. The dead end of Federal Party politics and the helplessness of the Tamil speaking people, in particular of the petty bourgeois masses among them, in the face of repeated provocative measures against them are the historical penalties for their support of the unprincipled politics of Tamil vested interests over the last 30 years. If Sinhalese communalism now appears triumphant, this is no evidence of its viability, since in the historic scale, the successes of the SLFP are as illusory as those of the blue-eyed, blonde-haired Aryans of Hitler's Germany. Nemesis will overtake the one as it certainly overtook the other.

To hasten this end the Tamil speaking people must decisively break with the Federal Party. So long as they are tied to it, there is not even a perspective of hope for them. The following observation of Trotsky has a deadly relevance to the current plight of the Tamil speaking people: "When a soldier's hands are tied, the chief danger is not the enemy but the rope which ties the soldier's hands."\* It is high time that the Tamil speaking people paid attention to the problems of method and leadership of their struggle as these are fast becoming the key questions. Indignation and denunciation of an openly discriminatory Government are no substitutes for a correct policy to fight such a Government. The present leadership, because of its close identification with the past, will not encourage any discussion of these fundamental questions—it would rather see the Tamil speaking people burn themselves out in impotent rage and despair against the Government than permit a critical re-examination of its politics. In the twilight of its life, the older generation which grew up under foreign imperialism and the Donoughmore constitution and which bears its share of guilt for the present impasse, can be indifferent to the many matters now pressing for a revolutionary socialist solution. But

\* Quoted by Isaac Deutscher in *The Prophet Unarmed* page 361  
Oxford University Press, London.



others, and in particular the youth can be anything but indifferent. Not only do they have no responsibility for the inglorious past of the last few decades but their own interests demand that they find a road out of the blind alley in which they find themselves, because of their father's and grandfathers' politics. They have a life to live and not only must they live as equal citizens but they must assure this inalienable condition to their children and their children's children. Individuals among them, because of the intolerable conditions at home may seek their salvation abroad, but the masses have nowhere to go but must remain here to fight it out with those forces which oppress them. And this means, above all, their integration with the revolutionary socialist movement—only then shall the tocsin sound for the final struggle.

And that tocsin shall also summon to a unified struggle, the majority of the Sinhalese speaking people, in particular the predominantly Sinhalese speaking urban working class, that class which in the words of the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 "holds the future in its hands." The leading role in this whole historic movement shall belong to the best elements from among the Sinhala educated intelligentsia. From their ranks will spring the genuinely declassed professional revolutionaries who shall carry socialist consciousness to the working class itself, just as from the intelligentsia of the Great Russian oppressors whose regime was a veritable prison house of subject nations and people there arose Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and his colleagues to lead the struggle against Czarism and Great Russian chauvinism. In today's putrid atmosphere which has even pervaded the most unexpected precincts this confidence may appear to many as thoroughly misplaced. But as the very pollution is the result of an unholy conspiracy of conflicting forces to keep the Sinhala educated petty bourgeois intelligentsia in ignorance and obscurantism, the clearance of the air is but a matter of patient effort and time. In any event in the hard school of experience and revolutionary struggle, the honest elements who today cannot see the organic connection between the struggle for socialism and the fight of the oppressed peoples for equality will soon appreciate the significance of what Marx said in his fundamental work: "In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralysed so long as slavery disfigured the Republic. *Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.* But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours



agitation, that ran with the seven league boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California."\* And when they realise the indivisibility of the struggle against Reaction—and this they soon must—then shall Man on this speck on our planet, that is called Ceylon, leave prehistory and enter history.

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\* Capital Vol. 1 p. 301 Moscow Edition



## POSTSCRIPT: 1977

Older readers will recall that when the main work, *The Way Out for the Tamil Speaking People* was published in 1963, attempts were then being made to create a front of the LSSP-CP-MEP as a contender for power to replace the existing government of the SLFP. This front turned out to be a non-starter and what finally emerged was a front of the SLFP, LSSP and CP which confronted the government of the UNP and its allies at the general elections of May 1970. Before such a front was established the SLFP jettisoned its then Right wing led by C. P. de Silva and a refurbished SLFP stepped into the shoes of the MEP. In all fundamentals, therefore, the United Front of the SLFP-LSSP-CP which bid for electoral support at the general elections of May 1970 represented in the main the same class forces as the front of the LSSP, CP, MEP envisaged in *The Way Out for the Tamil Speaking People*. What was stated therein about the front of the LSSP-CP-MEP is therefore applicable to the United Front of the SLFP-LSSP-CP. At the risk of repetition this is what was said, as far as the Tamil speaking people were concerned, about the front projected in 1963:

“What has been considered so far is the most favourable variant. But the evolution of events along this line is by no means assured. There are many counteracting factors not the least of which is that the solution is sought within the framework of Parliament which gives an undue weightage to hostile class influences and an exaggerated representation to backward areas. To these must be added the fact that the social base of the parties to the agreement is not wholly the working class at different levels of consciousness which is the case in the classical working out of the united front tactic. These alien, non-proletarian, and in some instances, even positively anti-working class elements will press on all or some of the parties to the agreement and seek to assert their interest through them, and to fashion them to serve their reactionary requirements. This *denouement* can be avoided only if the forces of the working class and the minorities, and of the latter, in particular the Tamil speaking people, throw their weight behind the Marxist parties. It is only to the extent that they rally behind the LSSP that they would be able to neutralize the reactionary opposing pressures and compel the LSSP-CP-MEP Parliamentary bloc to carry out the promised reforms, and to get the block to go beyond its



self imposed limits. If they remain aloof from the new regroupment, and specifically this means the LSSP, what they would in effect ensure is that the LSSP itself is but a prisoner in the block as far as their demands are concerned. It must not be forgotten that the ultimate effectiveness of the LSSP itself is directly dependent on the measure of support it receives from the working class and the Tamil speaking people'. (See page 41 of present edition).

The Tamil people stayed aloof from the Front, indeed rejected it in no uncertain terms, and the worst fears expressed in the above quoted passage were realised.

Why did the Tamil speaking people so decisively reject the UF at the General Elections of May 1970? Jaffna society, like all others, has its oppressor and oppressed classes, but unlike the rest of the country, the specific weight of the dominant section within that society, is much greater and what is more, its parliamentary influence is exerted within a small area. A Dutch missionary of the 17th century, Phillipus Baldeaus, observed: "Here (in Jaffna) there is a wonderful contempt for the lower castes and an extraordinary respect for the highest"\* This was the position in the natural economy still prevalent at that time. With the advent of the British, the meagre surplus of the natural economy was augmented, in other parts of the country, by the opening of plantations, providing ancillary services, growth of transportation, etc. but in Jaffna it was augmented by the money income of menial service under the British Crown in Ceylon and the Federated Malay States. Indeed the income from such service was so crucial for the money economy that Jaffna politicians rejected out of hand Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's proposal for a Federal Constitution made in 1925! The growth of the money economy of modern times not only strengthened the dominance of the original oppressor class of Jaffna society but drew around it new layers based primarily on the new money economy. Even though subsequent generations climbed up the social ladder of the money economy, they still remained, by and large, within the old framework of selling their services and skill to employers of labour: state, public and private. But the upward mobility of later generations tied them all the firmly to the capitalist

\* *A True and Exact Description of the Great Island of Ceylon* p. 372. Tr. by Pieter Brohier (1960) Colombo.



structure and their very success generated not only the feeling of being part of the system but increased their stake in the capitalist economy. There may be over 2 million Tamils in Sri Lanka but who can deny that over 90% of the Tamil doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers, senior executives in banking, commerce, industry and the agency houses, not to mention, apothecaries, foremen in industry, teachers, notaries, village headmen and administrative and clerical officers, come from one G.A.'s division in the Northern Province, i.e. the Jaffna district? Inevitably this imbalance in the Tamil community is reflected in the political representation of the constituencies within this G.A.'s division. The pressure of these elements on the voters in the North is in the direction of conservatism, not only at the May 1970 general election, but whenever the choice was put at every preceding general election.

But in the vacuum created by the lack of Tamil representation in the United Front, Sinhalese chauvinism rapidly moved in and soon established a powerful lobby—the *Sinhala Taruna Sangvidhanaya* with Mr Sivali Ratwatte as president, the same gentleman whom the UNP has retained as chairman of the Export Promotion Bureau and is the principal contact man of multinational companies, to press for its consistent anti-Tamil policy. By November of that year it, succeeded in pressurizing the Government to revise the results of the Examination for admission to the University and by the principle of media-wise standardisation imposing the hated *numerus clausus*\* in the matter of University admission. The realisation of the petty, sectarian objective of the *Sinhala Taruna Sangvidhanaya* directly contributed to a new extension in influence of Tamil communalism. The FP, in hibernation since May 1970, came surging back to life on the wave of the protest which gripped the student body in the Jaffna area in particular. The media-wise standardisation issue gave the Federal Party a new lease of life and a party hitherto based primarily on Tamil public servants, now obtained a new base among the student population, a perennially renewing body which furnished a ready material of cadres and activists. Others too got active among them and soon an organisation calling itself the *Tamil Elangyar Peravai* formulated the demand for a separate state. In the camp of Tamil communalism it combined the roles of a ginger group and a miniature

\* Readers of V. I. Lenin know that this was Czarism's device to restrict the admission of Jewish students to the University.



*Irgun Zvai Leumi*. It was so successful that within a few years the FP capitulated to its pressure to adopt the separatist demand as its own.

The United Front government, and the SLFP in particular, having raised the separatist monster, primarily dealt with it in a police-administrative manner and never sought a political solution, no doubt under the pressure of the right wing chauvinist lobby. The absence of Tamil representation within the government Parliamentary Group, in its turn, aided the work of the chauvinist caucus within the majority community. In this situation the natural drift to the UNP assumed the character of an avalanche outside the Tamil areas and, within it, in the Northern Province in particular, to the TULF in which umbrella organisation was now grouped the FP, TC and Thondaman's CWC.

The decision of Mr. Thondaman who speaks for the plantation workers to join the TULF with its demand for a separate state is on the face the most inexplicable. Not only are the class interests of the plantation Tamils clearly different from those of the North and East, their own immediate pressing demands of a "national" character are of an entirely different order, involving the ending of the apartheid regime imposed on them and their integration into the political and social life of the country. The identification of the CWC with the TULF was so manifestly ill-conceived that Mr. Thondaman, an otherwise astute politician, on his own would never have decided on that course. The only satisfactory hypothesis is that Mr. Thondaman would have acted on other pressures and directives. Mr. Thondaman's CWC, it is well known, is affiliated to the ICFTU. Of this body Philip Agee says that it is "the labour centre set up and controlled by the CIA to oppose the World Federations of Trade Unions."\*

The one historical merit of the United Front Government, for all its inadequacies and shortcomings, was that it was not immediately and directly representative of foreign imperialism and certainly as long as the LSSP and CP were in it imperialism did not look on it with favour and merely tolerated it. In fact imperialism's aim during this period was, while supporting Mrs. Bandaranaike, to dislodge the Left from the Government. Even after this aim was realised and Mrs. Bandaranaike emerged to lead a purely SLFP government imperialism looked on her as a parvenu and not its chosen representative. In this situation it was necessary for imperialism to keep alive

\* *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* p. 611 Penguin Books Harmondsworth, 1975.

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some sort of a mass movement to confront the parvenu government. After the experience of the Kurdish separatist movement in the Middle East, what could be better than a movement of the type represented by the TULF?

The TULF campaign of July 1977 was a montage of cynicism, frenzy and indignation. The farm horses of the old FP-TC leadership Messrs. Amirthalingam, Sivasithamparam and Navaratnam, already shown up as totally impotent in the preceding 25 years, cynically rode on the frenzy of the TULF youth who had worked themselves to an honest belief in an *Eelam* being created out of that general election. What was the basis of that belief? Surely, not their puerile ideas and certainly not, the strength of the social forces on which they were relying. If anything, the myriad of petty bourgeois households, each almost an independent economy of its own, was incapable of ever cohering to sustain any struggle, let alone a struggle in assertion of the right of national self determination. But undoubtedly, the TULF youth seriously believed in their separatist aspirations and not only did they believe in it but were also able to generate in others such a belief. The basis of their confidence was the support which these forces received from emigre Jaffna colonies in London and New York. And it is well-known that international reaction uses such settlements of dissatisfied upper income emigres for their intervention in developing countries. It is the proud boast of the CIA that it only uses nationals of the given country in its operations!

What is absolutely certain is that no organisation of Jaffna emigres abroad was linked to the labour and socialist movement in the host country. There is, however, ample evidence of their close association with the most reactionary elements and organisations in the UK and US. Thus, a few years ago, in an attempt to give publicity to the separatist cause, the House of Commons Order Paper carried a question in the name of 3 members of Parliament who turned out to be a Thatcher Conservative, a Monday Club Conservative and a Powellite Conservative. These are the international allies of the TULF! There is no doubt that world reaction, operating through these emigre circles in London and New York, sought to intervene in our political life through their tacit support for the separatist demand. Particularly in the event of world reaction's own government not being elected, the separatist movement provided it with a handy



instrument of political blackmail. The return of imperialism's own government was, by no means, certain and hence the frenzy and fury of the TULF campaign and the tone of finality which marked its election pronouncements.

It is said that the best laid plans of mice and men go awry and that is what happened in July 1977. It was neither a government of the United Left Front nor a government of the parvenu SLFP of Mrs. Bandaranaike but imperialism's own party which was returned to power with a sweeping majority and Mr. Jayawardene was firmly installed as Prime Minister. That was the hard reality on one side. On the other, the TULF, still intoxicated with their own election rhetoric, indulged in the sheerest fantasies. Thus Mr. Amirthalingam spoke expansively to the world press, even to the extent of inviting foreign governments to tender for arms and at the TULF victory celebrations at the Ramakrishna Hall, Colombo, recklessly promised the implementation of the secessionist programme. The problem the new government faced was to bring its official parliamentary opposition, which was still soaring in mid-air, to earth. In fact, since 22nd July 1977 international reaction through all its journals urged precisely this course of action on the TULF: "Co-operate with J. R. Jayawardene". But this shift which imperialism so much desired was not as easy as changing gears in a car and, in any case, right wing mass movements must first go through their "night of the long knives", before such a shift is effected. As the government, within limitations, has an independence to act even against an arm of its international backers, it proceeded by extra-legal means to move into action when the Police in Jaffna provoked the incident of 16th August.

The familiar cycle thereafter asserted itself: police provocation leading to mass retaliation and that retaliation under TULF leadership taking on a tribal form which in turn led to pogromist activity in the South followed by the establishment of refugee camps and the mass evacuation of Tamils to Jaffna. In the trauma of violence that followed, Mr. Amirthalingam saw his party's demand for a separate state "vindicated to the hilt" (*The Times* 3rd September 1977). As a piece of macabre humour this is hard to beat. No doubt in 1958 in a similar situation it was said that the incidents of that time similarly vindicated the Federal demand! These mischievous statements are a deliberate attempt to hide the real lesson of these events, viz, in



*the specific conditions of Ceylon where nearly half the Tamil population is held hostage in a society of widespread unemployment, high lumpenism and low culture, the politics of minority communalism carries within it a cyclical pattern which must be climaxed by an orgy of violence against the Tamil minority.* The practitioners of such politics cannot, therefore, shirk their responsibility. Mr. Amirthalingam, like Pontius Pilate, seeks to wash his hand of responsibility, but he and his cohorts cannot be permitted to get away with such evasions. He also told the same foreign correspondent: "If we do not have some place of safety we shall have to live eternally in refugee camps." (*The Times* 3rd Sept. 1977). What the poor man has not yet understood is that before long, on his path, there may neither be a place of safety nor a refugee camp.

Simpletons see the police action in Jaffna as being the "excesses" of an SLFP recruited, and, therefore, indiscipline force. But what they fail to realise is that the very indiscipline is in conformity with the immediate needs of the UNP government and has its origin in the highest echelons of state power. The government needed some move on its part to compel the TULF leadership to face reality and to strengthen the hands of what it considered were the more responsible elements among the TULF and its own supporters among the Tamils. Otherwise, how explain that on 18th August in the National State Assembly, so seasoned and responsible a politician as the Prime Minister should, while disclaiming responsibility for the truth of the assertion, put the following words in the mouth of the people: "If you want to fight, let there be a fight; if it is peace, let there be peace."\* and broadcast this speech over the national radio? How could it intervene except through the Police in Jaffna and through its supporters in the country at large? And this rabble, having a bare 3 weeks earlier looted SLFP shops and LSSP homes, showed not the slightest hesitation to attack Tamil shops and houses under the eyes of a benign Police. From the government's point of view the whole operation, despite the unsavouriness which enveloped it, was successful—it has ended the TULF leaders' somnambulism and brought to the surface the internal contradictions within them, leaving the TULF as a purely Jaffna phenomenon, as it, in fact, always was.

The TULF sought to unite the Tamil speaking people of 3 areas, viz. North, East and the hill country with separate and distinct problems under the common demand of *Eelam*. We have already noticed how

\* *Hansard* Vol. 23, No. 2 p. 244.



far removed are the problems of the plantation Tamils from this separatist demand. Even as between the Tamil speaking people of the North and East, the much vaunted unity was largely fictitious, not only on account of the refusal of the Muslim community of the Eastern Province to fall in line, but even as between the Tamils of North and East the contradictions were sufficiently sharp, as seen by the approval which district-wise standardisation received among Tamils in the Eastern Province. While their separate grievances brought them together, they were held together in a vice in obedience to a higher interest and a superior directive, viz, the need to confront a government which was left of centre. When that government collapsed on 21st July the TULF had served its purpose and soon Mr. Thondaman pulled out and it will not be long before the Tamil MPs of the Eastern province pull out of the TULF. A rump will remain in the Northern Province but what is certain is that the separatist demand will be kept alive but not activated. The time for such activation is when a Left or Left of Centre government is in power!

In view of the identification of at least one leading member of the Communist Party with the demand for *Eelam* and the flirtation of several ultra left groups with activists of the TULF, the question has naturally arisen in the socialist movement as whole whether it is bound to support the right of self determination in respect of the Tamil speaking people of the North and East. Before the era of world imperialism the right of self determination arose in the context of the struggle against feudalism. *In the circumstances of the present such a right arises in the course of the struggle against world imperialism and today it is in such a struggle that a nation is forged*, just as in an earlier epoch nations were born in the struggle against feudal monarchies. Merely because a group of people are united by a common language and occupy a contiguous territory that does not entitle the socialist movement to pledge itself to support the right of the peoples of this contiguous territory to self determination. The right of self determination is not an absolute right, valid under any and all circumstances. It is a right that is immediately qualified in the late 20th century by the exigencies of the struggle against world imperialism. Such a right must be asserted in struggle against world imperialism and it is only then that the socialist movement in power pledges to honour the exercise of that right. But where, as in the instant case, the very movement for self determination is not only inspired by world imperialism but is its chosen mass weapon to disrupt the socialist and anti-



imperialist movement, Marxists, in these specific conditions, can under no circumstances be champions of the right of self determination. A common language and a contiguous territory in themselves are totally inadequate. The key question is: *does it aid the struggle against imperialism?* But when the projected new state, as the creature of imperialism, is to be the foothold of world imperialism not only in Ceylon but also in South Asia, in particular, against the impending Indian revolution, it would be the gravest folly to sow illusions on this question.

Instead the socialist movement must make it absolutely clear that no such question even arises. We stand no more for the right of self-determination in *Eelam* than we stand for it in Israel. In both instances we are opposed to it because that is the demand of world imperialism expressed through the mouth of an Amirthalingam in Ceylon and a Begin in the Middle East. Does this mean that the socialist movement has no role to play? On the contrary, for the reasons set out in *The Way Out for the Tamil Speaking People*, the socialist movement alone can truly unify the nation and by the nation is meant not only the majority Sinhala speaking people but all peoples, whatever their ethnic origin. This task has finally and irrevocably passed to the socialist movement.

It is no accident that the UNP as the party of the compradore bourgeoisie should have no policy on the Tamil problem. Its own election Manifesto in July 1977 proclaimed its lack of policy. It committed itself to nothing—saying that it would implement what is agreed at a Round Table Conference of all parties. Assured of the backing of imperialism and not in conflict with it, a party like the UNP sees no need for any kind of settlement of the minority problem. Not so a party that faces the prospect of a conflict. It must secure its rear and therefore it attempts to evolve a policy, whatever may be its shortcomings. If the absence of a policy on the part of the UNP is no accident, equally, it is not without significance, that the SLFP under Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike had a policy, no doubt shifted about, but finally enshrined in the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact. But the implementation of it was frustrated by the compradore forces led primarily by the UNP and supported by its allies in the Right wing of the SLFP. Mr. Bandaranaike only caved in to this hostile pressure, but what is important, is that he had a policy as far as the indigenous Tamils were concerned.



The fury unleashed by that reactionary agitation finally spent itself only with the assassination of Mr. Bandaranaike himself in 1959. But it has cast a long shadow that Mrs. Bandaranaike who set herself up as a defender of "Bandaranaike principles" was soon to abandon what was indeed the late P.M.'s singular contribution to the evolution of a national policy. As far as the people of the North and East were concerned, the Communist Party at its very foundation had spelt out its policy and called for regional autonomy. The LSSP, on the question of colonization, the issue that generates much heat among all groups of communalists, had clearly made known its position, namely, that in the distribution of land the people of the area had the first priority and those of other areas ranked thereafter. This follows the order of priority established in the land decree of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of 19th February 1918\*. Even Mr. Bandaranaike, through his experience as Minister of Local Administration in the State Council, had advocated a system of Regional Councils with wide and extensive powers. As for the question of language, all three currents were firmly of the view that Sinhala and Tamil were to be the national languages of the country. During a whole historical period the Tamils, instead of throwing their weight behind these parties and using them as their instruments, engaged themselves in a labour of Sisypus under the Tamil Congress, and later, the Federal Party. At the very least, it is now necessary to restate the traditional positions of the Left and win support for these democratic ideas within the broad Left movement, i.e. the politically advanced elements among the people. They must once again become the common currency of ideas and it is to the extent that the Left succeeds in so infusing the mass anti-imperialist movement that it will succeed in defeating the pogromists among the ultra-Right. Otherwise the pogromists will tomorrow turn from the minority communities to organise attacks on the working class movement. This danger is real and the lesson of history is that pogroms are the prelude to attacks on the organised working class.

The impediment in the way of the secular, socialist and internationalist working class resuming its role as the leader of the nation is the influence still exerted by the Sinhala speaking bourgeois and upper petty bourgeois elements. Particularly since 1956, those

\* *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917—1918. Documents and Materials* Edited by Bunyan and Fisher (p. 375) Stanford University Press.



engaged in trade, business, the public services and the professions use the weapon of chauvinism to gain an advantage over their Tamil speaking rivals, and in situations where this weapon is irrelevant, they unhesitatingly resort to religion, and thereafter, to caste, to further their material interests. Precisely because they have gained ascendancy by dubious means, the mediocre among them, feel terribly insecure. The sense of insecurity, of all alike, is enhanced by the common realisation that they owe their ascendant position *vis a vis* their rivals to the tenuous and ephemeral success achieved in taking in tow the predominantly Sinhala speaking working class. The bourgeoisie now recognises the need for a comprehensive outlook to bamboozle the working class and keep it under their spiritual domination. This explains the current demand of Sir Senerat Gunawardena's All Ceylon Buddhist Congress to declare the country a Buddhist Socialist Republic and the novel doctrine formulated by Mr. Nissanka Wijeratne, the UNP Education Minister, that although the Sinhala speaking people are a majority in Ceylon, they still suffer from the psychological weakness of a minority, as they are a minority in the geographical region of Deccan India. This is a crude attempt at rationalization of the privileged position now occupied by the Sinhala speaking bourgeois and upper petty bourgeois elements and a call for support from the mass movement to maintain them in that position. It is true, at the level of Sir Senerat Gunawardena and Mr. Nissanka Wijeratne, the bourgeois interest is manifest, and therefore there is no immediate danger. But in the future the bourgeoisie will employ others to pollute the socialist movement. Only the growth of socialist class consciousness, with its secularism and internationalism, will eliminate these poisons.

But at the moment the ball is in the court of the Tamil youth. Somewhere along the line, the politics which they are pursuing, took the wrong turn; while it is true they bear no responsibility, it nonetheless behoves them to ascertain where it took the wrong turn, not for purposes of historical research but to guide their present action. *The fatal turn was when under the leadership of Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam they forsook the anti-imperialist movement and relied on minority communalism as the answer to the majority communalism of Sir Baron Jayatileke and D. S. Senanayake.* From within the Tamil community strident voices were not only raised in protest against this lapse into sectarianism but warnings of the inevitable fate in store for them



were uttered by such establishment figures as K. Balasingham, the eminent jurist, and Sir Waitilingam Duraisamy, the Speaker of the 2nd State Council, and by Jaffna's first rebel, S. Handy Perinpanayagam, the leader of the Jaffna Youth Congress. But the hysteria of those years not only drowned these voices but was to warp the personality of the Tamil political leadership. In time this leadership found the UNP (the home of Sinhala communalism) their ally and the forces in the anti-imperialist movement their enemy. And the worst that could be said of the latter was that on some question or other they may have yielded to the pressure of Sinhala communalism, and this only for the reason that the countervailing pressure of the Tamil masses was singularly absent in the anti-imperialist camp. This evolution of the Tamil leadership reveals a lot and shows that the bond of property is far stronger than the professed concern of the TULF leadership for the rights of the Tamil speaking people. If the Tamil youth will but understand its true significance, assimilate its full meaning and fearlessly draw the conclusions that follow, they would overcome their inner crisis and would be ready to take their rightful place not only to achieve their national rights but even more important, their legitimate place in the world movement against imperialism and for the international socialist revolution.



## APPENDICES

We are thankful to the Editor, *The Nation*, Dr. Micheal Roberts and the Editor, *Logos* for permission to reprint three of the four materials included in the appendices. The other document *Enter History* is an open letter issued during the general election in May 1970.







## ENTER HISTORY

### A Call to the Tamil speaking people addressed to the voters of the Uduvil Constituency

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party has nominated a member of its Political Bureau, the highest body of the Party, as its candidate for the Uduvil constituency. Accordingly I present my candidature to you, the voters of this electoral division. Although I had on two previous occasions unsuccessfully contested the Kankesanturai constituency, this is the first time I am seeking your mandate to Parliament. While the latter fact entitles you to examine my political credentials, I take the opportunity thus presented to set out for your consideration the central issue of the parliamentary general election of 1970. This is of concern not only for the country as a whole but it also is the touchstone in respect of the specific problem before the Tamil speaking people, namely, *the question of their democratic rights.*

#### A Clash of Interests

In every general election on adult franchise the voters are called upon to participate in some form in the vital matter of electing a government, namely, that body of men who would direct, wield and, if necessary, refashion the enormous power of the state in the interest of the sections which support it. This concerns you directly and immediately. It is, therefore, in your interest to elect a government that would promote your interests and respond to your pressures, *particularly as the interests of voters are not identical.*

It is idle to pretend that the interests of the big tea and rubber plantation owners, the rich landlords owning vast acres of arable and irrigated lands, the new industrial magnates, the local agents of foreign manufacturers, the directors of managing agency houses, the import and export merchants, in a word, the men who live exclusively on profit, dividends, interest and rent are the same as those of wage earners—workers, day labourers, farmers, clerks, technicians, salaried staff and professional men—who live mainly on the sale of their capacity to work to public and private employers. *Indeed these interests are sharply antagonistic.*

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(An Open Letter issued during the May 1970 General Election.)



It is only by keeping down the wages and salaries of the persons whose work alone produces wealth that the capitalists are able to draw their dividends and profits. And as the cream of this enormous surplus unearned income goes to the investors of the City of London, world imperialism powerfully backs these parasitic sections. And here is the great divide of society in Ceylon—a handful of planting and industrial magnates, foreign currency speculators and tourist touts, gem smugglers and profiteers and the overwhelming mass of wage earners who day in and day out are not only ruthlessly exploited by these swindlers but are kept in such conditions that they fall easy prey to and are the ready victims of every manipulation against their interest.

A clash of interests so deep seated has necessarily to express itself in two sharply opposing political movements, each seeking control of the state machine to promote the interests it represents. And the struggle for electoral supremacy between the united front of the SLFP, LSSP, and CP which strives to represent the movement of the workers, peasants, intelligentsia and generally the "small" man and the coalition of the UNP and its satellites, the Tamil Congress, the Federal Party, the J.V.P. and the M.E.P. which represent primarily the interests of foreign imperialism and its native satraps is nothing but the expression of the conflict between world imperialism and the national liberation movement.

### **Part of a World Struggle**

This is no isolated struggle, or worse still, some aberration of Ceylon politics, as many have been conditioned to think by the manufacturers of "educated" public opinion—the English language press of Ceylon. On the contrary, the struggle between the forces of the united front of the SLFP, LSSP and CP and the coalition of the UNP and its allies is an integral part of an international struggle. Everywhere in the Third World, the official euphemism for the backward colonial and the semi-colonial countries the same forces are drawn up and are engaged in struggle. No doubt the forms vary and so too the depth and intensity of the struggle. In Vietnam and S. E. Asia there is open, bloody and savage civil war, with American arms and men backing a Quisling government, in the mountains and jungles of Latin America and its cities, the struggle against American imperialism and its allies is now a sustained guerilla war, while in other



countries like Tanzania and Zambia in Black Africa, and in Libya and Algeria in North Africa the anti-imperialist movement is using the levers of state power to expropriate imperialist property. Nearer home, in India the struggle between the native forces backed by foreign imperialism and those striving to break out of its economic stranglehold erupted in the form of a struggle within the ruling Congress Party, between Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Morarji Desai and is for the present being fought out in that country's political and social institutions. And in Ceylon, within the parliamentary framework, a no less significant struggle is now taking place between the forces of imperialism and those opposed to it.

The international struggle between the camps backed by and opposed to world imperialism is a life and death struggle transcending every other conflict in the social structure of colonial society. Imperialism cannot let go its death grip on the countries of the Third World. It desperately needs them! Lazy minds and conscious agents of imperialism will dismiss this as a "slogan" of the Marxists. But the UN Secretary General's report to the 2nd UNCTAD conference in New Delhi reveals how imperialism bleeds white the so called independent countries, the former colonies of imperialism: progressive fall in the prices of industrial raw materials exported by the Third World countries, a steady increase in the prices of manufactured goods to colonial countries by the industrialised countries of the West, and the high monopolistic prices charged by Western imperialism for services like shipping, insurance, banking, industrial know-how, patents, etc. The combined effect of all this is so disastrous that imperialism itself resorts to artificial feeding and so loan and "aid" agencies have sprung up—but these only serve to bind the Third World to its exploiters. Thus according to imperialism's own mouthpiece, *The Economist*, as much as 87% of borrowing by Latin America is used for the servicing of old debts, i.e. for capital and interest repayment and while Ceylon uses 40% of its borrowings for the same purpose she is given the priceless advice "to borrow more heavily" so that the country is completely dependent on the financial sharks of the international money market.

But for the colonial countries, Ceylon included, the break with the imperialist system is imperative, if these countries are to get out of their backwardness. The surplus which is appropriated by imperialism is needed for planned investment. The annual export of



profits from Ceylon is not even disclosed in official statistics—so large is the slice. But it has been estimated at well over Rs. 1000 million; the country needs the surplus which private capital squanders for new investment and the country needs the millions which private racketeers and smugglers rob for new investment—an example of the latter is the gem industry, the official export figures to Hong Kong, Singapore and New York are only a fraction of the declared imports at these places. All this is money lost for new factories and plants, the wherewithal to end today's economic stagnation which stagnation is the breeding ground of communal and religious tensions and conflicts. The UNP government based as it is on foreign capital is absolutely helpless to curb these activities. Only a government firmly committed to an anti-imperialist programme and pledged to defend its independence can undertake this task.

### **Tamil Leadership in Camp of Reaction**

Where do the people of the Northern Province stand in relation to this historic struggle? True, under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi's early struggle against British rule in India an important section of Tamil opinion organised in the Youth Congress of Mr. Handy Perimpanayagam recognised that the future of the Tamils was linked with the struggle against imperialism. But 34 years ago, Tamil reaction defeated this movement and Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam made his shameful entry into political life by his crude appeal to Tamil communal sentiment. He also presented the Sinhala people, and not British imperialism, as the main enemy of the Tamils and thereby deflected the Tamil people from the anti-imperialist goal which the Lanka Sama Samaja Party in 1935 had set before the country as a whole.

Basking in the noon day sun of British imperial power, Mr. Ponnambalam scored his cheap and vulgar victory against the Jaffna Youth Congress on a nakedly communalist programme. But as Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out from his vast Indian experience, for all their talk, communalists are reactionaries to the marrow. Speaking in the name of the Tamil speaking people Mr. Ponnambalam and his coterie of Tamil communalists defended in the old State Council every act of the British Governor directed against the mass anti-imperialist movement, advanced the most patently absurd demands to block even the constitutional reforms proposed by the other elected members—



in a word, they were the willing tools of imperialist reaction to thwart the struggle for national independence. And all this was done in the name of the Tamil speaking people!

But imperialism has no need for squeezed lemons. When Mr. Ponnambalam had served its purpose, he was unceremoniously dropped and in the Soulbury Constitution British imperialism made its deal with Mr. D. S. Senanayake and his creation, the United National Party. Mr. Ponnambalam thereafter pledged in the general election of 1947 to fight the Sinhala communalism of D. S. Senanayake with his brand of Tamil communalism but soon capitulated to the United National Party in 1948, and out of this was born the Federal Party who in their turn now renewed the pledge to fight Sinhala communalism organised in the United National Party.

But the Federal Party not only carried over the communalism of the Tamil Congress in an even more aggressive form but, when it dislodged the latter in 1956, continued the reactionary Tamil Congress political tradition. Mr. Ponnambalam defended British imperial power in the days when "the sun never set" on the Empire but Mr. S. J. V. Chelvanayakam and the Federal Party came forward to defend it when it was being scuttled all along the line by the colonial masses in revolt.

The Federal Party opposed the liquidation of British bases in Trincomalee and Katunayake, they defended the right of British insurance companies to drain millions out of Ceylon, and opposed the nationalisation of insurance; they thought that foreign oil monopolies, Shell and Caltex, had an inalienable right to exploit the Ceylon consumer and hold him to ransom and opposed the nationalisation of the distribution of oil—the very step that led later to the setting up of a petroleum refinery and the creation of a petro-chemical industry; they opposed the Paddy Lands Act; and defended private vested interests in public education. Not for nothing did Jawaharlal Nehru warn that communalists are reactionaries!

Thus, during 34 years of Tamil communal politics which followed the defeat of the Jaffna Youth Congress, the political leadership of Jaffna has been identified on every crucial issue with the camp of reaction. Whatever and wherever was the camp of reaction at a given moment, there in the vanguard was the Tamil political leadership—



defending the British Governor's government against the popular legislature, arm in arm with D. S. Senanayake and the United National Party against the mass movement between 1948 and 1956, articulate against the legislative measures of reform and nationalisation of big imperialist and capitalist property in the years between 1956 and 1965, conspiring with foreign imperialist interests and big native property owners to topple the coalition government in 1964, and finally in 1965 in an indecent embrace with these very forces in a government which had made its prime task the defence of imperialist property interests in Ceylon, and therefore against the popular interest.

Over three decades of uninterrupted shame, and all this done in the name of the Tamil speaking people! Is it any wonder that even ordinary decent people, far removed from the influence of Sinhala communal elements must look askance at the doings of the men who have acted in our name during these long years? Is it a matter for surprise if these communal elements are able some times to rouse their people against the Tamils, when the acts of the accredited leadership of the Tamil speaking people over a long continuous period are so patently treacherous to the interests of the vast masses? Of course not all Tamils bear responsibility for this unmitigated record of national dishonour. But those Tamils who were in the ranks of the anti-imperialist camp and protested at the reactionary role of the Tamil political leadership have never been elected as the spokesmen of the Tamil people. This omission has only served to accentuate the reactionary role of the official Tamil political leadership represented by the Tamil Congress and the Federal Party.

### **No Hope for Democratic Rights in this Camp**

And what of that alleged preserve of the Tamil Congress and the Federal Party, the question of the rights of the Tamil speaking people? It was to defend these that Tamil communalism claimed to come into being. The very decline in the position of the Tamil speaking people in the years of the dominance of these two parties is the final, definitive and shattering condemnation of their politics. The communalism of a minority can never be an answer to the communalism of the majority community, and this obvious and elementary truth must now be learnt, if new disasters are to be averted.

However unpalatable it may be, the stark fact is that Tamil communalism can never defend and protect the democratic and legitimate



rights of the Tamil speaking people, however united they may be behind one or another Tamil communal party. Unity they have always achieved, but every new rallying to a communal party has meant one more attack and a new deprivation of existing rights. And this in turn has always led to a fresh capitulation to Sinhala communalism. So Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam capitulated to the United National Party in 1948, and Mr. Chelvanayakam who swore to fight that surrender in his turn capitulated to that very same organisation and the forces behind it.

In the intervening years between Mr. Ponnambalam's surrender and Mr. Chelvanayakam's agreement with Mr. Dudley Senanayake the United National Party had shown how deeply dedicated it was to minority rights. It organised the opposition to the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact, i.e. prepared the spiritual ground for the 1958 carnage, and since this preparatory work was insufficient its own journal, *Siyarata*, in May 1958 openly called for the killing of the Tamils. But credit to Mr. Chelvanayakam, he did not join a purely UNP government—his party joined a "National Government", that is, a UNP government further strengthened by the "guilty men" of Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's cabinet, who had consistently opposed his policy of concessions to the Tamils, men like C. P. de Silva, W. Dahanayake and persons outside the cabinet like K. M. P. Rajaratne. Could anything have been more humiliating to a party claiming to defend Tamil rights than joining a government of such notables? But no indignity is humiliating in defence of capitalist and imperialist rights. And when we recall what Jawaharlal Nehru said that communalists are reactionaries, is it surprising that the Federal Party should support such a government?

This prostration before the enemy is the inevitable fate of communalism. And to cover up their bankruptcy the Federal Party demands a monopoly of representation for itself so that it is free to bargain with other parties in the interest of the Tamil people. The futility of these "bargains" are now common knowledge—no government will honour them and no opposition will tolerate their implementation. Thereafter the Federal Party wails how unreasonable are the Sinhala parties! But what they don't tell the Tamil speaking people is that in the underworld of intrigue and blackmail promises are always honoured in the breach. So it is in the world of politics when the same methods are employed. What the Tamil people have not



yet realised is that this is the only method available to both the Tamil Congress and Federal Party. Can a nation or people secure its rights and live as equals on blackmail? Never! Even the most piffling concession from any government is made virtually impossible and laboriously difficult.

Worse still, over the years of their domination the Tamil Congress and the Federal Party have not only badly compromised the whole struggle of the Tamil speaking people for their just democratic demands and alienated the sympathy and support of their real allies but they have brought a historically legitimate movement to contempt and ridicule and have made of the Tamil people, the laughing stock of the nation. No wonder when they play the grand dukes in Jaffna and beg like Oliver Twist in Colombo.

### **Our Place is in the Anti-Imperialist Camp**

Is this then to be our fate? No, and a thousand times, "No"! But to play our part, to fulfil the role history has ordained, it is first necessary to move out of the camp of imperialism, of reaction, of the UNP and its allies whose handmaidens we have hitherto been, thanks to the Tamil Congress and thereafter the Federal Party. We have to move into the camp which is fighting these forces and there participate alongside with the best flower of the advanced Sinhala workers, peasants and the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia who at this very moment are leading thousands upon thousands of workers and peasants at different levels of consciousness in a struggle against imperialism and native capitalist reaction. Since it is axiomatic that the home of Sinhala communalism is in this camp these forces are in fact at this very moment engaged in a struggle against your enemy.

Let us make this joint struggle against a common enemy the smithy of the unshakeable and indestructible unity of the progressive, democratic, socialist and revolutionary forces among the Tamil and Sinhala people! Through all vicissitudes this is the alliance of your victory! Let the Tamils who value their investments in tea, rubber and coconut plantations, in industry and finance more important and vital than the struggle for language and citizenship rights remain with the UNP and its allies! But for those Tamil speaking people for whom the struggle for democratic rights is something serious we say: your place is in our camp—the camp of socialism and progress. The very division of the



Tamils along the lines of the national division between the UNP and the United Front would itself be a step forward in their struggle for democratic rights.

By this direct participation in the anti-imperialist struggle you would immediately enthuse your real supporters and allies, and awaken the sympathy and interest of persons in this camp who till now may have been indifferent or even hostile due in a large part to the reactionary role played by your existing leadership. A new world of tremendous possibilities immediately opens up before you! Your total and complete participation, your all out effort in the anti-imperialist camp would produce such a burst of fresh energy that this camp is bound in due course to inscribe your specific demands on its banner! The logic of your wholehearted participation would ensure their implementation! But all this is the music of the future, after you have entered the ranks where revolutions are accomplished, where society's path is cleared for human progress, where, in other words, history is made.

For the present, right now, what your friends and allies in the united front, in the trade unions, in the peasant unions, in the youth organisations, in the universities, in student and other mass organisations in all parts of Ceylon demand through me is that in the Uduvil constituency you elect me as the earnest of your determination to engage in a meaningful struggle and not indulge in the farce and parody which has been your fate under the leadership of the Tamil Congress and the Federal Party.

And permit me to conclude on a personal note: my Jaffna origin and background and my long and intimate association with the movement of the revolutionary Sinhala workers, peasants and socialist intelligentsia organised and led by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party gives me a unique position—a position not enjoyed by any other candidate in the Northern Province. I am your natural bridge to that historic revolutionary movement—the movement of your and indeed man's own liberation. The question is now fairly and squarely placed before you: to accept or reject the opportunity now presented!

Yours sincerely,

**V. Karalasingham**



## OPPOSITION TO PROGRESS

### Federal Party's Consistent Role

Old attitudes die hard. In fact they never do so long as the socio-economic context which originally gave rise to them still exists. It is well known that imperialist rule based itself in part on playing one community against the other and retarding the development of a united mass movement against it. The very nature of a colonial economy provided the material basis. Imperialism having extracted its monopoly share of the surplus permitted a "free for all" among the native people for the remnants. The resulting antagonisms and tensions, it sought to regulate and balance, in favour of one or the other community, depending on the circumstances.

As mass anti-imperialist consciousness grew, the rulers consciously moved to combat it by a deliberate policy of encouraging various communities to formulate sectional demands that went counter to the interests of the anti-imperialist struggle. In that vast laboratory of peoples that is India, even the blind could see how this policy worked out. British imperialism at various times encouraged the Scheduled Castes of Ambedkar, the Chamber of Indian Princes, the Ismaili Muslims of the Aga Khan, the Hindu Maha Sabha, and above all, the Muslim League of Mr. Jinnah. The latter, namely, the Muslim League, served imperialism best because it was able to develop a mass base among the Muslims in India on the demagogic cry of Hindu domination represented by the Indian National Congress, which of course by its very nature had a predominantly Hindu character.

### Pakistan Solved Nothing

A hopeless minority among the Indian Muslims, taking a wider historical look, refused to be drawn into the so-called separatist agitation of the Muslim League, which they well understood to serve the long term interests, not of the Muslims, but of imperialism. These men, of course, were denounced as "traitors" to the Muslim cause, as Hindu agents, etc. British imperialism finally settled on the Muslim



League as its principal agency of disruption of the mass movement against imperialism. This policy was so successful that the Indian National Congress itself compromised with British imperialism and agreed to the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan.

The newly created state of Pakistan solved nothing. It continued to serve imperialism. Just as, in the earlier period, the Muslim League served imperialism to disrupt the anti-imperialist struggle in India, so now the state of Pakistan became the base of imperialism in South Asia—the only difference being, of course, that American imperialism replaced the British as the overlord. It has taken 25 years, 10 million dead, and many more millions homeless and destitute before the Muslims in Bengal realised how false was the politics of their leaders who wrenched them away from the anti-imperialist movement of the "Hindu" leaders, and held out the promise of their liberation from "Hindu" oppression. Others in West Pakistan will, of course, in time come to the same realisation, but at what price it is still too early to say.

### Jinnahs of Ceylon

On a very miniature scale, and with important differences, the same line of development has taken place in Ceylon. Up till about 1938, British imperialism encouraged the Jinnahs of Ceylon politics, organisations like the Tamil Congress to thwart the anti-imperialist struggle. In 1948 when it made its deal with D. S. Senanayake and his United National Party, Mr. Ponnambalam moved to the new centre of reaction in this country represented by the UNP regime and a section of his Tamil Congress, seeped through and through with Tamil communalism, broke away to form the Federal Party. The latter could no more break away from the reactionary politics of its founder, Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam, than the new state of Pakistan could break away from the reactionary politics of Mr. Jinnah. For a time the Federal Party kept up the pretence of "anti-UNPism", but events soon caught up with them and, in 1964, they found their true level—with the heroes of Padaviya and Welimada and, above all, with the United National Party. The defenders of Tamil interests, like the defenders of Muslim interests in India, found their place in the camp of reaction and of imperialism, and with men who had a known record of pogrom activity against the Tamil people.



What brought this strange combination together? And what held them from 1965 to 1970? The defence of Tamil interests? At the very time the Federal Party was conspiring with the dark forces of reaction to stab the Coalition Government of 1964, their leaders were engaged in talks on the implementation of the Official Language Act in respect of old entrant Tamil public servants, and these talks, on their own subsequent admission, were most satisfactory. Despite this they joined up with the UNP and the others to defeat the Government—because the Coalition Government had already taken meaningful steps against imperialist and big capitalist property interests in Ceylon. They rallied to the interests of private property, and specifically of the rights of the Lake House group of newspapers, which had contributed more than its fair share to foul the atmosphere in respect of the legitimate interests of the Tamil people. Between the interests of the Tamil people and the rights of private property, the Federal Party knows what is paramount. And to underline the paramountcy of its defence of big capitalist interests in Ceylon, it joined in a Government which international capital wanted and which it fully supported.

#### **FP Boycotts Constituent Assembly**

Once again, in the camp of reaction, the Federal Party is taking its vanguard position. Immediately prior to the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, the Federal Party—soon to be joined by Sir Arthur Ranasinghe—sought to raise doubts about the “legality” of drafting an altogether new constitution and threatened a boycott. Apparently better counsel prevailed—certainly in the situation of the mass upsurge and enthusiasm which accompanied the formation of the United Front Government and which united the mass of the peoples of Ceylon round the red and blue flag of the Front, the Federal Party could only have stultified itself by any such gesture. Big capitalist interests themselves were too dazed by the crushing defeat to encourage these antics of the Federal Party. The position today is otherwise. Big Capital has recovered its poise and the Federal Party itself feels a “freer” air so that it can move to the front line of the camp of reaction. Hence its decision to boycott the Constituent Assembly.

Its boycott, of course, is “in the name of the Tamil people”. For all its limitations—and these limitations are all imposed by the very circumstances which attended the birth of the Constituent Assembly—the new Constitution marks an historic landmark in the political history of Ceylon. This is the first time that the democratically elected



representatives of the people have drafted a Constitution and are to proclaim it as the basic law of the country. It marks a sharp break from the past, when constitutions were imposed on the people of this country. The very break from that tradition opens new possibilities and one would have thought that a party allegedly fighting for democratic rights would welcome such a development, that it would participate in its work, move its amendments, and even though defeated in this assembly, seek to win the support of the people with a view to the convocation of yet another Constituent Assembly, and a new Constitution which would better express the democratic aspirations of the people. To do this the Federal Party must pursue correct politics. We have on other occasions shown why the Federal Party is incapable of winning the demands of the Tamil people and it is that congenital incapacity of the Federal Party which prompts it to the vain exhibition of "boycott" of the Constituent Assembly. What the Federal Party achieves by this boycott is to alienate the people whom it represents from the main stream of the anti-imperialist movement in this country.

### **Committed To Private Property**

The history of the Federal Party has shown its deep commitment to the interests of private property—a commitment that even takes precedence over its claim to fight for the rights of the Tamil speaking people. One of the most significant things about the Draft Constitution is that the right to property is not recognised, and the Constitution itself is pledged to promote "socialist and collective forms of property". This is the basis of the Federal Party's opposition to the present Constitution and its boycott of the Constituent Assembly. Of course, it cannot say so and no one would expect it to say it either. In raising the banner today against the new Constitution, it is the *avant garde* of reaction—only the Federal Party can play this role. The established party of the bourgeoisie dare not do so yet, however much it prefers the Soulbury Constitution. The Federal Party can justify its boycott before its voters, without appearing to defend private proprietary interests, as the acceptance of the principle of a unitary form of Government in the basic resolutions gives the necessary justification. But the UNP can boycott only at the risk of appearing as the shameless defender of private property rights. But the Federal Party's boycott today would serve the interest of the capitalist class as a



whole, at some future time, when reaction feels strong to undo the work of the present Constituent Assembly. This may then be the much needed fig leaf.

No Constitution and no Constituent Assembly can avert that catastrophe. The best drafted Constitution is only a scrap of paper, if the power of reaction is not broken. The power of reaction is an economic power which in Ceylon is concentrated in the big import and export houses, estate agency houses and the proprietary planting interests. The United Front Government has already announced its intention to break the power of the landowning gentry and this is a welcome measure. This must be followed immediately by the establishment of a state monopoly of foreign trade and the nationalisation of the Agency Houses as the guarantee, not only of the stability of the new Constitution, but of the emergence of an expanding economy.



## THE STRUGGLE AGAINST IMPERIALISM

I note that I am required to make a contribution on what is called Bridge Building, i.e. bridge building as between the two major communities in this country. This reminds me of the activities of one British Governor in my boyhood—if I remember right, it was Sir Andrew Caldecott. He, too, as he arrived in this country, I vaguely remember, said that what was needed was bridge building between the communities, and in his day—I have no doubt, like what you have had this morning—a tabulation of grievances of the major communities was presented to that Governor. No doubt that Governor, having heard the grievances of Ceylonese politicians, thought that the best advice that he could give was that there should be some bridge building. Following that, no doubt, the tradition is continued here, in this seminar today, where we had the morning session devoted to grievances and the afternoon to the task of bridge building.

Now, I must say, quite frankly, at the very outset that I reject entirely and wholly this idea, that is, that there is a thing called a set of grievances that have to be presented to an arbitrator and that arbitrator ruling what has to be done. This is, in fact, a hangover from the old colonial days and 25 years after the ending of direct British imperialist rule we still are prisoners of old colonial attitudes. This is clear to me from the fact that, at any rate in the discussions and the contributions that came up this afternoon, no attempt whatever has been made to present this problem in its proper international context.

The proper international context that we must bear in mind is the fact that we are a part of the Third World, that there is a struggle against imperialism going on and that, that struggle continues in Ceylon. It is in that context—the context of a struggle against imperialism, the context of a struggle to achieve certain objectives that we

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*Contribution to a Seminar on Sinhala-Tamil relations organised by Dr. Micheal Roberts in Colombo on 23rd October 1973. The other participants included Messrs. Tiruchelvam, Nissanka Wijeratne, M. Sivasithamparam and Dr. Roberts.*



as a nation have yet to achieve (not only us but one-third of this world are engaged in that struggle)—that we have to talk, to discuss, how these communities must come together, if, in fact, they are apart.

But the fact is that no speaker addressed his mind to this aspect—that we are part of the colonial world, that we are still engaged in the struggle against imperialism. That is the method by which we must approach this question. Approaching it that way, the Sinhalese people will have to ask: What are the grievances that the Tamils have? What prevents them joining hands with us? And the Tamils, on their side, have to ask: What is it that has brought us to the state, where the leaders of the recognised Tamil parties say: 'We belong to a second class community'; Where have we gone wrong?

In other words, the majority community have to ask—in terms of that struggle against imperialism which has to be waged, which is still being waged, which has not finished and by no means over—how are we to harness the resources represented by the minority people of this country. The minority people, in their turn, should ask: What can we contribute to that struggle and whether is it not in terms of that struggle that our own specific demands would find fulfilment? The fact that the gentlemen on either side do not approach it in this way shows how entirely unreal is the representation, the public representation of this problem.

But I must state there is a substratum of truth, that is, so far as the Tamil leadership speaks, it speaks for certain propertied elements within that community, there is an essential substratum of truth in their grievance. Equally there is an essential substratum of truth when those from the Sinhalese community speak in terms of what they call are their grievances. This overplaying on a single theme—the substratum of truth on both sides—is the expression of the intensity of the struggle between the communities for the meagre surplus, in the general conditions of a backward, colonial and stagnant economy. At the same time, in terms of propertied interests, in terms of the privileged interests amongst the Sinhalese and the Tamils, this cataloging of grievances and this discussion about grievances and about rights, without reference to a participation in any common struggle against a common enemy represented by world imperialism, in so far as all this is done, the protagonists on both sides are in fact promoting and furthering their common propertied interests.



And it is no accident either that over the years—not merely the last 2 or 3 decades but over the last 50 years at the least, if not more,—there has been a complete and total abandonment of one aspect of the question, that is, of the Tamil speaking people participating in a common struggle along with other elements amongst the Sinhalese against the common enemy, i.e. British imperialism. Ever since universal adult franchise was introduced into this country by the Donoughmore Constitution in 1931, propertied interests among both the Sinhalese and the Tamils have sensed a certain danger to their common propertied interests, and therefore, the period which marked the end of Ponnambalam Ramanathan's politics saw the beginning of what you may call acute communal politics, both in the North and in the South. There was now need for the Sinhalese propertied interests to protect themselves against the mass awakening in their own parts, and no less, in the Tamil areas, there was need to protect Tamil propertied interest from an awakening of mass aspirations that would endanger Tamil propertied interests. Therefore all sections of property owners in Ceylon opposed universal franchise.

Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, who was in the forefront of that agitation, sensed the transformation that was going to occur in the politics of Ceylon thereafter. It would be necessary for politicians of his class, if they are to have mass allegiance, to seek a new basis of support. They found it in an exaggerated fear of Pan-Sinhala domination. The development of the class struggle and the formulation of class demands, which received a powerful impetus from universal franchise immediately threatened propertied interests.

Sinhalese politicians of that period could play about with universal franchise for some more time and when the time ripened they duly discovered the Tamil danger. Tamil politicians could not. The sharp class divisions in the Tamil areas would permit no demagogy on social questions. They sought umbrage in the stability of the then ruling power. They went thereafter to Queen's House to present their grievances. And what were those grievances? They total up in sum: opposition to the grant of any concession whatever to the people of this country. Make no mistake about that. The role of Tamil politicians over the years, from that day onwards, has been a systematic obstruction of any movement of reform, of all movements of a mass character, and no one epitomised that so much as Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam.



And a speaker here earlier told us that, that generation, now 60 years old, disillusioned with the politics of the thirties, is most bitter. What was the politics that they followed in the thirties in Jaffna? The politics of Marxism? The politics of the Left? The politics of the struggle against imperialism? No, my friends. They crushed all this in the bud when they routed the Jaffna Youth Congress. They followed Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam and seriously believed what was then said in school books in England—that the sun never sets on the British Empire—and all their politics was geared to British imperialism to win favours and wring concessions.

But, of course, the Third World, the colonial world of the thirties and the twenties, was not the colonial world at the end of the Second World War. At the end of the Second World War, thanks to the struggle against imperialism in India in 1942, thanks to the Communists outbursts and uprisings in other parts of Asia, the sun did set. The sun set on this British Empire; and Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam was fatherless; not only Mr. Ponnambalam, the whole Tamil political leadership— orphaned, perspectiveless, and marooned. They continued thereafter in that tradition.

They identified themselves with and were part and parcel of the Governor's administration. Imperialism ruthlessly rejected them at the crucial moment. And thereafter Mr. Ponnambalam moved in to make his peace with Mr. D. S. Senanayake. And who was D. S. Senanayake then? He was the arch-priest of reaction, the representative of reaction, just as earlier, Sir Andrew Caldecott, or the other Governors, represented reaction. In the new Soulbury Constitution, D. S. Senanayake and the United National Party played that role. So you see, Tamil politics consistently has been identified with reaction in this country, that is, thwarting the legitimate movement against imperialism.

And if anyone tells me that this nationalism, this movement against imperialism, was tainted with communalism, with a harking back to older times—to the *Mahavansa*, I say: of course, it did. And so, my friends, did every nationalism manifest itself. So did every nationalism, whether in the colonial world or in the Western world, manifest itself in the initial stages, by a harking back to that glorious past. Of course, there never was a glorious past. But that did not prevent bourgeois national leaders in every part of the country—not only in



Ceylon, but in every part of the world—harking back to a Duttugemunu, to a Parakrama Bahu. In India, they went back to the Aryan conquest of India—not to a medieval Parakrama Bahu.

In Western Europe—have we forgotten our history? I ask these academics who have spoken here today, have you forgotten the history you teach? In Western Europe, the rising capitalist class in Western Europe from the time of Martin Luther had to take texts from the Bible. With what did Martin Luther, or Calvin, or Cromwell—Cromwell, the Puritan leader who accomplished the bourgeois revolution in England, what texts did he rely on? He relied on the Bible. That is, he relied on religious slogans, to use a modern terminology. He relied on what Dr. Roberts said—the *Dhammadipa* concept and I don't know what other *dipa* he referred to. Yes, the equivalent of that, all nationalisms, at all times in history, have relied on.

And in India, the national anthem—the *Bande Mathram*—it is a devotional song to a Hindu goddess. Of course, the minorities in India protested about it; the Marxists protested about it; that under this national song, we can't mobilise the people of India; and in fact that is true. Yours can only be a partial mobilisation, and you open the door—you open the door immediately—to all those reactionary elements who seek to seduce away the minorities from the national movement, playing on precisely this.

What was Jinnah's theme? This Indian National Congress is a Hindu organisation, this is for the liberation of the Hindus; We need a Muslim movement, we must fight Hindu domination. And there he was playing the game of imperialism—of British imperialism—and British imperialism rewarded him by setting up that State called Pakistan—an absurdity in terms of a state on any modern conception. That was the price Jinnah was able to extract. And in the present day disintegration of that monstrosity which is Pakistan, we are witnessing history, in her time, taking her revenge.

The lament is that Tamil communal leaders were unable to do the deal that reactionary Muslim leaders in India did. Jinnah was rewarded by the division of India. The complaint that is heard now in respect of G. G. Ponnambalam is that this communal leadership of the Tamils could not extract a similar price. But, however defensive



the origin of minority communalism that does not make it progressive, not even as a response to the communalism of the majority community. I concede, call it the communalism of the majority.

But the minority leadership must understand what is the spring of development, that is, fully understand the ramifications of this movement—have an understanding of the process of world history, and understand in that context, that even this majority communalism or this nationalism is but a passing phase. They must know what is the substance, what is the essence, and what is the appearance of things. Here, they look only at the appearance of things, forgetting the essence. The essence is that under Hindu overtones, under Hindu slogans, the Indian bourgeois leaders waged the struggle against British imperialism, just as under Biblical texts, the bourgeois democratic, capitalist revolution was carried out in the 17th and 18th centuries. Practically every bourgeois class that comes to play this role falls back on these images.

In Ceylon, it is useless making the allegation or levelling the charge that the advent of the leaders of middle class radicalism signified the contamination of the mass movement against imperialism with Sinhala chauvinist and Buddhist religious ideas. That is in the very nature of things. The problem is how rapidly to overcome, the "Luther-Cromwell" phase, so to say, and usher in, so to say, the secular phase of Hobbes and Locke, Montesquieu and Paine, and Marx and Engels. This is where Tamil political leadership has totally failed. It has no understanding of these problems.

The understanding that it has is to line up with reaction. And so, Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam did things and he was the hero of the Tamil community. He finally ended with D. S. Senanayake. And when the Federal Party was put to the test, and when it had to show its mettle—*Hic Rhodus, Hic salta*—what does the Federal Party do? It joins up with D. S. Senanayake's son, Mr. Dudley Senanayake, to form a comprador National Government. Not only Dudley Senanayake—it joins up with every known enemy of the Tamil people and with every known traitor in this country—it shamelessly joined up. It is as though the leader of the black nationalist movement in England lined up with Enoch Powell. The Federal Party finally joined up with K. M. P. Rajaratne, C. P. de Silva, Dahanayake and that lot. That is the camp where minority communalism found its true level.



There, in the United Front, is the caravan of history marching along, somewhat broken down, perhaps, *barakaratha* style, may be, and, not at the speed of a modern jet, which we so desire. *But that is the forward movement of history*, in the specific context of Ceylon today. The Tamil people are not there. They are here with the reactionaries. They are with men doomed by history. They are in a house of death. That is why all their striving is zero, if not, minus and that is why they have relegated themselves to second class citizenship. The responsibility lies entirely with the Tamil leadership that has shown no understanding whatever of the processes at work in our modern world, namely, the struggle against imperialism and the world struggle for a socialist goal. It is into this camp that the Tamil people must find their way, if their pressure is to bear any fruit.

And I say, my friends, even after we have achieved a socialist state, in the classical sense of the word, (and I am winding up, now, Mr. Chairman, bear with me), even after we have reached here in this country a socialist state, in the sense that we understand it as the dictatorship of the proletariat, even then, over a long historical period, various shades of discrimination will, no doubt, persist. You have it today in the Soviet Union, in the East European countries too, there are forms of discrimination that you can legitimately call national oppression and such is the lot of the Ukrainians in the Soviet Union, and the other national minorities in that country. But don't think that we, Marxists, ever said that the conquest of power, in what are called developing countries, or, what are, in fact, backward countries, by the working class, and, the establishment of a solid socialist dictatorship or working class government, in the most classical sense, would end discrimination. No, my friends! This is a product of the old, class culture and its complete eradication presupposes certain other developments.

Discrimination can end only when the socialist revolution has achieved those goals in the countries where their achievement is the immediate task facing them, that is, the developed and advanced countries of Western Europe and the United States of America. When the revolution occurs there and you have finally an international socialist state, (I must warn, it is not some mythical concept), and, national frontiers have been broken and man's productive forces have been liberated from capitalist relations of production and the capitalist state,



then we shall see the end of discrimination. When that liberation has occurred in the advanced, developed, capitalist countries of the world of today, then shall dawn the transformation to a socialist society on a world scale. Man in that period will look on national oppression and discrimination with the same revulsion that the thought of cannibalism evokes in modern man.

To sum up, my friends, the socialist revolution on a world scale will create the material conditions for the ending of discrimination in any form whatever. Only then shall discrimination end. The task of the Tamil people, therefore, is to throw up a leadership, a new leadership that understands the modern world and the significant and meaningful conflicts of that world. The task amongst the Sinhalese people—equally there is a task before them—is to lead the fight for a modern, secular state. After Cromwell, we had the American War of Independence—and the French Revolution—truly secular achievements. The majority community must also have sufficient self-confidence and strength of will to lead the struggle for a modern, democratic, secular state. This can be led only under the banner of socialist internationalism. In the fight for that goal, we can seek our alliance with the Tamil people, and together with them, achieve it.

The course of that struggle must bring together the two people because only in a fight against the common enemy, in a common, struggle, can unity be forged. Otherwise you have the type of unity that is now hatched on important political questions. Tamil property interests unite with the U.N.P. There is unity! That is why I say, my friends, this task of bridge building is a somewhat meaningless thing. Tamil and Sinhalese reaction are united. Tamil and Sinhalese agents of imperialism in this country are united. It is only the mass of the middle class and the broad mass of working people who think that they are not united and are so conditioned almost by the common design of the property owning classes. Paradoxical though it may be, it is only in socialist internationalism that the two peoples will find the common bond to bind them.



## IV

### AN OSTRICH POLICY WILL NOT DO!

The first thing to be noted about the minority or national problem is that it is not something peculiar to Ceylon. Not only other developing countries, but even the developed nations which long ago had accomplished their bourgeois democratic revolutions and therefore had resolved these questions are today faced with similar problems. I need but refer to the agitation of the Basque people of France and Spain, of the Scots and Welsh of the United Kingdom to illustrate the point that even the countries of Western Europe face this problem. Contrary to what the Sinhala and Tamil chauvinists say, the problem in Ceylon, is due neither to the communalism of the Sinhala people nor to the unreasonableness of Tamil demands.

*Uneven economic development* is a general law of capitalism and this unevenness is not confined only to the relationship between the imperialist metropolis and the colonial backyard. Within the imperialist country itself this relationship is reproduced. That is to say, the "town and country" relationship which is so characteristic of capitalism is extended to the country as a whole, and therefore Scotland and Wales in the U.K., the Basque country in France, Catalonia in Spain are the rural areas in relation to the industrial centres of England, the Paris and Marseilles industrial regions, and the financial centre of Madrid.

In the developing countries, the problem is further aggravated. In the conditions of underdevelopment, stagnation and above all the pre-capitalist heritage which weighs down heavily on these societies, the lever of state power is a powerful aid to the dominant group in the "rat-race" and this dominance is based on the discrimination of ethnic, caste, religious, or linguistic minority groups. In some countries of the Third World such discrimination is open as in Pakistan which proclaims itself an "Islamic Republic", while in others, it is masked, despite lipservice to democracy, secularism and even socialism.

#### Tamil Frustration

What is unique about Ceylon is not the existence of a national problem but the fact that the minorities are *politically defenceless*

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*Talk given to the Sri Lanka U. N. Association at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute on 23rd Nov. 1976. The other speaker was Mr. Justice Jaya Pathirana. Mr. Justice T. W. Rajaratnam presided. Reprinted from Logos Vol. 16 No. 2*



in the face of increasing pressure on them—a defencelessness brought about by their own barren politics. I do not propose to deal with the politics of minority communalism except to state that minority communalism which is the credo of the Federal Party can never be the answer to the communalism or chauvinism of the majority community. What I am concerned in this talk is to show that the majority people, the Sinhala people, cannot continue much longer to adopt an attitude of indifference to the aspirations of the Tamil people, that in fact these interests coincide in terms of the anti-imperialist struggle, the only worthwhile goal in the contemporary world.

The pressure on the Tamil speaking people, in particular those in the North, has increased. It is unnecessary to list the specific grievances which agitate the Tamils but suffice it to say that a sense of utter alienation has overwhelmed them. The gulf between them and the State power which has a wholly Sinhala chauvinist character about it, is ever widening. And the Sinhala character of the State power in the Jaffna district takes on the form of a “foreign” army of occupation in those parts. The growing alienation and frustration is reflected in the fact that the government’s own active supporters among the Tamils, not the “28 Sri” variety of Mr. Kumarasuriar, but those Tamils seriously committed to the anti-imperialist movement in our country, have recently met to formulate these grievances. You have but to read this document to realise how basic are these demands, that their recognition by the State involves no great concessions, and that these demands are so elementary that the cultured among you will be surprised to hear that a part of our people are denied these fundamental rights. The present policy which denies these rights naturally creates alternative moods of pessimism and despair, which in their turn are the breeding grounds of reaction.

### **A Peril to Sinhala People too**

Why do I say that the Tamil mood of pessimism *and* desperation, alienation *and* frustration is a peril to the Sinhala people as well? Precisely because the Sinhala speaking people are the overwhelming majority, the anti-imperialist movement in our country is predominantly Sinhala and this anti-imperialist movement cannot permit the people living in a part of the country to be used by imperialist reaction, without jeopardising the interests of the struggle against imperialism itself. When a people are driven to these alternating moods, they become, consciously or unconsciously, the tools of foreign imperialist



interests. Who can deny that the rabid chauvinism of an earlier generation of Arab nationalists contributed not a little to driving all the Jews into the arms of Zionism, and therefore, of American imperialism? I am not here referring to the role of the Federal Party which is the heir and successor to the imperialist tradition in Jaffna politics. But the position today is that the mass support which the anti-imperialist movement enjoyed in Jaffna—admittedly a minority support—is being eroded and the anti-imperialist movement's own supporters among the Tamil people are compelled to ask the government to abandon its present discriminatory policies against the Tamils.

The predominantly Sinhala anti-imperialist movement in Ceylon must seek to strengthen its allies in Jaffna and among the Tamil people generally and this can be done only on a political basis. Sinhala chauvinist elements that press on the government seek an administrative-police solution and they fan all the old fears. This move of Sinhala reaction must be met and the anti-imperialist movement must demand of the government that it enter into a meaningful dialogue on the basis of the legitimate grievances of these people with the elected representatives of the Tamil people, and not foist on them dubious leaders of the government's choice. By taking a frank and honest position in relation to the legitimate demands of the Tamil people, the government would thereby drive a wedge between the reactionary leadership of the Tamil speaking people and the popular masses supporting them.

The genuine problems before the Tamil speaking people have been formulated by the government's own supporters, namely, Messrs. E. R. S. R. Coomaraswamy and V. Kanapathipillai among others. They must not only be adopted by the anti-imperialist movement but it must give expression to these demands. Only by so doing will the anti-imperialist movement ensure that it has a mass base in the Tamil speaking areas of Ceylon, however small a base, however inadequate it may be in terms of Parliamentary representation. But such a mass base is essential, if for no other reason, at least to combat at the mass level, the reactionary politics of the presently accredited leaders of the Tamil speaking people. It is stressing the obvious to say that these politics are reactionary to the core.

Behind the TULF leaders are the reactionary forces of world imperialism. Of course as yet they are keeping a respectable distance from the TULF leadership, although the perspicacious would



be able to detect a link between the politics of the leadership of the TULF and the politics of world imperialist reaction. I will not say more than that for the present. Every anti-imperialist fighter among the Sinhala and Tamil people knows that as far as our country is concerned that struggle, namely, the struggle against imperialism is by no means over; if anything, we, the people of South Asia are just beginning to move into the centre of that arena. Let me come to the heart of the matter.

### **An Opportunity for Imperialism**

After the decisive and crushing defeat of American imperialism in Viet Nam, the United States which is the leader of world imperialism is without a sizeable base in this part of the world. India under Indira Gandhi is not only ruled out as a base of America in the Indian Ocean but this country is linked by treaty with the Soviet Union and is therefore the object of American imperialist designs in the Indian Ocean area. Bangla Desh, even after the anti-Mujibur coup, is too unstable, while America's official ally, Pakistan, cannot afford to open her borders to America, lest the whole Arab Middle East explodes. No government in Ceylon will dare permit an imperialist outpost in the foreseeable future, however much her rulers may be desirous of such an arrangement. But America's long term interest desperately cries out for a base in the Indian Ocean. Mrs. Indira Gandhi must be contained today, but tomorrow, the Indian socialist revolution must be throttled by direct military intervention. The prospect of that revolution is the nightmare of American imperialism, and today's forward planning of imperialism and the Pentagon is centred on how best to achieve that unavoidable task. You will ask: is not Diego Garcia adequate? The answer is simply no. Diego Garcia being an atoll off the coast of Africa is only a glorified aircraft carrier, good for today's job of patrolling the Indian Ocean, but logistically and otherwise useless for the purpose of mounting a military operation to smother a developing socialist revolution on the continent of India. This is where the projected new state of "Yarl Desh" will come useful to American imperialism. And America is not unmindful of this agitation and this demand. On the one hand, at present it is dutifully sympathetic, and on the other, through its Sinhala chauvinist agents on the other side, it persuades the employment of police methods and administrative fiat to put down the agitation of the legitimate demands of the Tamil speaking people, thereby opening the way to genuine mass support for the reactionary demand of separatism.



American imperialism's aim is to carve *an Israel out of Ceylon*, in order that such a creation will subserve its imperialist interests. In the Middle East, Israel was needed as a bastion against the Arab anti-imperialist movement, in South Asia she needs an Israel to crush the impending communist revolution in the Indian sub-continent. When the moment comes, American arms will find their way in a regular flow to activists among the champions of the separate state. Before you could say Jack Robinson that State may not only be a reality but the American marines invited to defend the "independence" of the new State! This is no piece of fantasy.

The growth of separatist tendencies among the Tamils with all its attendant dangers to the anti-imperialist movement must awaken it to a realisation of the urgent need for a correct policy to the legitimate demands of the Tamil speaking peoples, that this movement must find a solution acceptable to progressive sections of Tamil opinion, and that it must truly unify the nation and not merely one section of it. For too long socialists among the Sinhala people have fought shy of the Tamil problem but this ostrich policy cannot continue if we are to stand up to world imperialism.











**PRESS COMMENTS**  
**ON THE FIRST EDITION (1963)**

**“... highlights the Marxist view of the Federal Party’s basic weakness.”**

*Ceylon Daily News*  
Colombo 7. 2. '64.

**“The author sets forth his arguments with force and clarity...”**

*Hindusthan Standard*  
Calcutta 26. 7. '64.



**“A son tour, comme le camarade Karalasingham le souligne a juste titre, le parti marxiste revolutionnaire a le devoir d’etre le defenseur le plus loyal et plus efficace de la minorite Tamil a Ceylan.”**

*Sous le drapeau du Socialisme*  
No. 2. February 1964.  
Paris.

**“... the theoretical interpretation and understanding of a problem is more than half its solution.”**

*The Statesman Calcutta*  
10. 5. '64.

V. Satchithanandam who wrote the introduction passed away a few weeks later. He belonged to the London Marxist Group of 1936 which included S. C. C. Anthonipillai, Doric de Souza and D. W. J. Perera. He was a Mathematics graduate of the University of London and a Barrister at law, of Lincoln’s Inn. He retired as Commissioner of National Savings in 1969. In the words of Pieter Keuneman, “it is to Satchi’s eternal credit that to the end he remained loyal to the cause he espoused as a young man.”

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