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QUATERLY THEORETICAL ORGAN OF N.D.P, SRI LANKA

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THE PRICE PAID FOR THE OPEN ECONOMY

In 1977, the country was told that the newly elected UNP government would transform Sri Lanka into another Singapore. The new economic policy was put into place in 1978, and one part of the promise was kept, by which the country became a police state, even more brutal than the one that it sought to emulate. The anticipated prosperity following the policy of open economy, liberalised imports and privatisation, along with the sweat shops in the newly created Free Trade Zones that offered cheap labour under conditions of near slavery did not materialise.

The imperialists encouraged the government to liberalise trade and to privatise national assets. Loans were given in plenty for a variety of projects. Emigration of labour, with damaging social consequences, was encouraged, but to some extent eased the pressure of unemployment and brought in foreign currency at levels comparable with major traditional exports. Along with this emerged a new class of entrepreneurs and a new consumer culture. The transformation of chauvinistic national oppression into fully-fledged war from 1983 too created wealth for a section of the ruling classes. The increase in money circulation facilitated by borrowing from foreign sources, the cash generated by the sale of state owned and state controlled assets, and remittances from overseas employment created a sense of euphoria that took time to evaporate.

Sri Lanka soon became one of the biggest debtor countries of the world, thanks to liberalisation and war. The Free Trade

Zones that initially appeared to boost the economy proved to be a means by which foreign investors circumvented restrictions on their national export limits. Several investors wound up in the wake of the Asian economic crisis of 1997. The dream of becoming a Singapore ended up as a nightmare. The country is now facing economic ruin, and the war simply aggravated and accelerated the impending crisis.

It is not possible to isolate any aspect of the current crisis from the change in economic policy that came into effect in 1978. National oppression too was a part of the scheme and diverted public attention from an economic policy that led to neo-colonial control of the country. Today the government is desperate to sell the remaining few assets to fund its ballooning budget deficit. It is under pressure from foreign moneylenders to adopt a policy of 'austerity' for the masses. The severely run down school and university educational systems and health services are the next in line for the economic axe.

It is correct and necessary to protest about increase in prices, about the decline in the quality of services and about the fall in quality of life and other things that affect day-to-day life. But that alone is insufficient. One cannot oppose privatisation and the sale of national assets to multinational companies without being clear about the political issues underlying them. Thus, until the people clearly see the policy of privatisation and liberalisation and the war of oppression as the agents of misery that reduced the country to its present plight and are mobilised to act to reverse them, such protests will be of limited substance.

It is time for a politicised agenda of anti-imperialist and anti-chauvinist protest to replace the apolitical and opportunistic protests that have evolved over the past decade or so. Thus, it is the urgent duty of the leftist, democratic, progressive and patriotic forces of the country to unite and give leadership in salvaging the country from the deepening crisis brought about by the twin policy of open economy and national oppression.

SRI LANKAN EVENTS

Comrade Shan Remembered

The Sanmugathasan Centre for Marxist Studies commemorated the eighth death anniversary of the late Comrade N. Sanmugathasan at a well-attended meeting in Colombo. The occasion was marked by the re-launching of a publication on the Marxist theory of the state in Tamil by Comrade Shan. Comrade E. Thambiah addressed the gathering on the contributions of Comrade Shan to the left movement and the significance of the booklet at the time of publication and at present. Professor S. Sivasegaram chaired the meeting, which was conducted in Tamil and Sinhala, with Sinhala and Tamil translations provided by Comrade Sivagurunathan.

The launch of the booklet was followed by the Sanmugathasan memorial lecture entitled "The National Question and the Sri Lankan Left" delivered by Dr Sumanasiri Liyanage. A lively discussion followed the talk, which critically assessed the role of the left in the national question, with important contributions by Comrades Vasudeva Nanayakkara and Patrick Fernando among others. The meeting closed with a vote of thanks delivered by Comrade D. Satchithanathan.

The Floating Dollar and the Sinking Masses

The rupee has been devalued thrice over a period of three months, with the last devaluation in the name of 'the floatation of the dollar'. The 'floatation' led to immediate speculation that caused the US Dollar to soar to an exchange rate of Rs 100 to

a US Dollar, representing a 50 % rise in the value of the dollar over 12 months. The dollar subsequently settled closer to the Rs 90 mark, but an upward trend seems inevitable.

The government claimed that the decision was in the interest of the economy and that it will make Sri Lankan exports more competitive. But there were few takers for that story. The prevailing view is that the decision was taken under pressure from the IMF, which has for some time been applying pressure on the government to devalue the rupee to Rs 100 or more to a US Dollar. The uncertainty about the exchange rate of the Rupee against a background of 'market forces' deciding the worth of the local currency, has adversely affected the import trade, and sharp rises in the price of fuel, transport and essential goods are imminent.

A Remarkable Upsurge

The students of the University of Jaffna marked a Festival of Tamil Upsurge in the University Campus in January. They purpose of the occasion was to demand that the government acknowledged the unilateral ceasefire of the LTTE and negotiated with the latter to bring the war to an early end and solve the national question on the basis of the principle of self-determination.

Their demand for ceasefire, peace talks and solution to the national question on the basis of self-determination won tremendous support among the masses of Jaffna. Despite efforts by a Tamil political party with government patronage and the army high command to prevent people from attending, the function was well attended, much to the fury of the government, which accused the students of being manipulated by the LTTE. The New Democratic Party was foremost in encouraging and actively supporting the students' campaign.

Another significant feature was that the students emphasised a solution on the basis of self-determination, in contrast to the secessionist line once put forward by the Tamil militant organisations, of which many now reject the right to secession. In ideological terms, this was a victory for the NDP, which has over the past two decades creatively developed and campaigned for the principle of self-determination as the basis of the solution to the national question.

The success of the event in Jaffna led to similar events throughout the North-East which told the government in no uncertain terms the desire of the Tamil people for peace with honour and justice.

To Talk or Not to Talk

The government is now running short of excuses to refuse to talk to the LTTE. All manner of interpretations have been given for the LTTE ceasefire and every possible reason given by several cabinet ministers including the Prime Minister for not talking to the LTTE. The government is under pressure from its 'aid donor' nations to end the war, and it is also clear now that there is no way of 'progressing to peace through war'. Yet, there are other pressures against peace. The enemies of peace in the two capitalist parties and the chauvinistic Sihala Urumaya and the JVP are not encouraging a climate for peace.

Chauvinistic attitudes cultivated over two decades are hard to eradicate, but they need to be confronted and overcome. Hesitation by the government is being taken advantage of by India to sabotage the Norwegian initiative so that it can impose its will on its southern neighbour. The recent offer by Pakistan to supply arms on long-term credit will again help to prolong the war. But to what extent it will deter India's efforts for hegemony is another matter.

India's contribution to the banning of the LTTE by the British government was no less important than that of the Sri Lankan government. Whether the Sri Lankan government will take advantage of the ban to escalate the war or to pursue peace is to be seen in the coming months.

In any event, failure to settle the national question by negotiations will make this country the playground for regional and international power rivalry.

Undermining Free Education

Various opposition groups have claimed that, owing to pressure from the IMF, the government is planning to scrap free education. It is said that the club of European aid donor nations too demanded such a move. But the government has denied this.

The truth is that free education and higher education have already been systematically undermined over the past two decades by under-funding, encouragement of private education under the guise of 'International Schools' and private universities in the form of private collaboration with foreign universities.

School and university education in Sri Lanka, although not adequate to meet national demand, had for long maintained good standards. But lack of funding combined with fierce competition for places in universities has undermined school education so that children are forced to rely heavily on private education in tutorials. The deficiencies of the teaching and examination system further hamper the social and intellectual development of the students. This trend will ensure that only a handful of children with access to expensive schools receive good schooling and that, with higher education privatised through the back door, even fewer will have a good university education, like in 'good old colonial days'.

Isn't that what neo-colonialism is about?

Anger in the Hill Country

A satyagraha campaign was launched by the Ceylon Workers' Congress in the third week of February in Hatton in the Hill Country to protest the refusal by the management of the plantation sector to pay the workers the monthly allowance of Rs 400 awarded by government gazette notification. This allowance is being paid to all private sector workers except plantation workers. The campaign has since its launching gathered momentum.

It is significant that the CWC initiated the campaign since its leader Arumugam Thondaman is a cabinet minister. While much is questionable about the motives of the minister and while it is true that the Rs 400 increase is inadequate to compensate the wage losses that the plantation workers have suffered in real terms, the campaign is based on a just demand and deserves support. The New Democratic party extended its unstinted support for the campaign from the outset.

The growing strength of the campaign has now forced many politicians of the Hill Country who were initially sceptical to change their stand. The management will finally bow down, but what is important is that the plantation workers are still treated with contempt by the employers and the state alike. The experiences of this struggle will be a valuable experience in the political awakening of the Hill Country Tamils as a whole.

We must thoroughly clear away all ideas among our cadres of winning easy victories through good luck, without hard and bitter struggle, without sweat and blood.

Mao Zedong

Build Stable Base Areas in the Northeast, Dec. 1945

THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE SRI LANKAN MARXIST-LENINIST MOVEMENT

by **Comrade S.K. SENTHIVEL,**
General Secretary, New Democratic Party

The Marxist-Leninist movement is facing a variety of difficulties and challenges in every country of the Third World. These difficulties and challenges embody the characteristics of the particular circumstances obtaining in each country as well as the general features of the Third World

It is true that today the Marxist-Leninist movement in Sri Lanka is weak. While all Marxist-Leninists recognise this reality, every honest Marxist-Leninist is certain that the movement can be developed to a position of strength. It is now necessary for them to prepare to face the various challenges confronting them and forge ahead.

To analyse the challenges confronting the Marxist-Leninist movement, it is necessary to review briefly its past.

What is commonly referred to as the 'Left Movement' has completed sixty-five years. Within it, there have been movements that followed one of two main trends, in theory as well as in practice. One was the Marxist movement while the other was the Samasamajist movement guided by Trotskyite ideology and style of work. Although the Samasamajist movement has been subject to splits from time to time to give birth to new

parties, all of them remained Trotskyite in their basic approach and attitude. Even the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, which once chanted the name of Che Guevara and now describes itself as a new form of leftists, has shown strong Trotskyite features in its political approach, practice and tactics. One common feature of all Trotskyite movements has been the adoption of left extremism only to wallow in right opportunism later.

The communist movement of Sri Lanka adopted Marxism as the basis, with Leninism as the development of Marxism through social practice and the revolutionary position upheld by Stalin after Lenin. This communist movement betrayed Marxism-Leninism in the early 1960's and adopted the opportunist parliamentary path. The Marxist-Leninist movement emerged from within the communist movement to develop Marxism-Leninism and carry it forward as Mao Zedong Thought, which was a further development of Marxism-Leninism.

The Marxist-Leninist movement was a powerful political force in the early 1960's and into the late 1970's. While rejecting and thoroughly exposing the parliamentary path, it upheld the path of revolutionary struggle for social transformation on the basis of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought not only in theory but also through various revolutionary mass struggles and advanced the faith of the masses in revolutionary transformation.

The United National Party, which was then the party that represented the interests of the big bourgeoisie, and its imperialist masters were fearful of the growth of the Marxist-Leninist movement and did everything that they could to prevent it. They also acted to suppress the revolutionary mass struggles carried forward by the Marxist-Leninist movement.

On the other hand, the national bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party and its parliamentary allies of the 'Old Left' were out to wreck the Marxist-Leninist movement from within and

without. The government of the national bourgeoisie and the Old Left, which in 1971 put down the insurrection of the JVP acted ruthlessly in suppressing the Marxist-Leninist movement. Some who could not stand up to that oppression and surrendered to the government. In particular, the trade union movement which was seen as a mass base of the Marxist-Leninist movement in the Hill Country and the South was wrecked in a planned manner by pro-government forces and certain elements who masqueraded as leftists. The trade union movement lacked the theoretical understanding and politically conscious working class organisation to arrest the decline. Similar planned acts of sabotage were carried out to wreck other mass organisations. This was a major lesson and experience for the Marxist-Leninist movement.

The period 1970-77 witnessed the tearing away of the masks of those known as the great leaders of the Old Left and their betrayal of the working class and the masses. Their adaptation of a position representing the interests of the ruling classes did great harm not only to the Marxist-Leninist movement but also to the left movement as a whole. It was as a consequence of this that the UNP that was loyal to the imperialists and represented the big bourgeoisie and led by the most reactionary politicians came to power with an unprecedented majority in 1977.

The UNP led by J.R. Jayawardena, a loyalist of the US imperialists and a most reactionary politician, forced the country to change course, with disastrous consequences. There were two important aspects to this change of course: one concerned liberalisation of the economy and privatisation, and the other concerned the transformation of the Sinhala nationalism that was nurtured over the years into chauvinism and its propulsion into war.

The broad imperialist agenda of 'globalisation' for South Asia was first implemented in Sri Lanka in the name of liberalisation of the economy and privatisation. Sri Lanka was

thus made the training ground for the imperialist multinational corporations (MNCs).

The national question involving contradictions between the nationalities was transformed into a hostile contradiction through successive acts of communal violence and extended into a cruel war on the North-East. It should be noted that this war is a war of chauvinist oppression and that the imperialists and the Indian regional hegemonists have played their respective roles in the aggravation of and the expansion of this war.

The continuous and simultaneous implementation of the above economic practice of liberalisation and privatisation and chauvinistic war has resulted in a serious setback for the Marxist-Leninist movement as well as the left movement as a whole. The above two still pose the biggest challenge to the Marxist-Leninist movement today.

Seventeen years of UNP rule between 1977 and 1994 opened every possible door for imperialism to exploit and plunder through re-colonisation by the MNCs. Monopolistic capital entered the country from the US, Europe and Japan, the three centres of MNCs. In addition, Indian businesses too established their domination on this soil. This trend of re-colonisation continued un-hindered under the present PA rule. Schemes to surrender to the MNCs the few remaining state and public sector businesses and thus complete the neo-colonialist agenda are being drawn up by a government in which the so-called parliamentary leftists are partners. The economic, political, social, educational, and cultural affairs of the country have all been reduced to the state of being directed by bodies such as the World Bank, the IMF and the World Trade Organisation.

The war in the North-East has deflected the attention of the masses to such an extent that imperialism is able to create without resistance a climate favourable to itself. It was the feudal and capitalist ruling classes who while yelling "Tiger, Tiger!"

and "Terrorism!" had opened the door for the imperialist wolves to plunder the country.

Another consequence of the above is the polarisation of the nationalities. The ruling elite has transformed the big nation chauvinism that was nurtured among the Sinhala people into chauvinistic oppression. The UNP and the PA have shown that one is no worse than the other in not letting up in any way in this matter.

It was against a background in which the elitist Tamil parliamentary leadership was frustrated by the failure of its approach of political bargaining that the Tamil youth emerged as a force that carried forward narrow Tamil nationalism through armed struggle. It is only appropriate that any class, community or nationality should use armed struggle to regain its basic rights. There is no other way for it to win back or hold on to social justice for itself. The correctness in direction and final victory of any armed liberation struggle is determined by the kind of forces that lead and carry forward the struggle.

The Marxist-Leninists do not oppose or reject the national liberation struggle of the past two decades since it is opposed to chauvinistic military oppression. They are on the side of that struggle. But at the same time, they insist that the Tamil national liberation struggle should free itself from the confines of its narrow nationalism and move in the direction of a broader struggle. While it cannot be expected that the Tamil nationalist forces will readily adopt such a position, the Marxist-Leninists, by continuously emphasising this, can cultivate thoughts of social change through national liberation among the masses.

While we notice that the Marxist-Leninist movement has weakened and suffered setbacks during the past two decades or so, it is also important to recognise the reasons. It is important to identify the subjective and objective factors concerning these developments.

The chauvinistic war of oppression was a major challenge to the Marxist-Leninist movement. During the past quarter of a century, all the nationalities and communities of the country have become polarised and restrained to the confines of narrow nationalism. Under these circumstances, it became increasingly difficult for a Marxist-Leninist movement comprising all nationalities to function effectively. Especially among the Sinhala people, a situation arose in which not only the Marxist-Leninist movement but also a left movement capable of arresting the development of chauvinism and chauvinistic tendencies could only weaken. It is only a few individuals who are Marxist-Leninists there, but they seem unable to function organisationally or as a political party.

At the same time, the Marxist-Leninists from among the Tamil regions have amid severe pressure and challenges preserved their party organisation. The North-East and the Hill Country remain the regions of their activity, and the New Democratic Party is not only the party that represents the Marxist-Leninists, but also the only Marxist-Leninist party functioning as a party in this way in Sri Lanka.

The NDP, which has constantly drawn attention to the fact that the contradiction between the nationalities has become the dominant contradiction, has also steadily opposed chauvinist oppression and the war resulting from it. It has at the same time opposed the imperialist neo-colonial initiative that is pushing the whole country into disaster. The party has in its programme emphasised the carrying forward of broad based mass movements against these.

It should be noted that in recent years the party persevered in joining hands with the leftist, democratic and progressive forces of the country. While the NDP is a party that has as its theoretical basis Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought, it has been at the forefront of efforts to form a united front to

press for an end to the chauvinistic war, a solution to the national question on the basis of self-determination, and opposition to liberalisation and privatisation.

It was such efforts that materialised as the New Left Front, which started to act in a way that gave the masses newfound confidence. But the forces of the ruling classes and the JVP, each for its own purpose, acted to destroy this left unity. At the same time, the Trotskyite Nava Samasamaja Party (NSSP) acted in an underhand manner to break up the NLF. The parochial attitude of the NSSP towards a united front and its opportunistic craving for posts and positions became the cause for the disintegration of the NLF. This was much to the private joy of the so-called leftists in non-government organisations (NGOs), since the main task of the NGOs is to alienate Marxist politics from the masses.

There can be no future for the Left Movement until the leftist, democratic and progressive forces of the country do not come forward to unite to examine honestly the chauvinistic war of oppression and the resolution of the national question on the basis of self-determination, and put forward genuine proposals, while at the same time opposing the imperialist neo-colonialist agenda of globalisation. This is our determined view as Marxist-Leninists.

Already there are signs here and there that the forces of the ruling classes are moving towards fascist measures. But the situation prevails in which oppression against the entire Tamil people will be further extended through war.

The imperialist schemes implemented through globalisation have in the meantime had severe effects on the people. The people are struggling to carry increasingly big burdens in their everyday life. The working class and other toiling masses are becoming marginalised. They are in a situation where they have to come to a clear decision. But this decision cannot

be the return to power of the UNP, which is a stooge of imperialism. The truth is that the UNP is not a party of the masses and, in terms of class interests, the PA is not an anti-UNP force.

It is unfortunate that we are in a situation in which the leftist, democratic, progressive and patriotic forces are unable to put forward jointly an alternative programme for the gigantic problems facing the country or to carry forward mass movements and struggles in a way that arouses confidence among the masses.

But as Marxist-Leninists, we have not lost heart for even a moment. It is the people who create and carry forward history. It is only the people who can determine and transform the social structure. Neither the imperialists nor the reactionary ruling classes can determine the final outcome. Although the imperialists and their local stooges seem strong, the people will overthrow them. But this will not happen by itself. This can be achieved through the Marxist-Leninists and their working class party joining forces with sincere leftist and democratic forces. Marxist-Leninists have no way but to confront all manner of challenges to carry forward that arduous task.

Imperialism and its various agencies are propagating among the masses the poisonous thoughts of globalisation with increasing vigour and with the support and sympathy of state power. Propaganda for globalisation is spreading the falsehood that privatisation and market forces will lead to economic development and that by working hard every individual could become wealthy. It also preaches that information technology, which has taken giant strides in recent years, has become the vehicle for social emancipation. The imperialist information media and their local echoes are ceaselessly campaigning that classes will cease to exist as a result of these trends and that Marxism and socialism have become a dream of the past.

The extensive functioning of the NGOs as indirect tools of imperialism in spreading the above ideas and in preventing political ideas about social transformation reaching the masses is a serious challenge facing Marxist-Leninists. The aims and activities of these NGOs have been thoroughly exposed in several countries. There is no doubt that the day will arrive in Sri Lanka before long.

At the present stage in which Marxism-Leninism is facing challenges on several fronts, it is important that the truth and the details of the victories and achievements of the Marxist-Leninist movement during the past century be once again carried to the masses. Besides viewing the new conditions in the light of those experiences, the Marxist-Leninist movement should adapt itself to the new conditions.

At the same time, there should be no reluctance or reserve in subjecting all the mistakes of the past to criticism self-criticism. It is in this that the honesty of a Marxist-Leninist and one's unassailable faith in Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought depends.

The forces of imperialism are taking advantage of the temporary setbacks suffered by the international communist movement and socialism. They are using every trick in the book to undermine Marxist-Leninist forces and their organisations. Several former Marxist-Leninists have fallen into these traps. Many of these people who spend their time in individual prattling are unprepared for political work through a political organisation but go on indulging in empty talk. Even this tendency is a challenge to carrying forward the Marxist-Leninist movement.

The tendency for people to be enamoured at least temporarily with privatisation is encouraged in the interests of globalisation. Infatuation with information technology is diverting attention away from social contradictions. The effects of

the harmful consumer culture are poisoning the younger generation. The ruling class while proclaiming fake patriotism is keenly pursuing the chauvinistic war to safeguard its life of comfort.

All of the above pose a collective challenge to the Marxist-Leninist movement. To face this challenge and carry forward the Marxist-Leninist movement is the solemn duty of every honest Marxist-Leninist.

[Translated from Tamil]

When we look at a thing, we must examine its essence and treat its appearance merely as an usher at the threshold, and once we cross the threshold, we must grasp the essence of the thing; this is the only reliable and scientific method of analysis

Mao Zedong

A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire, Jan. 1930

Marxist philosophy holds that the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective world and thus being able to explain it, but in applying the knowledge of these laws actively to change the world.

Mao Zedong

Statement to the 6th Plenary Session of the 6th Party Central Committee, Nov. 1938

In times of difficulty, we must not lose sight of our achievements, must see the bright future and pluck up our courage.

Mao Zedong

Serve the People, Sept. 1944

THE POLITICS OF ELECTORAL BOYCOTT

by DESHABAKTHAN

1. The case for a political alternative

Some critics of the last parliamentary elections have commented that it was a fraud perpetrated on democracy. Electoral fraud is not new to us. We have got used to electoral fraud especially since 1977. It has become part of our environment like the seasonal cold, cough and fever. But when we declare that electoral fraud is a fraud perpetrated on democracy, we should not lose sight of the fact that bourgeois democracy is in itself a fraud perpetrated on the masses.

We know very well that bourgeois democracy is simply an institution that is in place to safeguard the interests of the capitalist classes. It is also true that parliamentary democracy is hardly democracy. This can be seen from the way the electoral process takes place in 'democratic' countries where there is reportedly no electoral fraud. Large sums of money are needed for one to be elected. There is a need for a vast amount of propaganda, which is not possible without the backing of the news media. In the world of the news media dominated by a handful of wealthy individuals, news is designed to serve the interests of the ruling capitalist classes. Thus, one needs the support of the capitalist classes to be elected. How could one who gets elected at the mercy of the capitalists act against the interests of capitalism?

Let us, for the sake of argument, say that a government that stands for the interests of the masses is elected to power somehow. What would happen to it? The US imperialists were behind the military coup that toppled the legally elected government in Chile and assassinated President Salvador Allende. It was a government based in Westminster, the mother of parliamentary democracy, that persuaded Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II to dismiss in 1957 the lawfully elected government of (British) Guyana headed by Cheddi Jagan. It was the great democrat Jawaharlal Nehru who dismissed the first non-Congress government ever to be elected in any state within India, formed by the Communist Party of India and headed by E.M.S. Nampoodripad in the State of Kerala.

Imperialism does not overthrow democratically elected governments so hastily now. It uses other ways of achieving its goal. It acts to tame the alternative political forces that capture power in parliament. When it fails in that, it uses local dissent to stir up civil commotion. It was the US imperialists who were the driving force behind the civil war initiated in the 1980s that finally led to the removal of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, even after the Sandinista succeeded in winning a democratically held election.

Imperialism is adept at manipulating those who gain parliamentary power. Parliamentary politics is politics controlled by the capitalist classes. It is designed to function in a way that no one can capture power without the backing of the capitalist classes. Even if one succeeds, one cannot hold on to power without compromising with capital. The basic rule of the game as designed by the bourgeoisie is 'Heads I win. Tails you lose'.

But people still hope that they can bring about a measure of social change through parliament. There are several reasons for this. The most important seems to be that, of the organs of state power, the parliament appears to be the most

powerful. The ruling classes to preserve this faith exploit all available means, from school textbooks to the daily news broadcast. They know that, as long as the parliamentary system does not lead to a transformation of the social system of capitalist exploitation, parliamentary democracy will be a powerful fortress protecting capitalism. To that extent, capitalism defends parliament and other related democratic institutions. In imperialist countries, the ruling party (or group of parties) and the main opposition party (or group of parties) defend the capitalist system. Thus, nothing more than social reform packages are ever presented on behalf of the masses. Even then, pressure is brought upon the government to ensure that these reforms do not benefit the masses at the expense of capitalist profit. Developments in North American and European politics since the 1980s abound with examples of such trends.

In Third World countries where long spells of foreign rule or some form of dictatorship preceded the establishment or re-establishment of parliamentary democracy, people tend to have faith in parliamentary democracy. But this faith fades away with passage of time. In addition to the might of wealth, the forces of corruption and intimidation begin to play a role in the electoral process. Capitalism does not mind the deterioration of faith in the parliamentary political parties descending into a lack of faith in the political process itself. This ensures that the people will not be in a position to rise in rebellion against the interests of capitalism and imperialism. This is one of many situations in which alternative politics becomes important.

Lack of faith in the existing political system will on its own not turn the people towards alternative politics. Forces capable of providing political leadership in that direction should be sufficiently developed in order to redirect such indifference towards politics in the direction of social transformation. Otherwise, there is a risk of emergence of fascism. Evidence for this has been seen over the past few decades in several Third

World countries. Besides this, imperialism also has another safety mechanism that it has used most effectively during the past two decades. It has greatly encouraged the so-called non-government organisations (NGOs) with great effect to dampen the force of mass opposition and to negate its political content.

On the other hand, every possible mass organisation that could be at the forefront of politically educating and awakening the masses is blunted in several possible ways. Capitalism does its best to prevent trade unions, mass cultural organisations, women's organisations and other such organisations from developing a wholesome political view of the society around them. Individualism, regionalism, sectarianism and caste politics are carefully cultivated so that the masses will remain divided.

In several Third World countries, the ethnic question has been transformed in a planned way into ethnic hostility. We can see that narrow nationalism, chauvinistic oppression in particular, is put into effect with the blessings of the imperialists. It is against this background that we need to develop alternatives to parliamentary politics.

2. Electoral boycott as political statement

When a voter participates in parliamentary elections, the choice before the voter is limited. The voter is often restricted to voting for one among a handful of political parties. When the choice is posed in the form of allowing or not allowing a particular political party to secure or to continue in power, the voter feels compelled to vote for a party that seems to be most likely to help in achieving the purpose. Thus, we have often seen that the choice shrinks to one between one of two bad dominant parties. The sidelining of the parliamentary left parties of Sri Lanka in the contests since 1956 was partly a consequence of this attitude of the electorate.

Many voters suffer the illusion that their vote is wasted if cast for a losing candidate. This illusion is to some extent carefully nurtured, and the tendency to support the strongest of several enemies who can defeat the biggest enemy has been there for several decades. We have seen that even those who regret their action after the event have been tempted to repeat that error again and again. Choices based on the search for one who can succeed or one who should not be permitted to succeed have only prolonged the rule by capitalist political parties.

This is not just a consequence of the belief that political change can be effected only through parliamentary elections and involves other social factors besides it. When the elections are seen as a contest, a contest for political power, many suffer the illusion that backing the winning side makes them part of the victory. This attitude is very much evident even in matters such as preferred sides in sporting events, favourite movie stars and entertainers, *etc.* that do not really concern one's social being, and is particularly strong among the sections of the population that are alienated from political power and not conscious of alternatives to parliamentary politics.

One cannot expect that the masses will abandon parliamentary politics when their hope that social change and the fulfilment of their needs can be secured through the parliamentary political system is shattered. People participate in elections because they like to exercise their 'power to elect' to change a government or to continue with it. In fact, people vote knowing very well that the outcome of the elections would be fraudulently altered in favour of the ruling classes. Voting is in a way an expression of an urge to exercise some form of political power, however false, that they think that they possess. When people do not enjoy real political power, they are deluded by illusive images of power. This illusion is the basis of bourgeois democracy.

It is only when the myth of bourgeois democracy is clearly identified by the masses that there is scope for the development of true democracy of the working people. But this change does not happen by itself. There are several instances when mass frustration with the bourgeois parliamentary system has led to mass frustration with bourgeois democracy, which in turn has been used by military dictators and fascists to capture state power.

Thus, Marxist-Leninists participation in bourgeois democratic exercises is a means of provoking thought about political alternatives among the masses. People need not express their opposition to the existing social system in the form of a choice between two bourgeois political parties. There are other options before them, and it is possible to put any of them into effect in a planned way to mobilise the masses politically and sharpen mass political awareness.

Electoral boycott is one of the highest forms of tactical democratic weapon that can be wielded against the fraud of bourgeois democracy and its distortion of the democratic principle. But the prerequisite for the successful implementation of a boycott is adequate political work among the masses. Electoral boycott is doomed to fail in the absence of a strong, progressive and democratic mass organisation or revolutionary political party.

There are several political tasks that need to be carried out before one gets to the stage of electoral boycott. The success of these tasks depends on political education. Most importantly, it should be realised that voting in elections is not just an act of voting an individual or a political party to power but a political statement. Thus, not only voting for one, but also not voting for any, not participating in the elections and spoiling the ballot paper too are political statements. In fact, a consciously spoilt ballot paper is a more powerful political statement than a vote cast without a clear understanding of the issues.

There is nothing in common between failing to vote in the elections by omission and deliberately keeping away from the electoral process. The former is at best passive silence while that latter can be a political statement as loud as thunder. To use the ballot paper as a political statement cannot be done in an *ad hoc* fashion. It concerns politicisation of the masses and actively involving them in mass politics. It is through such political work that one can overcome the view that a vote that does not determine the winners and the losers in an election is a wasted vote. This change in approach is essential for the move towards the politics of boycott.

Let us now examine what could be achieved through electoral boycott.

3. Electoral boycott as political struggle

The dictatorial nature of the bourgeois democratic state could manifest itself in several ways. Even when the mask of bourgeois democracy is in tatters, there are choices ahead of the bourgeois state. One such choice concerns the use of violence by the state, the use of thuggery, all forms of threat and bullying, impersonation and ballot rigging with the blessings of the state. The past twenty years of Sri Lankan politics has seen plenty of this. Another concerns the crippling of a genuine parliamentary opposition, if any. Causing splits within the ranks of the opposition party and ensuring formal recognition for the faction preferred by the ruling party is a tactic that has been used in Sri Lanka too. Disabling a popular leader of the opposition party from contesting or participating in elections is also a method that has been used in Sri Lanka: memories of the vindictive act of deprivation of the civic rights of the late Mrs Bandaranaike in 1980 and the brutal assassination of the charismatic leader of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party, Vijaya Kumaranatunga in 1989 have not faded from the memory of the country.

The constitution and electoral system have been amended in ways that ensures that the ruling party could prolong its stay in power. The allocation of a sizeable number of seats in parliament for un-elected persons such as members of the armed forces is another way in which the ruling classes ensured control for themselves in Indonesia, following the overthrow of Suharto and the return to parliamentary democracy as a result of mass unrest.

Thus, the ruling classes, when confronted with the prospect of losing political power through the parliamentary system, are able to take defensive measures of a 'democratic' nature. When such measures fail, they act to ensure that the change in government does not become a change in actual political power. Here the party of the opposition that comes to power is persuaded to preserve the interests of the ruling classes. The last political change in Sri Lanka is a fairly good example for this. It is worth noting that the centre-left government of India that was toppled three years ago was not able to act very differently from the previous Congress government on several major issues.

What the progressive forces could achieve through the electoral system is nothing more than a marginal change here or there. But often the ruling classes are not willing to make even those concessions. When they cannot subvert a government 'democratically' they resort to military intervention. Thus, whether bourgeois democracy succeeds or fails, the ruling classes do not lose their grip on power. Therefore, for the people to win they need to find an alternative path. As pointed out earlier, parliamentary elections too play a role in enabling the masses find that alternative path, especially when the masses continue to have faith in parliamentary elections. A revolutionary party may need to participate in parliamentary elections, even at a stage when the masses begin to lose faith in elections. When elections provide the only legal avenue for the revolutionary

party to reach out to the masses, participation in elections can be of much value in carrying out political work.

When the people's revolutionary liberation struggle grows in strength, parliamentary politics diminishes in significance. When there is no immediate prospect of such struggle and the crisis of parliamentary politics manifests itself in the form of electoral malpractice, abuse of parliamentary privilege and other activities of a criminal nature, electoral boycott can assume the form of a political struggle.

The political work that needs to be done in connection with electoral boycott is no less in scale or significance than that for participation in elections. As said earlier, it is not easy to alter the habit of voting for a political party as an expression of hostility towards another political party. It is not easy to eliminate the view that a vote is wasted when it is not cast. It may be necessary to explain again and again that voting in any fashion that does not rightly represent one's own position is a far bigger waste.

To vote is to make a political statement. But the statement can be made in ways that go beyond the expression of a limited choice. Thus, not voting can be an equally, if not more, powerful political statement. This political statement can be made in one of several possible ways. Spoiling the ballot paper in some way is one. Leaving the ballot paper blank is another, but there is the risk that the blank paper can become a stolen vote for a candidate. Tearing up the ballot paper is a possibility, which may not always be permissible. Not participating at all is a more powerful option, but in a democracy where ballot boxes are systematically stuffed, spoiling the ballot paper can sometimes be more effective. But, when electoral boycott succeeds on a large scale, it is a forceful slap in the face of the government, even in the event of large scale stuffing of ballot boxes.

Thus, the rejection of electoral politics is something that is done in a systematic manner by politically mobilising the

masses. Even if it cannot be carried out in the same manner in all parts of the country, it can be used to demonstrate the lack of faith of the masses in the parliamentary political system.

When the campaign for electoral boycott is not carried out properly and when the masses are not sufficiently prepared for that course action, electoral boycott can fail. Then the campaign can have an effect that is opposite to what was desired. Marxist-Leninists may therefore use in their campaign for a boycott some of the tactics that they use in parliamentary election campaigns. Carrying out an effective boycott campaign in selected electorates is one of them.

If force is used on people during the boycott campaign, it will only antagonise them. Many of us remember how armed threat was used to prevent people from voting in the north of the country in the 1980's. The JVP's campaign in the Southern Province forcing people to boycott the Presidential Elections of 1988 was also based on undemocratic violence. Leaving aside the question of who the beneficiaries of these actions were, one needs to examine the extent to which such bullying helped to strengthen the mass political base of those concerned.

Not everyone who disagrees with us is our enemy. It is possible through socially based political work to bring together people with diverse views to act together. But politics fails when armed threat is the means of winning over people. Any use of arms, when it is not guided by mass politics, is likely to end up in anti-people despotism.

Even if an electoral boycott scores a 50% success, it is a great victory. Sometimes the stuffing of ballot boxes can make the boycott only 20 to 30% successful. But the people will know the truth. The fact that the people have rejected parliamentary politics will be clear not only to the masses but also to their enemy, the ruling class. But what does electoral boycott achieve?

Electoral boycott on its own cannot bring about social change, but it succeeds as a voice of protest. It declares that the people have not only lost faith in parliamentary politics but are also ready to reject it totally. Boycott is certainly not an alternative to electoral politics, nor is it the path for social transformation. We should recognise that it is only a powerful tactical or even a strategic move in the course of development of a revolutionary struggle.

Thus, electoral boycott cannot be an end in itself. Its potential and limitations need to be recognised in the context of its role as a major political activity that marks a turning point that determines what is to come next in the revolutionary struggle. It is necessary therefore to carry out political work to prepare for people's democratic political power alongside the campaign for electoral boycott. Without preparation for people's democratic political power, without the masses being mobilised as a powerful fighting force, and without a clear political programme, electoral boycott soon loses its meaning. As a result, it becomes possible for the reactionaries to interpret the loss of faith of the masses in the parliamentary elections as a rejection of politics and use the opportunity to take power through a military coup. One should always be aware of this.

Hence, as in the case of any political struggle, electoral boycott should be carried out, considering all aspects, and against a background of mass politicisation and accompanied by other forms of political struggle that are compatible with it. It is important to remember that electoral boycott without the correct political perspective and carried out in isolation will be counter-productive.

Electoral boycott is a powerful political weapon that can be used to politicise and mobilise the masses. But, on its own, it is not a means for social transformation. As in the case of any weapon, its might depends on for whom, by whom, how, where and when it is used.

The strike weapon has been used by US-backed reactionaries in several countries to undermine left-wing governments, as in the case of Chile. In the same way, electoral boycott has been used by the US imperialists to topple the Sandinista government against which they used their 'Contra' terrorists in a decade long civil war. The reactionaries will also use electoral boycott when they do not see a possibility of defeating at the polls a government that they think is hostile to their interests. They will use it to pave the way for a military dictatorship. Thus, one has to be particularly cautious of one's allies in campaigns for electoral boycott. Where the initiative of the boycott is not with the forces of revolution, the forces of counter-revolution readily usurp it. This is particularly important in the context of Sri Lanka today when the very forces that have a notorious record of subverting democracy in the not so distant past are initiating campaigns for democracy.

[Translation of a serialised Tamil article in *Puthiya Poom*]

The assertion that the right of nations to self-determination cannot be achieved within the framework of capitalism) is incomplete and inaccurate, for not only the right of nations to self-determination, but all the fundamental demands of political democracy are "possible of achievement" under imperialism, only in an incomplete, in a mutilated form.... This does not imply, however, that Social Democracy must refrain from conducting an immediate and most determined struggle for all these demands - to refrain would be to the advantage of the bourgeoisie and reaction.

V.I. Lenin

The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (Theses), Jan.-Feb. 1916

THE POLITICS OF THE JANATHA VIMUKTHI PERAMUNA: A BRIEF ASSESSMENT

The relationship between a Marxist-Leninist political party and any other political party has historically been based on principle and underlined by a clear understanding of the class and ideological nature of the latter. Marxist-Leninists have, in different parts of the world, formed alliances with not only social democrats but also bourgeois political parties. But all such alliances have been for clearly defined purposes, with a thorough understanding of the issues involved, and based on a common programme, in specific contexts such as anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, and national liberation struggles. Marxist-Leninists in Sri Lanka did not stint support for electoral campaigns to dislodge the reactionary United National Party, when it was the sole agent of foreign imperialism.

Fraternal Marxist-Leninist parties can, as a result of their particular circumstances and experiences, have serious differences of opinion on matters of tactics and strategy. But they are always united by a common ideology and goal. The differences between fraternal parties have, more often than not, been resolved through discussion and dialogue. On the other hand, there can be no compromise with organisations hostile to the essence of Marxism-Leninism. It is in this spirit that we wish to draw the attention of all progressive forces and, in particular, fraternal Marxist-Leninist parties to the political character of the JVP and to the implications of even the sign of implicit recognition by a fraternal Marxist Leninist

party for the class struggle in Sri Lanka. The ideology and the politics of the JVP since its inception and its attitude towards Marxism-Leninism are briefly identified in the paragraphs below for the benefit of those who are unaware of the dubious past of the JVP.

The JVP at times calls itself a Marxist-Leninist party. Its only tangible claim to Marxism-Leninism was that some of its original leaders, including the late Rohana Wijeweera, were briefly associated with the Communist Party of Ceylon, led by Comrade N. Sanmugathasan, that broke away from the revisionists led by the late Pieter Keuneman and whose party, later to be known as the Communist Party of Sri Lanka, is now an appendage of the ruling People's Alliance.

The JVP, since its founding around 1968, adopted a populist style of work and appealed mainly to the frustrations of the Sinhala youth. It was unashamedly hostile not only to trade unions but also to the working class, because it failed to attract members of the working class among its ranks. It harshly denounced the working class as "a class that has dirtied and muddied itself by participation in trade union struggles". More cynically, it borrowed the phrase 'Indian expansionism', from the Marxist-Leninist parties including the Communist Party of China who used it in the 1960's and 70's to refer to the Indian bourgeois establishment and its desire for regional hegemony in the South Asian region, but only to use it as label for the Hill Country Tamil plantation workers of Indian origin. These workers who were brought into the country by the British colonialists through coercion and deceit are even today the most cruelly exploited section of the working class. But the JVP identified them as agents of Indian expansionism, merely to capitalise on the prevailing hostility of the landless Sinhala peasantry towards the Hill Country Tamils. The harshness of the JVP towards the Hill Country Tamils was so severe that it even declared at one stage before the insurrection of 1971 that when it takes power it will close down all the plantations and hand them over to the peasants to plant yam.

When discriminatory measures were taken against Tamils in the admission of students to the university in 1970, the JVP endorsed it by its silence, as it did on several other occasions during the past thirty years when the minorities were persecuted and discriminated against by successive chauvinist governments. The consistent failure of the JVP to attract people of the national minorities was therefore not surprising. But, like the BJP in India, and less successfully than the two bourgeois parties of Sri Lanka, it has from time to time found a token member or two from the minority communities for purpose of display, while it never seriously addressed the issue of national oppression in Sri Lanka.

The JVP, soon after its founding, had a clandestine existence in the short period running up to the general elections of 1970, and during this time it was referred to as the 'Che Guevara' movement. It was a time when Che was almost a cult figure among the youth in many parts of the world and the JVP too liked to be associated with this cult in some way so as to create a revolutionary image for itself that appealed to the youth. They rejected outright the political line of Mao Zedong, perhaps to some extent because the Communist Party of China had recognised the Communist Party led by Comrade Sanmugathasan as the fraternal party in Sri Lanka. It is also significant that the JVP never saw Stalin as a major leader of the Marxist-Leninist movement. This certainly was no accident, as subsequent events ensured that the JVP leader was gleefully embraced by a local representative of one of many versions of the 'Fourth International'. The affair with the 'Fourth International' and the declaration of Trotskyism as the ideology of the JVP in 1977-78 was short-lived, since the main opponents of the left movement had cut out for JVP a useful role which the JVP obligingly played in the years following the landslide victory by the right-wing UNP in 1977. We will return to this subject after we deal with the abortive uprising of April 1971 that led to the slaughter of Sinhala youth numbering between 5,000 and 15,000.

The JVP's reluctance to form alliances with Marxist political parties relates to its rejection of the working class and alternatively its reliance on the youth as the revolutionary vanguard, a tendency that was in vogue following the 1968 revolution of the youth in France and encouraged by the likes of Herbert Marcuse. The rapid growth of the JVP between 1969 and 1971 also meant infiltration by agents of the state machinery. As a result of its desire to attract large numbers of Sinhala youth and the need to retain them in its ranks, the JVP leadership gave them the impression that it was preparing for a major armed struggle in the near future. But despite all efforts to project itself as an organisation gearing up for a revolutionary armed struggle and an early victory, the JVP was hardly fit for confrontation with the armed forces of the Sri Lankan state, although the armed forces were then small in number and moderately equipped. The JVP drove itself to a point where it could not help acting according to a schedule that was not of its choice. The police arrested its leader Rohana Wijeweera when he was conducting political classes in the south-east of the country and, within a few weeks, the JVP launched its unsuccessful insurrection of 5th April 1970.

The JVP attacked several police stations across the country and even captured a few that were taken by surprise. It also exercised control over some regions in the south of the country and in the central region, but not for long. As the JVP lacked faith in mass politics and people's war, it depended entirely on its cadres for the seizure of political power. Given the shallow political understanding of the JVP youth, it was hardly surprising that they were soon isolated from the local masses in the areas that they seized control. But the price paid for the adventurism of the leadership was heavy. Thousands of Sinhala youth were killed by vindictive sections of the armed forces, even weeks after the insurrection was brought under control.

There was no sympathy for the JVP from the parliamentary left, who were then partners in power with the SLFP-led

'People's Government'. The government used the insurrection to place under detention Comrade Sanmugathasan, who was an unreserved critic of the anti-Marxist-Leninist line of the JVP. This arrest was designed to prevent the Marxist-Leninists from become a rallying point for the youth who were disaffected with the government and the reactionary UNP. Even Vasudeva Nanayakkara of the LSSP was detained for a short period, although the party leaders N.M. Perera and Colvin R. de Silva were cabinet ministers. It should be noted that at the time differences had developed between the LSSP leadership and Vasudeva Nanayakkara. What was remarkable was that the Marxist-Leninists of Sri Lanka, despite their strong differences and criticism of the JVP and despite the hostility that the JVP had shown towards them, were among the first to condemn the brutal suppression of the uprising and the indefensible slaughter of the youth.

All the leaders of the JVP were arrested and tried, with some receiving long prison sentences. Most of the leaders of the JVP had abandoned the party by 1976, with some finding the way into the SLFP, the party in power at the time of the uprising. Several individuals who recognised the erroneous line of the JVP formed small groups, which were not politically cohesive so that, in the end, some of them were reduced to acting in their personal capacity, while others, like many before them, dropped out of politics. In fairness to these youth, it should be said that it was not easy to create a Marxist-Leninist mass movement out of the wreckage of the JVP. In fact, groups had broken away from the JVP between 1969 and 1971 because they felt that the JVP was going against Marxist principles, but none of them emerged as a serious political force, largely as a result of the kind of political exposure and experience that they were subjected to while they were in the JVP.

While Wijeweera, the leader of the JVP was serving his long prison sentence, deals were in the making between the JVP and the UNP. The latter offered to quash the sentence of Wijeweera

and secure his release if they came to power. Deals were also made at the same time between the JVP and Bala Tampoe, once a Trotskyite firebrand with influence in one of the several Fourth Internationals and now an apolitical trade unionist. Tampoe offered them international respectability in the form of recognition by the Fourth International for which he held the Sri Lankan licence.

True to his word, JR Jayawardene, the leader of the UNP arranged the release of Wijeweera, who visited London soon after to declare his allegiance to Trotskyism. Although *realpolitik* in Sri Lanka dictated that the JVP cut itself loose of the Fourth International, the subsequent conduct of the JVP showed certain features of Sri Lankan Trotskyism, like swinging overnight from an extreme left position to a right opportunist position. The short season of Trotskyite sloganeering gave way, however, to the task of targeting the left parties and the SLFP, much to the joy of the UNP. Between 1978 and 1980, the JVP was responsible for the violent disruption of several mass meetings organised by the SLFP, its former 'left' allies, and even other left parties who had dissociated themselves from the SLFP-led government and its attack on the JVP.

The main beneficiaries of this JVP activity was the UNP and its imperialist masters, since the SLFP with its track record of anti-imperialist measures, was denied an opportunity to recuperate in the aftermath of its humiliating electoral defeat. The UNP used this opportunity to implement a series of anti-democratic actions that included the brutal suppression of the strike of 1980 and the unprecedented suspension of the civic rights of the former prime minister for political reasons.

The JVP, although nationally weak, retained a base among the youth, especially students, partly because of its reputation as a force that staged an uprising. The UNP, which used the JVP to weaken its main rival, took on the JVP as early as 1980. Given

the chauvinistic political mood that was being cultivated in the south of the island, the JVP, rather than correct its mistakes of the past and oppose national oppression, chose to turn a blind eye or even capitalise on it. The cynicism of the JVP was evident during the Presidential Elections held at the tail end of 1982, when Wijeweera, who was also the JVP presidential candidate, visited the North to campaign offered the Tamils the right to a separate state. On his return to the South, Wijeweera pledged at a public meeting that he would lay down his life to prevent secession. It is not certain whether Wijeweera assumed that what he told the Tamils would not be known to the Sinhalese and *vice versa*, but his double talk was soon thoroughly exposed in the North.

The exact position of the JVP on the national question, except that it was not in favour of secession, remained unclear for a few more years, but the JVP had clearly opted for a chauvinistic line by 1983, the year in which an anti-Tamil pogrom was carried out with the backing of the UNP government. Indira Gandhi, who on her return to power in 1980 decided to settle scores with the UNP government and its leader who had been personally hostile towards her, decided to encourage and support Tamil militants. This move at the time was also in the interest of the Indian ruling classes seeking regional hegemony. Several Tamil militant movements received generous support and armed training in India. Interestingly, it was reported that the JVP too, given its hostility to the UNP at the time, received Indian support during this period, but details of this need to be confirmed. It was, however, true that the JVP had ties with some of the Tamil militant groups in that period, but the JVP always steered clear of offering self-determination to the oppressed Tamil nationality.

When the Indian Government and the initially reluctant Sri Lankan Government imposed a solution in 1987 in the form of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, the SLFP and the JVP opposed it for chauvinistic reasons. While the leader of the SLFP, Mrs Bandaranaike also recognised certain unpublished terms and con-

ditions that infringed upon the sovereignty of Sri Lanka, the JVP's focus was entirely on the concessions made to the Tamil people. The alliance of the JVP and the SLFP in opposition to the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was short lived. The JVP decided to go it alone along an anti-democratic path. Between 1987 and 1989, it whipped up Sinhala chauvinism on the one hand and launched an attack on the government on the other, using bullying and terror tactics and without mobilising public opinion. The JVP also formed an opportunistic alliance with the then Prime Minister Premadasa who was prominent among the opponents of the accord within the government. The JVP enjoyed his patronage for a time, and was responsible for the assassination of several important politicians, some with the blessings of their patron. The JVP's decision to call for a boycott of the Presidential Election in 1988 also helped Premadasa to be elected as President, since the JVP campaign was most effective in the Southern Province, where the UNP was particularly unpopular. Premadasa, once elected, acted to consolidate his power.

From 1988 onwards, the Deshapremi Janatha Vyaparaya (Patriotic People's Movement), a front organisation of the JVP, terrorised the political rivals of the JVP and carried out several political assassinations of not only some leaders of the UNP, but also progressive elements like Vijaya Kumaranatunga, the leader of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party, and made an attempt on the life of Vickramabahu Karunaratne of the NSSP. The JVP miscalculated its fortunes among the lower ranks of the armed forces and blundered into turning on the armed forces and killing members of the families of service personnel. The government took advantage of this situation to hit back hard. With no support forthcoming from the ranks of the armed forces for the increasingly isolated JVP, the armed forces and government hit squads went on the attack to kill suspected members of the JVP and their families in large numbers. No less than 50,000 Sinhala youth fell victim to the two-year reign of state terror in the South. The JVP leader

Wijeweera remained incognito as a tea estate manager, only to be found, arrested and unlawfully executed in 1991. The JVP was again thrown into disarray.

It should be noted that some of the leaders of the JVP from its early days, like Lionel Bopage, who remained loyal to Wijeweera resented the chauvinistic line taken by Wijeweera in 1987 and left the JVP in frustration. The leadership of the JVP today has not even the remotest Marxist connection and comprises a generation that emerged during the 1980's, noted more for its chauvinism, opportunist populism and conspiratorial politics than for Marxist thought. The anti-democratic record of JVP violence between 1987 and 1989 was so abysmal that to gain political respectability the JVP had to abandon revolutionary armed struggle and declare that it will take the parliamentary road to socialism.

The JVP has since benefited from the frustration of the masses with the UNP and the PA comprising the SLFP, the CP and the LSSP. But in its greed to win more seats in parliament it adopted an openly chauvinistic line. With the racist Sihala Urumaya (SU) appearing on the scene in 2000 to capitalise on the chauvinism among the urban elite and the educated middle classes, the JVP began to sound more and more chauvinistic to the extent that many saw little difference between the JVP and the SU election campaigns. The JVP, following its decision to secure political power through parliamentary elections by any means, has become openly hostile to the aspirations of the Tamil people, which it now brands as communalism. It depicts the Tamil struggle for national survival in the face of armed state oppression as 'terrorism' that has to be put down. Thus, it is also opposed to a negotiated settlement that allows the Tamils any degree of autonomy in their traditional homeland.

The opportunism of the JVP more than matched that of the LSSP leader Colvin R de Silva who carried flowers to the temple in 1970, when the leaders of the JVP paid homage to the

chief priests of the Buddhist chapters at their respective residences and offered their election manifesto for their blessing before its launch. They ensured that a television crew went along to record the event and telecast it to the whole country. This was more than symbolic of the way in which the JVP has chosen to pander to Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. The current hostility of the JVP to the Norwegian initiative for a negotiated settlement makes it seem indistinguishable from the SU chauvinists.

The JVP has been intolerant to rivalry from the political left, and has always rejected a united front with left parties. Not surprisingly, it refused to recognise the New Left Front formed in 1998 and, when invited to join on a common programme, offered to negotiate individually with selected groups and parties in the NLF in order to undermine the NLF. Thus it succeeded in tempting the leader of the Trotskyite NSSP and through him wrecking the NLF within an year of its founding.

One may sum up the politics of the JVP as follows. The JVP was never a party that accepted Marxist-Leninist ideology. It has to this day been an anti-democratic party that has rejected the principle of united front among progressive forces. It does not recognise the Tamils as a nationality with a traditional homeland and the right to self-determination. It even rejects the right of a people to struggle for national survival and denounces it as terrorism.

The JVP uses Marxist phraseology in a crass fashion to reject a just solution for the national question in Sri Lanka. It uses the argument that there can be no just solution to the national question under bourgeois rule not only to reject regional autonomy for the traditional Tamil homelands but also to subvert the peace initiative. It does not condemn the genocidal war while it cynically dismisses the LTTE's unilateral cease-fire. It is hardly surprising that, while all genuine progressive forces who condemned imperialist meddling in Yugoslavia and NATO atrocities against the Serb

people also denounced Serb chauvinism for its part in the national disaster of Yugoslavia, the JVP distinguished itself by an unqualified defence of the Serb chauvinism of Milosovic.

The JVP's line on several issues is that they will all be solved when socialism arrives. This line, once used by the opportunist old left represented by the CP and the LSSP, is being used again by the JVP to avoid taking a principled stand on issues.

The position of the JVP on imperialism and globalisation is interesting, since of late it has even conceded that the economic crisis of the country is due to the lack of foreign investment. While it declares that it will put an end to imperialist plunder, it refuses to say how that is possible through the existing parliamentary political system. The JVP does not believe in the masses or the mass line. Like all bourgeois parties before it, it simply says, "Elect us to power, and we will do the job for you".

It is interesting that the JVP now dabbles in trade unionism, which it denounced three decades ago as evil. The JVP has now a modest trade union base developed over the past two decades. But the style of JVP trade unionism is not any more militant or revolutionary than that of the old parliamentary left, and the JVP has yet to explain how its change of heart about trade unionism came into being.

The dilemma of the JVP is understandable. It is not a Marxist party to have a viable Marxist theoretical position. It cannot explain or defend its two adventurist insurrections that killed tens of thousands of its members and supporters as it lacks the humility to accept responsibility or apologise for its mistakes. It can offer no valid explanation of its abandoning armed struggle, again since it does not like to admit fault. But it wants the people to believe that it has abandoned not only its path of anti-democratic terror but also revolutionary armed struggle. Perhaps inevitably, its election manifesto of last year was little more than a reformist agenda designed for the Sinhala petit bourgeoisie.

The JVP, following its securing of 10 seats in Parliament, attended on invitation a conference of Marxist Leninist communist parties held in Kathmandu last year. This invitation has been exploited by the JVP to secure credibility as a Marxist-Leninist party, while violating the very essence of Marxism-Leninism.

Comrade Sanmugathasan was precise in his assessment of the JVP in 1970 as an anti-working class party of the petit bourgeoisie. The JVP of today does not even have its revolutionary slogans of thirty years ago. Its development since the 1970s has been based on Sinhala chauvinism and populism. While it has an occasional Marxist phrase to serve its opportunistic purposes, it has not in any way contributed to the development of Marxist thought, discussion or debate. Its barrenness of thought is evident not only in its lack of sound political theory but also in its aridity in literature and art.

The JVP has among its followers many good Sinhala youth, as was the case in 1970 and in the late 1980's. The Sinhala youth see the in JVP the only leftist option. This is inevitable in the absence of a Marxist-Leninist alternative in the South. The JVP leadership acted to prevent the emergence of a credible left in the New Left Front. It will again try to stop the emergence of any genuine left movement. The longer the genuine forces of the left take to mobilise their resources and develop a serious political alternative to show the way out of this war and address the most pressing issues of the day, the greater are the prospects of an even grater betrayal of the Sinhala youth for a third time by the JVP leadership. It is only a strong challenge from the genuine left that can arrest the chauvinistic rot in the JVP and give an opportunity for the progressive elements behind it to play their due role in bringing together the nationalities of Sri Lanka and liberating the country from the clutches of imperialism.

[An article drafted by the by the Political Analysis Group of the NDP]

NORWEGIAN PEACE EFFORTS AND RESPONSES

It has for long been the wish of the Marxist-Leninists of Sri Lanka that the national question of this country should be resolved without foreign interference. This position taken by the Marxist-Leninists following the deal between the Indian government led by Rajeev Gandhi and the Sri Lankan Government led by J.R. Jayawardena in 1987 was vindicated by the experiences of 1987-1989. The New Democratic Party (NDP), then the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (Left), was the only political party to correctly identify the Indo-Sri Lanka accord as one made without consulting the Tamil national movements and designed to serve the regional interests of India as well as to suit the plans of the Jayawardena government to use the Indian army to fight its battles.

There were other opponents of the accord who had other motives that did not concern a just solution to the national question, like for example the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and certain elements in the then ruling United National Party (UNP), who were primarily opposed to the concessions made to the Tamil people. The JVP used this opportunity to whip up Sinhala chauvinist sentiments marked by strong anti-Indian feeling and confronted the state in an adventurist fashion. Its terror tactics misfired and enabled the

state to use its might not only to brutally crush the JVP insurrection but also slaughter around 50 000, comprising mainly youth suspected to be members and supporters of the JVP and members of their families. However, the presence of Indian soldiers on Sri Lankan soil was resented by all nationalities of this country and even those who expressed support for the accord, like for example the parliamentary left, finally conceded that the Indian forces had to leave. The price for Indian intervention was paid mainly by the Tamil masses of the North-East, and meddling by the Indian armed forces contributed further to the souring of the relations between the Tamil and Muslim communities.

It has at the same time not been the position of the Marxist-Leninists that a third party should not act to bring about a cessation of hostilities or to facilitate negotiations between the parties at war. What concerned them was that, often, third party intervention has involved forces with other interests that were detrimental to the well being of the parties in conflict. Thus, they have recommended that, as far as possible, the parties concerned should settle the issue through direct negotiation. But, under the circumstances prevailing in Sri Lanka, including the chauvinistic political climate, direct negotiations do not seem possible in the foreseeable future without an initiative by a mutually acceptable third party. Given the Marxist-Leninist position that the national question is the most pressing issue facing the country, they recognise the useful role of a third party as a facilitator or a mediator in the peace process. But they also emphasise the need for the two sides to negotiate a solution to the problem without creating the need for outside forces to impose peace. They have no doubt that one has always to be cautious about third party intervention in resolving conflicts in the Third World, whether it be civil war or conflict between countries.

We cannot deny that Serb chauvinism has to bear a considerable portion of the blame in the events that led to the break-up of Yugoslavia. But it was imperialism that took advantage of

the crisis in Yugoslavia to break up the federation, which, although only nominally a socialist country, was an important anti-imperialist force in the international scene. It had to be punished for its leading role in the non-aligned movement in challenging superpower hegemony in the decades preceding the decline and fall of the Soviet Union. Intervention by the UN in Bosnia-Herzegovina and by the NATO in Kosovo were inspired by US imperialist interests, and all acts of war by the UN and NATO were carried out in the name of peace. Intervention by imperialist armed forces only contributed to the worsening of relations between the different nationalities, and it will be useful to note here that 'ethnic cleansing' in Kosovo started only after NATO waged war on Serbia. The vicious role of the US and its European allies in dismembering Yugoslavia should be a lesson for the entire Third World.

The Tamil people still have bitter memories of the Indian peace keeping of fourteen years ago. Although some Tamil political leaders, including ex-militants, would like to erase the memories of 1987-1989 and get India involved, the Tamil public mood is still hostile to the idea. Again, what happened in the wake of the advance on Jaffna by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2000 is a reminder to the Tamil people that the priorities of the Indian ruling classes do not concern the interests of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka. It is also clear that the Tamil nationalist parties that dominate the political scene in Tamilnadu will do little to stop the Indian government acting against the Tamil people if it is in the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie. But some Tamil parties have continued to talk about peace keeping by UN or regional forces that involve the participation of India. What they fail to recognise is that, even if such peace keeping is acceptable, certain preconditions need to be met before it is put into place.

The entire people of Sri Lanka want peace. Even the local and foreign investors who do not profit directly or indirectly

from war want peace. Prolonging the war in the North-East does not serve US interests in the South Asia any more, and that is an important factor in the US support for the Norwegian peace initiative. The declaration of the LTTE as a terrorist organisation by the US government and US support to date for the Sri Lankan government has not enabled the Sri Lankan government to win its war of national oppression. Although the US reluctantly adopted a position in favour of Indian intervention in Sri Lanka following the loss of the Elephant Pass military base to the LTTE last May, there is a serious clash of interests between US imperialism and Indian expansionism on the question of regional hegemony in South Asia. It is against this background that attitudes towards the Norwegian peace initiative should be seen.

Despite the claims of the JVP that Norway is an imperialist power whose peace initiative is motivated by a Norwegian desire to exploit Sri Lankan marine resources, few would believe that Norway is an imperialist power. It is clear that the inventions by the JVP result from a need to find anti-imperialist respectability for its chauvinistic opposition to a peace move that could result in autonomy for the Tamils in the North-East. At the same time, we cannot pretend that we do not recognise the fact that Norway launched its peace offensive with the wholehearted blessings of the US. Does that make the Norwegian initiative an imperialist conspiracy?

While it is not correct to claim that Norway acts as the agent of US imperialist interests, one cannot deny the possibility that the US will seek to advance its interests through the peace process. In fact, the crisis in the peace efforts between the Israeli state and the Palestinian authority is a result of meddling by the US, which serves Zionist interests by posing to be neutral even when Israel is clearly the culprit in wrecking the peace process and by continuing to back Israel militarily and otherwise. Thus, a need for caution exists, but more from the point of view of the oppressed Tamil nationality than that of the Sri Lankan state.

But to reject the peace process on the basis of potential risks is to reject any peace effort in the foreseeable future.

What is the situation that confronts the Norwegian peace initiative? The experiences of eighteen years of war, the breach of every agreement between the government and the Tamil nationalist leadership and the long series of acts of deception by successive Sinhala chauvinist governments since 1947, and the hard line adopted recently by the Sri Lankan government do not provide much reason for the LTTE to take the Sri Lankan government at its word. On the other hand, the chauvinistic political climate created and encouraged over the past decades in the South and ceaseless efforts to portray the liberation struggle of the Tamils as mere terrorism serve as a serious obstacle to peace talks between the government and the LTTE. We cannot ignore the contribution of the erroneous forms of struggle by the LTTE to this political climate. But the fundamental problem remains the hard line taken by the chauvinistic political leadership of the major political parties in the South. In fact, chauvinism has fallen into the trap that it set for the minority nationalities.

Whatever the government says about peace, human rights and a just solution, its actions are more and more of an opposite nature. The declaration by the LTTE of its willingness to negotiate for a peaceful solution has, despite the serious reservations that many have about their politics and their method of struggle, placed the government and the Sinhala chauvinists in an awkward situation. The government is not in a position to reject openly the peace initiative by Norway nor is it able to bring about 'peace through war' as it once claimed it would. Thus, there are other strategies emerging from within the ranks of the government to disrupt the peace efforts. The venomous and chauvinistic speeches of the Prime Minister are matched by the jingoism of the Deputy Minister of Defence. The claims meanwhile by the state controlled media about the great victories in the battlefields, secured very much in territories abandoned as strategic liabilities

by the LTTE forces, fit well into this pattern. The Foreign Minister and the leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party, a former militant movement that is now a much junior partner in the government, are also doing whatever little they can to wreck the peace process.

The JVP and the Sihala Urumaya, the latter with only a Sinhala chauvinist anti-minority agenda, had one thing in common in the recent months, namely making political gains by pandering to Sinhala chauvinism. Although the UNP likes to appear to be in favour of Norwegian mediation, when it comes to the resolution of the national question, one cannot ignore its chequered past. The conduct of the UNP in the parliament only a few months before dissolution of parliament in August 2000 made it amply clear that it will not hesitate to wreck any solution to the national question if it would further in any way its desire to return to power. Besides the above described indigenous factors, there are other important regional factors that have been in play during the past few years.

Illusions about the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government were cultivated in a systematic fashion in the minds of the Tamil people by various elements including the private sector Tamil news media in Sri Lanka. The alliance between the BJP and the Makkal Dravida Munnetrak Kazhagam (MDMK), Paattaali Makkal Katchi (PMK), and even the Dravida Munnetrak Kazhagam (DMK), the party in power in the state of Tamil Nadu, was shown as a sign that the NDA government would not act against the interests of the Tamil nationality or in support of state oppression. This hope was boosted by the well known pro-LTTE stance of the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, whose hatred towards China and Pakistan is no secret. The LTTE had an even stranger supporter in the leader of the Marathi nationalist Shiv Sena, Balraj Thakare, a close associate of the forces of Hindutva that the BJP represents and well known for his anti-South Indian sentiments since the 1960's.

It was hoped that the NDA government would lift the ban imposed on the LTTE by the Congress government following suspicion that the LTTE was behind the assassination of Rajeev Gandhi. But this hope failed to materialise: the friends of the LTTE in the NDA could do little to prevent the extension of the ban when it was due. This should have made it clear to all Tamil nationalists that those who decide on foreign policy issues are not those elected to parliamentary power but the representatives of the ruling classes and that a Hindu chauvinist government will not sacrifice its ambitions for regional hegemony in order to defend the right to self-determination of the Tamils. The junior partners of the BJP simply struck the right balance between making fiery speeches in support of Tamil Eelam and safeguarding their cabinet posts in the Central Government. But there are many who still suffer illusions about the potential role of MDMK, PMK and Fernandes, and they may never learn that these friends of the LTTE will not jeopardise their relationship with the BJP, except in their own interest.

The situation is even less hopeful for those who pin their faith on the BJP. This has been clearly demonstrated by the course of events since May 2000. The Indian government's role went beyond offering help to the Sri Lankan government to avert military humiliation in the wake of the disaster at Elephant Pass. It has done all but openly declare its hostility to the Norwegian peace initiative. Open hostility to the peace initiative will expose India's ambition for hegemony running against the interests of peace in the region. Thus, Indian displeasure is indicated in other ways. The pro-BJP and the Brahminist media, such as the influential Hindu and Indian Express, have carried out a cynical and systematic campaign against the peace initiative to this day. The reiteration of the India's demand late last year for the extradition of V. Pirapakaran, the leader of the LTTE, is not only an indication that little has changed in favour of the Tamil liberation struggle, but also that the Indian estab-

lishment will tolerate none other than a client to be in charge in any part of Sri Lanka.

What should be remembered by the nations and oppressed nationalities of the South Asian region is that whether the government of India is Congress-led or BJP-led is irrelevant to the policy on Indian domination of the region. While there are significant differences between the two parties in their respective declared positions on questions of secularism and foreign policy, they represent an 'Indian nationalism' that serves the interests of the capitalist classes who are willing to make deals with the imperialists at the expense of the Indian masses. In fact, 'Indian nationalism' in the context of post-independence bourgeois rule could not have been anything but the ideology of the ruling classes. The communists of India had an opportunity to provide an alternative, which they have sadly missed to become even more 'patriotic' than the Congress and the BJP on issues such as national unity and self-determination. The compromise by the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party (Marxist) of India with Indian nationalism along with their *de facto* commitment to the parliamentary road to socialism has increasingly isolated them from the struggles of the most oppressed sections of the masses and national liberation struggles.

What needs to be stated most emphatically at this point is that crucial decisions that concern the 'national interests' of India are not made by the debating societies in the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament but by the administrative machinery, the security forces, the secret services and such other organisations which do not change when the elected government changes. Their might in determining major decisions cannot be taken away by parliament or parliamentary elections. Thus, until the nature of the Indian state changes, very little will change in India for the oppressed masses of India and the region.

India sees the Norwegian initiative as something concerning the interests of the US and European powers, and it will not be very tolerant towards anything that appears to undermine its right to meddle in the affairs of South Asia. It acts covertly to undermine the Norwegian initiative only because it is not in its interests to act overtly. Its new found moral high ground of opposition to 'terrorism' has other benefits as well, especially in its war of oppression in Kashmir.

Indian intelligence and subversion organisations have been actively involved in the affairs of Sri Lanka since the early 1970's. The Indian ruling classes resented the principled neutrality of the Sri Lankan government during the Sino-Indian border conflict of 1962 and India's wars with Pakistan, including the one that led to the birth of Bangladesh. The Sri Lankan government that sought the support of many governments in the region, including the Indian government, during the JVP insurrection of April 1970, agreed to allow Pakistan to use Sri Lanka as a base to transport its forces to what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). This position was correct in principle since, legally, Pakistan was dealing with a civil war, which was subsequently transformed by India into a war with India, which backed one of several factions. Indian pressure on Sri Lanka ensured that Pakistan found another way.

The integrity of Sri Lanka's neutrality in international affairs was not questioned even with the weakening of the economy in the wake of the events of the early half of the 1970's, including the JVP insurrection, the increase in oil prices as a result of the initiative of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and food shortages caused by two successive years of crop failure compounded by the decision of the US government to suddenly terminate the sale of subsidised wheat to Sri Lanka under PL480. The Indian government led by Indira Gandhi could not take full advantage of its military assistance for the Sri Lankan government following the JVP

uprising of April 1971. But certain outstanding issues concerning the two countries were settled, really to India's advantage, in 1975. Indian efforts to 'neutralise' Sri Lanka *vis a vis* China did not materialise, but Sri Lanka did not act in any way that was harmful to Indian regional interests until after 1977.

The arms of Indian expansionism were not idle. According to A.J. Wilson, a political scientist close to both the UNP and the Federal Party, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, the leader of the FP was keen to ask India to intervene in Sri Lanka following an increase in state oppression against the Tamils in the mid-1970's. The rise in Tamil youth militancy was observed with interest by Indian intelligence and the potential for exploiting this disaffection was in the mind of the Indian expansionists. Although Tamil militants had used India as their backyard in the 1970's, the real opportunity came only after 1977. But Morarji Desai, whose Janatha Party assumed power in India in 1977, was as pro-US as JR Jayawardena and was supportive of the UNP government. He turned a blind eye to the oppression of Tamils in Sri Lanka, but Indira Gandhi who returned to power in India in 1980 chose to exploit the Sri Lankan national problem to her advantage. Political observers saw her actions as an act of revenge against J.R. Jayawardena, who never concealed his distaste for her. But it was the UNP government's moves to befriend US at the expense of India's regional ambitions that provided the motivation for Indian involvement in the Tamil national question.

Activities of Tamil militants were tolerated in India during the early 1980's, but following the state sponsored anti-Tamil violence of 1983, India chose to militarily train and provide support for several militant organisations. Each was made to believe that it was the chosen one while agencies like the Research and Information Wing (RAW) and the Information Branch (IB) exploited internecine rivalry to keep the beneficiaries under their control and to discipline any who refused to comply. All militant organisations were of the impression that India would do for the

Sri Lankan Tamils what it did in 1971 for the Bengalis in what was East Pakistan.

The true intentions of India were revealed only when Rajeev Gandhi, who succeeded his mother Indira Gandhi who was assassinated in 1984, struck a deal with J.R. Jayawardena, by which India was able to ensure through the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 that Sri Lanka would not act in ways detrimental to India's ambitions for regional hegemony. While Sinhala chauvinism was able to stir Sinhala hostility to this deal, the Tamils had to experience two years of 'peace keeping' before they realised what the Indian ruling classes were after. Significantly, however, the Indian government agencies still exercise control over the leaders of some of the former militant organisations.

Indian agencies were also suspected of providing training for the JVP around 1985-86, the time when the Tamil militants were actively trained there. The JVP was reported to have maintained links with at least one Tamil militant organisation even when it acted against the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987. The JVP has of late abandoned its virulent anti-Indian line of the past, especially since the Sri Lankan Army debacle of May 2000, and has been soft on the right-wing government of India. The Sinhala chauvinists constituting the Sihala Urumaya (SU), founded in early 2000, too are warm towards India. It has been reported that the Sinhala Veera Vidhana, an anti-Tamil and anti-Muslim organisation, now a part of the SU, has for some time been receiving Indian patronage. The decline in anti-Indian sentiments of Sinhala chauvinists cannot certainly be a miraculous change of heart. The role of the anti-Muslim feelings of the BJP and the SU in forging this unholy alliance too cannot be negligible.

The reality is that the forces of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism, Hindutva and Indian expansionism are together in their efforts to undermine the Norwegian efforts to facilitate or mediate talks between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. Signifi-

cantly, the only Tamil political party of the North-East that is a partner in government was openly hostile to the peace efforts, until it was clear that the Tamil people are very keen that the government should respond positively to the LTTE cease-fire. The other Tamil nationalist parties that pay lip service to peace talks were reluctant to involve themselves in a campaign in support of the Norwegian initiative as proposed in January 2001 by the New Democratic Party (NDP). They are still reluctant to criticise India for its negative role, and after decades of hostility towards China, decided to include China in the list of countries that they want to lobby in support the peace initiative. Where they fail again, is that they still refuse to recognise where genuine support for peace with justice and dignity for the minorities can come from within the country.

Their reluctance to join hands with the NDP and the Left and Democratic Alliance is partly because that does not fit in with their plans for parliamentary political deals. Their abhorrence of mass politics too is a factor in their reluctance to be involved with the forces of the left. But reasons outside the country also need to be considered in today's context, since without exception, these Tamil nationalist groups and organisations have in the past relied to varying extents on Indian patronage for their political survival.

Any genuine leftist in Sri Lanka should support the Norwegian efforts to initiate talks and to urge the government to respond to the LTTE cease-fire. Norway is in the advantageous position of being acceptable to the government and the LTTE, and can, at least in the short run, be an 'honest broker' to bring about an end to the war and facilitate if not mediate a settlement. There is no guarantee that Norway can bring peace to Sri Lanka. But it is better placed than any other country that one can think of at present. Efforts by the JVP and the SU to tarnish the image of Norway by accusing it of 'imperialist' intentions and commercial interests are cynical and not in the interest of the people of

Sri Lanka. Equally bad are the irresponsible statements by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of the country and the demands on Britain to ban the LTTE at a time when the LTTE has stated most explicitly its desire for a negotiated settlement.

The prospects for peace slip with every wasted day since the more chauvinist sections will gain from the reluctance of the government to take the initiative. The government can hope to fool the international community and the various funding agencies with its halfhearted moves towards peace. Even a ban on the LTTE in the UK or elsewhere and the desired 'international isolation' of the LTTE cannot bring peace to this country. Let us not forget that the forces that oppose peace with the LTTE are also the ones that oppose a just solution to the national question.

Let us not for a moment forget the possibility that Norway can be used by the US or the EU to further their interests in this country. Such an event can be averted if the parties concerned in the conflict act with sincerity and honesty to bring about a lasting peace on the basis of justice and fair play. There is an even greater need to watch the moves of those who do not want peace talks. All acts of mischief can be thwarted if mass support can be mobilised for an end to war and for a just solution. The genuine forces of the left have to act firmly and with resolve and a sense of urgency to mobilise mass support for peace and to negate chauvinistic manoeuvres that will only prolong the agony of the masses of Sri Lanka.

[An amended translation of an article in Tamil by the Political Correspondent of *Puthiya Poomi*, Jan-Feb. 2001]

The standpoint of the old materialism is 'civil' society; the standpoint of the new is human society, or socialised humanity.

K Marx
Theses on Feuerbach, 1845 Spring

INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

Israeli Elections: Nothing Really Changed

Ehud Barak's defeat at the elections in February was a foregone conclusion. His initial acceptance of Ariel Sharon's offer of the post of Minister of Defence showed that he shared with Sharon a policy of hostility towards the Arabs. His later withdrawal from the proposed 'National Government' to go into retirement from politics is a career decision and not a political decision.

Barak's refusal to withdraw in favour of his Labour Party colleague Shimon Peres, who is reputedly softer on the Palestinians and had a good chance of winning, ensured Sharon's victory, and that was a gift to the hawks of Zionism. But Peres, even with his willingness to be 'more reasonable', could not be expected to defy the Zionist masters of Israel and their backers in the US. With the Labour Party and Peres now partners in the Sharon government, the hard reality facing the Palestinian masses is that they should persist in struggle even to survive as a people.

Kurdistan: The Campaign to Free Ocalan Gathers Strength

The oppressive Turkish regime arrested Abdella Ocalan two years ago with the help of Israel and the US. By arresting Ocalan, it hoped to bring the PKK's struggle for Kurdish liberation to an end. The death sentence passed on Ocalan by the Turkish kangaroo court revealed more to the world about the oppressive

nature of the Turkish state. What was achieved was that Turkish oppression of the Kurdish nation caught the attention of the whole world.

The campaign to free Ocalan is spreading all over Europe and growing in strength. It has also become a rallying point for the Kurdish national liberation struggle. Thus, the Turkish oppressor lifted a rock only to drop it on his own feet.

Indo-Pakistan rivalry

It was once the rivalry between the two superpowers that was exploited by the governments of India and Pakistan to prop up their shaky economies and to beef up their military strength. With only one superpower around, the game has changed, and is being played in different ways by the weaker states of South Asia. The Sri Lankan state seems to be a beneficiary of Indo-Pakistan rivalry.

Pakistan is trying to curry favour with a desperate Sri Lankan government in the middle of a serious foreign currency crisis by offering modern weapons on long-term credit. To what extent this will diminish the influence of India on the Sri Lankan ruling classes is something to be seen. But the only losers in this sorry state of affairs are the people of Sri Lanka.

The Earthquake in Gujarat

The earthquake that struck Gujarat took a heavy toll in lives and property. Much argument followed about the failure to anticipate the event and the handling of the event. But what is clear is that much of the loss of life and property was the result of human greed which was responsible for the poor quality of construction in the ruined urban areas.

Bad construction is often detected only when disaster strikes, as in many Asian countries in recent times. Bad construction in

Asia is not the result of bad technology. India has modern building technology that is second to none in the West. But there is much money to be made by saving on materials by the builders. It is those who minted money through improper and corrupt practices that are responsible for the losses. But they are also the very people who parade themselves as philanthropists by doling out money to the affected.

True humanitarianism was seen in the acts of kindness of the Pakistani people and Kashmiri militants who donated blood for the survivors of the earthquake. Not surprisingly, this received minimal attention from the Indian ruling classes and the media controlled by them.

Iraq: The Bombing Goes On

The continuity of US policy on Iraq was confirmed by the parting shot by President Clinton. The bombing of Iraq on his last day in office was symbolic, and the Bush administration is continuing with that policy. But the Anglo-American adventure backfired badly. NATO allies distanced themselves from the actions of the US and the UK, and France went so far as to criticise them. America's desire to impose its will on the world now seems harder to realise than it did after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This does not mean that US imperialism and its loyal bulldog will mend their ways in Iraq or elsewhere. Arrogance of power never learns humility except in humiliating defeat. It is for the people of the many countries of the world to campaign against this cruel bombing of the innocents in Iraq, and demand that their governments act fast to reverse UN sanctions against Iraq and actively breach UN sanctions in the event of the US and UK having their way in the UN Security Council with their power to veto.

The Philippines: Another Velvet Revolution?

The dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos was overthrown by public unrest. But the nature of the state did not change. Corason Aquino was 'more democratic' than her predecessor, but the capitalist classes and the land owning classes that she represented did not become any kinder to the people, nor did the armed forces become any gentler in their handling of the popular forces struggling against state oppression. Successive changes in government did not mean a change in the nature of the state and its bondage to the US imperialist masters.

Joseph Estrada too was elected with a powerful mandate. But he turned out to be as corrupt, anti-democratic and oppressive as Marcos. His downfall was very much in the same pattern as that of Marcos, but with 'People Power' getting a little help from the legislators. Estrada's successor Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, despite her solemn promises, cannot do much for the oppressed masses of the Philippines.

There is, nevertheless, something positive in the overthrow of another Ferdinand Marcos by the masses. It gives them new courage and will to fight, and when they realise that the parliamentary options before them are no real options, they will join hands with the revolutionary democratic forces of the Philippines to liberate their motherland.

Kashmir: Continued Ceasefire and Continued Killings

The BJP-led government has declared an extension to its ceasefire. But the number killed during the three months of ceasefire up to February 2001 reportedly exceeded that in the three months preceding the ceasefire. A ceasefire with no peace plan or proposal and no genuine desire for the settlement of

the national question of Kashmir will only prolong the agony of the Kashmiri people.

There can be no peace in Kashmir, until the principle of self-determination is respected by India and Pakistan. As long as India and Pakistan see Kashmir as a disputed territory, there can be no just solution to the problem.

If a country satisfies certain basic conditions, the US is tolerant of democratic forms, though in the Third World, where a proper outcome is hard to guarantee, often just barely.

Noam Chomsky
Detering Democracy, 1991, p.332

It should be borne in mind that human rights have only an instrumental function in the political culture, serving as a weapon against adversaries and a device to mobilise the public behind the banner of our nobility, as we denounce the real or alleged abuses of official enemies.

Noam Chomsky
Detering Democracy, 1991, p.130

The question whether objective truth can be attained by human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. It is in practice that man must prove the truth, that is, reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking. The dispute over the reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.

K Marx
Theses on Feuerbach, 1845 Spring

Democracy means to rely on the masses, correctly to follow the mass line. Hence, to be successful the movement against embezzlement, waste and bureaucracy must rely on the masses.

Ho Chi Minh
To Practice Thrift and Oppose Embezzlement, Waste and Bureaucracy, 1952

IN THEIR HEARTS

by R. MURUGAIYAN

*In their heart of hearts
they mumble and grumble,
those who go on dreaming
"If only the masses at large
can be left alone
in their illiterate misery and despair,
all comfort, pomp and prosperity
would solely be ours,
and limited to our tiny circle
with the shortest possible reach"*

*But on platforms and in assemblies
they preach, plead and pray,
uttering mystical phrases
about the Divine Dance,
the Heavenly Culture and Paths of Justice,
and parade themselves as saintly beings
amidst an unsuspecting mob
of duped imbeciles.*

TWO POEMS BY JOSE MARIA SISON

CHEMISTRY OF TEARS

Tears have too long been
the food of the weak
But hunger has become
anger so fierce,
Turning the tears of the meek
into nitroglycerine
To explode the vile system
of terror and greed.
Such is the chemistry of tears
catalysed by inequity.

FROM A BURNING BUSH

The voice of the people thunders forth
From a burning bush in the mountain,
Unite to overthrow the rule of terror
And the three gods of exploitation.

The lightening tongue of the fiery bush
Crackles and carries the flames
Over the rolling hills and meadows
To the expectant valleys and the plains.

More burning bushes rage and roar,
Boldly break out into fields of flames
And send up high flying scrolls
From the fields of stubble that blaze.

Lightenings smite the tower of idols.
The flying scrolls enter the apertures
And invite the flames from the stubble
To close in on the roots of the tower.

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