

Comrade A Vaidialingam
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Memorial Lecture

Athithan Jayapalan

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Comrade A vaidialingam
Birth Centenary Committee



Address:
'Arivakam' , 13 Arcus Road, Bromley BR1 4NN (UK)

E-Mail:
avaithi100@hotmail.com

The National Left, Imperialism and the National Question

Athithan Jayapalan

I am honoured to have been invited to the memorial event and to pay tribute to A.Vaidialingam, a founding father of the Communist Party of Ceylon, a pioneer in building the communist movement on the island, and a dedicated leader, resolved to stand with the masses and serve their interests. He is admired for his people centric and progressive conceptions of the political, economic and socio-cultural reality on the island, his understanding of its multi-national characteristics and his resolve to emancipate the masses from exploitation and to ensure their welfare. The left and the leading Tamil Marxists of the day were in the forefront during the late colonial period and early post-independence in organizing the labourers of the Tamil north in an erstwhile caste bound and class ridden society. This resolve also led them towards championing the struggles of the downtrodden and in particular the oppressed castes struggle for equity. During the 1960s they were instrumental in mobilizing the militant anti-caste struggle in the North, with the Peking-wing of the Communist party undertaking the armed temple entry campaign.

Then and today the incipient Left's principled stand towards national equity between the Sinhala and Tamil nationalities and the rights of the interspersed minorities, as articulated in the CP resolution of 1944 and the Keuneman-Vaidialingam memorandum, remains an imperative to safeguard the island from imperialism and chauvinism. In 1944 A.Vaidialingam and his comrades laid down a political path in which the future of the island was to be built on the recognition of the Tamil and Sinhala nationalities and their respective, inalienable right to self-determination. History and its dynamics are testimony to how these cardinal principles of Marxist-Leninism concerning the indivisible right to self-determination were progressively forsaken by the parliamentary Left in Sri Lanka. The political engagement within the framework of an imperialist implanted Westminster modelled parliamentary

democracy and unitary state bourgeoisie system rampant with racial supremacy and chauvinism, ensured the national Left's collision with reactionary forces of the state establishment.

This article will illuminate the nature of the relationship between the colonial Sri Lankan unitary state and the geo-strategic and political interests of imperialism in the region and the tragic trajectory of the parliamentary Left which deviated from the cardinal principles of Marxism-Leninism laid down by founding fathers of the Left in the island.

The Unitary State and the Multi-National Island

The unitary state administration and Westminster modelled parliamentary democracy were designed and implanted by the British colonial rulers in the island of Sri Lanka at different historical junctures as mechanisms to secure the perennial geo-strategic and political interests of imperialism in the Indian Ocean region. It is noteworthy that Sri Lanka and its offshore waters bound by the Indian Ocean are strategically essential as the global maritime trade passes through them. The Indian Ocean region facilitates the water gateways for half of the world's container ships, half of its bulk cargo and two thirds of its oil shipment (Khalid 2005). Since antiquity The Indian Ocean has been essential in global trade as the littoral

states with coasts facing the Indian Ocean were the pillars upon which trade from Europe, Middle East and later from the Americas was connected to South Asia, South East Asia and China. Due to its strategic position in the heart of the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka has throughout the pre-colonial, colonial and now in the post-colonial era retained a centre stage in world trade and has rightfully been recognized as crucial to exercise hegemony in the region, and by extension the world.

The early colonial conquest of the Kotte kingdoms on the south western coast of Sri Lanka by the imperialist Portuguese began in early 16th century and in 1598 the lowland Sinhalese lost their sovereignty through the formal signing of the Malvana convention.

The Portuguese quickly administered a comprador system through which predominately Sinhala locals were enlisted as soldiers known as the Lascarins to serve the Portuguese crown (Abeyesinghe 1986; Indrapala 2003). In 1619, after aggressive Portuguese military campaigns against the Tamil north, nobles of the Jaffna kingdom signed the Nallur convention and formally ceded their sovereignty to the Portuguese crown. These conventions are significant historical materials which document that the kingdom of Jaffna as well as Kotte were "*independent, legally constituted, diplomatically recognized, political entities*" at the time of colonial conquest, i.e. they were two sovereign states (Hensman 2010). The Lascarin tradition of native comprador servants continued throughout the Dutch and British colonial period, enlisting their services to the imperialist-corporate exploitation and domination of the island. The colonial conquest of the island was concluded by the British Empire when they defeated the rebellious Vanni and its Tamil chieftain leader Pandaravanniyan in 1803 and annexed the Kandy kingdom in 1815, leading to the signing of the Kandyan Convention the same year.

Geopolitics of Imperialism

Ceylon was then and still is a multi-national island, yet the collusion of capitalist, geo-strategic and political prerogatives of imperialisms and the subservient nature of the ruling native comprador elites denies and obfuscates the multi-national reality of the island to sustain a neo-colonial mono-ethnic nation state. Despite the formal independence of Ceylon in 1948, the very structures inherited from the colonial state facilitate the neo-colonial bondage of the island in the so called era of post-independence. As much as the mono-ethnic nation state serves as the instrument of dominance for the various ruling bourgeoisie elites of the dominant nation and hence a mechanism of national oppression it also remains a tool of neo-colonialism of competing international hegemons in the region.

American Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840 -1914), considered the father of modern American naval strategy and geo-political thinking with his classical '*The Influence Of Sea Power Upon History*', elucidated the global significance of controlling the Indian Ocean:

"Whoever attains maritime supremacy in the Indian Ocean would be a prominent player on the international scene. Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. This ocean is the key to the seven seas in the 21st century, the destiny of the world will be decided in these waters" (Quoted in Jash 2015)

Admiral Thayer words reflect the fact that U.S. and British imperialism had in the late 19th century itself, theorized the imperatives for imperialism in the 21st century to control the Indian Ocean in order to attain world hegemony.

The significance of the Indian Ocean for European imperial-corporate interests led to different imperialists and power establishments vying to secure access to strategic, military, economic and infrastructural factors on the island throughout the colonial and post-colonial period. The Portuguese came in the 16th century; the Dutch in the 17th century, the French made attempts during the latter 18th century, but the Treaty of Amiens secured the prized island for the British. Consequently in post-colonial times, the British and U.S. imperialists have taken keen interest in the Sinhala bourgeoisie state of Sri Lanka and its comprador English educated Sinhala elites. The unitary administration implemented by the British in 1833 on advice from the Colebrooke –Cameron commission, incorporated by force the entire island and its socio-political formations into a single politico-judicial set-up with centralized powers in Colombo, the capital which would become the seat of the Sinhala speaking English educated elite. External colonialism structured the politico-judicial structures of the island in such a manner that it would cultivate internal colonization and national oppression, by deliberately refusing to recognise the nature of the multinational island, in particular denying Tamils the sovereignty which imperialism had usurped centuries earlier. Noteworthy is that Britain has historically and contemporarily been denying the multinational environment of the island and subsequently refuted the nationhood of Tamils. Colonial imperialism bequeathed to their neo-imperial successors in Westminster and Washington the erudite insight that national and linguistic inequality, racial supremacy, and a bourgeoisie state

controlled by the dominant nation's comprador elite would see as their foremost duty to propagate Sinhala chauvinism dependent on the national oppression of Tamils in order to secure their own parasitic class interests, which are tightly interwoven with those of neo-imperialism.

In November 1938 the British secretary of State for Colonies in a memorandum regarding appointment of 'minority' representatives in the executive committees of the Council of Ministers responded to the moderate demands put by the conservative Tamil bourgeois leader, G.G Ponnambalam. The latter advocated a system of a fifty percent representation for Tamils and 'other minorities' and fifty percent for the Sinhala majority in parliament as a safeguard from Sinhala hegemony in the colonial state. The British refuted it for their own geopolitical and administrative convenience and in contrast preferred a centralized pan-Sinhala executive ministry (See Appendix 1).

The shrewd logic presented by the Colonial Officer was that the 'insistence' by Tamil politicians in demanding to secure minimal safeguard mechanisms for the Tamil nationality and the interspersed minorities, elicited Sinhala chauvinism which in turn led to Sinhala political dominance. Such an outlook is reminiscent of the contemporary stand of the so-called international community coveting the geopolitics of the U.S.-U.K-Japan axis, which condemns Tamils demanding equity and justice for the national oppression they suffer at the hands of the subservient Sinhala bourgeoisie nation-state.

An excerpt from a memorandum by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, titled 'Report on Ceylon' and dated 17th March, 1948 illustrates further British favouring of the Sinhala English educated bourgeoisie and their leader D.S. Senanayake who incidentally became the first 'independent prime minister of Ceylon':

"Ceylon is settling down as a genuine Dominion. Present ministers are extremely friendly and want to maintain and deepen the British connexion. They want, for instance, to preserve English as the official language in Parliament and courts. They do not want Ceylon to be a Republic: in looking for a name to describe themselves

they are inclined to favour 'Kingdom of Ceylon'.....Sehanayake is in the genuine tradition of Dominion Prime Ministers : deeply committed to the British connexion. The present Administration is firmly in the saddle and has, I think, been strengthened by the transfer of power. To quite an extent we can help the present Administration if we preserve the right approach to them. It is hardly too much to say that if we treat them strictly as a Dominion, they will behave very like a loyal colony: whereas if we treat them as a Colony we may end in driving them out of the Commonwealth. For some time the tone in which we conduct our various negotiations will be extremely important. I think that all such negotiations should, therefore, be conducted by our High Commissioner or through the Commonwealth Relations Office..... The friendship of Ceylon for Britain, which was always strong, became stronger after 4th February. " (C.P (48).91).

The above excerpts elucidate the sort of congenial relationship the British imperialists and the Sinhala English educated elite enjoyed, a relationship which incidentally facilitated a historic bloodless decolonization process, in which the British literally handed over independence to their subservient friends among the Sinhala English educated elite. Imperialist interests and Sinhala bourgeoisie interests coincided in the perpetuation of the unitary Sri Lankan state. Initially the Tamil section of the English educated Tamil conservative bourgeoisie, represented by Arunchalam Ponnampalam and later G.G. Ponnampalam collided with the Sinhala elites in securing such a unitary state. The conservative Tamil bourgeoisie was effectively sidelined in the course of the late 1940s and early 1950s as a result of their neglect of the Tamil masses. The progressive tendencies among Tamils became dominant and were represented by Tamil Leftists, anti-imperialists and the progressive national bourgeoisie, who dominated the early Federal Party.

Anti-imperialism and National equality

The British imperialists, coping with the weakening of the empire during WWII and its aftermath, identified two forces in South Asia and elsewhere which threatened its regional and global sphere of influence; anti-imperialist nationalist movements of the Indian variant, and the then proliferating left movements.

In Sri Lanka, anti-imperialism represented by the Indian anti-colonial movement inspired Jaffna Youth Congress (JYC), later the Suriyamal movement in the south, and the national Left represented by the LSSP and CP constituted thus the greatest threats for British imperialism (Kadrigamar 1980: Vaithespaara 2007a.). It is noteworthy that the JYC, with influential leaders like Handy Perinbanayagam formed the ideological and inspirational basis for the anti-imperialist youth leagues and societies formed in the Sinhala south, out of which emerged the Sinhala Suriyamal movement and the Left movement on the island (Kadrigamar 1980). He was also known for the articulation of the merits of self-rule and anti-colonialism, and for his efforts in to mobilize people among the Sinhala south and the plantations.

In the British colonial field report and memorandum quoted above, he reflects that opposition to the British on the eve of independence was exhibited by the Left parties and by the Tamil North "...one village in the north flew black flags: a few slogans were stencilled on walls : " Real, not fake, independence."

In contrast he noted the following amongst the Sinhala bourgeoisie dominated state council and the masses:

"...there was real rejoicing at independence peacefully won in co-operation with Britain. (This revealed itself in the official flying of the Union Jack side by side with the Lion Flag: the unofficial flying of quite a number of Union Jacks; the emphasis on royalty in the celebrations; the good will of the crowds towards the Duke ; passages in the Prime Minister's speeches.)" (C.P (48).91).

In contrast the parallel interlocking of Tamil radicalism and the national Left was also attested by the significant participation of Tamil clerks, activists and workers from the North East and from the Hill Country in the trade union movement and the LSSP. Incidentally the largest proletariat on the island, the Hill country Tamils employed in the exploitative plantations also provided the most militant sections of the trade union movement on the island. There was heightened Leftist and unionist activism among the plantation workers as sporadic strikes and protests erupted from November 1939, which lasted throughout the 1940s under the leadership of the Ceylon Indian Congress and to a lesser degree by the LSSP aligned All-Ceylon Estate Workers Union (ACEWU). V. Balasingham of the LSSP was essential in mobilizing the plantation workers through the ACEWU (Ervin 2008). During this period several Tamil workers and unionists from the plantations were killed by the colonial police and plantation authorities due to systematic state repression, thus marking the first martyrs of the Left (Goonawerdena 1960). The first son of the plantations to be martyred for the Left was Govindan, a Tamil plantation worker who was shot and killed by the colonial police during the All-Ceylon Estate Workers Union led Mool Oya Estate strike on January 19th 1940.

During the general strike of May – June 1947 organized by the trade unions and the Left parties, the colonial police resorted to lathi charge and firing live ammunition to break the hartal. The police violence and colonial aggression injured 18 and killed yet another Tamil left activist, the clerical worker V. Kandasamy (Goonawerdena 1960).

The British devised perennial schemes to contain or eradicate these elements of threats. In contrast the pro-imperialist Sinhala national bourgeoisie party of the UNP and later its breakaway Tamil conservative bourgeoisie party the Tamil congress opted to negotiate and appease the imperialists rather than confront them. The British had clearly identified the progressive sections of the Tamils intelligentsia and bourgeoisie initially represented by the JYC and the incipient national Left as a potential threat to their interest as the Tamil North became a notable base for anti-imperialism and leftism in the island.

The potential union between the indigenous and progressive forces of the two nationalities was also unwarranted in the eyes of imperialism. Arguably imperialist hegemony probably grasped the danger of indigenous rebellions and anti-colonial uprising in the region through the experience of the popular revolts against the British imperialism during the late 18th century and early 19th century. In this period imperialism faced formidable challenges in the form of the Tamil dominated Polygar wars in South India, the Tamil Vanniyar revolt and the Kandyan Sinhalese Uva rebellion in the island. In a similar spirit it is plausible that through the prism of imperialism Tamils were deemed largely a non-subservient and potentially troublesome people. In contrast the Sinhala English educated bourgeoisie from the low-country of the old Kotte kingdom appealed to them as subservient

The British imperialist and the Sinhala bourgeoisie of their choice seemed to be conscious of a Sinhala chauvinist formula in order to deal with the growing popularity of the Left among Sinhalese and Tamils, as well the fledgling Tamil national mobilization which was represented by the progressive sections of the Tamil bourgeoisie led by S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, who would form the Federal Party.

The Colonial Officer quoted earlier also identifies that the Sinhala bourgeoisie both rural and urban *"tend to be terrified by the Left opposition which they do not understand; they regard it as a monstrous and wicked violation of the natural order and, if it grew, would be tempted to suppress it. Their spontaneous reaction is to combat Marxism with Buddhism and they are spending a good deal on this propaganda. Buddhism (and the Catholicism in the coastal area north of Colombo) are indeed very powerful barriers to the advance of the parties of the Left."* (ibid)

The above indicates the compliant nature of the Sinhala bourgeoisie and how the British colonial rulers deemed them eligible in sharing integral interests as that of imperialism.

The eradication or suppression of Tamil national characteristics and political rights as advocated by the Sinhala chauvinist nationalism has effectively obfuscated the imperialist designs for the island. During colonial rule itself the comprador Sinhala elite were enlisted in

providing the anti-Tamil 'opium for the masses' through a supremacist Sinhala Buddhist ideology and state oriented patriotism. The Mahavamsa mentality transpiring from the Pali language Mahavamsa canon unearthed by British colonialists became the basis for a Sinhala nationalist consciousness. Such a relationship between imperialism, the English educated Sinhala elite, the nation-state and the Sinhala national consciousness was made contingent upon anti-Tamil racism and seemed to have been structured into Sinhala statecraft and political culture in the 1930s during the pan-Sinhala state council. It has since been the primary driving force behind transforming the island into a mono-ethnic nation-state bonded to imperialism and institutionalizing a protracted structural genocide on the Tamil nation.

The Incipient Left

In concurrence with cardinal Marxist-Leninist principles both the LSSP and the Communist Party of Ceylon, formed respectively in 1936 and 1943, had in their founding party programmes proclaimed that the Tamils and Sinhalese constituted two distinct nations and had the full right to self-determination. Tamil Marxist intellectuals and activists were among the founding members of the LSSP and the later CP.

Prominent Tamil Left leaders emerged within these formations. Within the CP there was P. Kandiah the first leftist to win a parliamentary seat from the Tamil North and V. Ponnambalam and N. Shanmugathan. Within the LSSP there were the leading Trotskyist theoretician, V. Karalasingam and his brother trade union organizer Vaithianathan Balasingham (Vaitheespara 2007b ; Ervin 2008). Tamil left-wing nationalist V. Navaratnam was also associated with the LSSP in the early years (Navaratnam 1996). It is also important to mention here C. Tharmakulasingham, a pioneering Tamil Marxist who organized the Omnibus Union in Jaffna. Among the founders of LSSP were also notable Tamil Marxists V. Sittampalam and his brother V. Sachithanandam, who aided in the organization of the workers of Jaffna's cigar economy into the Cigar Workers Union. S.C.C. Anthony Pillai was another early and leading member of the LSSP. B.M.K. Ramaswamy from Puttalam, was also a founding member of the

LSSP who became a remarkable organizer and translator, and was officially designated by the LSSP to the task of building the Fourth international in India. He was a founding member of Bolshevik-Lennist Party of India (BLPI) and became instrumental in mobilizing the trade union movement in South India and by party branches in Madurai, Tuticorin and Theni districts (Ervin 2008). He was also participant in the anti-colonial disobedience struggle known as the Quit India campaign in 1942-43. Tamil members of the LSSP predominated among those who were sent to India to build the BLPI and among those who had to escape British persecution on the island during World War II. A proctor and LSSP supporter from Jaffna by the name of Kanagarathnam was a key figure in smuggling top LSSP leaders such as Robert Gunawardena, N.M. Perera and dozens of party members to India in July 1942 (Gunawardena 1971). He organized the historic escape route by the use of fishing boats and by mobilizing the networks among the Tamil fisherfolk of Valvettihurai (Ervin 2008). It was Tamil leftists and fishermen who smuggled the Tamil and Sinhala leaders and cadres of the LSSP out of the reach of the colonial government. As the colonial government persecution of left party members and unionist in the island increased, Kanagarathnam escaped through Valvettithurai to Tamil Nadu where he too worked to organize the BLPI.

The left's then principled stand towards Tamil nationhood was reflected in that the main support bases for the CP and LSSP in terms of popular support came initially from districts in the North. The North became a hub for leftism and between the 1940s-60s Tamil anti-imperialists and C.P (Peking and Moscow wing) and LSSP aligned Tamil Marxists were prominent in organizing co-operative initiatives and in the mobilization of the workers of the peninsula into unions. The coastal villages of the Tamil north, became historic in ensuring the survival of the LSSP and the Left movement during colonial repression, and incidentally they were also at the centre stage in the Eelam Tamil national liberation struggle which commenced three decades later. During the mid- and late 1960s the Left parties righteously supported the revolutionary anti-caste struggles unravelling in the villages and towns in the North led by the Tamil left. Most notably was the militant anti-caste and temple-entrance struggle spearheaded by N. Shanmugathan and his Communist Party (Peking Wing).

The incipient left realized the necessity of the accommodation and recognition of Tamil nationhood, homeland and right to self-determination, as the foundation to form an equal basis and parity of status for the Sinhala and Tamil nation to co-exist. It remains till date that it is only under such conditions that both nations could be able to jointly mobilize an anti-colonial movement to secure the island from colonial exploitation and eliminate oppression and exploitation within the island.

In particular the Communist Party's incise proposal for all-island unity was grounded on Leninist insights regarding the national question, in which the equity of nations formed the material and ideational basis for supra-national unity in the struggle against imperialism and towards socialism. The Communist Party of Ceylon, of which A. Vaidialingam was a founding father and a theoretician, addressed the national question on the island in concise terms in their resolution presented to the All Ceylon Congress, whose Sinhala bourgeoisie leadership favoured dominion status and a unitary-Sinhala dominated nation-state. In the second resolution of the Communist Party, issued in Colombo on the 15th October 1944, they declared:

“ ...in order to achieve unity between the different communities and a common demand for the recognition of independence and a free constitution, it is necessary to recognise that the development of Ceylon is taking and will take a multi-national form and that a united and free Ceylon can be realised only on the basis of guaranteeing full and equal opportunities for the development of all nationalities and minorities in Ceylon. As there are distinct, historically evolved nationalities – for instance, the Sinhalese and Tamil – with their own contiguous territory as their homeland, their own language, economic life, culture and psychological make-up, as well as interspersed minorities living in the territories of these nationalities, this meeting declares that the constitution of a free and united Ceylon should be based on the following democratic principles: “ (Source: Roberts 1977)

The CP adapted their resolution from a more radical version declared by the executive committee of the Ceylon Trade Union Federation (C.T.U.F.) on 23rd September 1944. The C.T.U.F. resolution included a preamble and a Leninist principle which was left out in the CP resolution:

"This committee declares that Ceylon's future development will not be along the lines of a one nation unitary state, with all except the Sinhalese people being regarded as minorities living within this state. As in fact there are two distinct nations historically evolved nationalities in Ceylon- the Sinhalese and the Tamils – each with their own contiguous territory as their homeland, their own language, economic life, culture and psychological make-up, as well as interspersed minorities living in the territories of these nationalities, this committee declares that the constituting of a free Ceylon must be based on the following principles:

- (a) Recognition of the equality and the sovereignty of the people of Ceylon -
- (b) Recognition that the nationalities (Sinhalese and Tamil) have **the right to free self-determination** including the right, if **they desire**, to form their own **separate independent state.**"

The Left forces were in opposition to the majority of the Sinhala bourgeoisie and the conservative Tamil bourgeoisie, demanding full independence of Ceylon, instead of subjection to external influences of the British imperialism through a dominion status. For such a truly anti-imperialist and sovereign movement and reality to manifest, these men in the incipient Left grasped the imperative of the M.L principles of equality of the nationalities. In the Sri Lankan context it implied the recognition of the Tamil and Sinhalese nationalities, the facilitation of the right to self-determination and the implementation of statutory safeguards to the interspersed minorities. Such equality between the nationalities and communities of the island was recognized as the very foundation to build a sovereign and independent country.

The national bourgeoisie represented by the All Ceylon Congress, demanded the CP to elaborate their views on the principle of equity between the nations and the formation of a multi-national country. The document produced by the CP towards such an effect was known as the Keuneman- Vaidialingam memorandum of 1944. A. Vaidialingam is regarded as the theoretician behind such a historical and ideological work, and had with greatest integrity argued forth and defined the nationhood, self-determination and sovereignty of the Tamils and Sinhalese alike.

The insights of the C.T.U.F. and the C.P. resolutions of 1944 in recognition of the multi-national nature of the island and the articulation of the principles of equality of the nationalities as the basis to form a multi-national union were consistently forsaken by national parliamentary left. The parties' leadership adapted a conciliatory approach towards the state centric-Sinhala nationalism. Such historic revisionism legitimized by parliamentary logic to capitalize on electoral votes ensured that Sinhala chauvinism infiltrated into the Left.

The 1960s marked the decisive entrance of the left leadership of the CP and LSSP, into conciliation with the Sinhala bourgeoisie chauvinists in the SLFP, and their participation in the United Front government of Srimavo Bandaranaike. The CP and LSSP leadership betrayed the principles laid down in their manifestos by accommodating Sinhala state terrorism and chauvinism. As a result the Tamil leaders within were isolated in terms of party influence and increasingly lost their standing among the oppressed Tamils. Genuine Sinhala revolutionaries such as Edmund Samarakoddy, retained his principled stand towards the Tamil national question and broke with the LSSP. It is to note that Tamil Marxists leaders such as Ponnambalam and N. Shanmugathasan, observing the intransigence of the Sinhala bourgeoisie and parliamentary parties progressively moved towards endorsing the Tamil national liberation movements. The parliamentary logic of the Left leadership, its accommodation of Sinhala chauvinism, and silence over the structural genocide perpetuated on the Tamil nation, led the larger Tamil left into a position of existential crisis. Committed to their socialist adherence to inter-national unity between the nationalities in the island, unable to counter the dominance of Sinhala chauvinism within the Left formations, and unable to

accommodate the Tamil militant youth and the genuine aspirations of national liberation, they were subjected to a parallel process of isolation. These historical processes and its implication can be undone, if the future Left on the island, recognizes the ultimate historical necessity of supporting the oppressed nation's struggle for national equity and to unconditionally fight genocide as the very grounds to sprout multi-national co-existence.

Conclusion:

Sri Lanka's location at the heart of the Indian ocean, have made this little tear drop of an island, the undying fantasy of imperialism and aspiring world hegemon, and has both historically and contemporarily been at the crux in the geo-political gambit between rival world hegemon. Such external prerogatives and interests have taken such a hold of the island in consolidating the Sinhala elite and the nation-state, that they successfully hamper the masses of the Sinhala nation from approaching the Tamil national question in a rational and just manner through which equity and the right to self-determination between the two nations could be secured, and the task to fight imperialism and safeguard the island could be undertaken. Without equity between the nations, and the accommodation of the indivisible and inalienable right to self-determination of the Tamils, the fate of the island is sealed by the hands of subservient comprador Sinhala elites, a mono-ethnic bourgeoisie nation-state dependent on the services of imperialism for its existence. In the aftermath of imperialist funded and supervised counter-insurgency against the Tamil national liberation struggle and the genocidal massacres in Mullu'vaykal, the recognition of the crimes and the punishment of the fascist national bourgeoisie, the Lascarin Sri Lankan military and its imperialist co-genocidaires are central to Tamil political mobilization. In a similar spirit, the recognition of Tamil nationhood, sovereignty and historical homeland forms the central pillar of the basic democratic demands of the Tamil people. An evaluation of these demands reflect that they are in itself, revolutionary as they are confrontationist towards imperialism and demand the democratic dismantling of the Sinhala bourgeoisie nation state.

To fight imperialism on the island and in the region was before and still remains imperative in securing political justice and emancipating the island from the shackles of imperialism, capitalism, national

oppression and genocide. Yet it is such a historical task which has been consistently forsaken on the island in the name of majoritarian Sinhala chauvinism, parliamentary politics and statecraft.

In this light it is poignant to analyse the keen interests taken by the British and other European imperialists in the mid-19th century, in uncovering the isolated 'Aryan Sinhala Civilization' in the midst of a Dravidian ocean. The Aryan myth of the Sinhala speakers was created by the British and likewise the Sinhala English educated elite was cultivated and groomed in the manners of Sinhala supremacy and chauvinism as envisaged by imperialist orientalism. The corollary was an imperialist friendly, vaguely anti-Christian missionary, anti-Tamil national Sinhala bourgeoisie, who together with British orientalist and sections of the Buddhist clergy articulated an antagonistic Sinhala nationalism prophesising the mono-ethnic Sinhala Buddhist Nation-state and the assimilation of Tamils (Tamibah 1986; Kapferer 1988). Such a process obfuscates the necessity of anti-imperialism and its interdependence on the principles of equality between nationalities.

In order for Tamils and Sinhalese alike to steer the future developments of both nations and the island as a whole, it is imperative to dismantle the mono-ethnic bourgeoisie state through endorsement of the Tamil struggle for national equity and political justice. Similarly in order to destroy the congenial relationship between imperialism and the bourgeoisie state it is necessary to fight both in order to eradicate the national oppression of the Tamil nation, emancipate the Tamil homeland and to secure for the Sinhala masses, a representative state in their homeland reflecting their interests.

Future anti-imperialist, multi-national co-existence and sovereignty of the island as a whole, is dependent on the ability of progressive forces within the Sinhala polity to mobilize the masses in support of the national aspirations and grievances of the occupied and beleaguered Tamil nation; mainly to recognize the crimes against them and to endorse the indivisible right to self-determination. If the Left continues to forsake its own maiden manifestos and cardinal principles of Marxists-Leninism, then they will be held account for the historic failure in building comradeship with the struggling Tamils as well its

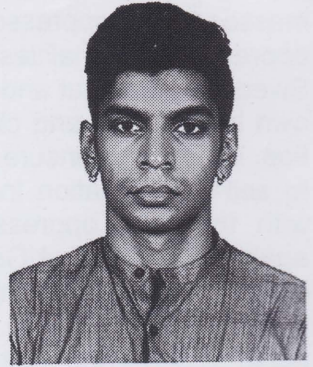
historical betrayal of socialism through its conciliatory and opportunistic endorsement of Sinhala chauvinism. V.I. Lenin in his classical work 'Critical Remarks on the National Question', and rightfully invoked by Ponnampalam of the LSSP in 1977, articulates the nature of the right to self-determination and the role to be played by the masses of the oppressor nation towards the national question of the oppressed nationalities. Lenin cites the historical example of the Swedish proletariat and progressive forces who rightfully against their own bourgeoisie and clergy agitated on behalf of the Norwegian nation, in opting to ensure the Norwegian people could decide their right to self-determination in Norway and not in Stockholm. In solidarity with the then oppressed Polish nation, Lenin heroically argued against the threat of Great Russian chauvinism within the party and elucidated that the right to self-determination, whether to secede or not is to be decided in Warszawa among the oppressed nation and not in Moscow, the seat of the oppressor nation.

If parliamentary politics is the scapegoat for such revisionist trajectory, then it is needless to say that a revolutionary Left needs to readress their tactics toward the masses and not towards consensus within a bourgeoisie chauvinist parliamentary system.

Appendix 1

*"The presence of Minority Members on each Executive Committee not only failed to prevent the election of a pan-Sinhalese Ministry but... actually provoked it; its election was the Majority Community's answer to the insistence by certain Minorities on a retention of the Executive Committee System..... If the Executive Committee system should be retained against the prayer of the Majority Community I therefore foresee a succession of Pan-Sinhalese Ministries. Only a communal distribution of seats, on a fifty-fifty basis or some approximation to it, could prevent it; and as I have already stated I am opposed to such a distribution. Moreover if Minority Ministers were elected as the result of a communal distribution of seats the Board of Ministers could never be a consentaneous body; for they would be divided on fundamentals of the Constitution. Of the Pan-Sinhalese Ministry it can at, least be said that, so far as the present Constitution admits, it provides an element of congruence.it has been suggested to me that the Governor should exercise this right in such a manner as to secure a percentage of portfolios for the Minorities. With this suggestion I **profoundly disagree**; nor do I consider that it should be definitely laid down in the Order in Council that the Ministry must be representative of all communities. Such a provision would give rise to varieties of interpretation and thus lead to heart-burning and disgruntlement." (C.P.254 (38))*

Mr Athithan Jayapalan



Born in Jaffna, raised in Oslo, Norway.

Studied Masters in Social Anthropology in the University of Oslo, University of Bergen, Norway and in the University of Pondicherry.

Studies Nationalism, Political identity, trans-nationalism and conflict situation.

Has since 2009 been writing op-eds at online web and news sites relating to the political situation in Sri Lanka and South Asia, and has been involved in attempt to build solidarity between Tamils and towards the Baloch and Kurdish people.

He is the son of famous Tamil poet Mr Va I Sa Jayapalan

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