

# **NEW** **Democracy**

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

## **THE WAR AND THE DETERIORATION OF NATIONAL RELATIONS**

*It is clear in the aftermath of Agni Kheela I that the government cannot progress to peace through war. Sadly, the lessons of the losses in human life at tremendous economic cost to the country are soon forgotten. In fact, they are never learnt by the chauvinists. While after every military fiasco the vast majority of the population questioned the sense of this war, leaders of the Sinhala capitalist and chauvinist political parties and of the armed forces and the chauvinist media were only interested in analysing the causes for the failure and exploring ways of winning the war. Despite all manner of explanations about the need to continue the war, the war has become an end in itself to those who are ideologically bonded to chauvinism.*

*The government took the wrong attitude towards the Norwegian peace initiative right from the beginning. Every indication of LTTE's willingness to negotiate was seen as a sign of weakness and something to be taken advantage of. The government increasingly believed its own propaganda and was encouraged to do so by the Indian establishment, the mainstream news media, and even certain influential personalities associated with the Indian parliamentary 'left'.*

Today, the government is indicating willingness to negotiate with the LTTE, and even the Indian government is acknowledging the need for it, but only after ensuring that the Norwegian negotiators acknowledged that India will have a say in the peace process. The main opposition party is more interested in extracting concessions from the government as a price for co-operation in the peace process. The JVP has maintained a strange silence in the recent weeks, but has not indicated any change in its position on the national question. The signs are that even if a ceasefire is possible in the near future, the negotiations will go on for much longer. Meddling by India, the chauvinistic media, and chauvinistic organisations ranging from the Sinhala Veera Vidhana to the recently founded Api Sinhala are likely to complicate matters.

The tragedy of the current political situation is that the main political parties fail to acknowledge the fact that Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism is the main cause of the present crisis. Any attempt to circumvent this central issue will be a refusal to face reality, and chauvinism has to be overcome before narrow nationalism is defeated. The chauvinists also portray the national question as essentially a problem of terrorism and seek to reduce it, at best, to a Sinhala-Tamil issue. Thus, they deny the existence of other aspects of the problem. The fact that Sinhala-Muslim conflict of 1915 was the first major incident of communal violence on a national scale cannot be easily ignored. Sinhala Buddhist nationalism has since developed into the populist chauvinism that stands in the way of unity among the nationalities.

Muslims were not targeted by Sinhala chauvinism for a short period, but, with the Muslims emerging as serious rivals in small businesses and in the professions since the 1970's, hostility has grown among Sinhala businessmen and professionals. The anti-Muslim violence of 2<sup>nd</sup> May in Mawanella is a sign of the chauvinistic hatred that has been nurtured among the Sinhala petit-bourgeoisie. Although events of such severity may not recur in the near future, the feelings that underlie these acts of hatred continue to thrive.

The UNP and the JVP seem more interested in demonstrating that the blame lay with certain politicians of the ruling PA. The PA is attempting to deflect the charges in the direction of mischievous elements seeking to discredit the government. Muslim leaders in the PA and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress are embarrassed, but unlikely to do anything to make things worse for the PA. However, what is lacking in every one of them is the honesty to admit that Sinhala-Muslim relations have deteriorated because of the mishandling of the national question, owing to the three main Sinhala political parties pandering to chauvinism.

The continuing harassment of the Hill Country Tamils and discrimination against them has pushed a small number of youth towards the LTTE. This is in turn used to justify further harassment and acts of state sponsored violence against the Hill Country Tamils, as witnessed in the wake of the Bindunuweva massacre last year and the Balangoda incident of May this year.

If the government and the Sinhala opposition parties see the peace process as something that is done under international pressure, especially from countries that lend Sri Lanka money to prop up its tottering economy, the peace so achieved is bound to fail at the first possible provocation. There is a need for a fuller realisation that the unity of this country depends on the coexistence of the different nationalities as equals on the basis of mutual respect, tolerance and above all the right to self-determination.

Opportunist parliamentary politics is inimical to communal harmony. It permits bourgeois political parties to play the interests of one community against that of another for short-term political gain, and this has been the history of many decades of parliamentary politics in this country. Without an active mass movement for peace and understanding between the nationalities under the leadership of the working class, lasting unity is hard to achieve.

## LET US MOBILISE ON MAY DAY!

**Demand an end to the war, peace talks and self-determination!**

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(Statement issued by the Northern Regional Committee of the  
New Democratic Party)

May Day is the day of the struggle for the rights of the working class of the world. It is the day of remembrance of the struggle of the American working class, in which it shed blood to win its right for an eight-hour working day. This glorious day of revolutionary struggle is remembered annually as the day of declaration of revolutionary resolve to struggle against all forms of oppression in this world.

In Sri Lanka today, the national question has in the form of a war come to the fore as the main social contradiction. The North-East and its people as a whole have been subject to severe oppression and the livelihood of the people has been wrecked in every conceivable way.

In the past two decades, nearly seventy thousand people have been killed because of war. Many thousands have been severely injured and disabled. Several hundred thousands have been displaced from their homes to suffer a life of indignity and degradation as refugees within their country and abroad. People have lost property worth hundreds of million rupees.

Workers, peasants, fisher-folk, state and private sector employees and all kinds of working people are suffering in the hands of this cruel war. They are forced to lose the benefits of their efforts and labour and live a life of misery.

Women, in addition to their burdens of sorrow, continue to be subject to sexual harassment, torture and rape. There is no sign of a reduction in the acts of sexual violence and cruelty committed against women, irrespective of their age. A recent example of this is the sexual torture and rape in the detention camp in Uppukkulam, Mannar.

In addition, arbitrary arrests, disappearances and detention in prisons and detention centres without inquest or trial go on unabated. So far, no justice has been done with regard to those who have gone missing.

While the war situation is wreaking havoc in the lives of the ordinary people, it has its rewards for a selected few in the sectors of politics, commerce, transport and a few other sectors. The people most affected by the war remain those of the North-East.

Democratic, trade union and human rights too continue to be denied, and the war serves as a dense smokescreen for the denial of these rights. Workers and employees have been pushed into the plight of having to depend on the mercy of a few and beg for what should be their lawful rights such as opportunity for employment, security of employment, wage increases, provident fund and normal working hours. Workers face a harsh situation in which they are unable to safeguard the rights that they won through sustained struggle.

The chauvinistic genocidal war has been responsible for the continuation of the present tragic situation in the North-East and for the decay and degradation of the economy, political climate, social order and culture in the whole country. Forces of imperialism and regional hegemony have been acting behind the scene to ensure that this war reached its present peak.

The war of chauvinistic oppression has helped the implementation without hindrance of the policy of globalisation led by

America in Sri Lanka through liberalisation, privatisation and consumerism. The forces of imperialism and regional hegemony have succeeded in serving their respective interests of dominance by linking with the ruling classes of Sri Lanka in its conduct of the war in the North-East.

The government has made the war an excuse for raising the prices of goods and services and to burden the people with a high cost of living. The government is, through fully accepting the advice of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, enabling the rapid re-colonisation of the country to become a neo-colony. The United National Party and the ruling People's Alliance have followed identical policies in this matter. Both the parties of the ruling classes have used the war imposed on the Tamil people as a principal tool in their endeavour to serve their imperialist masters.

We demand that this chauvinistic war of oppression must be put to an end. At the same time, we insist that the national question that has been the cause of this war be resolved through peaceful negotiation. We welcome the calm and conditional approach of the Norwegian negotiator to bring about talks. A solution so achieved should comprise genuine autonomy for a united North-East based on the principle of the right to self-determination. The solution based on autonomy for the North-East should be such that the people of the North-East can determine their mode of existence, their way of life, and economic, political, social and cultural development without any form interference.

The solution based on such autonomy should also ensure that the identity and individuality of the Muslims of the North-East is preserved and that it is acceptable to them. A solution should be found in a similar way for the question of the national rights of the Hill Country Tamils.

A just solution for the national question is necessary to salvage the country and its people from the cruel climate of war. Our New Democratic Party emphasises on this May Day that there can be no solution through war and only a political solution through negotiation can solve the problem.

Mass movements that demonstrate the power of the unity of the people should be carried forward to oppose the war that is wrecking not only the North-East but also the whole country in several ways and to demand a just political solution. It should be shown that the force of the people is the mightiest force. That is the path to the solution.

The New Democratic Party has always taken the path of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and fought on the side of the people and against all forms of oppression. In the context of the present social structure, there is a need to struggle against racial, national, caste and gender based oppression at the theoretical and practical levels. This is a historical need too. Our Party calls upon the new generation to mobilise along the path of mass struggle with far sight and clarity of vision, so that it can carry forward its historical task.

- \* Let us mobilise on the revolutionary May Day!
- \* Let us demand a political solution!
- \* Let us carry forward the path of mass political struggle!

(We) should be on our guard not to overestimate science and the scientific method when it is a question of human problems; and we should not assume that experts are the only ones who have a right to express themselves on questions affecting the organisation of society.

Albert Einstein  
"Why Socialism," article written for *Monthly Review*,  
Vol. 1 No. 1, May 1949

# MOBILISE THE MASSES TO CAMPAIGN FOR SELF DETERMINATION

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(Excerpts from the May Day address of  
**Comrade S. K. SENTHIVEL**, General Secretary, NDP)

## On the economic policy of the PA government

President Chandrika Kumaratunge has abandoned all the promises she made at the time of coming to power in 1994. She is continuing with the policies of the UNP, and pursuing a policy of privatisation as instructed by the World Bank and the IMF.

Only a few sectors such as the banks, the railway and the postal services that have not been privatised yet. But it is said that negotiations are afoot to privatise these as well.

All the American companies that were driven off the Sri Lankan soil have now returned. They are plundering the wealth of this country while the power to determine the exchange rate of the US dollar has gone from the Central Bank to the IMF.

## Vulgarisation of workers' struggles

The glorious May Day is now being vulgarised by cheap musical programmes and stunt shows. Today in Jaffna, several trade unions go in procession to Sridhar movie theatre. When they get there, they receive blessings by

telephone from the 'leader', and they return in the belief that they have won their rights. Workers win their rights through struggle: what are won through patronage are not rights but alms. Workers should realise that only the rights that are won through struggle that will endure.

## On the attitude of the government

Those in power think that all problems will be solved if the LTTE is suppressed. However, their efforts to suppress are only causing the struggle to grow stronger.

The government, while saying that the problem should be solved through negotiations, is continuing with the war. The President has claimed that it is possible to simultaneously conduct the war and peace talks. The ordinary people know that this is not feasible and it is strange that the President is unable to understand what the ordinary people can.

The outcome of the war cannot be determined by modern weaponry, and peace cannot be secured through piling up modern weapons. A stage can arrive when the very weapons that are being used against the Tamil masses will be turned against the Sinhala masses. It should be noted that the Prevention of Terrorism Act designed to counter the LTTE had been used to detain Sinhala youth as well.

The last UNP government used the armed forces to kill tens of thousands of Sinhala youth between 1987 and 1989. After all, the same state machinery killed thousands of Sinhala youth in 1971.

## The struggle and the Tamil nationalists

The Tamil people are in this sad plight today because of the erroneous leadership of the Tamil leaders. When the

TULF passed the Vaddukkoddai resolution calling for an independent Tamil Eelam in 1976, we, the communists warned about the dangers of putting forward the demand for secession simply to secure a few seats in the parliament.

Mr Amirthalingam, the leader of the TULF declared in Valvettithurai: "Give us five-thousand youth and we will give you Tamil Eelam in six months". But, in the end, the very knife that he sharpened stabbed him in his chest.

Who is responsible for the killing of seventy thousand Tamils, the displacement of hundreds of thousands, and the loss of valuable property?

How many families have been wrecked by the gun toting Tamil groups that claim to have returned to the path of democracy? How many are the youth whose future has been wrecked by them? Is there a sacred river on this earth in which the leaders of these organisations can wash clean their sinful hands?

Taking shortcuts to progress will lead one along erroneous paths.

### **On the role of India in Sri Lanka's national question**

India is paying more attention to dominating Sri Lanka than to solving the national question of Sri Lanka. We can never forget the injustice perpetrated by the Indian government to the Lankan Tamils in 1987 and we need to be conscious of the cruel deeds carried out by the Indian armed forces on our soil between 1987 and 1990.

What happened to many like Eelaventhan who firmly believed that India would secure a separate state of Tamil Eelam for us? They have been deported from India amid strong protest. In fact, our Tamil leaders believed that

India is our 'motherland' and will never let us down. But they have been let down. India only sought to dominate Sri Lanka by using the Tamil militant organisations, but in the end it had to retreat after taking a severe beating.

Today, Sinhala chauvinist organisations such as the Sihala Urumaya and Veera Vidhana are the beneficiaries of Indian support. These organisations see India as an anti-LTTE country and therefore demand that Norwegian mediation should be abandoned in favour of Indian mediation.

We cannot struggle for our rights by relying on India, America or Britain. If we do, we will end up conducting a struggle directed by them.

### **On reassessing the nature of the Tamil leadership**

From Sir P. Ramaniathan to A. Amirthalingam, what all the Tamil politicians wanted was to crown themselves as leaders of Tamils and not to win liberation for the Tamils. The ascent to power of J.R. Jayawardene in 1977 also marked the worsening of the relationship between the nationalities. It was this, which forced the Tamil youth to bear arms. The history of the Tamil people who have been suffering untold misery for the past twenty years needs to be changed.

To achieve this, there is a need for a broad based mass uprising. The working people and peasantry should unite. Our rights to justice should be explained to the Sinhala people. The history of the struggle of the Tamil people, including the role of leaders such as Sir P. Ramanathan, A. Amirthalingam and V. Pirabakaran needs to be re-viewed.

The conservative and self-centred Jaffna society should be mobilised across caste and class boundaries. They

should abandon empty slogans and meaningless demands and unite around the policy of winning liberation.

A nationality has been pushed to the brink of struggle between life and death. Moreover, it is those who carried the gun for the past two decades who have been guiding us. They are responsible for the plight of the people. They have not permitted the people to discuss politics, to participate in politics, or to engage in mass struggles. They proclaimed: "Stand by us, who carry weapons. We will win your rights". And they isolated the people from politics.

That is precisely why it is important to mobilise the people and to emphasise through them the right to self-determination. It is only through an autonomy comprising the merged North-East and free of interference by the central government that a state of normalcy can be restored and peace secured.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; that is, the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships.

**K. Marx and F. Engels**  
*The German Ideology.*

If the Japanese scientist, in order to help mankind vanquish syphilis, had the patience to test six hundred and five preparations before he developed a six hundred and sixth which met definite requirements, then those who want to solve a more difficult problem, namely to vanquish capitalism, must have the perseverance to try hundreds and thousands of new methods, means and weapons of struggle in order to elaborate the most suitable of them.

**V.I. Lenin**  
*A Great Beginning, 28 June 1919*

The American oligarchy's need for a huge military machine must be sought elsewhere than in a non-existent threat of Soviet aggression.... The central purpose has always been the same: to prevent the expansion of socialism, to compress it into as small an area as possible, and ultimately to wipe it off the face of the earth. What have changed with changing conditions are the methods and strategies used to achieve these unchanging goals.

**Paul A. Baran & Paul A. Sweezy**  
*Monopoly Capital, 1966*

Every theory of armed struggle has to arise as the consequence of an actual armed struggle. In every case, practice comes first and theory thereafter .... If you really want to advance the struggle you must make a critical assessment of the experiences of others before applying their theories, but a basic theory of armed struggle has to come from the reality of the fight

**Amilcar Cabral**  
*Our People are Our Mountains, 1971*

## SRI LANKAN EVENTS

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### The New Democratic Party Celebrates May Day

The New Democratic Party celebrated May Day in Jaffna and in Ragala. The Revolutionary May Day Rally in Jaffna, organised jointly by the New Democratic Party and the Nava Lanka Workers' Union, was held at the Auditorium of the Jaffna Multi-Purpose Co-operative Society. The meeting was addressed by Comrade S.K. Senthivel on behalf of the NDP (excerpts of speech published in this issue), Comrade K. Panchalingam on behalf of the NLWU, Comrade K. Thanikasalam on behalf of the Deshiya Kalai Ilakkiyap Peravai, Comrade P. Murugesu representing the peasantry, Comrade S. Thavaraja on behalf of the Democratic Youth Front and other trade union representatives. The meeting was followed by a revolutionary cultural programme, which included the staging of the Tamil Play 'Puthiyathor Ulakam' (A New World).

The Revolutionary May Day Procession and Rally in Ragala was addressed by Comrades E. Thambiah, S. Thevarajah, S. Rajendran, S. Panneerselvam, J. Satkurunathan, P. Chandrakumar, K. Subramaniam, Ms Kalaichelvi and T. Sanmugarajah on behalf of the NDP and affiliated mass organisations and Comrade Patrick Fernando of the Diyasa Study Circle and Comrade Vasantha Dissanayake of the United Socialist Party. The slogans put forward at the Rally concerned the demands for a new wage structure that includes a Rs 400/= allowance for the plantation workers, cost of living relief, right to autonomy for the Hill Country Tamils, the immediate release of the Hill Country Tamil youth held in detention, an end to the war

and the right to self determination of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities, and a call for the struggle against globalisation, capitalism and racism.

Both May Day events were well attended. They reflected a spirit of confidence and determination, while drawing attention to the grim political reality facing the country and to the arduous tasks ahead.

### Chauvinism Strikes Again

The day after May Day was marked by planned communal violence directed against the Muslims in the town of Mawanella in the Hill Country. Mawanella town has a thriving business community of Muslims and Sinhalese who have coexisted in peace for many decades. Acts of communal violence were reportedly provoked by the refusal of a Muslim shopkeeper who refused to pay 'protection money' to a gangster with pro-government leanings. Well over one hundred shops and around a hundred homes suffered serious damage. Two mosques were badly damaged as was a statue of the Buddha situated in the town.

Muslims in Colombo, angered by the event, decided to go on a protest demonstration in Maradana, Colombo following their communal worship on the afternoon of Friday, 4th May. Police efforts to control the crowd led to provocations resulting in stone throwing at passing and parked vehicles. Unlike in Mawanella, the situation was quickly brought under control before it could lead to further violence, and a few Muslims including a Muslim nationalist politician were detained for questioning.

The leading political parties are making accusations and counter accusations about the events and about the involvement of a government minister and ruling party politicians in the events of Mawanella and about mischief-makers for the incidents of Maradana. What has been ignored by the PA, the UNP and the

JVP is that the events of Mawanella could not have taken place without a political climate of chauvinistic hostility towards the Muslims. The fact that Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists have been able to use the media to falsely accuse the Muslims for both incidents and that anti-Muslim activities have been on the rise over the past decade or so has escaped the attention of these parties. This is not surprising, since each of them has a strong power base among forces of Sinhala chauvinism, which any of them dare not antagonise.

### **Targeting the Plantation Workers**

The killing of an army deserter by Tamil plantation workers in Balangoda following sexual harassment of a female led to the arrest of some suspects. Gangs of 'villagers' were able to attack the suspects while the suspects were in police custody. It is notable that the government takes particular care to ensure that detainees belonging to the armed forces are spared the wrath of the public. The treatment of the members of the minority nationality in police custody has been in the pattern of Welikada in 1983 and Bindunuweva last year, and the trend continues.

The Hill Country Tamils are angered by such events and even more by the behaviour of their leaders who, for a taste of power, are still clinging on to alliances led by Sinhala chauvinist parties.

### **The Quenching of the Rods of Fire**

Scarcely hours after the LTTE ended its unilateral ceasefire on 25th April, the government forces in the North launched their latest military offensive, 'Agni Khiela' as a pre-emptive attack against the LTTE and to recapture some more of the territory that they lost to the LTTE an year ago. The military offensive proved to be a military as well as a political disaster for the government. Several hundred soldiers lost their lives in vain when they ran into stiff resistance from the LTTE and more impor-

tantly, the government's image was tarnished in the eyes of the advocates of war as well as the campaigners for peace.

The government appears to have squandered an excellent opportunity to initiate peace talks when the LTTE adhered to its unilateral ceasefire. Much effort was spent on putting pressure on the international community to ban the LTTE, which was banned along with several other 'terrorist organisations' by the UK more for other reasons including pressure from India. Even more effort went into analysing the intentions of the LTTE and finding reasons why the government should not negotiate. Efforts to undermine the Norwegian peace initiative were, in particular, encouraged by the Indian government, which succeeded in pressurising Norway into consulting India in the conduct of the peace process and persuading the Sri Lankan government to limit the role of Norway. Indian authorities went to the extent of rejecting the proposed memorandum of understanding between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE.

The government appears to have been misled by the extent of the military successes in the North during the period of the LTTE ceasefire as well as by the covert and overt encouragement by the Indian government in finding a military solution to the conflict. Although the government seems more amenable to peace talks now than it was during the past several months, the prospects for peace are still not bright. With forces of chauvinism in control in the three main political parties in the South and pressure from extremist organisations such as the Sihala Urumaya and sections of the Buddhist clergy, the success of the talks is very much in the balance.

The Agni Khiela disaster was an avoidable human tragedy. The loss of lives, like in many earlier occasions, has not benefited the country in any way. These losses can find meaning if they can only lead to a sincere pursuit of peace and a just and lasting solution to the national question.

## BANKRUPTCY OF THE TRADE UNIONS IN THE PLANTATION SECTOR

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by E. THAMBIAH, National Organiser, NDP

**T**ea, rubber and coconut plantations have been the mainstay of both the colonial and post-colonial economy of Sri Lanka. The tea plantations are mainly in the central region of the country and the rubber plantations in regions surrounding those planted to tea. Coconut was mostly grown closer to the coast. Plantations were first set up in the 19th century by the British colonial rulers, who initially planted coffee in the central highlands and abandoned coffee following blight that killed off most of the coffee plants. By early 20th century the estate sector had expanded to include tea, rubber and coconut. In the colonial era, the plantation sector was mainly export oriented. The dependence on the export of tea, rubber and coconut continued even into the post-colonial era, and income from these crops comprised the bulk of the export earnings of the country. Even after the so-called independence in 1948, the plantations remained mainly under the ownership or control of British companies.

The SLFP-led United Front government of 1970-77 nationalised the tea plantations under its land reform legislation and placed them under semi-government organisations such as the State Plantation Corporation, People's Estate Development Board and various co-operative societies. Owing to the chauvinistic attitude of the government towards the plantation workers,

who were predominantly Tamils of recent Indian origin who constituted the bulk of the Hill Country Tamil nationality, and the mismanagement of the estates by political and nepotistic appointees, who lacked knowledge and experience in managing the plantations, the plantation economy faced ruin. The UNP, which came to power in 1977, did not put right the defects of management. Instead, it handed over the management of the plantations to 22 private companies, under pressure from the IMF and the World Bank.

While it is true that the dominant role of the plantations in the national economy has eroded to a large degree, it still leads the export sector and remains a major source of employment, with 400,000 workers depending on it for their livelihood. Their ancestors were brought into the country by the British from South India a century or more ago, but a substantial number of them are still 'stateless' (i.e., without any form of citizenship).

While the plantation workers remain the most organised and unionised working force on the country, they live in sub-human conditions. Their wage levels are much below that of manual workers in any other sector of the Sri Lankan economy. Often, wage increases awarded by the government to offset the rise in cost of living or other difficulties faced by the workers were to the exclusion of the plantation workers. The plantation workers have had to wage struggles to win even the smallest wage concession.

For example, a collective agreement was concluded between the plantation trade unions and the management in June 2000 according to which a worker was entitled to a basic daily wage of Rs 101/=, an incentive allowance of Rs 6/= and an attendance incentive of Rs 15/=. When the government announced by its gazette notification of 31st July 2000 that all private sector employees were entitled to a wage increase of Rs

400/= per month for monthly wage earners and Rs 16/= per day for daily wage earners, employees who were covered by collective agreements signed between January and July 2000 were excluded. As a result, the plantation workers did not benefit from the announced wage increase on technical grounds, since the Ceylon Employers' Federation representing the plantation companies had concluded an agreement in June 2000 with three of the leading plantation trade unions, namely the CWC, the LJEWU and the JPTUC.

The plantation trade unions protested in anger against this act of discrimination, pointing out that the agreement of June 2000 was only designed to regularise wages in the plantation sector, whereas the Rs 400/= offered by the government was to meet the rising cost of living. Thus, the denial of this increase to the plantation workers amounted to discrimination.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga appointed a commission to look into the complaint of the trade unions, and it is widely believed that the ruling of the commission was in favour of the position taken by unions. But the plantation workers were denied the increase in wage. The CWC, which is also a partner in power with the Popular Alliance government, without consulting other plantation trade unions, launched a strike on the eve of the general election of 10th October 2000. On the morning of the election, the state radio announced that the demand by the CWC for an increase in wage of Rs 400/= had been granted. It became clear soon that both the demand by the CWC and the consent of the government were part of a planned act of deception designed to help the CWC candidates facing the polls on 10th October as allies of the PA.

This shameful act of deception made the CWC and its leader Arumugam Thondaman, a cabinet minister and grandson of the late S. Thondaman who led the CWC until he died a year earlier, very unpopular. To add to this unpopularity was the in-

sensitivity of the CWC to the massacre of detainees at the rehabilitation camp in Bindunuweva, the protests against the massacre and the acts of intimidation in the aftermath of the protests.

Many of the readers will know of the killing of Tamil inmates in the Bindunuweva rehabilitation camp in October 2000. The victims included Hill Country Tamils and members of the community came out in the streets to protest against the killings. The demonstration organised by trade unions, political parties and other mass movements was attended by many thousands, and the participants were subject to police brutality and attack by Sinhalese mobs, purely because they were Tamils. The workers who participated in demonstration were angered not only by the killings but also by the burden of the rising cost of living, the denial of a wage increase and the deception by the CWC. It was therefore not surprising that the leader of the CWC, in his statements, attacked the demonstration and poured words of scorn against the participants and left for India, leaving behind him a trouble situation, much in the way his grandfather did when struggles by the plantation workers were at their height.

In a desperate move to salvage his leadership and the position of the CWC vis-à-vis the plantation workers, Arumugam Thondaman launched a 'satyagraha' campaign to press for wage increase of Rs 400/=. Despite their suspicion about the motives of Arumugam Thondaman, rival trade unions and several political parties extended their support for this campaign. The New Democratic Party was among the first to express support, which it lent without stint. The NDP, without associating itself with the show put on by the CWC leadership, carried out its poster campaign in support of the demand. In all, the satyagraha campaign was an event of major political awakening in the hill country as a whole.

One month into the campaign, the CWC along with the LJEWU and the JPTUC came to an agreement with the

Ceylon Employers' Federation and called off the campaign. Arumugam Thondaman and his Trade Union and political rivals Chandrasekaran (a UNP ally and elected MP on the UNP ticket) and Sellasamy (a UNP national list MP) competed to claim that they had won the wage increase, but it turned out that they had won nothing.

The settlement with the Employers' Federation turned out to be nothing more than a re adjustment of the structure of the maximum daily wage that the plantation worker was entitled to. While the basic wage was set at Rs 116/= in place of the earlier basic wage of Rs 101/= plus the incentive allowance of Rs 5/=, reflecting an increase of Rs 9/=, the attendance incentive was reduced from Rs 14/= to Rs 5/= so the maximum wage remained where it was at Rs 121/=. The attendance incentive is, however, to be paid for those with 75 % attendance rather than with 90 % earlier. In fact, the categories of workers with 25 days of work per month (over 75 % attendance) include those who work in tea factories, nurseries and estate bungalow gardens, to whom the wage increase has no relevance. The 'new' agreement does not entail any new financial commitments for the companies and only involves an amendment to the June 2000 collective agreement.

The settlement was, thus, a total sell out of the satyagraha campaign and a crude betrayal of trust of the workers. The history of the CWC is full of compromises that have rendered worthless the struggles of the workers. The CWC leadership also resorts to shameless lies to cover up its treachery, as it did recently in connection with the struggle for the Rs 400/= wage increase. It was joined by other trade unions in claiming that they scored an unqualified victory for the unity of the leadership of the trade unions when the truth was that the struggle was sold down the river.

Interestingly, the Chairman of the Employers' Federation and Chief Executive Officer of Agalawatte Plantations Ltd, Rajiv de Silva claimed that the companies simply played around with the numbers and that the demand for the wage increase of Rs 400/= was not conceded in the settlement following the satyagraha. This is much closer to the truth than any claim by the trade union leaders.

The betrayal of the satyagraha demonstrated the absolute bankruptcy of the plantation trade unions with leaders who come from semi-feudal and capitalist backgrounds. The parliamentary political leaders of the Hill Country Tamils and trade unionists have been thoroughly exposed by their own actions. They lack the courage to mobilise the class-conscious workers to fight the plantation companies and to strike a hard bargain to obtain a fairer settlement. In fact, they are so badly isolated from the working class that they are not opposed to globalisation and privatisation.

The plantation trade unions are the children of the colonial era and are the beneficiaries of the concessions secured from the British colonial rulers. They are not fit even to make a reasonable bargain in the present economic set-up where the workers are subject to even greater exploitation. It is folly to expect them to play a progressive role or even to carry out some reformist tasks to improve the living conditions of the plantation workers.

The plantation workers need to build up their trade union movement afresh on the basis of their class identity so that their just struggles will not fall victim to the kind of betrayals and sell-outs that they have seen in the past. The plantation workers have to draw up their own programme of action to safeguard the plantation economy from the exploitation of the plantation companies that is not only weakening the workers but also ruining the plantation economy.

# MORALITY, OURS AND THEIRS

(Marxist reasoning and nationalist reasoning)

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by IMAYAVARAMBAN

The claim that 'Nationalism is fundamental' has very much subsided now. Those who sought to find an ideological rationale for nationalism based on its history could not rescue themselves from the absurdity of their own arguments. However, the defeat of the philosophical reasoning and ideological justification on behalf of nationalism has not marked the end of nationalism. For, where there is national oppression there is nourishment for nationalism. When one seeks a solution based on nationalism for national oppression or any other national problem, there is the danger that the solution can lead to worse problems than it sought to eliminate. This danger is inherent in nationalism.

Even under circumstances where nationalism is progressive, it introduces features of hostility into essentially friendly contradictions among people. Nationalist reasoning, even within a given nationality, fails on the question of human equality. Marxist reasoning, despite errors in applying it to practice and defects in approach, can only be based on the principle of human equality. We find that the approach of those who adopt a narrow nationalist line in the name of Marxism inevitably becomes anti-working class and hostile to oppressed people. The mettle of one's Marxism can be tested on the basis of the stand taken by one in not only the national question but also every social contradiction that involves the oppression of man by man.

Thus, despite the differences between a variety of solutions and decisions that honest Marxists may come up with in a given context, one could recognise certain fundamental points of agreement. It is understandable that nationalists cannot find agreement on any issue other than the national question. Besides, nationalism also creates for itself grave problems concerning the matter of national identity.

The development of all forms of social and political thought has depended on human identity. People have more than one identity in society. Differences in identity become causes for contradictions among people. All differences in identity, with the exception of gender, are mutable, and have to be viewed in their historical context.

Some forms of identity have a long history. Colour and race are two examples. However, mixing between people of different races and colour has persisted throughout history. Language, culture, region and religion have enabled people to identify themselves as a social group and function as one. Nevertheless, they too have been subject to change, at individual level and at the level of a community. Division of labour and the hierarchical social stratification that accompanied it during the course of development of the human society caused the emergence of class society that institutionalised the exploitation of man by man. Human identities and human societies today have a class basis. To that extent, the history of the world has been the history of class contradictions and class struggle.

Identity plays an important role in the relationship between people. The extent to which identity affects the relationship between people depends on the importance attached to the differences in the various aspects of identity. Differences in human identity are essentially friendly contradictions. There is much evidence for this in history. But when state power takes advantage of these differences, elements of hostility are allowed

to enter and grow within these contradictions. Racism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, linguistic and religious fanaticism, nationalism and caste ideology have each in some historical context been the ideology of a small minority to enable it to reinforce and expand its dominance and to legitimise its actions.

Historically the identity of people has continued to change. Racial mixing, linguistic mixing, change of religion and changes within religions, interactions between countries and regions at various levels, war, invasion, exodus, migration, exchange of ideas, the growth in the means of communication and several other human activities have resulted in the continuous transformation of the identity that any group of people may give themselves, and history has also witnessed genocide. One can readily see the difference between the nationalist view of identity and the relationship between societies that do not share an identity and the Marxist view. It is this difference in view that distinguishes nationalist morality from Marxist morality.

When nationalist reason crosses the boundary of struggle against national oppression, it takes a step in the direction of chauvinism. The history of cruel oppression of the Jews by white racism, dogmatic Christianity and a variety of European nationalisms in Europe is several centuries long. Initially, many European nationalists ignored the acts of persecution and genocide against the Jews by Nazism with the aid of such ideologies. After the creation of Israel by the big powers to serve the interests of imperialism, the very Jewish nationalism that fought for liberation became an aggressor and the watchdog of American interests in the Middle East. What the various Arab states that pose off as Arab nationalists have done for the liberation of the oppressed Palestinians pales into insignificance before what they have done to strengthen their grip on state power and enrich themselves.

National identity is complex to define in countries with several ethnic groups. There are times when people of the same ethnic

group emphasise religious and regional differences between member groups. On the other hand, we see instances, as in the case of Cuba, where Hispanic white, black and mulatto people are able to see themselves as one nation. Again, in several countries of the West Indies, people originating from the Indian sub-continent have long abandoned their 'Indian' identity. Their 'Indian' identity has, however, been exploited by British and American imperialists, as in the case of Guyana, to whip up hostility towards them.

What is important to be noted is that there is nothing natural or eternal about nationalism and that nationalism is something that emerges out of a society in response to a socio-political climate at some point of time in history.

Indian nationalism, Tamil nationalism, Hindutva and the various caste identities that are asserting themselves in the politics of Tamilnadu are equally absurd. A small social group, with a short-term perspective and to further its own interests, has nurtured each of them. But that does not render absurd the human identities that they seek to represent. These identities deserve to be treated with respect. The Marxist approach sees this respect as something based on the equality of all human beings and as the right of a social group to preserve its identity in that context. The nationalist approach gives precedence to one identity and subordinates the interests of all other groups to those of one.

Even today, in Sri Lanka we hear some Tamil nationalist speak in a derogatory fashion about the Sinhalese. The Marxist view is that neither insulting remarks against the Tamils by Sinhala chauvinists nor their offensive deeds against Tamils and Muslims can justify insulting the Sinhalese. It is when only a Marxist becomes a degenerate that it becomes possible for his thinking to be dominated by narrow nationalism. We have seen the Lanka Samasamaja Party and the revisionist Communist Party take

the slippery road of chauvinistic politics following their rejection of the revolutionary line in the early 1960's. We also know that every genuine Marxist-Leninist criticised their opportunism. It was not necessary for a Marxist to be a Tamil or a Muslim to make that criticism. Similarly, when Muslims and Sinhalese are made to suffer in the North-East in the name of liberation, a Marxist condemns it irrespective of his national identity.

As stated earlier, the reason for the differences between the Marxist approach to the national question and the nationalist approach are easy to recognise. The former opposes the oppression of any nationality, but the latter, while opposing the oppression of a particular nationality, endorses the oppression of other nationalities by that nationality.

Tamil nationalists in Tamilnadu, who resent the loss of linguistic identity of Tamils who migrate to North India or any other part of India or any other part of the world, are known to insist that Telugu, Marathi and other non-Tamil settlers in Tamilnadu and other regions with a Tamil majority should abandon their mother tongue. We also see that, even when settlers from outside Tamilnadu use Tamil as the main language of their day-to-day life, they 'alien origin' is taken advantage of to attack them when necessary. The Marxist approach not only recognises the right of the individual and any social group to preserve their identity but also considers it correct to facilitate it.

One needs to be cautioned at this point about dogmatic Marxism and opportunism. Some dogmatists argue that, since all will be well after a socialist regime is in place, nothing but class struggle matters, and thereby reject all other social struggles including the national liberation struggle. Here, it is worth reminding ourselves of Mao Zedong's view that dogmatic Marxism is of less worth than excreta. Dogmatic Marxism is not Marxism, but what has been excreted by living Marxism in the course of history. There is on the other hand the opportunist

tendency that betrays the people to make deals with the ruling classes and imperialism. Its tradition is really that of the social democracy that Lenin aptly described as social imperialism. The opportunists who masquerade as Marxists to gain popular support reveal their nationalistic and opportunistic nature when confronted by the question of national oppression.

Nationalism finds itself incapable of taking a clear stand on issues such as human equality, socialism, feminism, environment, neo-colonialism, multinational companies, casteism, religious and linguistic rights of minorities. And one may find that, whenever it has taken a clear and correct stand, it has been in the context of a national liberation struggle guided by leftist ideology.

I do not argue that Marxists have always taken the correct stand on all occasions. In fact, Marxism cannot have an inflexible and eternal policy on nationalism. It views the national question based on a more fundamental issue concerning social class. It has the need to view a national liberation struggle not from the point of view of one nationality or the other but by taking into consideration several factors including the global, local and regional situations. As a result, there is room for error, but such errors can be rectified by correctly reviewing the earlier assessment.

It is not possible to reduce the concepts of self-determination, nation and national liberation to mere formulae. That would not be Marxism either. They need to be subject to examination from various angles. There is a need to differentiate various aspects of the contradictions of a friendly nature among the people from the various aspects of the contradictions of a hostile nature between the people and the enemy. It is on this basis that Marxists recommend that the solution of the national question require an approach that excluded armed conflict. But, at the same time, it holds that it is entirely correct for people to resort to armed struggle when facing a genocidal war of national oppression.

On the question of who is a friend and who is an enemy, a Marxist can clearly tell the difference between the people and racialists. What Marxism seeks to do is to prevent the transform of a war of liberation into hostility between people of different nationalities. Nationalism cannot adopt such an approach. It is easily tempted to form unprincipled alliances based on the idea that the enemy's enemy is a friend and thereby enable the replacement of one form of oppression by another.

Nationalist reason is a prisoner of the national identity that it has defined for itself. Its inability to reach across the limits it has set for itself contributes to its moral weaknesses. National interests emphasised by a nationalist invariably allow the advancement of one nationality at the expense of other nationalities. Thus, from a nationalist point of view, for conflicts between nationalities to cease, all other nationalities should cease to exist. This is not possible without war, and the nationalist politics Adolf Hitler, although an extreme example, serves as a useful reminder.

Marxist reason seeks the elimination of social classes. It wants the annihilation of the capitalist class as a class. What is needed is the elimination of the case for the existence of an exploiting class, not the elimination of individuals that constitute the class. Since capitalism (i.e., imperialism in the present context) imposes war on the oppressed people, armed struggle becomes an inevitable historical necessity. Since what Marxism aims to achieve is a social order in which there is no room for the exploitation and oppression of man by man, its main target is a particular social order and not any individual. When socialism leads to communism, not only the capitalist class will be eliminated at the dawn of a classless human society but also the proletariat.



## THE CHALLENGE OF INDIAN HEGEMONY

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by DEEPAN

The Hindutva ruling class of India has always wanted the ruling class of Sri Lanka to submit to its hegemony and conform to its position in handling the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka. Under the guise of co-operating with the Sri Lankan Government to resolve the problem of citizenship for the Tamils of Indian origin (now widely referred to as the Hill Country Tamils since most of them are settled in the central highlands of the island) who were brought to Sri Lanka to work in the tea, rubber and coconut plantations.

Under the Sirima-Shastri Pact of 1965 and the Indira-Sirima Pact of 1974, the Indian Government enabled the Sri Lankan Government to extradite a large proportion of the Hill Country Tamils to India while granting Sri Lankan nationality to a smaller proportion. It should be noted here that the Hill Country Tamils were rendered 'stateless' in 1948 by the first post-independence government of the country, led by D.S. Senanayake, its first Prime Minister. Despite the various laws of citizenship and the said agreements that were supposed to have solved the citizenship problem, two hundred thousand Hill Country Tamils remain 'stateless'

In the 1950's, India sought to disrupt the Sri Lankan plantation industry by various means. In particular, it prevented

Tamil plantation workers from travelling between Sri Lanka and India. In 1971, a section of the Indian Air Force was sent to Sri Lanka to help the Sri Lankan Government to overcome the JVP insurrection. In the 1980's, the Indian ruling class resorted to using the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka to its advantage, training and arming nearly all the Tamil militant separatist groups, over whom India exercised total domination. In 1987, the Indian strategy changed and the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 was signed by Rajeev Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister and J.R. Jayawardene, the Sri Lankan President. India was able to bring President Jayawardene to his knees through the Accord, which recognised Indian hegemony over Sri Lanka.

It was clear that India was not concerned about the rights of the Tamils of Sri Lanka, when in late 1987 India fought alongside the Sri Lankan armed forces against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the only significant Tamil militant separatist organisation that was outside Indian control, even after it was pressurised into accepting the Accord. The Indian troops referred to as the 'Indian Peace Keeping Force' had been sent to ensure peace in the North and East of Sri Lanka to enable the implementation of the Accord, but what the IPKF achieved was the deterioration of the already chaotic situation. Thousands of Tamil youth were killed and several Tamil women were raped by soldiers of the IPKF.

When R. Premadasa assumed office as President in 1989, he demanded that India should withdraw its troops. India, in turn, encouraged the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, an Indian client organisation in control of the newly formed North-East Province, to unilaterally declare independence of this region. With the collapse of the EPRLF-led regime in the North-East, India was forced to pullout the IPKF. The withdrawal of the IPKF was by no means an end to Indian meddling. India did everything in its power to prevent the Sri Lankan Government from coming to an agreement with the

LTTE. India succeeded in its conspiracy to drive a wedge between President Premadasa and the LTTE, and President Premadasa submitted to Indian control.

Following the assassination of Rajeev Gandhi, who was out of power since 1989, the Indian ruling class took express steps against the LTTE, which was accused of the assassination. Following her election as President in 1995, Chandrika Kumaratunga expressed her desire to negotiate with the LTTE, but India was strongly opposed to this and demanded the extradition of the leader of the LTTE, V. Pirabakaran for trial in connection with the assassination of Rajeev Gandhi. This was rather strange since India showed not the slightest interest in trying Rohana Kumara, the member of the Sri Lanka Navy who attempted to kill Rajeev Gandhi during the Guard of Honour accorded to him when the latter visited Sri Lanka to sign the Accord of 1987. The Sri Lankan Government was instead asked to pardon the attacker. If the Indian attitude to the Sri Lankan ethnic problem was marked by the conspicuous silence of Prime Minister V.P. Singh between 1989 and 1991, in 1997, it was marked by the great warmth of Prime Minister I.K. Gujral, of the same 'secular' political alliance, towards the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist Government of Sri Lanka. Gujral in fact encouraged the Sri Lankan Government's pursuit of a policy of escalation of the war and humiliation and harassment of the Tamils.

The BJP-led alliances which had been in power since 1998, appeared non-committal about the conflict in Sri Lanka, but the true colours showed when the LTTE which was driven out of Jaffna in 1995, recaptured the strategic Elephant Pass Army Camp and was poised to take over Jaffna. The Indian Government, which once air dropped food parcels to the Tamils under siege in 1987, volunteered to give 'humanitarian aid' to rescue The Sri Lankan soldiers under siege.

The Indian ruling class did not conceal its irritation about Norway taking the initiative in the latter part of 2000 to enable negotiations between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE. It hastened the tempo of its dance of destruction and issued statement after statement aimed at provoking the LTTE into doing things that would undermine the proposed peace process. They expressed views denouncing the LTTE and revived the long forgotten demand for the extradition of Pirabakaran. The Indian position on the conflict became indistinguishable from that of the Sinhala chauvinists. They went so far as to provide Sri Lanka with military hardware and a warship operating in the sea to the north of Sri Lanka and maintained by India. The Indian High Commissioner for Sri Lanka has visited this ship on several occasions.

The Indian Government also brought pressure upon the Norwegian representative so that India would be fully briefed about the developments in the peace efforts at every stage. The Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry too is obliged to keep India informed of its every move. Clearly, the Indian ruling class does not like outside forces handling the solution of the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka at the expense of the dominant role that India has reserved for itself. The Indian espionage agency RAW earlier successfully conspired to weaken most of the Tamil 'liberation' organisations so that they were reduced to becoming the mouthpieces of India.

India is, however, cautious in formulating a solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. It certainly cannot be pleased to see the Sri Lankan Tamils enjoy a greater degree of autonomy than what is enjoyed by the people in the various states that constitute the Indian union. The Indian media are playing a more significant role than the Government of India in serving the interests of the ruling class on the question of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The Hindu, Frontline and The Indian Ex-

press are notorious for their activity in creating public opinion hostile to the just struggle of the Sri Lankan Tamils and against the legitimacy of the LTTE in that struggle.

Unfortunately, the two major parliamentary left parties of India too seem to view the problem through the looking glasses of the ruling class. They have contributed to the clouding of the issues and are thereby seeking to ignore it. The reality, however, is that nearly all the people of Tamilnadu and the vast majority of the people of the other states and the genuine leftist and democratic forces of India fully support the just struggle of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Besides, India has its own agenda of 'globalisation' for Sri Lanka. It has secured a favourable trading status for itself with Sri Lanka through the Free Trade Agreement concluded between the two countries two years ago. This agreement is designed to transform Sri Lanka into a dumping ground for the Indian producers to dump their surplus production and poses a serious threat to Sri Lankan producers. Already Indian investors are holding majority share in several Sri Lankan plantation companies and the Indian business community is well poised to capturing the Sri Lankan market. Indian influence is particularly strong in the communication sector, with giants like Tata as well as medium-size companies dominating Information Technology business in Sri Lanka. The private health services sector too is coming under the domination of the Indian private hospital network.

The Indian High Commission based in Colombo is active in Indianising the life style of the middle class through a well planned programme of cultural intrusion, so that resistance to Indian hegemony will be minimised. A Council of the People of Indian Origin has been set up, organised by the High Commission and its agents within the business community in Colombo, as a constituent of a global organisation linking people of Indian Origin.

As part of the Indian strategy, the Hill Country Tamils who prefer to call themselves Hill Country Tamils rather than Indian Tamils, as they used to be under British rule, are being systematically labelled Tamils of Indian Origin. Further, all people of traceable Indian origin are referred to as Indians in Sri Lanka by the Indian business community, following the setting up of the above Council. This, clearly, is a part of the expansionist programme of the Indian ruling class. The Hill Country Tamils earned for themselves the name Hill Country Tamils through sustained struggle and, despite their awareness of the richness of the Indian civilisation and cultural heritage, cannot return to a past when they were portrayed as aliens. But the Indian High Commission and the Indian business community are working hard to establish the idea of 'Indians in Sri Lanka' in a manner akin to 'Indians in the US'.

The conduct of the High Commissioner for India in Colombo is more characteristic of a Viceroy than of a High Commissioner. The High Commissioner and the Deputy High Commissioner based in Kandy are known to violate the norms of diplomatic conduct by making frequent public comments on the internal affairs of Sri Lanka when they attend public and social functions. The Deputy High commissioner even went to the extent of appearing on the platform of the *satyagraha* campaign at Hatton, organised by the Ceylon Workers' Congress in connection with its dispute with the plantation management over the non-payment of monthly allowance. The conduct of the Deputy High Commissioner, which would normally have been construed as interference in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka, was not even criticised by the government.

The High Commission has continued to exercise control over the 'Tamil political parties'. It has also been reported that it succeeded in buying over the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and some of the pseudo left parties in 1987 so that they too

would recognise the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 and participate in the elections for the newly established Provincial Councils. It is significant that from then on this pseudo left has been very silent on the question of Indian domination.

It is interesting that the JVP which was for long a champion of the 'anti Indian expansionist' cause has now warmed up to the Indian High Commission for reasons known only to its leadership. Equally, the Sihala Urumaya, a Sinhala chauvinist party with a strong fascist streak in it, enjoys a good rapport with India. There is suspicion that well over a thousand youth associated with Sinhala chauvinistic and fascistic organisations have received armed training in India. It seems that Hindutva has found common cause with Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism.

Notably, the JVP, the Sihala Urumaya and a whole host of other chauvinistic organisations that claim to be patriots of Sri Lanka deliberately choose to ignore the dangers to Sri Lanka, contained in the Free Trade Agreement with India or in the Indian manipulation of the ethnic conflict.

It was only the genuine Marxist-Leninist forces of Sri Lanka, such as the New Democratic Party, that cautioned against and firmly opposed the hegemony, expansionism and high-handed attitude of India towards Sri Lanka. This opposition is based on the grounds that the Indian approach towards Sri Lanka is hostile to the liberation of all the peoples of Sri Lanka and that Indian hegemony is detrimental to the interests of the people of the region. Equally, the people of India, and the genuine leftist, progressive and democratic forces of India will not tolerate Indian hegemony, expansion and high-handed attitude, since their liberation will be delayed unless they fight against Indian hegemony. The Indian ruling class is not only the foe of the people of India but the people of the entire South Asian region. Thus, it is not possible to confine the struggle against Indian hegemony to any one country of the region.

The Indian Hindutva ruling class has now placed itself in a position that it is able to dictate terms to its smaller neighbour on its south. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and one of the main architects of Indian foreign policy, correctly stated that 'the other countries could not tolerate that the rich prize of India should fall again to another power'. However, Nehru deliberately avoided making a similar reference in connection with the 'other countries' or the smaller neighbours of India. Nehru never believed in the concept of equality among countries or nations and, as far as South Asia was concerned, he was for Indian hegemony over its neighbours. India's moves to establish control over Sikkim were among many instances of the policy of Indian hegemony. Nehru, in the course of answering a question posed by a journalist on that subject, said that the day might come when India will similarly deal with Sri Lanka. The conduct of India towards Bhutan and Nepal over the past half-century and its present attitude towards Sri Lanka give expression to Nehru's plans for India.

While the Sri Lankan ruling classes represented by the UNP and the SLFP are soft on western imperialist powers, they do not dare confront India or develop an independent foreign policy for Sri Lanka. Today, the Indian ruling class, despite its contradictions with the US and other imperialists will not take any steps that might seem hostile to them, and they, in return, will not act to hurt the Indian ruling class, on issues including Indian policy towards Sri Lanka.

Under these circumstances, any struggle against the Indian ruling class, Indian hegemony and expansionism is in essence a struggle against capitalism and imperialism. Thus, it is necessary to defeat every form of hegemony, expansionism and high-handed attitude to liberate the people of this region to pave the way for the victory of the proletariat, the oppressed nations and all oppressed peoples in Sri Lanka and the entire region.

... the practice of democracy, of criticism and self-criticism, the group responsibility of the population for their life, literacy teaching, the creation of schools and health care, the training of cadres from peasant, and labourer backgrounds and other achievements. We should thus find that the armed liberation struggle is not only a product of culture but also a ... determinant of culture. This is without doubt for the people the prime recompense for the effort and sacrifices which are the price of war.

**Amilcar Cabral**

*Unity and Struggle, Monthly Review Press, 1979, pp. 152-153*

It was through bourgeois art, which for a long time went hand in hand with bourgeois science, that man expressed, and by expressing strengthened, his new confidence in the future. At the same time, the great bourgeois realists were acutely conscious of this breach at the heart of their society.... This is the positive or revolutionary side of their work. There is also, of course, a negative or reactionary side, due to the ideological limitations of their class and epoch. In contemporary bourgeois society, this negative aspect has prevailed. The artist's work may be technically accomplished, but it is decadent or trivial. It has lost touch with the masses of people and so withered at the root.

**George Thomson**

*The Human Essence, China policy Study Group, London, 1974*

In a nation that is struggling against a foreign foe, the class struggle assumes the form of national struggle, a form that indicates that the two are consistent with each other.

**Mao Zedong**

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

## INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

### THE AMERICAN GUNBOAT

The US government, which is on the one hand facing serious economic crisis at home, is pursuing with even greater vigour a policy of military expansion and gunboat diplomacy across the world. The US foreign policy seems to be stumbling from one blunder to another and the quality of the leadership of President Bush and his team has caused open concern among American allies, with the exception of Britain as one may have reasonably expected. The number of foreign policy blunders within a four-month period may tempt one to associate them entirely with the Bush administration. However, a careful look will show that much of it is a consequence of the US policy of gaining absolute global hegemony, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

European resentment against American arrogance has been on the rise for some time and US policy in Europe had been a cause of friction on several issues starting from the Bosnian crisis to the recent mess involving Kosovar Albanians. Europe has shown considerable reluctance in siding with the US over the incident involving the violation of Chinese airspace by a US spy plane that was forced to land in the Hainan Island at the cost of a Chinese fighter aircraft and the life of its pilot. American arrogance in refusing to make a full apology has hardened the Chinese position and resulted in the refusal by China to return the aircraft until the US accepts full responsibility for

the incident. The US chose to use Taiwan to 'teach China a lesson'. The US offer to sell modern weapons to Taiwan infuriated China, which for good reason has been always suspicious of American intentions in Taiwan. The US offer to provide Taiwan with modern submarines manufactured in Europe was soundly rebuffed by European governments, which do not want to spoil their ties with China.

The US government also shocked the world with a declaration of its intention to develop a new missile defence system, which it justified in terms of defending the US against 'rouge states' such as Iraq, Iran and North Korea. This plan carrying many of the features of the 'Star Wars' defence strategy proposed under Ronald Reagan is in violation of a whole range of arms control treaties that the US entered into over the past fifteen years. This move is seen by many countries as something that will trigger a new arms race. While Russia and China have expressed strong opposition, there is little enthusiasm among most of the European allies of the US.

American policy on Israeli aggression and oppression against the Palestinians is another issue in which the US finds itself in disagreement with Europe. The refusal of the US to control Israeli misdeeds and its treatment of the popular uprising of the oppressed Palestinian massed on par with the brutality of the Israeli army and air force has gained little approval.

Signs of increased isolation of the US from its one-time allies became even clearer when they voted the US out of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations. The US has used its position there to regularly propose resolutions to condemn China and Cuba while carefully defending its notorious allies like Israel and Turkey. The initial response of the US legislators was one of anger and a counterproductive threat to withhold US contributions to the UN. This threat was toned down later. However, the US legislators are still threatening to withhold co-operation with the International Court of Justice.

This humiliation of the US was soon followed by the exclusion of US from another UN body, the International Narcotics Control Board. The US legislators have responded with anger to this as well. Most analysts appear to be of the view that the successive European slaps in the face for the US had little to do with the blunders under the leadership of Bush and that resentment had been growing even with Bill Clinton in the White House.

Increasing isolation of the US does not necessarily mean that the US will be more respectful to the views of the international community. Its desire for absolute global domination is too strong for that. It is covertly seeking to forge new alliances with India and hopefully a post-Islamist Iran to counter China and Russia. But, whatever the US imperialists may try in their efforts to control the globe, they are certain to fail, since the people of the world are opposed to US imperialism.

### **The Enemy of Korean Unity**

The US has been instrumental in the continued division of Korea. Although the country has remained divided because of imperialist intervention for over half a century, the people of both the socialist North and the US-dominated South have continued to cherish dreams of re-unification. The initiative taken by North Korea in the 1970's for re-unification of the North and the South was sabotaged by the US and its clients in the South. The US has maintained a strong military presence in the South with troops numbering 37,000 today. Resentment against US domination and US military presence has been a problem for successive governments. As a result, the US had continued to back dictatorial regimes in the South. Popular resistance to the dictatorship led to a degree of electoral democ-

racy and the government has been under increased pressure from the masses to improve ties with the North. The US permitted contact between the North and the South much after the collapse of the Soviet Union and at a time when the South Korean economy thrived under the economic boom in the Far East and the North faced unprecedented economic difficulty, in the hope that it could subvert socialism in the North.

The global economic crisis of 1997 hurt the South Korean economy badly. The growing anti-American sentiment was reinforced by issues such as the emergence of new evidence of American mass killing of South Korean civilians in the 1950's. The US government, unable to arrest the momentum of the demand for a North-South dialogue, finally exposed its true intentions by recently expressing its objections to the efforts of South Korean President Kim Dae Jung to continue the dialogue with President Kim Jong Il of the North.

US opposition to Korean re-unification is understandable since re-unification means that the US cannot continue to preserve the 50 years old official 'state of war' between the two halves of the nation and there will be no case for US military presence on the East Asian sub-continent.

### **Elections in India**

The elections to the state assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Pondicheri, Tamilnadu and West Bengal in early May did not produce any major surprises, except for the scale of the victories scored in each state. The BJP-led alliance was expected to perform poorly, especially in view of the worsening economic situation and following the recent fake-arms deal scandal that led to the resignation of Minister of Defence George Fernandes. India's demonstration of its military might and its recent success in space technology did not impress the voters.

The main beneficiary has been the Indian National Congress since the third force in Indian politics has failed to be a coherent political group. On the other hand, the electoral success of the Congress is no measure of its status as an all-India party. It depended on a variety of alliances for its success in three states, with the success in Pondichery no more than a gift from the ADMK. Again, none of the states involved a serious confrontation with the BJP in its strongholds. The opportunist alliance forged with Mumta Bannerjee's Trinamul Congress in Bengal proved an electoral disaster.

The elections have once again demonstrated the might of regional political parties and the importance of ethnocentric nationalism and issues of a regional nature. Although the emergence of strong regional political parties is in itself not a bad thing, the political nature of these parties is a cause for concern. These parties make use of resentment against control by the Central Government and ethnic and caste rivalries to come to power, and have shown a willingness to make deals with any political party so that they have a taste of power at the centre and security and privileges in their own states. Assamese, Tamil, Sikh, Telugu and even Kashmiri nationalist parliamentary political parties have demonstrated their capability for such unprincipled alliances. The same is true of caste-based parties, whose leaders have taken advantage of their caste-based electoral strength to bargain for cabinet posts and other concessions.

Parliamentary politics engenders opportunism and commitment to the parliamentary path to socialism is guaranteed to bring out the opportunist in a left politician. Although the two major communist parties are less tainted by corruption than the bourgeois parties are, their appetite for opportunistic alliances has grown over the years to the extent that in Tamilnadu they have switched alliances between the DMK, the MDMK and the ADMK. The CPI (M) and the CPI between them have bagged 11 seats in Tamilnadu, but only as a token of goodwill

from Ms Jayalalitha, the leader of the ADMK. They, in return, have endorsed her appointment as Chief Minister, despite their earlier stance that she was guilty of corruption and deserved to be out of politics.

What the results mean for the BJP-led NDA government is another matter. There is no threat to the parliamentary majority of the NDA, unless there is another major scandal or political crisis. The expression of willingness by Ms Jayalalitha to co-operate with the BJP in the wake of her victory indicates that the parliamentary arithmetic of the NDA can be readjusted to ensure its survival with a slight readjustment in composition.

There is cause for some joy for those who sincerely see the poor performance of the allies of the BJP as a defeat for forces of Hindu chauvinism. However, such chauvinism is never defeated through electoral battles. Even if the BJP is routed at the polls, that defeat need not be the defeat of Hindutva. As long as the ideology survives, it will find other political hosts who need the votes of those misled by Hindutva. The so-called forces of secularism, cannot confine their battles to the parliamentary, state and panchayat elections, but confront Hindutva at the ideological and mass political levels. It is only by the correct application of the mass line that the reactionaries can be defeated.

### **The Palestinian Wound**

Israeli Prime Minister General Ariel Sharon has kept his promise to the Zionist electorate. The events of the months following his election reminded the world of the brutality of the Israeli forces two decades ago when it invaded Lebanon and butchered Palestinian refugees in Beirut. Killing of innocent Palestinians by the Israeli armed forces continues in the name of controlling terrorism, in the name of revenge for the killing

of Israeli settlers by Palestinian militants, and in the name of law and order.

A comparison of the acts of 'terrorism' by the Palestinians with the 'lawful' violence of the Israeli state, including torture, shooting, machine gunning, and bombing and bulldozing of residential areas, would expose the real nature of the Israeli state. Israel has come under strong criticism by European countries. It has even been mildly criticised by the US for its 'over reaction' to Palestinian 'misdeeds'. Nevertheless, Jewish settlements in occupied territories continue, moves to integrate East Jerusalem with Israel continue, acts of aggression against Lebanon continue, and the killing of Palestinians continues. Foreign Minister Shimon Perez, the Zionist dove, offers explanations and the US administration understands, and Israel speaks the language of peace through war.

Israeli behaviour under the leadership of Rabin, Netanyahu, Barak and Sharon, since the deceptive 'Land for Peace' deal, has at last made one thing clear to the PLO leader Yasser Arafat, that peace, for the Israelis, has only one meaning, surrender to Zionism. He acknowledged that he has let down his people by trusting Israel. This admission has come rather late and only after his own bodyguard was assassinated by the Israelis in April.

The Israeli attitude had by May become a source of embarrassment to many Arab states, particularly Egypt and Jordan, which liked to preserve their ties with Israel, and even to the Sheiks in control of the oil fields. If the Israeli acts of oppression and aggression were to continue unchecked, in the course of time, it would de-stabilise the US allies among the Arab states. Mass anger in Jordan against Israel was a sign of things to come. The use of excessive violence has now forced many Arab states, including Egypt and Jordan, to threaten to suspend all dealings with Israel. This is likely to bring pressure

upon Israel to scale down its attacks, but the Palestinians cannot count on the corrupt Arab regimes for their liberation. As long as the US backing for Israel exists, there will be no justice for the Palestinians except through sustained mass struggle.

### A New Axis?

The US is seeing in India a new ally. India has shown remarkable enthusiasm for the proposed US missile defence system, much to the irritation of its one time ally, Russia. India, while paying lip service to the just cause of the Palestinians, is warming to Israel. It is also making gestures to the Iranian regime to isolate Pakistan, by taking advantage of the opposed positions of Iran and Pakistan regarding the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. US efforts to improve ties with Iran have, however, been thwarted by mass hostility in Iran towards the US. However, the existence of a common enemy in Iraq, ruled by Saddam Hussain is a favourable factor.

A US-sponsored 3-I's axis comprising Israel, Iran and India will serve US interests of globalisation in Asia. The US has been concerned for some time about signs of closer ties between China, Russia and India, caused by the increasingly aggressive attitude of the US. It has done all it could to sour relations between China and India. Winning over Iran is hard as long as the Islamist forces are strong there. The Mujahideen opposition with its headquarters now in Iraq is another force to contend. The Palestinian problem too is an obstacle, but not something that cannot be overcome if a 'pragmatic' government can be left in control of Iran.

Much depends on the changes that may take place in India, Iran, and of course Palestine, in the years to come. However, the defeat of US sponsored schemes for regional domination depends on the mobilisation of the masses in the countries of Asia.

## MAY DAY POEM

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**Sukanta Bhattacharya (1926 -1947)**

Don't you see how the red fire spreads  
from one end of the world to the other?  
Why go on living a dog's life then?  
How long would you be satisfied  
with the bone picked up from other men's tables?  
Must you express yourself in cries and whimpers only,  
and crawl on an empty stomach more dead than alive?

Gasping and dog-tired, your tongue hanging out  
must you writhe and stumble, ready to drop?  
Will a stroke of the head and a pat on the back  
make you forget an empty stomach  
and the chain around the neck?  
Must you go on wagging your silly tail all the while?

Better by far that you repudiate your status as a pet  
and your utter subjugation to the master.  
Come, give up your piece of dried up bone  
for a taste of flesh and warm blood  
and for meat barbecued over red fire.  
Only then shall we be able to flaunt a lion's mane  
where our necks are callused now  
by clanging the chain

*[Courtesy: Sukanta Bhattacharya; a selection of his poems,  
translated by Kshitit Roy, Saraswat Library, Calcutta, 1976]*

# RE-ASCENDING CHINGKANGSHAN

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Mao Zedong

I have long aspired to reach for the clouds  
And I again ascend Ching kangshan.  
Coming from afar to view out old haunt,  
I find new scenes replacing the old.  
everywhere orioles sing, swallows dart,  
Streams babble  
And the road mounts skyward.  
Once Huangyangchieh is passed  
No other perilous place calls for a glance.

Wind and thunder are stirring,  
Flags and banners are flying  
Where men live.  
Thirty-eight years are fled  
With a mere snap of the fingers.  
We can clasp the moon in the Ninth Heaven  
And seize turtles deep down in the Five Seas:  
We will return amid triumphant laughter.  
Noting is hard in this world  
If you dare to scale the heights.