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FIRE CHURNING FROM WITHIN

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From the Editor's Desk

The political situation in the country has deteriorated since the tsunami, with chauvinistic considerations overriding the declared humanitarian concerns. The fisher folk and other toiling masses, who comprise the worst affected victims, have been badly neglected as a whole by the government, and the Tamils and Muslims of the East have suffered further discrimination as minority nationalities. The tragedy of the tsunami, which many hoped would heal the wounds of national conflict and unite the people, seems to have done quite the opposite.

The tsunami has, besides, opened the doors for forces of foreign exploitation and domination. The Sri Lankan government in desperate financial crisis, unable to lay its hands on the 4.5 billion US dollar 'aid' package tied to the peace process, is gleefully accepting offers of tsunami aid without consideration of implications. However, in the three months after the tsunami, most of the victims are living in tents and shoddily constructed temporary shelters.

The government has shown little interest in the revival of the peace process, while armed forces and anti-LTTE Tamil militants are involved in acts of provocation and killings, with retaliation from the LTTE. This is a threat to the ceasefire that has held for three years. While the government and the LTTE may count on the reluctance of the other to reopen hostilities, there is a serious risk that further escalation of the current shadow war could blow out of control.

The government with the connivance of the treacherous CWC leadership has now decided to go ahead with the environmentally hazardous Upper Kotmale hydropower project that would displace many thousands of Hill Country Tamils and destroy their livelihoods. However, resistance is strong among the people of the threatened region as well as progressive and environmentally aware groups and

individuals. As long as the people stand firm and carry forward an enduring mass campaign, they will definitely win. The battle needs to be carried out on several fronts: among the broad masses of the country; among progressive forces across the country; among the community of scientists and technologists who care for the country's resources; among people with concern for the environment. It is crucial that the imperialist interests behind the scheme are exposed, as well as the treacherous leaders who are acting against the interests of the people of the region and the country as a whole.

Internationally, however, the situation is getting brighter for anti-imperialist struggles, with US imperialism in a desperate struggle to hold on to Iraq, and Latin America daring to stand up against the hyper-power. Most significantly, less than 15 years after Marxism was pronounced dead by the imperialists, the Maoists have shown to the world that, by relying on the people and people alone, it is possible to combat an oppressive regime with backing from international reaction of every kind, and win.

The lessons of Nepal are important to Marxists and freedom fighters for liberation across the world. Final victory of the Nepali revolution may take time, but the revolution is on the right course. The coming months in Nepal will expose to the people of Nepal and the rest of the world the bankruptcy of the utterances about democracy and freedom by US imperialism and the regional hegemon. It will also expose the reactionary nature of the Chinese capitalists masquerading as leaders of the Chinese Communist Party. Most importantly, it will demonstrate that struggles against various forms of human oppression are inseparable from each other and form an integral whole, and that this recognition is essential to carrying forward the revolution in countries saddled with the burdens of feudalism, capitalism and imperialism.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION FOLLOWING THE TSUNAMI AND INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION

by

Comrade SK Senthivel

[Address by Comrade Senthivel at the Seminar on the Current Political Situation held on 20th March 2005 in Jaffna]

After Indonesia, Sri Lanka had the largest loss of life and property because of the tsunami of 26th December 2004. An estimated 42 000 have lost their lives, property worth one thousand-five hundred billion rupees was damaged, and a million people were rendered homeless by the tsunami attack on the north, east, south and west coasts. Those who lost their relatives have still not recovered from emotional shock. What is particularly significant about the tsunami is that the overwhelming majority of those affected severely are ordinary fisher folk, minor craftsmen, peasants and members of the lower middle class.

It is important to note that, although it is close to three months since the tsunami, the Government has not carried out with interest or responsibility any of the necessary remedial measures for the rehabilitation of the affected population. It is the already war-ravaged North-East that were most affected by the tsunami, and the districts of Mullaitivu and Amaprai suffered severe damage. But the Government has been acting in a step-motherly fashion. However much the leaders of the ruling classes, including the President, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the opposition, may seem to shed tears of sorrow, their real concerns are in carrying forward their political manoeuvre amid the tragedy.

The tsunami was some form of a blessing to the President and the UPFA government. At a time when they were desperate because of their inability to secure the four-hundred and fifty billion rupees pledged by donor nations during the previous regime by starting negotiations with the LTTE, a situation arose in which, instead, funding was offered by many countries as tsunami relief. The World Bank wrote off some of the old debts and announced a few new loans. Some countries wrote off old debts and offered new soft loans. Although there was ulterior motive in all this, they provided an alternative to the financial crisis faced by the UPFA government.

For a few days after the tsunami, the leadership of the ruling classes spoke about the destruction by nature that did not recognise ethnic, linguistic, religious and regional differences, and about humanitarianism that transcended all. Hardly two weeks passed before they exposed their true nature. In the south and the west, the people faced neglect as working classes. In the north and the east they faced neglect as a nationality and as working classes. That situation still continues.

The JVP, a major partner in the ruling UPFA, is rousing chauvinist fervour to oppose the proposed Joint Mechanism for tsunami relief in the North-East. The objective reality of the day is that a joint mechanism involving the Sri Lanka Government and the LTTE is necessary to rebuild the North-East already ravaged by war and now the tsunami. While the LTTE has agreed to compromise on the matter, owing to JVP resistance, the President has been procrastinating.

Meantime, the concerns of the ruling party and the opposition are more about how to handle the forthcoming presidential elections rather than the problems faced by the people of the country. On the one hand, the prices of consumer goods are rising by the day while, on the other hand, schemes for privatisation are being implemented. It appears that talk about negotiations on the national question, which is the main problem facing the country, has been washed away by the tsunami. Meanwhile, there are contradictions and conflicts within the ruling party. President Kumaratunge is seeking to become a power

wielding prime minister by amending the constitution through a court order, or a referendum. The UNP, however, is emphatic that the executive presidency should continue.

Foreign countries that infiltrated into this country through the transformation of the national question into war are now present in the open in the name of the tsunami and are vying with each other to serve their respective motives. The US, the UK, Japan and Canada on one side are competing against India on the other. US troops have set foot on Sri Lankan soil for the first time in the pretext of relief work. The British and Canadian forces also joined in. Indian troops landed within two days of the tsunami.

What relief work did these foreign forces carry out? They carried out tasks of carrying out surveys to serve their respective aims of dominance. It is now said that these forces have departed. The number not in uniforms but involved in advisory, guiding, and espionage work remains a secret.

The cowardice and helplessness of our main Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim political leaders finds expression in their unfortunate failure to oppose or to condemn the landing of foreign troops in this country. It was only the non-parliamentary left parties that insisted on the withdrawal of the foreign forces.

The country has been transformed into an arena for Indo-US rivalry for domination through the arrival of the foreign troops. They are keen to transform the post-tsunami political and economic conditions in the country to serve their respective interests. Despite their rivalry, they are intent on the neo-colonisation of Sri Lanka through liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. The UNP stands close to the US in the Indo-US contest for domination, while the SLFP as well as the JVP prefer to go along with India.

The US and Japan give the impression that they are emphatic that they oppose resumption of war in Sri Lanka. Having already entered the country behind the backdrop of war, they now need peace to plunder the resources of the country by expanding and implementing their programmes for liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation.

Against the background of the tsunami, the World Bank, IMF, ADB and NGOs are ready and waiting with outstretched hands to prepare the ground for encroachment by these alien forces. The people, not cared for properly by the government, seem to be in a situation where they could be deceived by the material and monetary assistance that they receive from the NGOs. Theirs is the generosity of the robber who helps in need.

Under these conditions the political, economic, social and cultural situation after the tsunami seems to be developing as an anti-people trend. Three years since the MoU and the Ceasefire Agreement, there has been no proper move towards negotiations to solve the national question. The North-East that is in a state of destruction following the war and the tsunami continues to be neglected by the government.

While the LTTE has climbed down a few rungs to consent to a joint mechanism, the government is deceptively delaying and avoiding it. Meanwhile, one sees the LTTE has initiated a diplomatic offensive centred on the European Union. The reality, however, is that the LTTE has arrived at a juncture at which it has to take certain definite decisions. Their decision in this matter is eagerly awaited.

Thus, the signs are that the political situation after the tsunami has taken a turn for the worse for the whole country and its people and hostile to the Tamil people struggling for self-determination. Foreign intervention is favouring this tread, and the people need to look at the matter with far sight rather than from narrow perspectives.

HAIL THE GLORIOUS STRUGGLE OF THE NEPALI MAOIST REVOLUTIONARIES FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE

by
Deshabakthan

Historical Background

On 18th February 1951, popular protests and Indian intervention put an end to the Rana regime, which for over a century had held the Nepal's Kings captive; King Tribhuvan ascended the throne and ruled until his death in 1955. At the time of ascending the throne, he made several pledges, including the introduction of multi-party democracy, but shamelessly failed to honour them. Since then, it has been a long history of struggle to secure a parliamentary democracy. (See Box for a timeline of events since 1951).

It was the success of the democratic movement that ushered in a fledgling democracy in 1990 with a parliamentary, multi-party system in partnership with a constitutional monarchy. The constitutional monarchy in Nepal is not like those in several modern bourgeois democracies, including several European countries and Japan, where the monarch is by and large a figurehead, with the royal family enjoying some privileges, subject to the consent of Parliament. In Nepal, the King, as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, enjoys considerable executive powers as well as the right to dismiss lawfully elected governments and to impose Emergency Rule – a right that Nepal's Kings have exercised frequently.

The political parties of Nepal, including the main communist parties, consented to this arrangement, based on the plea that the institution of monarchy is a powerful national symbol for Nepal's people. Irrespective of whether these parties erred in emphasising the

backwardness of Nepal society, the experience of Nepal in the last 14 years is that the monarchy, by its tendency to hang on to a medieval and autocratic model of power, was inimical to Nepal's incipient modern democracy.

Nepal's communist parties have historically been at the forefront of its democracy movement, and that was precisely why, in the 1991 elections, the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) emerged as the main opposition force with 69 seats, with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), at the time known as the United People's Front of Nepal, winning 9 seats. In 1994, the CPN (UML) secured 89 seats to form a minority government that survived a mere six months before being dismissed by the king. The elections failed to secure parliamentary representation by even one member of the oppressed sections of the population, and the 1994 government was unable to take even the smallest meaningful step in the interest of social justice for the masses of people oppressed on the basis of gender, caste and religion, under the feudal system. The impotence of parliamentary politics in Nepal stood in stark contrast to the people's democratic aspirations, and the Maoists withdrew from parliamentary politics to launch a mass struggle for democratic reform.

As expected, the parliamentary polity deteriorated rapidly, the political parties getting fragmented by infighting, so that stable government was not possible. Meanwhile, the parliamentary communist parties with their illusion of power through parliamentary means also suffered splits. The appointment and dismissal of successive puppet governments in quick succession by the King, led to popular disillusionment. It was against this background that the palace massacre of 2001, attributed by many to an imperialist conspiracy and possible Indian involvement, took place. The ascent of Gyanendra to the throne expedited the erosion of the legitimacy of the monarchy, particularly because of his intense personal unpopularity as opposed to the significant measure of popularity that his predecessor had enjoyed.

Against this background, the campaign of CPN (Maoist) to end the power of the monarchy and to set up in its place a full-fledged

republic gathered momentum. However, one cannot attribute the rise of the Maoists to the events in the Royal Palace and the unpopularity of the King. The Maoists had built a powerful mass base by launching struggles against feudal oppression in its every form in the countryside and they were in control of a large part of Nepal by the time of the royal coup of 1st February 2005. In fact, every attempt of the Nepali state to militarily overcome the Maoists resulted in further strengthening of the hold of the Maoists over the Nepali countryside (reportedly, extending to 77% of Nepal before the coup).

The Royal Nepalese Army, frustrated by its failure to gain control over the vast Maoist-commanded rural areas, resorted to wholesale military repression, complete with massacres, executions and 'disappearances'. Military oppression had an effect opposite to what was intended and rather than silence the demand for the move towards a republic, it strengthened it. The autocratic Gyanendra resorted to a series of desperate measures including the setting up of a series of puppet regimes that were dismissed faster than they were put in place. The coup of ²⁰⁰⁵ had its dress rehearsal in 2002. Then, the mainstream Parliamentary parties, including the CPN (UML), extended their support to Emergency Rule, in the name of curbing Maoist terrorism. Although the parliamentary communists withdrew active support to the autocrat, they were in no position to spearhead a campaign against the monarchy. The initiative in this matter was with the Maoists, who had already rejected the parliamentary farce.

It seems that the CPN (UML) had not learned much through its parliamentary experience since 1990 so that, even as lately as June 2004, the party was a willing partner in the puppet regime headed by Deuba, which was dismissed early this year. The reluctance of the parliamentary parties even to protest formally against the autocratic regime emboldened the King, who acted swiftly to bid for absolute power.

It is in the wake of a political disaster, resulting from their own folly, that the parliamentary political parties are seeking to salvage their credibility by calling for a return to democratic rule. The unpopularity of the Royal Coup has persuaded even the international

backers of the autocratic regime to call on the King to restore 'democratic' rule.

Politics of Regional Hegemony

Another aspect of the tragedy of Nepal concerns its strategic importance to imperialism because it is landlocked between China and India with a border stretching over 1000 km with India and about 800 km with the Tibet Autonomous Region of China. The Indian expansionist successors to the British rulers of the sub-continent have nurtured dreams about Indian hegemony over the region, starting decades before Indian independence, with plans for a Greater India covering a bigger territory than British India. Nehru had made no secret of this dream in the years preceding Indian independence. Although the secession of Pakistan dented this grand plan, the plan was revived and reactivated according to the reality of the post-colonial era.

India's aggressive approach towards its neighbours was an outcome of the desire to be a regional power; and its alliance with the Soviet Union of the post-Stalin era until its disintegration was to a great extent conditioned by its desire to contain Chinese influence in the region, on the one hand for fear of a proletarian revolutionary upsurge inspired by the then socialist China and on the other to minimise Chinese influence in countries neighbouring India.

Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim, the three landlocked states wedged between China and India, came under increasing Indian pressure since 1947. This was possible because, historically, and particularly because of British imperial domination of the region, the three countries had most of their trade across their border with India and were subject to Indian influence. Independent India did everything possible to reduce these countries into its protectorates or vassal states at best so that they could be assimilated to India in due course in the cause of realising the dream of Greater India. Sikkim was the annexed by India in 1974 on the pretext of democratising the country. Bhutan has been reduced to a virtual colony of India with the King of Bhutan dancing to India's tunes so that he could hold on to power

using a most oppressive dictatorial feudal regime. How democratic the proposed two-party democratic system for Bhutan, with the monarchy as a national institution, is something that will depend on the turn of events in the region.

Nepal being bigger than Bhutan has been used to considerable freedom from Indian control and domination even from the time of the British rulers with whom the ruling elite of Nepal had good relations. Indian control of Nepal proved to be difficult, especially with the monarchy asserting its independence and the prospect of China coming to the defence of Nepal in the event of Indian aggression.

India, however, did not fail to take advantage of the fact that the main trade routes of Nepal were through India, to prevent the rulers of Nepal from concluding major treaties with China and especially the procurement of weapons from China for the defence of Nepal. India also imposed a number of unequal treaties of trade and defence with Nepal, which were renewed and reinforced from time to time, to tighten its grip on Nepal and use the threat of closure of its border for trade to blackmail and bully the Nepali rulers. Meanwhile, the masses became increasingly hostile to Indian domination and demanded the abrogation of all unequal treaties with India.

With the Indian bourgeoisie all out to dominate trade in Nepal and bleed Nepal dry in its quest for profits and a feudal monarchy unable to lead the country out of its economic backwardness, the national economy continued to weaken and many Nepalese went in search of livelihood to India and to Bhutan. Tourism was another means of keeping the tottering economy in place, but was accompanied by an unacceptable social price besides opening the country to imperialist meddling. The British had a vested interest in preserving the Nepali monarchy so that they continued to have a say in the affairs of South Asia. This role has, however, been taken over by US imperialism, which took advantage of an increasingly unpopular monarch seeking outside help to keep the Maoists at bay. The US also justifies its interference in Nepal based its 'war against terror'. Thus the

dictatorial monarchy gets military support from the US, the UK and India.

China, prior to its taking the capitalist road, treated the affairs of Nepal as internal to the country, while being appreciative of the role of the government in resisting Indian pressure in its external relations, and especially in its refusal to allow its territory to be used to subvert China. The prospect of Nepal, under Gyanendra's rule, becoming part of the US plan for the encirclement of China, without or with Indian connivance, is a matter of concern for the Chinese state. Thus, its abandoning of the socialist cause as well as the need to preserve Nepalese neutrality have made it expedient for China to join the chorus of condemnation of the Maoists as terrorists. China, however, has, unlike the US, UK and India, refrained from involvement on the side of the monarch in the armed conflict in Nepal.

On the political side, India has always sought to meddle in Nepali affairs through 'democratic politics', by using loyal political leaders and parties who would act as its agents. The Nepalese Congress Party, which formed the first government under the Nepali monarchy that was fully restored to power in 1951, had for long been loyal to the Indian establishment. The party has since fragmented because of internal rivalries, political differences and royal intrigue.

China, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, always supported liberation struggles at the people-to-people level and the Chinese Communist Party extended political support to fraternal parties, but without interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, so that amicable state-to-state relations were possible, despite differences in the political systems. Today, the Chinese leadership has gone to the extent of denouncing a genuine revolutionary communist party as terrorist, merely to appease a dictator. Although it is unlikely that China will be directly involved in the conflict in Nepal, it is unlikely to be a source of inspiration for the masses struggling for democratic change.

The Path and Purpose of the Current Struggle

King Gyanendra took absolute power on 1st February 2005 through a coup in which he sacked his government for ‘failing to bring the Maoists to the negotiating table’ and his subsequent moves to control the media, free speech and right to free assembly. It was clear from the conduct of Gyanendra, since he assumed power in following the palace massacre, that there was no peaceful path to securing democracy in Nepal. What the events since the royal coup have done is to make it abundantly clear to even the politically naïve that there is no chance for democracy in Nepal without abolishing the monarchy.

It was the Maoists who correctly identified the nature of the Nepali state and therefore reject the parliamentary road to achieve social justice. Thus, even before the palace massacre, they were in control of vast areas of the Nepali countryside which they extended it to virtual control over 90% of Nepal well ahead of the Royal Coup of 1st February. It was, again, they who, through their experience in revolutionary mass struggle, correctly recognised the true purpose of Gyanendra’s invitation to them for talks, was not to discuss democracy but to deter it.

The course of the struggle over the past decade has been tortuous. The establishment of people’s power in the Nepali countryside was achieved through mass struggle against feudal exploitation and domination and by implementing land reform as well as firm steps to counter caste, gender and ethnic oppression in the name of tradition. The Maoists demonstrated that revolutionary struggle could achieve for the people what parliamentary and other reformist methods could not achieve. The broader struggle to transform the state, however, is a people’s war against the state apparatus, and especially the police and the army. The struggle has also involved the launching countrywide campaigns such as mass demonstrations, hartals and blockades which have increasingly demonstrated that the revolutionaries could bring the government to standstill even in urban centres where the government could claim to be in some form of control.

As a true Marxist Leninist party, the goal of the CPN (Maoist) is a socialist Nepal. Again, as a Marxist Leninist party, it recognises the need to carry the struggle forward in stages. The immediate task of the armed struggle of the Maoists is the establishment of a democratic regime in Nepal. They were willing to negotiate with the Royal Government of Nepal for the purpose of setting up a democratic government with a constitutional monarchy. This was tactically correct, and the unwillingness of the government to negotiate with the Maoists on that basis demonstrated to the people of Nepal that the monarchy was only interested in holding on to state power at any cost.

The parliamentary parties, including the revisionist Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist), have demonstrated their political bankruptcy by collaborating with Gyanendra to form governments under his patronage so that, in the process of negotiating with the Maoists, the dirty work of defending the interests of the dictatorial regime fell on their shoulder. It was only after the coup of 1st February and the arrest of nearly all leaders of the parliamentary political parties that most of the leaders of these parties saw light.

The call by the Maoists for a genuinely democratic regime and the abolition of the monarchy has now been accepted by most of the political parties. Thus the initiative in the struggle against the monarchy and for setting up a democratic republic of the people of Nepal is now with the Maoists.

The Maoists have again adopted the correct Marxist Leninist strategy of uniting with the many to isolate the few in calling for broad-based unity in their democratic revolutionary struggle. This had given the lie to the reactionary propaganda that the Maoists were fighting to replace the monarchy with a 'communist one-party state'.

Since the coup of 1st February it is widely accepted in Nepal that monarchy and democracy cannot coexist in Nepal. The issues that the revolution faces concern the nature of the democracy that is to follow the demise of the monarchy.

There can be no compromise on the question of land reform and other victories scored by the masses through revolutionary struggle. That would be a betrayal of the masses and the revolution. There is much to be decided on the questions of revival of the economy of Nepal, establishing and defending a genuine people's democracy, and the role of patriotic, progressive and democratic forces in building a liberated Nepal.

Salient Features of the Revolutionary Struggle

While much remains to be achieved to secure final victory, there are several impressive features of the revolutionary struggle with important parallels in revolutionary mass struggles of the past. There are also new features that offer much inspiration and valuable lessons to revolutionary movements in South Asia.

Ten years of mass revolutionary struggle in the countryside has demonstrated to South Asian society what could be achieved through revolutionary mass struggle on the fronts of caste and gender oppression. The Maoists have made serious and conscious efforts to eliminate discrimination and oppression in the name of caste and gender.

What has been achieved has not been without resistance. Since, not only the feudal oppressors but also sections of the oppressed masses including victims of caste and gender oppression are subject to the cultural hegemony of the ruling classes, much remains to be done that cannot even be initiated until there is a people's government in Nepal to take the country along the path to full social justice and socialism.

What is also highly commendable is that members of the oppressed castes and women play a prominent and leading role in carrying out the revolution at the local and national level. Women comrades in leading positions have pointed out that the representation of women in the leadership is still low. They also note that the Maoists are ready to rectify the situation, and act to ensure that women play a

bigger role not only within the Party but also in the transformation of Nepalese society.

The harshness with which oppression by caste and gender are dealt with at times has led to some resentment, much to the glee of the enemies of the Revolution. But as Mao himself pointed out long ago, “the revolution is not a tea party”. Mistakes will be made in the course of struggle, especially in the implementation of policy. But what matters is that they are corrected and not repeated. A political party that adopts the mass line is never reluctant to admit its mistakes or to correct them, and therein lies the strength of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.

States and the Revolution

The Nepali state has been a state of feudal oppression and even its consent to a democratically elected parliament, although with the monarch holding the power to dismiss the elected government at will, was as a result of years of mass agitation and struggle, especially by the left and other progressive forces. The Nepali monarchy wanted to take advantage of its strategic location between China and India to wield unlimited power over the country.

While China has practiced a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the country, it desires political stability in Nepal. Recently, the Chinese government went out of its way to side with the monarch and to denounce the revolution, in the hope that the neutrality of the Nepali state could be preserved, and thereby confirming its increasingly capitalist class character.

India has asserted its strategic and economic interests in Nepal and has a long record of meddling in the affairs of Nepal, including economic blackmail through blocking the trade routes of Nepal. What India wants too is a stable government in Nepal, but with a political party that is amenable to the Indian ruling elite exercising power. Such things are hard to come by in a country whose economy is in ruins, with a majority living in abject poverty.

India has the advantage that Nepal is a Hindu kingdom with close cultural ties to India. But the Nepali people, despite the strong cultural affinity to India, also value their national identity. The Nepali people cherish their ties with the people of India. Equally they resent domination by the Indian ruling elite and other exploiting classes. But the Indian ruling elite, insensitive to the feelings of the Nepali people, seeks to dominate Nepal in every possible way in realising its dream of a greater India.

The US imperialists have, particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union, sought to intensify their expansionist activities in Asia so as to encircle and isolate China, which they sees as a major challenge that needs to overcome in its bid for global domination. US interest in Nepal and its military support for the oppressive regime have been on a steep rise since the ascent to power by Gyanendra. The 'War Against Terrorism' waged by the US in the aftermath of the '9.11' tragedy has become an additional pretext for supporting the repressive regime.

US, Britain and India are the three main sources of arms and military support to the Nepali regime. Despite pretences to support democracy, the British government has always acted to undermine democracy and democratic struggle when they posed a threat to imperialist interests.

The three countries together have, while making public calls upon the King to restore democracy, dragged their feet about stopping military supplies to Nepal. Although military assistance to the monarchy has been formally withdrawn by India and the UK, and the US is threatening to follow suit, the unholy trinity will do everything in its power to prevent the Maoists from coming to power.

It appears that they are waiting for the first possible excuse to support the dictator after he is able to make some cosmetic changes to create a semblance of democracy by accommodating some of the parliamentary political parties to add a democratic tint to his authoritarian regime. The current situation is, however, bleak for the politically isolated Gyanendra, with most of the political parties

endorsing the position of the Maoists that there is no democratic future for Nepal with the monarchy in place in any form. But the prospect of some of the leaders, including some of the so-called communists, returning to the fold of the monarchy still exists.

Thus Nepali democracy faces a threat from the regional hegemon, the main global super power and its closest ally. Maoist participation in the governance of Nepal in any form, let alone taking control of the country's affairs, will not be tolerated by these powers and the risk of problem getting internationalised is high.

We can expect that everything will be done to make it difficult for the Maoists and other forces of democracy but, as long as the Maoists adhere to the revolutionary path of relying on the masses, uniting with the many to isolate the few and persevering in people's war, they will succeed in overthrowing the monarchy to bring democracy to Nepal and transform it into a genuine people's democracy.

The Media

The global media has as usual been mischievous in presenting the Maoists as a gang of terrorists who have increasingly held the Nepali countryside to ransom through sheer terror, with the aim of establishing a one-party communist state in Nepal. They draw material in support of this view from the official media, enemies of socialism and parliamentary opportunists of every shade. The Indian mainstream media has been even more pathetic in its attempts to present as news its subjective wish that the Maoists will be overcome by the monarchy.

Although statements by the CPN(M) have been clear that their goal was the establishment of democracy in place of the monarchy (see, for example, the statement by the CPN(M) leader Prachanda at the end of this article), the international media has consistently chosen to ignore it. It is difficult for the media so used to seeing the world through imperialist tinted glasses to see that strength of the CPN(M) in Nepal came through mass political work and revolutionary struggle against feudal and state oppression. Having got used to the

idea that communism was dead and buried after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subversion of socialism in China, the media keep falling back on the language of anti-communist propaganda of the early years of the cold war.

Even today, the mainstream media try their level best to underplay the menace of state terror and dictatorial rule in Nepal and highlight the ‘acts of terror’ by the Maoists. The success of every call for nationwide strike or a blockade is attributed to Maoist terror than to mass support. Such is the objectivity of the media monopoly so that one necessarily relies on alternative media for reliable information.

The very fact that the global media observes guarded silence on Nepal in the pretext of the communication shut down imposed by the government is clear indication that things are going well for the revolutionary struggle for democracy. It is interesting though that the media gladly reproduce fabrications by the Nepali state media about ‘military successes’ of the RNA and about ‘splits in the Maoist leadership’. One such story in March was that Baburam Bhattarai had been expelled from the leadership and prohibited from making statements to the press by the party leader Prachanda. The Maoists not only denied the story but also published an important article by Bhattarai (which is also reproduced in this issue).

The Left and the Nepali Revolution

When the Soviet Union was dragged into World War II by Nazi invasion, the stand that one took on the question of support for the Soviet Union was a measure of one’s sincerity towards the socialist cause. In the post-war era, the stand one took on the liberation struggle in southern Vietnam against US aggression, and on the Palestinian struggle against Israeli aggression and oppression made it possible to tell a progressive from a reactionary. In the post-Soviet era, the revolution in Nepal has emerged as the litmus test for a true anti-imperialist and socialist.

Marxist-Leninists in India, despite ideological differences and differences relating to political and revolutionary strategy, hail the

success of the Maoist-led struggle against the monarchy. They want the monarchy to go and the victories scored by the revolutionary masses for social justice in the countryside to be consolidated.

The revisionist Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist) in India are reluctant to endorse the leadership of the Maoists in the struggle to replace a dictatorial monarchy with a true democracy in Nepal speaks volumes about the degeneration of these parties. They refer to the Maoists as terrorists and express satisfaction when the Chinese capitalist regime denounces the Maoists. In essence, their position is no different from that of the Congress Party, which, in turn, is not very far from that of the Hindutva BJP and the RSS, which demand unqualified support from the Indian government for the Hindu dictator. All of them seek to preserve Indian hegemonic interests in Nepal.

The parliamentary left in Sri Lanka is no different from its revisionists in India. The JVP too is silently endorsing the approach of the Indian expansionist state.

While the genuine left in Sri Lanka will give unqualified support for the revolutionary struggle in Nepal, any person with a sense of social justice and the faintest idea of the situation in Nepal, how it has been ruled by the feudal monarchy, the oppressive social structure, and the present dictatorship cannot but support the struggle for democracy.

The majority in Sri Lanka are in the dark about Nepal owing to lack of information and misinterpretation by the main news media. It is therefore the duty of the genuine left to publicise the essential facts that:

- 1 Nepal remains a backward country because of the feudal social system presided over by an archaic monarchy.
- 2 Nepal has been ruled by a dictatorial monarchy, which, since the palace massacre, is a ruthless reign of royal military terror subservient to foreign interests, mainly India and the US, seeking to control Nepal.
- 3 The Nepali parliamentary political parties, including those on the left, have failed the people of Nepal by compromising with

the monarchy to the extent that they preferred to hold office under royal patronage rather than stand up for social justice and the fundamental rights of the masses.

- 4 The Maoists are not terrorists but genuine revolutionaries carrying out an armed mass revolutionary struggle to bring democracy and social justice to Nepal.
- 5 The Maoists have liberated 90% of the territory of Nepal and, in the regions that they have been administering for several years, they have implemented land reform and put an end to social injustice in the name of caste and gender. In fact, even religious minorities in Nepal enjoy greater freedom under the Maoists than under the Hindu state.
- 6 The present struggle is not about setting up a one-party state but to get rid of a one-man dictatorship.
- 7 The revolutionary struggle in Nepal continues to advance despite King Gyanendra assuming absolute power and using that power to silence the whole nation by clamping down on not only the media but all means of communication.
- 8 The Nepali revolution has demonstrated to the world that Marxism is more alive than even before it was pronounced dead by the imperialists and their agencies.

Telling the truth about the revolution in Nepal to the masses of Sri Lanka is important in several ways, especially by way of inspiring the masses to persevere in revolutionary struggle against every form of local and foreign oppression.

Now, with the sovereignty of Nepal and the democratic rights of its people under foreign threat, the revolution in Nepal more than ever needs and deserves the support of all those who are opposed to imperialism and its agents. The revolution in Nepal belongs to the entire oppressed masses, and any support that struggle receives is worth many times more for liberation struggles the world over.

Timeline of half a century of Nepal's turbulent history

- 1951** - End of Rana rule. Sovereignty of crown restored and anti-Rana rebels in Nepalese Congress Party form government.
- 1955** - King Tribhuvan dies, King Mahendra ascends throne.
- 1959** - Multi-party constitution adopted.
- 1960** - King Mahendra seizes control and suspends parliament, constitution and party politics after Nepali Congress Party (NCP) wins elections with B. P. Koirala as premier.
- 1962** - New constitution provides for non-party system of councils known as "panchayat" under which king exercises sole power. First elections to Rastrya Panchayat held in 1963.
- 1972** - King Mahendra dies, succeeded by Birendra.
- 1980** - Constitutional referendum follows agitation for reform. Small majority favours keeping existing panchayat system. King agrees to allow direct elections to national assembly - but on a non-party basis.
- 1985** - Communists begin civil disobedience campaign for restoration of multi-party system.
- 1986** - New elections boycotted by communists.
- 1989** - Trade and transit dispute with India leads to border blockade by Delhi resulting in worsening economic situation.
- 1990** - Pro-democracy agitation co-ordinated by communist and leftist groups. Street protests suppressed by security forces resulting in deaths and mass arrests. King Birendra eventually bows to pressure and agrees to new democratic constitution.
- 1991** - Nepali Congress Party wins first democratic elections. Girija Prasad Koirala becomes prime minister.
- 1994** - Koirala's government defeated in no-confidence motion. New elections lead to formation of UML Communist government.
- 1995** - Communist government dissolved. Radical leftist group, the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) begins insurrection in rural areas aimed at abolishing monarch and establishing a people's republic.
- 1997** - Continuing political instability as Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is defeated and replaced by Lokendra Bahadur Chand. Chand is then forced to resign because of party splits and is replaced by Surya Bahadur Thapa.

- 1998** - Thapa stands down because of party splits. GP Koirala returns as prime minister heading a coalition government.
- 1999** - Fresh elections give majority to Nepali Congress Party. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai becomes prime minister.
- 2000** - Prime Minister Bhattarai steps down after revolt in Nepali Congress Party. GP Koirala returns as prime minister, heading the ninth government in 10 years.
- 2001** April - General strike called by Maoist rebels brings life in much of the country to a virtual standstill; police arrest anti-government demonstrators, including some opposition leaders, in Kathmandu.
- 2001** 1 June - King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya and other close relatives killed in shooting spree allegedly by drunken Crown Prince Dipendra, who then shoots himself.
- 2001** 4 June - Prince Gyanendra crowned King of Nepal after the late King Birendra's son, Dipendra - who had been declared king on 2 June - died of injuries sustained during the palace shooting.
- 2001** July - Maoist rebels step up campaign of violence. Sher Bahadur Deuba becomes prime minister, heading the 11th government in 11 years, after Girija Prasad Koirala quits over the violence.
- 2001** July - Deuba announces peace with rebels, truce begins.
- 2001** November - Maoists say peace talks have failed, truce is no longer justified. Launch coordinated attacks on army and police posts.
- 2001** November - State of emergency declared after more than 100 people are killed in four days of violence. King Gyanendra orders army to crush the Maoist rebels.
- 2002** April - Maoist rebels order five-day national strike, days after hundreds are killed in two of bloodiest attacks of six-year rebellion.
- 2002** May - Intense clashes between military and rebels in the west. Rebels declare one-month ceasefire, rejected by government. Deuba visits Britain and other states, seeking help in the war against Maoist rebels. US President George W Bush pledges \$20 million.
- 2002** May - Parliament dissolved, fresh elections called amid political confrontation over extending the state of emergency. Deuba expelled by his Nepali Congress party, heads interim government, renews emergency.

- 2002** October - Deuba asks king to put off elections by a year because of Maoist violence. King Gyanendra dismisses Deuba and indefinitely puts off elections set for November. Lokendra Bahadur Chand appointed to head government.
- 2003** January - Rebels, government declare ceasefire.
- 2003** May/June - Lokendra Bahadur Chand resigns as prime minister. King appoints his own nominee Surya Bahadur Thapa as new premier.
- 2003** August - Rebels pull out of peace talks with government and end seven-month truce. Rebels call three-day general strike in September.
- Late 2003 onwards** - Political stalemate; clashes between students/activists and police; resurgence of violence.
- 2004** May - Royalist Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa resigns following weeks of street protests by opposition groups.
- 2004** June - King Gyanendra reappoints Sher Bahadur Deuba as prime minister.
- 2004** August - Maoist rebels stage week-long blockade of Kathmandu, stopping supplies from reaching the city.
- 2004** December - Maoist rebels stage week-long blockade of capital.
- 2005** February - King Gyanendra dismisses Prime Minister Deuba and his government, assumes executive power, declares state of emergency.

Courtesy: Liberation News Service, 24.2.2005

News Bulletin of CP(ML) Liberation, India

Statement of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)

Press Release, 4th February 2005

A brutal stupidity of plunging the country and the people in to darkness and terrorism is being exhibited by fratricidal artificial king Gyanendra Shahi, as the final writhing of the feudal autocracy. There is no alternative before the great Nepalese people who are fighting for a Democratic Republic of Nepal by standing on the achievements of the historical movement of 1990, except to overthrow the feudal autocracy through its root. On this crucial turning point of decisive battle between autocracy and republic, it is a historical necessity for the all the pro-people political forces, civil society, intellectual community and all the level and sphere of people to advance united on this direction. With full responsibility and keeping to this historic necessity, our party has already called for the united front against the feudal autocracy. In order to make the broad united front effective, our Party appeals through this statement to the entire parliamentary parties to form united fronts both in the central and local level and advance the movement ahead. Our party heartily appeals to all those pro-people's forces through this statement, to come forward to forge the united front both in the local and central level, as wherever and whatever becomes possible. Committed to the interests of the country and people, our Party humbly appeals to all pro-people forces, to come forward by all means by forging a united front wherever and by whatever means possible, by casting away their mutual misunderstandings, to create storms of movement against autocracy. We would also like to clarify to all those concerned that we are utterly ready for the necessary sacrifice and flexibility from our side for this purpose.

We heartily thank all the masses of people for their support to making the three days' countrywide general strike (Nepal Bandha) from 2nd-4th February successful, called by our Party as an initial reaction against the retrogressive coup by Gyanendra. By condemning the Nazi style repression of the Royal Army terrorists over students in Pokhara and through imposing autocratic control over communication and independent publications, our party strongly appeals to all students, teachers, professors and guardians to come out to a powerful resistance. It is historical necessity to perceive that a strong resistance is the only foundation of people's protection. In this very

context, our Party challenges Gyanendra Shahi to withdraw his retrogressive steps immediately. If he fails to withdraw his autocratic steps, our Party will be compelled to come out for a countrywide blockade and traffic strike for indefinite time, from the historic day of the 10th anniversary of Great People's War, 13 February. Our party heartily appeals to all the political forces, civil society, intellectual community, journalists and all levels and sections of people to store the most essential goods for daily consumption and support our movement by all means to make it successful. The 21st century will be the people's century and it is sure that feudal autocracy will be defeated.

Prachanda, Chairman, Central Committee,
Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)

The King Addresses His Subjects, and a Poet Responds

The king "addressed" the nation today on the occasion of the democracy day, 18th August 2005, and lamented that politics in Nepal was being conducted "far from the common man". An anonymous poet's reflections circulated through e-mail today captures the irony of the king's speech:

'far from the common man'

Surrounded by military security,
All protest under the gun sights
Phone lines cut
Martial law in place,
Sri 5 maharajadhiraj himself steps along a red carpet, and
Speaking in the royal plural,
Announces to his subjects
That he was obliged to take over
because
Politics was being conducted
"far from the common man"

[courtesy: www.insn.org, February 19th, 2005]

THE ROYAL REGRESSION AND THE QUESTION OF DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

by

Baburam Bhattarai

In his famous work *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx had said: “Hegel observes somewhere that all great incidents and individuals of world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.” It was while drawing a parallel between the coup of 1851 by Napoleon’s nephew Louis Bonaparte, who had then crowned himself as Napoleon III, and the original Napoleonic coup of 1799. Of course, this was in a satirical sense.

Similar law of Hegelian dialectics seems to be in operation in the history of Nepal, too. While the father, King Mahendra, had staged a military coup on December 16, 1960 against the first parliamentary democracy established after 1950 to centralise all power in himself, now the son, King Gyanendra, has staged another military coup on February 1, 2005 against the second parliamentary democracy restored after 1990 and centralised all state power in himself. However, for the politically enlightened ones, it is not difficult to see beneath the surface that this episode of February 1 is merely a continuation or culmination of the episode of June 1, 2001, when the relatively more weak or liberal King Birendra, along with his entire family, was butchered and a new dynasty ushered in by Gyanendra. This way, the “First February” of the Nepalese history seems to be a carbon copy of the “Eighteenth Brumaire” of the French history; but

it is yet to be seen whether it will be more 'tragic' or more 'farcical'.

The Essence of the Royal Regression

In his every public utterances after the coup, including the 'royal proclamation' of February 1, Gyanendra has laboured hard to sell the theory that his present move is designed to restore 'peace' and consolidate 'multi-party democracy' by exorcising the ghost of 'terrorism' [i.e. the ongoing revolutionary People's War led by the CPN(Maoist), and this is meant only for a definite time-frame of coming three years. While talking to a group of selected media persons on February 24, he has particularly taken pains to project himself as the real Messiah of 'democracy' and the exorcist of 'terrorism' and has demanded of the parliamentary political parties and the entire members of the international community to cooperate with him in this grand venture against 'terrorism'. Thus, he has sought to project himself as the true follower of the US President George W. Bush in the international crusade against 'terrorism' and begged everybody to grant legitimacy to his autocratic military regime at least on that count. Of course, he seems to have learnt a few lessons from General Musharaf of Pakistan.

However, Gyanendra's such political gimmicks are not cutting much ice among the masses, as he has a tainted image as the hardliner autocrat even within the palace since his father's and bother's days and is particularly hated among the public as the real fratricidal and regicidal culprit in the palace massacre of June 1, 2001. Particularly after his induction of the old palace stooges of known anti-democratic persuasions like Tulsi Giri and Kirti Nidhi Bista as his principal political associates and his abduction of all fundamental and democratic rights of the people with the countrywide declaration of emergency, the essential nature of his despotic military rule has been thoroughly unmasked. Despite his incessant parroting about his commitments towards 'multi-party democracy' and 'constitutional monarchy', all his real practices so far including the crackdown on political parties and their leaders, free media and human rights

activists and blatant trampling upon the limited democratic provisions of the old constitution, leave one in no doubt that the supine parliamentary democratic system has been snuffed out and the autocratic monarchy restored in the country.

Hence the questions arise: How could the limited bourgeois democratic system established after 1990 be abolished, and the autocratic monarchy restored so smoothly? Should not the wheel of history move forward rather than backward? For the correct answers to these questions, one has to grasp the laws of social development in a scientific and objective manner and to correctly evaluate the weaknesses and limitations of the Firstly, it should be acknowledged that struggle between social classes provides the basic motive forces of societal development. The present Nepalese society in a semi-feudal and semi-colonial stage is a multi-class society, and the principal struggle there is among the feudal, the bourgeois and the proletarian classes. All the three principle contending classes have their allies, too. The traditionally dominant feudal class has the comprador and bureaucratic bourgeoisie with it; the small and weak bourgeois class has a section of the rural and urban petty-bourgeois class with it; and the proletariat has the vast number of poor peasants and semi-proletariat with it. This basically triangular class contention is increasingly turning into a bi-polar contention after the initiation and development of revolutionary People's War under the leadership of the proletariat since 1996. In other words, according to the law of class struggle and social development, the parasitic reactionary classes are polarised on one side under the leadership of the most capable and strong class among themselves, and on the other side are rallied the working and the progressive classes under the leadership of the most advanced class, the proletariat. As the monarchy representing the feudal and comprador and bureaucratic bourgeois classes is historically the strongest representative of the reactionary classes in Nepal, the parasitic classes most adversely affected by the revolutionary People's War have been increasingly rallying under the leadership of the monarchy. This is the rationale and essence of the current royal regression or the restoration of autocratic monarchy in the social class terms. The regressive march of the reactionary classes

in opposition to the progressive march of the working classes is perfectly in keeping with the dialectical law of social development.

Secondly, viewing from a further political angle, it should be acknowledged that the inherent defects and weaknesses of the bourgeois parliamentary democracy established after 1990 and the general infirmity and incapacity of the middle strata and forces also provided an objective basis for the ultimate feudal autocratic regression. Historically, the major parliamentary political forces, viz. the Nepali Congress and later the revisionist UML, enjoy no independent class base of their own, and tend to represent a hodgepodge of class forces ranging from the feudal elements and comprador and bureaucratic bourgeoisie to the petty-bourgeoisie and constantly take vacillating and conciliatory political positions. Contrary to this, the monarchy traditionally draws its strength from the prevailing feudal property and cultural relations, and principally, from its monopoly hold over the Royal Nepal Army (RNA). To be more specific, the political change and the Constitution of 1990 did not properly settle the question of 'state sovereignty' traditionally claimed by the monarchy and left the final 'state authority' and strategic control over the RNA in the hands of the monarchy. This 'historical blunder' (to paraphrase Jyoti Basu from India!) paved the way for the monarchy to gradually gobble up the parliament and the Constitution and consummate the current royal regression. Moreover, the parliamentary forces during their twelve years' long rule in between did nothing to bring about a progressive transformation in the traditionally feudal and increasingly comprador and bureaucratic capitalist socio-economic and cultural base of the society. In the later period, particularly along with the rapid development of the revolutionary People's War, their class and political base got further eroded. As a result, the upper strata of the society which had backed the parliamentary forces after the political change of 1990 gradually returned back to the fold of the monarchy and the lower and a section of the middle strata naturally got polarized around the revolutionary People's War. This dilemma of the reformist parliamentary forces has been summed up in Chairman Com. Prachanda's recent People's War Anniversary statement thus: "Ultimately, the so-called royal

proclamation of February 1 has not only exposed the irrelevance of reformism in the Nepalese politics, but also shattered the collective lethargy of the parliamentary political forces.”

Thirdly, from a military point of view, this action of total centralization of the old state authority in the absolute monarchy can be seen as an attempt of the moribund reactionary classes to wage a final battle with the revolutionary forces in the ever mounting class war in the country.

In view of the recent declaration of the CPN (Maoist) to lead the nine-year old revolutionary People's War into the final and decisive stage of strategic offensive, it is not unnatural, though foolish, for the frightened reactionary classes to attempt to wage a final battle of life and death under the direct leadership of the monarchy, which has assumed supreme commandship of the RNA since its inception. In the recent past the pathetic showing of the RNA in almost every real battle with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been blamed by certain quarters on the contradictions of de jure political leadership of the parliamentary forces and de facto leadership of the monarchy over the RNA. Also, it is not hard to understand the super military ambitions of Gyanendra, who has grabbed the throne by butchering the entire family of his brother, Birendra, to project himself as the great saviour of his tottering feudal and comprador-bureaucratic bourgeois class. Nevertheless, as any common student of military science would know, the victory or defeat of a particular army ultimately depends more on its social class base and the political goal rather than on the leadership prowess of its commander, and in that sense the ultimate defeat of the reactionary RNA should be a foregone conclusion and Gyanendra's dream would be mere chimera.

Role of the International Forces

In the present day world of imperialist globalization any internal political event has more international ramifications than ever before. Hence the February 1 royal regression has generated worldwide reactions, and all major world and regional powers and organizations,

including the UN, the USA, the UK, the EU, India, China and others have issued public statements on the question. Surprisingly none of the major international players have supported Gyanendra's regressive steps so far. Not only that the major powers like the USA, the UK, the EU and India, which have been the principal props for the reactionary regimes in Nepal in the past, have publicly opposed the current developments, and others like China, Russia, Pakistan, Bangladesh etc. have commented upon the events as 'internal affairs of Nepal'. The most significant international development has been the suspension of military aid by India and the UK (the USA also appears to be toeing the same line) and suspension of 'development aid' by a number of EU countries. International human rights organisations such as the Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, etc., have publicly denounced the royal regime for its rampant violations of human and democratic rights of the people. Thus the autocratic royal regime has been totally isolated from the international community so far, which is a good omen for the democratic movement.

However, the despotic regime is desperately seeking to exploit two issues to gain international support for itself. The first is the 'anti-terrorism' card, and the second, the 'geo-political' card. The hackneyed 'anti-terrorism' card, much exploited after September Eleven by all and sundry petty dictators and reactionary regimes of the world, has already lost much of its original steam and is yet to be seen how it will fare in Gyanendra's case. But one can be fairly certain that the enlightened world public opinion won't be easily hoodwinked by the 'anti-terrorism' claims of a person of Gyanendra's ilk, whose hands are blood-stained in the infamous palace massacre and who has now launched a countryside reign of military terror against the people by suspending all political and fundamental rights. Nevertheless, as all the values and norms in a class-divided society are governed by class interests, it won't be surprising if some of the reactionary rulers of the world would ultimately back the regressive royal regime, overtly or covertly.

As far as the 'geo-political' card of the country's strategic positioning between the two super-states of China and India is concerned, Gyanendra's attempts to repeat the skilful diplomatic manoeuvring of playing one neighbour against the other as practiced by his father, Mahendra, in the specific cold-war context of the last century cannot be expected to bear much fruit in the changed situation of international balance of forces in general and the India-China relations in particular. The recent coming together of the USA and India and their coordinated policy against royal regression may tempt Gyanendra to play the China card. He has given enough hints of this by appointing the old royalist Kirti Nidhi Bista with a known pro-China tilt as one of his principal associates in the government. Similarly, Pakistan and Bangladesh, with traditional contradictions with India, may provide some breathing space for the royal regime; some indications of which have already come from the Pakistani ambassador in Kathmandu. However, given the extremely shaky position and uncertain future of Gyanendra himself, it is hard to believe that any of the neighbours will go beyond diplomatic niceties to extend him any substantial material help. Similarly, on the part of the proletarian revolutionaries they should be prudent enough to practice strategic firmness and tactical flexibility in the matters of diplomatic relations particularly with the immediate neighbours.

Another noteworthy factor in recent days is the indication of some positive change in the attitude of major international and regional powers towards the revolutionary forces in Nepal. Due to their own distorted class outlook and interests, these major powers in the past used to regard the monarchy and the parliamentary forces as the so-called 'two pillars of stability', and they were seen working hard to bring about a grand alliance between the two against the revolutionary democratic forces. Now they seem to be increasingly veering round a 'three pillar' theory, including the revolutionary forces; which is, of course, a step forward. But the historical necessity and the new objective reality of the country is that the new 'two pillars' of parliamentary and revolutionary democratic forces join hands to uproot the outdated and rotten third 'pillar' of monarchy. The CPN(Maoist) has already made a policy decision to

this effect, which is reflected in the recent Anniversary statement issued by Chairman Com. Prachanda.

The Question of Democratic Republic

After the royal regression of February 1, there are seen some important developments in the internal political situation. Whereas earlier the national politics was divided into three streams of monarchy, parliamentary democracy and revolutionary people's democracy, now it is gradually getting polarized into two broad streams of monarchy and democracy. Particularly, the leaders, cadres and supporters of parliamentary democracy have now seen through the anti-democracy manoeuvring and divide-and-rule policy of the monarchy in the past and their collective ire against the monarchy has sharpened more than ever before. Though there are sponsored public rallies and statements in favour of the autocratic monarchy on a daily basis, none of the known political parties or their leaders have openly endorsed the royal move so far. While the royal regime has laboured hard to propagate that the harsh autocratic measures are directed only against the 'terrorists' (i.e. Maoist revolutionaries), the people have increasingly realized that they are against all the democratic forces. Similarly, almost all the members of 'civil society', media persons, human rights organizations, professional organizations, etc. have openly come out against the royal coup. This is obviously a good sign for the future of democracy in the country.

However, it is a matter of serious concern that even after more than a month since the coup the democratic forces have not been able to come up with an effective & coordinated plan, programme or mechanism of resistance against the autocratic monarchy. The CPN (Maoist) attempted to provide initial tempo to the resistance movement by organizing a three-day 'Nepal Bandh' (shut-down) and a fifteen-day transportation blockade in February, and is planning further mass-mobilization and military-action programmes in coming months. The parliamentary forces did organize some propaganda activities from India and symbolic public rallies within the country, and are planning peaceful mass-arrest programmes for the future. But the desired sharp attacks against the monarchy in a unified manner,

firstly, amongst the parliamentary forces and, secondly, between the parliamentary and revolutionary democratic forces, has not materialised so far. Whereas the Nepali Congress has come out more sharply against the monarchy, the so-called 'leftist' UML has made a relatively muted response against the royal coup. This has naturally raised some apprehensions among the masses whether a new 'Rayamajhi' trend (i.e. the capitulation of the then general secretary of the CPN, Keshar Jang Rayamajhi, to the monarchy in the 1960s) is in the offing. However, after so much blood-bath the situation has undergone a sea change since then. Hence, even if a few Rayamajhis from the left camp and a few Tulsi Giris from the Nepali Congress camp may arise, the overwhelming majorities of the leaders & cadres of the political parties and the general masses of the people are likely to fight till the end against the autocratic monarchy. Moreover, with the presence of the revolutionary PLA to take on the monarchist RNA, and the more favourable international situation than ever to fight against the absolute monarchy, a new objective ground is prepared for the democratic political forces to mount a unified assault against the monarchy so as to sweep it away forever.

Precisely in this context the question of anti-monarchy common minimum programme and slogan acceptable to all the democratic forces, including the parliamentary and revolutionary democratic forces and the international community, has become pertinent. It has been the considered view of the CPN(Maoist) that the programme of election to a representative Constituent Assembly and institutionalization of the democratic republic is best suited for the purpose. The old slogan of restoration of the parliament or re-activation and amendment of 1990 Constitution, advanced by the parliamentary forces and the international community, has been totally outdated and inadequate in the new context. A brief recapitulation of the incessant struggle between the monarchy and democracy since the 1950s in the country should leave no one in doubt that without the complete abolition of the archaic institution of feudal monarchy and its puppet RNA no form of democracy can be secure and institutional in Nepal. It has been proved time and again that the so-called 'constitutional monarchy' seen in operation in some

of the highly developed capitalist countries cannot be replicated in a semi-feudal & semi-colonial society. Hence any attempt on the part of the parliamentary political parties and the international forces to preserve the thoroughly rotten and discredited institution of monarchy, in this or that pretext, does not correspond with the historical necessity and ground reality of balance of forces in the country, and the agenda of 'democratic republic' has entered the Nepalese politics.

As for as the sincere commitment of the revolutionary democratic forces, who aspire to reach socialism and communism via a new democratic republic, towards a bourgeois democratic republic is concerned, the CPN(Maoist) has time and again clarified its principled position towards the historical necessity of passing through a sub-stage of democratic republic in the specificities of Nepal. Particularly, in "An Executive Summary of the Proposal Put Forward by CPN(Maoist) for the Negotiations" presented during the negotiations in April 2003 [See, Some Important Documents of Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), 2004] the minimum content and the process of realization of this democratic republic through a Constituent Assembly has been expressed in concrete terms. The fact that the democratic republic is envisaged to be institutionalized through a freely elected Constituent Assembly, should cast away any illusions about the democratic credentials of the revolutionary forces. Further concrete issues like the creation of a new national army after the dissolution of the royal mercenary RNA can be discussed during the process of negotiations.

The need of the hour is unity of all democratic forces of the country on the common minimum programme of a democratic republic. If anything is lacking so far it is the real democratic vision and will power on the part of the leadership of major political parties. Also, it is the time to win confidence of the masses of the people through a correct projection of the democratic credentials of political parties, and for this the correct practice of inner-party democracy would be a significant component.

In the end, it may be useful to recollect Engels to understand why a proletarian party needs to uphold the programme of a bourgeois republic in the particular historical specificities of a country like present-day Nepal. Lambasting the Bakuninist anarchists who had opposed the immediate programme of a republic in nineteenth-century Spain, Engels had said:

“When the Republic was proclaimed in February 1873, the Spanish members of the Alliance [i.e. Bakuninist ‘International’] found themselves in a quandary. Spain is such a backward country industrially that there can be no question there of immediate complete emancipation of the working class. Spain will first have to pass through various preliminary stages of development and remove quite a number of obstacles from its path. The Republic offered a chance of going through these stages in the shortest possible time and quickly surmounting the obstacles. But this chance be taken only if the Spanish working class played an active political role.” [From “The Bakuninists at Work”]

March 15, 2005.

JANATHA VIMUKTHI PERAMUNA: TRAPPED BY CHAUVINISM

by

Mohan

1. EARLY DAYS: CHAUVINISM AND ADVENTURISM

The origins of the leadership of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna were in the Ceylon Communist Party, which split in 1964 following the ideological debate on the question of the so-called peaceful (meaning parliamentary) path to socialism. The leader of the JVP, Rohana Wijeweera was a member of the Marxist Leninist faction of the Party, also referred to as the Peking Wing in view of its adopting the revolutionary line taken by the Marxist Leninist parties led by the Communist Party of China. He took with him a small group that he had formed around himself during the short period in which he was with the Party. He was joined by dissenters from the revisionist faction, referred to as the Moscow Wing, which took the parliamentary path to socialism as prescribed by the revisionist camp led by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The JVP also attracted a sizeable number of youth without strong ideological background, and from the outset adopted a populist line. It should be noted here that Wijeweera participated in the notorious Sinhala chauvinist protest march of 1966 against the Dudley Senanayake - SJV Chelvanayakam accord to settle issues relating to the grievances of the Tamil nationality, and that disciplinary action was taken against him for that move. The revisionist CP and the

Lanka Sama Samaja Party too participated in the march organised by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, where anti-Tamil racist slogans were shouted, for which the two parliamentary left parties were criticised by the Marxist Leninist CP.

Like the Marxist Leninists and other opponents of the government, the JVP too was harassed by the then UNP-led government that was in power between 1965 and 1970. The JVP, although it claimed to be Marxist and referred to itself as the 'Che Guevara' movement, was seriously lacking in political theory and analysis based on Marxism.

The JVP had no working class base, and did not have a peasant base either, although it had infiltrated peasant organisations of the Marxist Leninist CP. It claimed that it would capture power through the strength of its youth organisations. This was an erroneous idea, which some left intellectuals encouraged in the late 1960's, especially during and in the wake of the youth uprising of 1968 in Paris. Their rejection of classical Marxism as well as working class leadership was based on the negative experience of revisionist communist parties in Europe, and the French Communist Party in particular.

The JVP leadership had little time for theory and they designed a fast track to ideological education through a set of five lessons on audiotape, commonly referred to as the 'Five Lessons'. Four of the five lessons of about an hour's duration each covered the political history of the country, the economic crisis, imperialism, Marxism and revolutionary struggle among other things; and the fifth was dedicated to 'Indian expansionism'. This term was in popular use in Marxist Leninist circles at the time and referred to the hegemonic ambitions of the Indian ruling elite and their tendency to lord it over India's weaker neighbours.

The JVP improvised on this concept of Indian expansionism to have its own version where the plantation workers who are of Indian origin (now referred to as Hill Country Tamils) were portrayed as the extended arm of Indian Expansionism. The JVP did this to take advantage of the lack of understanding between the Hill Country Tamils and the Sinhala peasantry in the Hill Country, caused by the deliberate isolation of the plantation workers from the rural Sinhala

population by the British plantation owners. The Hill Country Tamils had already been deprived of the Sri Lankan nationality by a cruel piece of legislation in 1947 and therefore their right to vote, and since then have been politically marginalized, where they were neglected even by the parliamentary left which was only interested in gathering votes. As a result, a section of the Hill Country Tamil elite which took advantage of the social and educational backwardness of the plantation workers dominated them through its near monopoly of the plantation trade unions.

The JVP concentrated mainly on gaining the support of the Sinhala youth to the point that it totally ignored the grievances of the national minorities, and went to the extent of denouncing the working class as filthy. The JVP's adventurist line cloaked in populist slogans and instant solutions to burning political problems appealed to the unsophisticated Sinhala youth, and the JVP, within the space of a few years was a major force among youth, including university students. The lack of Marxist literature in Sinhala and the decline in good reading habits worked in JVP's favour. But the JVP leadership did not realise that the rapid swelling of its ranks with Sinhala youth also meant that the agents of the state could infiltrate it, and that it could be forced into action even before it was ready.

The JVP tactically supported the SLFP-led United Front at the polls in 1970. Given the strong resentment against the UNP-led government of 1965-1970, the UF defeated the UNP to secure a strong majority in Parliament.

The JVP insurrection took place at a time when the people, despite disappointment with the performance of the UF in power, were still supportive of the government. The insurrection of 5th April 1971 was launched before the UF could complete a year in government, and only a few weeks after Wijeweera was arrested by the police during a political session with a JVP cell in Amparai in the east of the country. A series of apparently accidental explosions in JVP 'armament factories' in early 1970 also appear to have pushed the JVP into early action before the police could get at its leaders. However, the JVP strategy of capturing power by taking control of police stations and

blockading strategic roads was too simplistic and failed miserably in the face of a brutal counterattack by the state machinery, which was initially taken aback by the JVP assault on several police stations across the country.

The meagre political education of the cadres who were also lacking experience in mass political work was clear in the conduct of local leaders who held power in a few regions for a week or a little longer following the insurrection. Some declared themselves as the new state officials, with very much the same titles, but without any programme or plan for exercising revolutionary power. The JVP insurrection, perhaps dreamed of as an imitation of the Cuban revolution, turned out to be a rather poor parody and a nightmare. The number killed by the armed forces was under 1500 according to pro-government figures, but probably well over 10 000 but not as high as 25 000 or above as some opponents of the PA government would like to have.

In any event, responsibility for this large loss of life at the hands of a repressive state also lies with the JVP, which, with its leader in custody, launched a poorly conceived and badly delivered armed struggle, whose timing was seemingly determined by events outside the control of the JVP. Had the JVP been a mass organisation with allies among progressive forces and the working class, at least the scale of the loss of life could have been significantly reduced. Ideologically and organisationally, the JVP was not ready for a broad-based mass organisation or mass struggle. Its approach towards potential allies was conspiratorial, parochial and domineering.

2. THE REVIVAL: SHIFTING STRATEGIES

The PA government, and the SLFP leadership in particular, realised that punishing the JVP rank and file who were rounded up at the end of the insurrection was politically unwise and even suicidal. Hence, programmes were initiated for their rehabilitation. Several of the JVP leaders who had short prison sentences turned to the SLFP. A majority of the politburo of the JVP quit the party either to give up

active politics or to seek refuge in the capitalist political parties that they once opposed.

Rohana Wijeweera, who, along with a few others who were sentenced to long terms in prison, had their sentences commuted by the UNP, which returned to power in 1977 with an unprecedented 75% majority in Parliament. This was according to a deal that was concluded between the UNP leader JR Jayawardane and Wijeweera, which also meant that the UNP and the JVP had a happy co-existence for nearly three years. Thus, the JVP regrouped and reorganised with the blessings of the UNP, while in the meantime, encouraged by the UNP, it targeted the SLFP and its erstwhile parliamentary allies, the CP and the LSSP, by disrupting public meetings through violent means.

The JVP also had another interesting ally in Bala Tampoe, the veteran Trotskyite trade unionist with a strong mercantile white-collar trade union and links to one of the several rival 'Fourth Internationals'. Wijeweera, once denounced by Trotskyites as a 'Stalinist' of some kind, declared his conversion to Trotskyism on his first trip abroad since his release and the JVP was promptly baptised as a member organisation of that Fourth International. (It took nearly a quarter century for the Trotskyite umbrella organisation to realise that the JVP was after all a chauvinistic organisation and denounce it as one in 2002).

The JVP leadership flirted with some Tamil militant organisations that claimed to carry forward the struggle for an independent Tamil state, for which they claimed that the Tamil United Liberation Front secured a mandate at the 1977 elections but failed to fight for. While the JVP had no clear policy on the national question, it was instinctively opposed to secession or even federation, since the Sinhala electorate was hostile to either idea through decades of exposure to chauvinistic politics under the leadership of the UNP and the SLFP and the lack of resistance from the parliamentary left.

Wijeweera contested the Presidential Election of 1982, and during his campaign in Jaffna openly endorsed the right of the Tamil nationality

to secession. However, when the news appeared the following day in the Sinhala media, he reversed his stand to declare that he would not tolerate the division of the country under any condition. His performance at that election was not impressive, but ahead of the very weak performance of the two Trotskyite rivals, Dr Colvin R de Silva of the LSSP and Vasudeva Nanayakkara of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (a breakaway from the LSSP in the mid-1970s).

The JVP thus established itself as the largest left party in the South. This was made possible by the inability of the various factions of the JVP that broke away from it after the 1971 insurrection to regroup as a Marxist Leninist organisation. Individually, many JVP dissenters were attracted to Marxism-Leninism, but the political groups formed from among them, were organisationally weak, ideologically confused, and unwilling to unite, so that, with time, several ended up in NGOs, while many dropped out of politics altogether.

The JVP was still politically weak and had no credible alternative programme to salvage the country, which was blindly rushed along the path of globalisation through policies of economic liberalisation, privatisation and free trade. Its attitude to the national question became increasingly chauvinistic, especially after the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 and the rise of Tamil militancy with the backing of India.

Leaders such as Lionel Bopage who tried to persuade the JVP to give up its chauvinistic approach to the national question and the grievances of the Tamils left the JVP as their efforts were frustrated by Wijeweera. The JVP saw its chance for resurgence as a major political force in the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, signed in 1987, avowedly for the purpose of solving the national question, but really to provide India with a stranglehold on the defence and external affairs of the country. The clauses of the accord that implied Indian hegemony were critically commented upon by Sirima Bandaranaike, the leader of the SLFP; but the JVP was only concerned about its giving 'too much' to the Tamils through the setting up of a merged North-East Province that was intended to become an autonomous unit within Sri Lanka.

The JVP whipped up Sinhala chauvinistic sentiment in its opposition to the accord and was initially joined by the SLFP. Soon, the JVP saw an opportunity to monopolise that campaign, which also capitalised on resentment against the decade long UNP rule, and decided to work on its own agenda. A mass organisation called the Patriotic People's Movement (DJV) was formed and it was in the name of the DJV that many anti-democratic acts of violence were committed by the JVP.

The DJV carried out a viciously anti-Indian campaign targeting Indians and businesses with Indian links. Although there was consensus between the JVP and Prime Minister R. Premadasa against the presence of Indian forces in the country, something that they also shared with the LTTE, and each for a different reason, the relationship soured with Premadasa's election as President in 1989 (although, in fact, the JVP's call for a boycott of the presidential election helped Premadasa to win against Sirima Bandaranaike, since the call to boycott was heeded by opponents of Premadasa rather than his supporters).

The JVP, which was able to paralyse government for short periods by calling for a shut down of businesses, intensified its campaign against the government and increasingly indulged in terror against its opponents. Among the political leaders slain by the JVP was the popular Vijaya Kumaranatunge, the late husband of President Chandrika Kumaratunge, allegedly for supporting the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. (There was an attempt on the life of the Nava Sama Samaja Party leader Dr Karunaratne too for the same reason, although that did not deter Dr Karunaratne from warming up to the JVP a few years later in the hope of securing a seat in Parliament).

President Premadasa concentrated the full potential of the state for terror against the JVP and the result was the loss of life of well over 50 000, with some estimates going close to 100 000. Although most of the killings were by the Sri Lankan armed forces and state-sponsored unofficial militia, the JVP/DJV had a sizeable number of killings to answer for. They also caused much damage to public

property and used terror against not only its oppressor, but also those who dared to differ politically.

By 1989, the UNP regime had brutally annihilated the entire JVP politburo except for one member, the viciously chauvinistic Somawansa Amarasinghe who escaped to the UK. This was almost a death blow to the JVP, and it was only after the assassination of President Premadasa in May 1993 that the JVP re-emerged on the political scene.

3. CHANGE OF IDENTITY

Shortly after 1993, the emphasis of JVP shifted further towards chauvinism and capture of power by the parliamentary path. The JVP opted to capitalise on rather than counter the chauvinism cultivated in the Sinhala electorate by successive bourgeois governments. It had also built a sizeable trade union base at the expense of the two parliamentary left parties and, to some extent, the SLFP, whose trade unions had been rendered ineffective by the electoral humiliation in 1977.

Initially, the JVP, while playing on Sinhala chauvinist sentiments to gather votes, clung on to leftist slogans; and when the New Left Front, an alliance of six political parties and groups including the New Democratic Party and the NSSP, showed signs of emerging as a significant leftist force uniting the different nationalities, the JVP got into action to wreck it with the connivance of the careerist leader of the NSSP.

The JVP had a major handicap in electoral politics because of public resentment of its atrocities of 1987-89 and its targeting of not only the government that it was in conflict with but also several progressive elements opposed to the UNP. With a serious left political alternative pushed out of the way, the JVP went on to spruce its image as a democratic party of the left that has unconditionally shunned violence, and to refashion itself as the defender of national unity by combating the 'separatist terrorism' of the LTTE.

By 1998, the efforts of the SLFP-led Peoples Alliance government to militarily subdue the LTTE through its 'War for Peace' failed miserably. The people were tired of the war, and it became clear to the UNP and the SLFP, the main Sinhala chauvinist capitalist parties, that there was no prospect of defeating the LTTE militarily and that the economic crisis demanded a negotiated settlement. Their newly born desire for peace was, however, not matched by political work to combat chauvinism and to explain the case for a just solution based on the right of the Tamil nationality to self-determination. Resistance from right-wing pressure groups to any form of concession to the Tamil nationality persisted. These groups formed an alliance named Sihala Urumaya in the year 2000, which was renamed Jatika Hela Urumaya before the General Election of April 2004.

The JVP competed with the SU/JHU for the Sinhala chauvinist vote by campaigning that Tamil terrorism, if undefeated, will lead to the division of the country. When the LTTE agreed to drop its call for a separate Tamil state early in 2002, following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the UNP-led government that came to power in 2001, the JVP denounced the MoU, and objected to the recognition of traditional Tamil territories and any form of autonomy on that basis.

To add further credibility to its Sinhala chauvinist credentials, the JVP took copies of its election manifesto for the General Elections of 2002 to the chief priests of the elitist Buddhist chapters, namely Asgiriya and Malwatte, to be blessed by them, and worshipped the priests by falling at their feet. This well surpassed what Colvin R de Silva, one of the founders of the Trotskyite movement in Sri Lanka, did in 1970, when he carried flowers to the Dalada Maligawa (the famous Temple of the Tooth in Kandy) and paid homage to the priests.

Such was the opportunism of the JVP leaders, that they also took along a video camera crew and members of the media to give the event the maximum publicity in the national media. The JVP did not, however, fare too well at the polls in 2002. It realised that it could not win a sufficient number of seats in parliament by going it alone. At

the same time it had a difficulty on compromising with its potential ally the SLFP-led PA on the national question, since the PA, like the UNP, had publicly recognised the merged North-East as a traditional Tamil region, although the sincerity of the UNP and the SLFP in finding a just and lasting solution to the national question has always been questionable.

The JVP like the SU/JHU opposed the MoU and any form of negotiation with the LTTE, and argued that the problem should be solved by militarily defeating the LTTE. The SLFP and the JVP were unable to reach consensus on the approach to the national question almost until the eve of the General Election of April 2004, forced upon the country by President Kumaratunge, who dissolved Parliament by taking advantage of the failure of the UNP-led United National Front government to make headway with the peace talks. The United Peoples Freedom Alliance was formed with the JVP giving its half-hearted consent to talks, but not to autonomy for the Tamils.

The UPFA emerged the largest parliamentary group, but lacking an absolute majority, and the UPFA government took several months of horse-trading to secure a parliamentary majority. The JVP, however, cunningly handled the electoral process, based on a district-wise proportionate representation system combined with a preferential vote scheme, and secured 30 seats in Parliament, although the JVP vote alone would have entitled it to just half that number.

In government for the first time, the JVP found its allies among Sinhala chauvinist hardliners within the SLFP, including those on the right wing of the party and hard-line opponents of the LTTE such as Kadirgamar, the Foreign Minister. With their help, the JVP sought to block even the slightest conciliatory move of the President and the government towards the LTTE to resume the peace negotiations.

The relationship between the Indian ruling elite and the once bitterly anti-Indian JVP had changed beyond recognition since 1989. The Indian elite also had other things in mind. They chose to weaken the LTTE from within and by encouraging conflict between the Muslims

and the Tamils. This process got into full swing following the beginning of the peace talks between the UNF government and the LTTE. There were frequent clashes between Tamils and Muslims in the East, and a demand from some Muslim leaders to de-merge the North-East Province and to set up a Muslim autonomous unit in the south of the province. The JVP, cynically, encouraged the idea of a Muslim autonomous unit for some time, while opposing autonomy for the merged North-East.

Of late, the JVP has actively provoked Sinhala-Tamil clashes in the East in order to create a climate hostile to peace talks. The political line of the JVP now is to oppose the Tamil national cause, and the LTTE in particular. As a result, it has virtually abandoned its anti-imperialist posture and its earlier opposition to the US war in Iraq. Since the fall of the Saddam regime, the JVP has been quiet on the issue, while, locally and internationally, all opponents of US imperialism have escalated their criticism of US occupation of Iraq.

The JVP even went to the extent of commending the US for extending its proscription of the LTTE and, more remarkably, it has recently welcomed the presence US marines on Sri Lankan soil in the pretext of tsunami relief work and thanked the US for sending them to the country. Meanwhile its chauvinist conduct in its post-tsunami relief activities in the East has angered Muslims and Tamils alike.

The JVP had vigorously opposed various moves of earlier governments to privatise and 'restructure' state owned enterprises. Of late, it has left the protests to its trade union allies and student organisations while finding excuses to connive with its partner in power to facilitate privatisation of the distribution water, electricity and petroleum products behind the scenes. Privatisation of higher education is the next big betrayal on the agenda, but likely to be implemented in a very indirect way.

The change in social conduct of the JVP leaders over the past five years is perhaps symbolic of its ideological transformation. The JVP leadership had to its credit a simple life style from its early days though two insurrections and revival as a political force. The JVP leaders and cadres until 2002 were simply dressed and declared that,

if elected, they would use their allowances to serve the needy masses and not buy the duty-free luxury vehicles that MPs are entitled to. Now we see JVP leaders in designer clothes driven around in air-conditioned motorcars. It is too soon to say where it will all end, since it is only a short time since the JVP leadership tasted the good things in parliamentary political life.

The present JVP, devoid of principles and lofty ideals, and the bitterly chauvinistic Somawansa as the sole link with the party that launched the 1971 April insurrection, has less in common with the militant JVP of then than has Tony Blair's New Labour Party with the pre-World War II British Labour Party.

The JVP, merely to keep itself in power, is in the process of abandoning all pretences to being socialist or even anti-imperialist. The petit bourgeois JVP has now made a bid to becoming the main chauvinistic national bourgeois party. How long that will take depends on how well the SLFP performs on behalf of that class, which, like most national bourgeoisie of the post-colonial era, has irredeemably sold out to imperialism.

4. THE JVP AND THE SRI LANKAN LEFT

The left in Sri Lanka has not taken a uniform stand with respect to the JVP. The positions taken by the different parties regarding the JVP correspond to their respective ideological positions.

The 'old left', represented by the LSSP and the CP in Sri Lanka, has developed along two lines. Historically, the Trotskyite LSSP has been the electorally stronger, especially in the South. The Communist Party, besides regional strongholds, had a strong working class base because of its trade union work. Although the left was electorally weak in the North, the CP had a good mass base there. Following the split in the CP in 1963, its 'Moscow Wing' got stuck in the quagmire of parliamentary politics and gradually lost its mass base to become an appendage of the SLFP for all practical purposes. The LSSP suffered splits in 1964 and in the mid 1970s, neither of which seriously affected the party but, by partnership in government with the SLFP, it degenerated faster than the CP (Moscow Wing). Today

the two parties are allies of the SLFP, and entirely at its mercy to retain their parliamentary seats. Thus, despite their aversion for the JVP, they stay on in an alliance that includes the JVP, for fear that political wilderness faces them if they leave .

The Trotskyites who left the LSSP in the 1970s formed the NSSP, which underwent several splits in its short history. The NSSP and its factions have always harboured illusions about cleaning the JVP of its chauvinist ideology. In their view, the chauvinism of the JVP was not inherent to it but incidental. Even if there was basis for this assumption in 1971, events since 1987 could not have left cause for illusion. The JVP saw through the weakness of the NSSP and exploited it to wreck the prospect of a genuine left political alternative for the country.

Sections of the JVP that abandoned it after 1971 regrouped in various forms, but none as a political party. Several individuals and groups were attracted to Marxist Leninist ideology, but lacked the determination and drive to rebuild as an organisation. They thus squandered opportunities offered by popular opposition to war and to the economic policies of successive governments, as dictated by the IMF and the World Bank.

NGOs have taken advantage of the frustration of politically unorganised leftists and some left leaders who are desperate for funds. NGO funding has made such degenerates of some that they even reject the need for political work, while others get their priorities muddled and give first priority to NGO projects and second priority to political work to unite the left forces. While the leftists associated with the NGOs denounce the JVP for its chauvinism, they achieve very little through the NGOs, which rule out political work.

Marxist Leninists have consistently been cautious about the petit bourgeois and populist approach of the JVP, which was seriously lacking in Marxist analysis and increasingly opportunist in its approach. They have very much respect for the thousands of JVP youth with a spirit of sacrifice and thirst for social justice but misled and even betrayed by the JVP to lose their life in vain in struggles

that only helped to reinforce the repressive state machinery and to strengthen the grip of the imperialism and its local agents. They recognise that attraction to the JVP today is for less idealistic reasons, but many left-oriented Sinhala youth support the JVP, because they see it as the only viable force on the left. Marxist Leninists see the building of a credible left alliance for revolutionary mass politics rather than to win parliamentary seats as the only way to combat populism and political frustration leading to fascism.

5. THE JVP AND THE INTERNATIONAL LEFT

The JVP, despite its lack of ideological commitment to Marxism and its increasingly chauvinistic stand, certainly desires recognition by international 'Marxist' parties. In the 1970's it was hostile to the then socialist China because the Communist Party of China would not recognise it as a Marxist party. Its use of the Che Guevara label was not enough to endear it to Cuba either. Despite unfounded accusations about North Korean involvement in the JVP insurrection of 1971, there was no formal link between the JVP and the Korean Workers' Party. The JVP's negative approach towards the working class and its claim that the youth as a social group would make revolution could not have endeared the JVP to any party worthy of calling itself Marxist.

The strange triangle of political intrigue involving Rohana Wijeweera, the leader of the JVP, JR Jayawardane, the leader of the UNP, and Bala Tampoe, a politically bankrupt Trotskyite that made possible the resurrection of the JVP under Wijeweera's leadership, and the endorsement of the JVP in 1978 as a 'Marxist' party by a 'Fourth International'. This recognition really meant nothing as the JVP was more interested in chauvinistic politics.

The credibility of the JVP as a party inspired by Marxism was destroyed by its conduct in its 1987-89 insurrection. Its re-emergence as a significant political force in 1999 and its identification with Marxism in its mass rallies appear to have persuaded the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), the biggest parliamentary left party in Nepal, to invite the JVP to its National Congress in 2000. Marxist Leninists

and other leftists protested against this, and since then there has been no formal invitation to the JVP from any participants at that congress. The JVP, however, gathered some mileage out of that invitation to present itself as a Marxist party with international recognition.

The JVP during the past three years has descended to its lowest level as a chauvinistic opportunist organisation, without a shred of Marxist ideology to guide its theory or practice. It is under these circumstances that the Communist Party of India, which has formal ties with the revisionist CP of Sri Lanka, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which developed an affinity for the Sri Lankan revisionists less than four years ago, had invited the JVP to their respective National Congresses in March this year.

Varatharajan, the Secretary of the CPI(M) Tamilnadu when questioned by the BBC interviewer in the Tamil news programme *Tamilosai* went to the extent of defending the chauvinism of the JVP as a response to LTTE separatism. He saw anti-imperialist and socialist virtues in the JVP, something that the CPI(M) did not see in the JVP five years ago but sees after the rapid degeneration of the JVP since 2002.

The truth is that the CPI and the CPI(M) are communist parties only in name and would hardly qualify even as social democrats. They have no agenda besides parliamentary politics and use their shamelessly bureaucratic trade unions as a means to serve their parliamentary goals, which is clinging on to power in the states of West Bengal and Tripura, and regaining Kerala. The leadership is keen to share power at the centre with the Congress Party in the pretext of defending 'secularism', while the two parties are in fact serving the cause of Indian hegemony by their hostility towards national liberation struggles within India and in several other countries, including Sri Lanka.

Their attraction for the JVP is that it is now the darling of the Indian establishment, owing to its bitter hostility towards the LTTE and to the peace process. The fact that the CPI and the CPM recognise the JVP as one of their kind is used by sworn enemies of Marxism

among Sinhala chauvinists as well as by Tamil nationalists to identify the JVP as a classical Marxist party and thereby discredit Marxism.

The genuine Marxist forces of India who broke off with the CPI(M) in 1967 and suffered ruthless suppression by the Indira Gandhi regime in the 1970s, and now reorganised as Marxist-Leninist and Maoist communist parties and groups, have never approved of the JVP. It is heartening to note that they are steadily growing in strength in several states in India and are in the process of building broad-based revolutionary unity against imperialist, bourgeois and feudal oppression.

It is particularly important to keep the international left and liberation movements across the world informed about the true nature of the JVP. Criticism of the JVP from a Marxist perspective is particularly important, since much of the criticism of the JVP in the Sri Lankan media is based on its conduct during the two insurrections. The mainstream media portray the JVP as an insurrectionary force, and by implication revolutionary and Marxist. This is a deliberate effort to discredit Marxism by attributing Marxist characteristics to the JVP while attacking it for its misdeeds.

Thus, facts about the JVP and Marxist analyses of its conduct should be placed before the international left movement for scrutiny. Exposure of the JVP and its new opportunist allies like the CPI and CPI(M) will help to dispel illusions about the JVP among sections of the youth and oppressed Sinhalese masses. The genuine left among the Sinhalese should match its criticism of the JVP with concrete action to build an effective mass political left alternative.

NDP pays homage to veteran Comrade Sithamparam

Comrade S Sithamparam, a veteran of the communist movement and long standing Party activist passed away in Kilinochchi at the age of 85. Comrade Sithamparam, was born in Kankesanthurai in 1920, and was attracted to the Communist Party as a youth when the Party was founded in the North during World War II. He remained loyal to his communist ideals and lived as a good communist until he breathed his last on 26th March 2005.

A native of Kankesanthurai, he played a leading role in developing the Party in Kankesanthurai. In a climate of caste oppression and untouchability that prevailed at the time, he developed as a class conscious militant comrade. He placed dedication and trust in Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and was therefore a communist fighter in several respects.

He served as a leading member of the Mass Movement for the Elimination of Untouchability of 1966-1971, guided by the Marxist Leninist Communist Party, and opened the battle front of the famous Maviddapuram temple entry struggle by submitting to the Government Agent, the temple trustee and the Inspector of Police an appeal by the Kankesanthurai branch of the Movement, made on behalf of the people of the oppressed castes of the region.

Comrade Sithamparam was a true Marxist Leninist in word and in deed and integrated himself closely with the activities of the NDP even in his old age. He was among the six veteran communist

militant comrades to be honoured at the 25th Anniversary of the NDP held in Jaffna in 2003.

Representatives of the Party Central Committee and the Northern Regional Committee paid their respect to Comrade Sithamparam at his funeral in Kilinochchi.

NDP pays homage to Comrade Chandrakumar

Comrade Perumal Chandrakumar (11.11.1969 – 18. 2. 2005), joined the Sri Lanka Democratic Youth Movement in 1992 and the NDP in 1995. He was a member of the Hill Country Regional Committee of the Party. Until his death of sudden illness, he played an active and inspiring role in the struggle of the hill country people against oppression. A teacher by profession, he taught with dedication, honesty and sincerity. He was also an effective political activist and a brilliant orator.

We give below the tribute by the NDP Central Committee.

Revolutionary tribute to the late Comrade Chandrakumar

The departure of Comrade Perumal Chandrakumar, who for the past thirteen years carried out ceaseless struggle for the liberation of the suppressed people, is a great loss to the Party, the people of the Hill Country and communist fighters throughout the world. On becoming a member of the Party within three years of joining the Sri Lanka Democratic Youth Movement, he carried forward intense struggles, and developed his personality as a communist to become a member of the Hill Country Regional Committee. He participated in the national congresses of the Party and made a solid contribution to the

development of theoretical and practical work programmes for the liberation of the oppressed people of the whole country.

Comrade Chandrakumar contested the Provincial Council elections according to Party decision. He was confronted with various challenges which he courageously overcame. He severely oppose every action that was hostile to the working people and acted firmly to defeat it. He proved his mettle in the demonstration in Talawakelle town against the Bindunuweva massacre. He acted skilfully when the police sought to suppress it and was at the fore to protect the people and party leaders.

He was well aware of the negative aspects of the Upper Kotmale Project and worked in collaboration with the people's movement against the Upper Kotmale Project. He participated keenly in the signature campaign and protest demonstrations against the scheme.

He worked with dedication to set up a broad-based teachers' organisation under the leadership of the NDP and worked enthusiastically to build the New Democratic Teachers Union. He was also keen to impress upon the teachers the position of the NDP that the problems of the teachers should be approached from a social scientific point of view, and to develop that approach. He proposed programmes to achieve that purpose at meetings in Vavunia, Jaffna, Ragala and Hatton. He critically ridiculed organisations functioning under the patronage of reactionary trade unions in the hill country.

Comrade Chandrakumar understood the negative tendencies of the life of isolation under conditions of globalisation and privatisation, in which trash from India was making people mentally ill, and he developed a character that befitted a great communist and succeeded in putting it into practice. He achieved within his life of 35 years what would have taken a long life. As he integrated himself with the lives of the oppressed people, he was also subject to the perils of poor hygiene faced by the hill country plantation workers.

Comrade Chandrakumar, who had the wide range of great qualities of a communist, only days before he fell ill, proposed a scheme for carrying forward organisational work in the Hatton-Talawakelle

region and addressed a meeting, introducing the comrades that he had cultivated.

Comrade Chandrakumar whose memory is deeply etched in the hearts of Party comrades, has, through binding himself closely with the life of struggle of the people of the hill country, has won a place in the hearts of all.

Our revolutionary tribute to him will be to continue in the journey towards the goals for which he dedicated his life by transforming our sorrow into strength.

Central Committee of the New Democratic Party

18. 02. 2005

Press Communiqué of the NDP

Comrade SK Senthivel, in his communiqué to the press on 13th March 2005 in connection with recent incidents of rape and murder in the North-East, made the following observation:

It is three years since the Memorandum of Understanding and the Ceasefire Agreement came into effect. During this period, members of the armed forces have continued to commit acts of rape against women in regions under the control of the Army. In some instances, women have been raped and murdered. The incidents of rape by members of the armed forces last week in Neerveli and Thunnalai-Kalikai are a continuation of this trend. The New Democratic Party strongly condemns the two incidents. At the same time, the Party wishes to point out that the main cause for such incidents of rape is the existence of large and small military camps and check points amid residences of the people and that it is essential that they are removed.

The communiqué further added that, recently, in Mannar, a student has been forcefully subject to sexual abuse. Prior to that, in Vavuniya, a woman was raped and murdered. There have been many incidents of sexual violence in the East, which have not been reported in the press. They have now occurred in Neerveli and Thunnalai-

Kalikai. The reason for such incidents to take place is the existence of large and small military camps and check points amid settlements, residences, work centres, schools and other public places. As a result, women, in particular, face the risk of rape and harassment at any time. Also, the students and the people go through their daily life in fear and panic. Besides, the existence of the armed forces amid residences seems to encourage social misconduct and cultural degeneration. Also accidents involving military vehicles lead to tension and conflict between the population and the armed forces. Hence it is essential that large and small military camps and check points should be moved out of residential areas and areas where people move about. The only way to ensure that is to find immediate means to solve the national question that has been transformed into war. It is essential that the negotiations that have been allowed to drift are resumed without delay and a political solution found thereby. The Party points out that it is only when military positions are removed from among residential areas and democracy and normal life are restored that people, especially women, can live free and without fear.

SK Senthivel

General Secretary, New Democratic Party

13. 3. 2005

Seminar on the Current Political Situation

A political seminar under the heading “The Political Situation after the Tsunami and International Interference” was held at the Auditorium of the Multi-Purpose Co-operative Society Building in Jaffna at 3.30 p.m. on 20th March 2005. The seminar, chaired by Comrade K Kathirgamanathan, Secretary, NDP Northern Region, was addressed by Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary, New Democratic Party, Comrade K Thanigasalam, Member, Politburo of the New Democratic Party, and M Thiyagarajah, a humanitarian trade union activist. The meeting was well attended and the addresses were followed by a lively discussion.

[The address by Comrade Senthivel is included in this issue.]

Convention of Activists of the People's Campaign Against the Upper Kotmale Project

The co-ordinators of the People's Campaign Against the Upper Kotmale Project organised a meeting of campaign activists on 10th April 2005 at the Christian Workers Fellowship Hall, Hatton. The meeting was attended by over five hundred and included the following parties and groups:

1. The New Democratic Party
2. The Nava Samasamaja Party–New Left Front
3. Democratic Left Front
4. National Union of Workers
5. Ceylon Workers' Alliance
6. Western Province People's Front
7. Railway Workers' Alliance
8. The January Movement
9. The New Cultural Organisation
10. Puthiya Malaiyagam
11. Sri Lanka Democratic Youth Front

An Executive Committee of sixteen was elected, with Comrades E Thambiah as Organiser, Comrades L Seneviratne and Comrade P Prabakaran as Co-ordinators and S Shanmugarajah as Treasurer.

The Convention made the following declaration:

The Upper Kotmale Electrical Power Generation Project to be launched at the heart of the Nuwara Eliya District in the central highlands and endowed with great natural splendour is a scheme of aggression funded by aid from the Japanese government. This project will lead to disastrous consequences for the plantation workers of the Hill Country and for the Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim people of Sri Lanka.

This project will be a cause for the destruction of natural environment and human life.

This project, which is potentially disastrous in the social, cultural, political, geographical, biological and economic spheres, should definitely be defeated.

This Conference has determined that the struggle for the total abandonment of this project will be carried forward through the united struggle of the Hill Country Tamils.

It warmly invites all progressive and democratic forces to join in the People's Campaign Against the Upper Kotmale Project to fight against this project, defeat it, and ensure victory to the people.

It invites all political parties, trade unions, voluntary organisations, youth associations, media persons, educationists, teachers and students to undertake the historic responsibility of defeating this Project which is a major threat to the existence of the Hill Country Tamils.

The Convention adopted the following resolutions to carry forward the campaign against the Upper Kotmale Project.

1. The Convention resolves to carry out a house-to-house propaganda campaign to educate the people about the disasters of the project.
2. The Convention calls upon all political parties, trade unions and other organisations to take up the protest against this project in their May Day rallies.
3. The Convention resolves to hold protest meetings against the project across the country from May 2nd to May 15th.
4. The Convention resolves to observe a Protest Day on the 15th of May, the day of demise of Martyr Sivanu Letchumanan.
5. The Convention resolves to carry out a variety of agitations in Colombo.

6. The Convention resolves to carry out pressure campaigns in Sri Lanka as well as in Japan in order to get cancelled the loan facilities offered by the Japan International Agency Bank.
7. The Convention resolved to carry out international campaigns of ceaseless agitation through the parent organisation as well as by its International Branch that has been set up in London.

Revolutionary May Day 2005 of the New Democratic Party

The New Democratic Party will mark May Day 2005 in Jaffna in the north and at Ragala Hill Country with processions and public meetings.

The May Day procession and meeting in Jaffna will emphasise the following matters:

The setting up of a joint mechanism to carry out tsunami relief in the North-East

Opposing to chauvinistic oppression

Demanding workers' rights

Demanding an end to privatisation

The May Day procession and meeting in Ragala will emphasise the following matters:

Opposition to the Upper Kotmale Project

Emphasising the rights of plantation workers

Opposing to chauvinistic oppression

Emphasising the revolutionary path for the struggle of the Hill Country Tamils

The Party warmly invites its supporters and all other progressive sections of the masses to join in the processions and the meetings.

Sri Lankan Events

Saved by the Tsunami, Sunk by Tsunami Aid?

The UFPA government was facing a dire financial crisis in December 2004. The prospect of steadying the tottering economy using the four and a half billion dollar foreign aid package pledged by the international community for rebuilding the war-wrecked economy seemed bleak, since the 'aid' package was tied to progress with the peace process. With the JVP, controlling 30 seats in Parliament, and a section of the SLFP hostile to meaningful peace negotiations, including Anura Bandaranayake and Laxman Kadirgamar, the government was not merely unable to restart the stalled peace talks but actually contributing to the deterioration of the situation.

The unwillingness of the government to negotiate with the LTTE on the basis of the Interim Self Governing Authority proposed by the LTTE as the basis for resuming the peace talks has only helped to harden attitudes on both sides, and the government has not been able to speak with one voice on the question of resuming peace negotiations. Meanwhile, the Tamil-Muslim conflict in the East had subsided, with the government paying more attention to buying Sri Lanka Muslim Congress MPs and, in the process, weakening the SLMC and causing bitter clashes within the Muslim community in the East. Meantime, fratricidal killings within the Tamil community resumed in a big way.

Friction between the JVP and the SLFP came into the open with public statements of disagreement on various matters ranging from power sharing within the government to policy matters. The JVP leaders made remarks harshly critical of President Kumaratunga who in turn challenged the JVP to quit if they do not like to stay in

government. It was an uneasy alliance which was unable to keep any of its election promises. The popularity of the government was on the wane, but the UNP was hardly the alternative.

The UNP had no policy alternatives, and its criticism of the government's handling of the peace process lacked substance, since it was the UNP that was responsible for the stalling of the peace process. Meantime, President Kumaratunga's government started targeting individuals in the UNP. Legal action was initiated against former ministers for corruption while one prominent MP from the UNP was made minister even before he crossed the floor. The UNP was confounded by this attack and, rather than address the real issues facing the people, has among its main targets the release of former minister SB Dissanayake who was handed a stiff two-year sentence for 'contempt of court'.

It was in a political climate where both government and opposition were totally lost amid deepening political and economic crises that the tsunami struck the island. The government, emboldened by the generosity of the international community and the offer of hundreds of million dollars as aid for rebuilding the tsunami-ravaged economy, started to play politics. Sadly, both government and opposition were insensitive to the implications of foreign aid for the sovereignty of the country.

The US which was chastised for being mean with tsunami aid, suddenly became generous towards Sri Lanka and the next thing that happened was that US marines were in Sri Lanka in the name of relief work. Although 500 servicemen were said to be involved, the actual number was probably several hundred more. Public resentment about the presence of US troops was given expression by only the left organisations outside parliament. The US Marines left in February, to be replaced by intelligence personnel and other subversive elements. The Indian elite are concerned about the US interest in Sri Lanka. However, they seem to assert themselves through indirect pressure on the government.

The government used the opportunity to marginalise its political rivals and to weaken the LTTE by monopolising tsunami relief. But the clumsy way in which it handled relief work exposed its incompetence, corruption and outright discrimination. The Muslims of the east coast, who were among the worst hit, received minimal relief. Even along the south coast and the affected portion of the west coast, which received more attention from the government, there are charges of discrimination on political lines as well as on ethnic basis.

Relief to Tamils, especially in LTTE-controlled areas, was initially from voluntary contributions and through NGOs. The LTTE had agreed to co-operate with the government to implement relief work and consented to a joint mechanism for the purpose. The government has yet to agree and is under pressure from the JVP to resist the joint mechanism.

The JVP has also tried to use the opportunity to settle Sinhalese in the tsunami affected regions with predominantly Muslim and Tamil populations, and this has met with stiff resistance from local communities. But the JVP has not given up on its efforts and is using its power as a member of a ruling coalition to achieve its goal.

The initial decision of the government to prohibit building within 200 m from the coastline was revised to 100 m. However, blind imposition of the rule has led to local resentment, especially in areas where it is impractical. There is also anger about government allowing existing buildings within the proscribed zone with partial damage to remain but not rebuilding, as this will benefit tourist hotels and big businesses but not the poor. It is also justifiably feared that the big operators of tourism will eventually lay claim to large stretches of beach for themselves while those who depend on the sea for a livelihood will face restrictions.

Much was said soon after the tsunami that the national tragedy will unite the people and that the country will be rebuilt. But within a few weeks, chauvinism and political and bureaucratic cynicism exposed their teeth. Big businesses controlling the finance sector and the media used the aftermath of the tragedy for their own publicity. Local

NGOs have a field day with funding channelled through international sponsors. Meanwhile, local construction businesses and technical experts are queuing up for their cut in the tsunami relief spin-off.

The tragedy has only worsened the prospects for an early peaceful solution to the national question. The Ceasefire Agreement is increasingly observed in breach by both parties. The lack of enthusiasm of the government about the peace talks seems to be a signal to encourage acts of provocation by mischievous elements within the armed forces. The recent surge in conflicts between the armed forces and the public in the north is not a healthy sign; and public anger against callous conduct by members of the armed forces needed no prompting by the LTTE.

In the east, the Karuna faction that split from the LTTE has received encouragement from the government. Since the tsunami, several leading members of the LTTE, including its Batticaloa-Amparai regional commander, were killed, with the Karuna faction claiming responsibility; and opponents of the LTTE in the EPDP, EPRLF and the Karuna faction, which are supportive of the government, have also been killed in matching numbers. The LTTE's charge of collusion between the armed forces and the Karuna faction gained credibility following evidence that the Karuna faction operates from army controlled territory.

Sadly, no parliamentary political party is alive to the danger of the sovereignty of the country being subverted in the name of rebuilding the country. The US is making its bid for a permanent military presence in the island. India, which concluded an unequal trade pact with Sri Lanka a few years ago, is being pressurised by the Sri Lankan government to conclude a defence agreement. India has not shown much haste, partly because of internal political wrangling, but is eventually likely to secure a deal to its benefit. Japan, meanwhile, is exerting pressure on several economic fronts, including the environmentally hazardous Upper Kotmale hydropower project that threatens the livelihood of a sizeable section of the Hill Country Tamils and its existence as a community.

The euphoria due to the increase in foreign currency reserves by the inflow tsunami relief funds and the temporary arrest of the foreign exchange rate of the Rupee is now gone. Realisation is just sinking in that only part of the over a billion dollars pledged as aid for tsunami relief would arrive, and much of it with strings attached. In any event, reliance on foreign aid has for long been the bane of the national economy.

The tsunami gave the government a short reprieve, and if the post-tsunami relief work was carried out in a spirit of reconciliation rather than to gain political mileage, there may have been a chance for a fresh start in the right spirit. The tsunami was, however, not without winners among the greedy businessmen, corrupt politicians and government officers, and NGO officials. But among the affected people, there have only been losers, and to that list should be added the peace process and the sovereignty of the country.

International Events

The Passing Away of Pope John Paul II

Catholics across the world mourned the passing away of Pope John Paul II. The Pope assumed office when the East European socialist governments were in crisis. The crisis, in part due to resentment about domination by the Soviet Union, which was in competition with the US for global domination, led to the rejection of socialism.

The Pope encouraged the right-wing, anti-government trade union movement, Solidarity (which was also a beneficiary of the CIA), in his native Poland by expressing his moral support. It is, however, wrong to claim that the fall of socialist governments in East Europe was due to him, despite his significant role.

On many issues, his views were diametrically opposed to those of his short-lived and much liked predecessor whose name he took. With John Paul II as Pope, the Vatican took a hard conservative position on divorce, abortion and birth control, and the position of women in religion and society. His conservatism also obstructed Liberation Theology, which sought common ground between Marxism and Christianity in the struggle against oppression in Latin America.

Yet, despite his rejection of Marxism, he denounced the US embargo against Cuba and criticised imperialist globalisation. It is too early for Vatican to be on the anti-imperialist front with the oppressed masses. However, it soon realised that the interests of US imperialism and those of the Catholic Church did not coincide once the 'common enemy' was subdued. Right wing evangelical Christian organisations, which were close to the US imperialist establishment, were busy undermining the authority of the Catholic Church everywhere, so that siding with US imperialism in the era of globalisation would

have only further isolated Vatican from the world's Roman Catholic community.

For whatever reason, in the past decade, the Pope has stood by the people struggling against imperialism on key issues and should be commended for it.

Bihar & Jharkhand: Electoral Snub to Indian Revisionists

The recent elections to the state assemblies of Bihar and Jharkhand only helped to expose the divisions within the ruling alliance at the centre. The BJP and its allies were the main beneficiaries, and were able to form the government in Jharkhand, while a government could not be formed in Bihar.

While in some parts of Jharkhand the Maoist Communist Party effectively campaigned to boycott polling, in some others the CPI(ML) performed well to win a seat and come a close second in two others. The revisionist CPI and CPI(M) performed badly. In Bihar, the CPI(ML) won seven seats and outperformed the revisionists with the CPI winning one seat so that, even electorally, the CPI(ML) is stronger than the revisionists put together in each of the two states.

Lebanon: A Slap in the Face for Bush

The former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri was killed by a car bomb on 14th February. George Bush instantly accused Syria, and insisted on the immediate withdrawal of Syrian troops stationed in Lebanon, although reputed observers suspect that the bombing was the handiwork of Israeli intelligence. Well-orchestrated anti-Syrian demonstrations on the streets of Beirut demanded the resignation of the government and immediate withdrawal of Syrian troops in Lebanon.

The US pushed through the UN resolution 1559 calling for a Syrian withdrawal and militia disarmament. The purpose was to portray Syria as an aggressor, whereas Syrian military presence was by

national consensus under the 1989 Ta'if Accord that ended Lebanon's 1975-90 civil war that killed 150 000. Thus, Syria agreed to a troop pullout in time for the elections in May, but not immediately.

A massive counter-demonstration by half a million people (one seventh of the Lebanese population) on 8th March in support of Syria put things in perspective, and Premier Karami who was forced to resign following the US orchestrated demonstrations was reappointed and the Syrian position on troop pullout was accepted. Thus, an attempted coup by the US to destabilise Lebanon failed, but much depends on the outcome of the forthcoming elections in May. The big question remains: When will Israel pull out of occupied territory in Palestine?

North Korea: Calling the American Bluff

North Korea announced in February that it has nuclear warheads, thus calling the bluff of the US, which has used all manner of threats against it. It also declared that they were developed to defend itself against US attack and that no negotiation on the nuclear programme is possible until US President George Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice withdraw their statement that North Korea is a terrorist state.

Latin America: Bold and Defiant

Venezuela: In March 2005 President Hugo Chavez declared in public that the path to a new, better and possible world, is not capitalism but socialism. This supplements his earlier comments at the World Social Forum (WSF) in Brazil in January, and is seen by political analysts as part of increasingly overt agitation for socialism by Chavez.

Uruguay: Uruguay swore in its first leftist President Tabare Vazquez on 1st March, who shortly after restored full diplomatic relations with Cuba, and announced that he would re-establish, maintain, and

strengthen diplomatic relations with all South American countries, and work for regional integration.

Bolivia: President Carlos Mesa Gisbert resigned on 7th March after taking office one and a half years ago, following the fall of the hated and murderous regime of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. Mesa, then Vice President, took over and pledged to act to reclaim for Bolivia its natural resources, social, economic and political reform and bring to justice the killers of civilians during in the October 2003 protest that put an end to the earlier regime. Mesa's compromise with the multi-nationals and the Bolivian elite led to protests and strikes. However, his resignation was unexpected and could have been under right-wing pressure for not being repressive enough. The future for Bolivia depends on how well the masses are mobilised by the left, which still needs to draw up a common agenda.

Guatemala: Over 25 000 farmers, workers and indigenous people, in Guatemala City and across Guatemala, began a day of protest against the ratification of a Free Trade Agreement with the US. The protests intensified after its ratification by the Legislature on 11th March and police shooting killed two protesters on 16th March. More protests are planned, as there is strong opposition to the Agreement, and there are also plans to challenge its ratification in the nation's courts.

Iraqi Elections: the American Farce and After

The US media claim that the Iraqi elections of 30th January were democratic, giving us more reason for not taking them seriously. The Sunni Muslims were boycotting, some Shiite clerics did not want to miss out on the opportunity for access to power, and the Kurdish allied of the aggressor wanted to capitalise on the boycott by the Sunnis. After two months of wrangling Iraq is to end up with a Kurdish president, probably a Shiite premier, continuing Sunni resentment, and a 120 000 strong US occupying force still in place and unlikely to withdraw.

The outright rejection of the US favourite, interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi does not mean that the Iraqis can be rid of the Americans in a hurry. Aggressors rarely leave; they are driven out. Nevertheless, a handful of sectarian elements taking advantage of Sunni frustration to incite anti-Shiite violence will hurt anti-imperialist unity and could lead to the fragmentation of the country, much to the advantage of the US imperialists.

It is important that the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle is with the forces of Iraqi unity and is not perverted by fanatical forces. The reality is that the resistance to occupation is still spontaneous and lacks coherence. Thus, the emergence of a united front to lead the mass struggle against aggression is a necessary precondition for liberation, and can emerge only in the course of struggle. In any event, US occupation will cost the imperialists dearly, and the cost will escalate by the day.

Fire churning from within*

Pannaamaththuk Kaviraayar

Tea flourishes and thrives
on the highlands manured by
the dead bodies of great grandfathers, grandfathers,
children and women buried beneath.

The hands of those who poured sweat and blood
on the hilly woodlands ... no, no, they are wanted no more.

Driven away from the roll call site,
they are now out in the street.

The tender descendents of those who made the roads
arrived like the smoke exhaled by the factory chimney
to roam like the spirits of the dead
on the roadside ... the bazaar ... the street junctions.

The infants, who once leant against the beautiful breasts of their mothers
covered by tender fresh cloth
have now been thrown on the roadside
to suffer a plight worse than a dog's, as prey to the cannibals.

The faint moan of the meek was inaudible
on the streets that the honourable live –
only their self respect went cheap.

Women with nothing else to sell
sell their bodies
to stave off hunger.

To demonstrate their chastity
by hanging or drowning themselves in the well –
are they a mere few in number?

They let another touch their body
before Yama could take away their lives.

The tender femininity
whose tender fingers plucked tender leaf
is falling charred in the street.

Damn the society of the honourable.
A fire is churning in the belly.

*[*Plantation workers thrown out of the plantations in 1973-74 were reduced to begging.]*

Epitaph

On the Soldier Fallen at the Time of the Signing of the Armistice

by

Grigor Vitez

(B. 1911, Croatia, Yugoslavia)

The news flow swifter than the bird,
and swifter than the wind,
and swifter than the lightening.
The ether vibrated happiness.
But the news came late.

For those fallen it was much too late.

And had it come an hour earlier,
he would now be alive,
shaking hands with comrades – laughing;
and had it come a day earlier,
many more would be alive;
and had it come a much earlier,
still more would be alive.

They should have sent the message much, much earlier, before there was the need for any dead.

(From *An Anthology of Modern Yugoslav Poems*,
Ed. Janko Lartvin, London: John Calder, 1962)

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