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THE SIEGE

Ahmed Faraz

[**Ahmed Faraz** (1931-2008) wrote this poem, *Muhaasirah (The Siege)*, when in 1977 General Zia-ul Haq overthrew the democratically elected government of Pakistan under Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.]

My enemy has sent message for me
That his army-men have laid siege around me.
On every tower and minaret of the city-wall
His army-men are standing with bows in their hands.

The lightening-wave has been extinguished
Whose fervour awoke volcanoes from the soil.
Landmines are laid in the waters
Of the streamlet that came flowing to my street.
All people— outspoken and bold, are now bodily torn.
And all the rebels are sent to gallows.

All the mystics and mystic-initiates, all the guides and leaders
Have gathered in the high-towered palace, hoping favours.
All the honourable judges, ready to take oath
Are sitting on the way, like adamant beggars.

You have been an admirer of poets' dignity
Those stars of the art's sky are now before you.
At the wink of a ruler's buddy,
A number of begging poets would gather before him.
Weigh the footing of these dauntless and the faithful
Look around you; see yourself, who is with you.

If you want to protect your life, the condition is this:
Put your pen and paper in the killing-yard.
Otherwise, you are the only aim of archers this time.
Therefore, shun off your sense of honour in the street.

(continued on inside back cover)

From the Editor's Desk

The dominant media and the political parties continue to be obsessed in one way or another with the 'victory' in the war against the LTTE, or rather the war against terrorism, so that protests about the violation of democratic and human rights by the state and issues of corruption and abuse of power by those in government seem rather muted. The only thing that seems to trouble the two main Sinhala chauvinist parties in opposition is that the government has taken advantage of the military success to win the elections to the Provincial Councils, most recently to the Wayamba (North Western) and Central provinces in February.

The genuine left and progressive and democratic forces have always argued for an end to the fighting and a just political solution through negotiations, not based on considerations military success or failure but because a military approach cannot resolve the underlying issues and will only make things worse for the country and all nationalities.

The national question is still the main contradiction in the country and will remain so even if the government takes full control of every square inch of territory under the control of the LTTE. Even the annihilation of the LTTE as a military force cannot resolve the national question, which can only have a negotiated solution. No government of Sri Lanka has approached the problem with the aim of finding a just and lasting solution acceptable to the nationalities concerned. The repressive approach of the UNP government since 1978 did not take long to develop into a genocidal war leading to foreign military intervention in the North-East and a bitter civil war in the South. But reactionaries never learn from their mistakes.

The approach of the Tamil militants was erroneous in its lack of democracy and rejection of mass politics and mass struggle; and short-sighted in its failure to recognise the need to forge broad-based alliances nationally and internationally with the oppressed classes and nationalities struggling against oppression. The struggle against national oppression was purely militaristic, and deluded by military successes in the period running up to the Ceasefire Agreement of 2002.

Both the government and the LTTE relied on foreign support for their respective causes, especially after peace negotiations began to falter in 2003. The result was that both sides allowed themselves and the country to be manipulated by foreign powers, especially US imperialism and Indian expansionism, under various pretexts, so that the country is well enmeshed in the wrangle for hegemony in South Asia, especially

between the global superpower and the regional hegemonic power, with the latter tempted by the prospect of becoming the unchallenged regional power under the patronage of the former, and the former to use the latter for its purpose of encircling and weakening China and Russia before they are serious contenders for global domination.

The conduct of India and the 'international community' in issues relating to the human tragedy in Sri Lanka, especially in the past three years, vividly showed their hypocrisy and cynicism. The pursuit of war by the Sri Lankan government did not trouble them, except to the extent that it affected whatever political, military or economic interests of each here in the context of their regional and global ambitions.

It is wrong to expect imperialist and hegemonic powers to act differently. It is equally wrong to expect the local reactionary ruling classes to act differently from the way they are acting. Thus despite all the words of sympathy and concern and appeals for a peaceful resolution of the national question, the plight of the oppressed nationalities can only get worse and not better in the foreseeable near future. The kind of class forces dominating the government and the main opposition parties are not inclined to improve the lot of those already displaced by the war in the Vanni or are likely to be displaced in the weeks to come, let alone resolve the national question.

There are urgent problems concerning the safety and essential needs of the victims of war, who are in a desperate situation where they are unable to obtain the necessary food, clothing, shelter and medicine and live in fear for their lives. The New-Democratic Party in a recent statement has pleaded with the government that they should not be victimised in any way, and stressed that it is the duty of the government to provide them with full protection, their basic needs and consolation. But utterances by those drunken with military success seem ominous. Proposals have been made, and later retracted, about setting up 'model villages' after the fashion in which the British colonialists did in Malaya (now the most populous part of Malaysia) and the US imperialists in Vietnam to combat 'communist terror'. The fact that such things can even be suggested does not bode well for peace in this country.

The genuine left and democratic forces in the South should take the initiative in reversing this state of affairs and retrieve the country from the social, economic and political mess into which it is sinking fast, and the hands of foreign powers.

The Chauvinistic War and the Right to Self-Determination

(unsigned article)

The war has been intensified in the Vanni region. The goal of the military strategists seems to be to capture Kilinochchi town and surrounding areas. The immediate target of the government led by the President seems to be that if the lion flag is planted in Kilinochchi, it will be possible to deliver a powerful message of military success to the Sinhalese people.

The longer term view seems to be based on the belief that the current rule of the Rajapaksa brothers could thereby be prolonged in parliament, and the next presidential term secured by the incumbent. To this end the Sinhalese people have already been administered the drug of military victory. The drug is being administered continuously so that they do not recover from its effect.

The calculation of the government and the armed forces is that the capture of Kilinochchi will break the backbone of the LTTE, after which the movement could be decimated in stages. This has been the belief of every government of the ruling classes that pin their faith in the military might of its armed forces. But, whatever the wishes that such governments may have, objective situations do not let them materialise. As a result, the forces of the ruling classes act in violation of the very constitutions drafted by them as well as in breach of internationally accepted norms. The war caused by the national question and the violation of democratic and human rights in the context of the war have developed in this manner.

Such practices have been used not only by the present Mahinda Rajapaksa government but by all those who ruled the country during the past three decades. Because the harshness and cruelty of the current situation are severe, those of the past cannot be readily ignored.

Violations of democratic and human rights by the armed Tamil militant movements are not any more justifiable than the conduct of governments of the chauvinistic ruling classes. Nor can they be covered up without criticism.

The ruling classes have been harsh towards the entire Tamil people based on chauvinistic capitalist oppression. At the same time, the anarchy, denial of democracy and violation of human rights by Tamil liberation movements, large and small, cannot be acceptable to Tamil people with a conscience.

Indisputably, such matters along with the demands put forward with respect to Tamil national liberation and the tactics employed should be seriously considered and be subjected to criticism and self-criticism. Those who reject this need can only be incorrigible Tamil nationalists who will cause more and more ruin for the Tamil people. Such unrepentant and incorrigible attitude can only produce as response nutritious fodder for chauvinistic oppression by the ruling classes.

Chauvinists have continued to deny the reality that the Sri Lankan national question is part of a process of historical development. Even today the arrogant claim that “this country belongs to the Sinhalese” remains dominant. Views affirming that stand point find expression in opinions, addresses, interviews and responses that one comes across.

The army commander recently said without any hesitation that this country belongs only to the Sinhalese. Soon after, cabinet minister Champika Ranawaka from the Jathika Hela Urumaya reiterated that view. Buddhist priests of the JHU have endorsed and hailed that view.

What is sad is that no Tamil or Muslim minister who holds a post in the government or any Tamil party giving support to the government has denounced or protested the above utterance. They do not seem to display the firmness of their anti-LTTE stand in opposing chauvinistic oppression.

What needs to be noted here is that one, while denouncing the denial of democracy and violation of human rights by the LTTE, cannot turn a blind eye to chauvinist capitalist oppression and the chauvinistic ideology which rationalises it. Nor can sweep it under the carpet and provide support to the ruling classes, because the arrogant stand that “this country belongs to the Sinhala Buddhists” sees the entire Tamil,

Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities as settlers and minority slaves.

It is on this basis that the war is being pursued. The war conducted in the name of combating terrorism is in denial of granting through devolution of power the rights that are due to the nationalities. The LTTE is being used as the pretext to wreck and destroy the essential life and existence of the Tamil nationality. Only the armed activities and attacks by the LTTE are shown to the Sinhalese people. Meantime, the fact that it was they, the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists, who were the cause for such “terrorism” to appear and to develop is being concealed.

In addition, as a consequence of the stands taken by successive governments, conditions have developed in which the traditional territories, land and water resources, language, employment opportunities and cultural features of the Tamil nationality have been subject to discrimination, neglect and suppression. Based on this, the national contradiction developed into a hostile contradiction and reached its current state of military oppression.

Thus, contrary to what the government claims, we cannot accept that the national question is a question of terrorism. There is an urgent and essential need for a solution to the national question that will be acceptable to the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities. It will be realistic for such a solution to be based on autonomy and the principle of self-determination within the framework of a united Sri Lanka.

The government’s approach of avoiding the above, emphasising the unitary state, rejecting devolution of power, and adopting what suits it in the 13th Amendment should be abandoned. At the same time, the LTTE should abandon taking the other extreme of demanding a separate state of Tamil Eelam and insisting that the stand taken by a single organisation is solely representative of Tamil aspirations.

The need of the day is for the LTTE to accommodate other Tamil organisations to go for negotiations without compromising the uniqueness of the Tamil people and their territories. The LTTE and other Tamil organisations should approach the present and the future of the Tamil nationality in terms of the endurance of its economic, political, social and cultural aspects.

Political wisdom that enables the adoption of policies that are feasible as well as practical is now important to all Tamil organisations.

The welfare and needs of the Tamil nationality and realistic demands to achieve them should be placed above the interests of power, domination and portfolios for their respective organisations. In that interest, there should in the first place be full faith in the Tamil people and a defined mass political line for them.

At the same time, mass struggles need to be carried forward in a way that wins the support of the Sinhalese people. It is essential that obstructive political postures that harm this purpose should be eliminated from the Tamil side. This is clearly not an easy path to traverse, but there is no option.

Already the Tamil leadership has been disappointed by pinning its hopes on India, the US and Western imperialist forces. It is futile to ignore this experience and build castles in the air. It will not be possible to carry forward mass movements effectively without daring to oppose imperialism and without embracing democratic, progressive and leftist forces.

No struggle can fail if it mobilises the people based on the correct policies and let them be at the fore of mass struggles. It should be realised in the current context that struggles need to be carried out without breach of people's democracy and human rights, and that no mass mobilisation or struggle can be carried forward through armed intimidation.

Thus there is a need for clarity and far sight about the current war situation, the political, economic and social environment created by it, and how the concept of the right to self-determination should be applied to find a political solution. In the current war situation in Sri Lanka, it is important that these matters are discussed and debated at all political levels, especially among the younger generation.

[Translation of article in Tamil, Puthiyapoomi, Nov-Dec, 2009]

The Mullaitivu War

[Translations from *Puthiyapoomi*, Jan-Feb 2009]

The Mullaitivu War and the Agony of the People

Attacks on civilians should be halted

by

Bhupathi

Chauvinistic oppressors are gloating that the Vanni war for the liberation of the North has reached its final stage. Chauvinistic propagandists and the mainstream Sinhala and English media are trumpeting that “terrorism, now confined to a tiny territory, is breathing its last”. They also declare that the LTTE in retreat is now approaching defeat.

Our concern is the safety and livelihood of the four hundred thousand people entrapped in the Mullaitivu region. They are people of this country. They are entitled to all fundamental rights including the right to survival. The armed forces of the government have encircled them as if they are aliens and denying them access to food, clothing, shelter, and medicine and medical treatment. The government charges

that the LTTE is using these people as a human shield. It has announced that it has therefore created a 35 square-mile 'Safety Zone' in Thevipuram east of Kilinochchi and west of Udayarkattu and called upon the people to come to the territory liberated by the government forces. But there is no sign that people are moving towards that area.

It is not possible to determine whether the LTTE is preventing people from leaving or the people are reluctant to leave out of fear of whatever that may befall them. It is known, however, that the LTTE for its security will seek to have the people with them. Thus, four hundred thousand people are entrapped between the intense battle lines drawn by the government for its final assault and the lines of defence of the LTTE and are facing misery. The people of the North-East have faced such misery several times over in the past thirty years. But the tragedy of Mullaitivu today surpasses all of them.

Bombs dropped everyday from aircraft and bombs and missiles fired by multi-barrel rocket launchers are killing and maiming people. People have left their homes. The villages that are said to have been liberated look like cremation grounds. The number of deaths soars by the day. Children, infants, the elderly, women and the sickly suffer the most.

It is not just the people of the Vanni but the entire Tamil community that is anxious and concerned about its future. The major question as to what would follow seems to be what bothers the entire Tamil people. The chauvinistic capitalist forces are declaring victory upon victory. Meanwhile, the Tamil people have been pushed to a stage where they need to find an answer to the question as to what the net outcome of thirty years of struggle has been.

The LTTE alone is not answerable, although they have been the main players. A part has been played by everyone who contributed to the development of Tamil narrow nationalism. The Federal Party, the Tamil United Liberation Front and the armed Tamil movements that succeeded them are all responsible and answerable. This, however, is not the time to go into that in detail. The pressing concern of the moment is about freeing the four hundred thousand Tamil people from the siege of Mullaitivu.

The Indian government, from the manner in which it delivered the food and relief funds, had made it clear that India is not prepared to act. The Indian Foreign Ministry official Shivashankar Menon has answered the question even more clearly. According to news in the local

media, he has said that India will not press for a ceasefire. This has made the Sri Lankan Tamils feel that they have been betrayed by India. Besides, they also believe that the 'international community' has been indifferent. Why is this? The motives of these parties have been different from how the Tamils perceived them. One part of the current tragedy in essence is that the Tamil leaders are unwilling to come to terms with the consequences of their failure to see the reality and their blind faith in India and the 'international community'.

On the other hand, rash moves have been made without taking into account the left, democratic and progressive forces among the Sinhalese. This has helped the ruling chauvinistic capitalist classes to stir up chauvinism and isolate the Sinhalese masses, and to portray the demands of the Tamils as terrorism.

The conservative Tamil leadership never showed any faith in the left, democratic and progressive forces among the Sinhalese as forces that could come to their rescue in the long run. Those who succeeded them in the Tamil political arena too had not seen the genuine left among the Sinhalese and the broad masses of Sinhalese as friendly forces in a long term perspective. The relationship has been handled as a tactical measure concerning individuals who could be of help from time to time. Besides, Tamil militants have launched attacks on Sinhalese civilians.

The chauvinistic war of oppression took advantage of all these and now claims that it is fighting the final battle of its 'war of liberation' by encircling Mullaitivu. Following the fall of Kilinochchi, the current battle for Mullaitivu has pushed four hundred thousand people into a cruel situation which is a matter of life or death for them.

Therefore air and land attacks on civilians should be ceased forthwith by the government. The food, clothing, shelter, and medicine and medical treatment needed by them should be provided. At the same time, the LTTE should allow the people to take independent decisions according to their wishes. It should be realised at least from now on that nothing can be achieved by forcing the people.

That is why we say loudly and clearly to the two sides of the conflict that both sides should guarantee the freedom of movement, the right to life and the right to safety of the four hundred thousand civilians.

Who are the Winners and Who are the Losers?

(unsigned article)

The ongoing war in the Mullaitivu District in the North has reached its final stage. The Sri Lankan army, navy and the air force have intensified their war effort. Meantime the LTTE, which has retreated from their earlier defence lines are involved in demonstrating their final strength. Debates about who the winners and losers are in this conflict are based on the political perspectives of the persons concerned.

At the same time, what is the plight of the nearly four hundred thousand people entrapped by the war? What will happen to them? These are the questions that trouble those with social concern and love for humanity.

The President has said that when the war is won, it should be declared the second independence of Sri Lanka and be celebrated by the whole country. His proclaimed view is that it is not victory for one race or a religion but a victory that belongs to the whole country.

However, could a victory scored militarily be a lasting victory in the national question of Sri Lanka? The war was carried forward to find a political solution to the national question that was the cause of the war. Thirty years of militarization, imposition of war and struggles have ruined the North-East and its people.

Yet, amid all these, political solution remains empty talk. The real victory should have been scored in the political arena. Had a just political solution to the national question that was acceptable to the Tamils and Muslims been found, it would have been a permanent victory for the future of Sri Lanka. But the chauvinistic capitalist elite forces never came forward or expressed consent. They used the national question as a device in their bid for parliamentary political power and viciously cultivated and propagated chauvinism.

It was the reaction to this course of events that developed into struggles by the Tamil people and eventually armed struggle. Hostility between the nationalities was developed as a chain of events in which the two forms of narrow nationalism nurtured each other. In a situation where the country was set ablaze by war, hegemonic forces, each out of its self-interest, added fuel to the fire. What is seen in Mullaitivu is its manifestation in full force.

The net effect of this war is being experienced by the country and the people. The Tamil people of the North-East have faced the harshest and most cruel losses and destruction. The pathetic situation of the four-hundred thousand people entrapped in Mullaitivu by military encirclement is a high point in the continuing process. The government has to provide the necessary guarantees for their lives and safety. Likewise the LTTE that exists in their midst should accept due responsibility and provide the necessary guarantees.

The president and the army commander could claim victory in this 'final battle'. The president could hold victory celebrations, declaring that the country has won its 'second independence' in its history. On the fourth of February 2009, the country marks 61 years of independence. The independence won 61 years ago has had no meaning thus far.

Declaring a second independence militarily by denying the Tamil people their rights and aspirations in their own country will not bring victory to the country and the people. Such a military victory is fundamentally of no use to the country and the people. It is really a defeat. It could be a victory only to the chauvinistic capitalist elite of the ruling classes and those who represent them in government. In the long run, it is a defeat for the vast majority comprising the toiling masses of the country.

It should be remembered that no nationality that seeks to dominate another nationality can be free.

Thus, anyone who observes the social class contradictions behind the declaration of victory for chauvinistic oppression and the trend of events will not fail to realise and recognise where Sri Lanka is being dragged to. Thus the question of deciding who the winners are and who the losers are is best left for the times to come.

Indian Central Government and Sri Lankan Tamils

Vehujanan

Indian central government policy on the national question of Sri Lanka has always given priority to India's regional interests. Policy making has been aimed at not just exercising hegemony over the whole of South Asia but beyond it to cover the whole of Asia. In particular, it has been compelling every South Asian country to accept its role as 'big brother'. Refusal has been met with threats or attacks under some pretext. Sri Lanka, for example, has experienced this in the past.

Sri Lanka has strategic importance due to its geographic location in the Indian Ocean. The US, the West and India need the island of Sri Lanka in their respective bids for global or regional dominance. It was when JR Jayawardane, out of loyalty to the US, sought to surrender the country to the US, that Indira Gandhi and India took a keen interest in Sri Lanka. The opportunity came when ethnic violence was unleashed on the Tamils in 1983. India used it as pretext to get involved in Sri Lanka and used the issue as a device to serve its own purposes.

The conservative Tamil nationalist leadership, which was incapable of analysing why India showed an interest or assess it from a long term perspective, trusted India in full faith, from its standpoint of narrow nationalism. It was believed that Tamil Eelam will be carved out for the Tamils like Bangladesh was carved out of Pakistan in 1971 by the Indian armed forces under the leadership of Indira Gandhi. Sadly, a vast majority of the Tamil people were convinced to that effect by the Tamil United Liberation Front. The Tamil nationalists also ridiculed the logical arguments put forward by Marxist Leninists who placed before the people the facts and the objective reality to firmly declare that Tamil Eelam was not feasible in this fashion. They even denounced Marxist and socialist positions and expressed to the hilt their loyalty to India. Another group was immersed in its faith in the US and the West which were instrumental in the creation of Israel.

It was amid such developments that India began to strengthen its position to tighten its grip on the whole of Sri Lanka. The present Mahinda Chinthana government suits that purpose very well. Indian economic infiltration has gushed with speed into Sri Lanka, and has developed to the extent that Sri Lanka could soon be considered a strong colonial possession of India. India will not tolerate anything that stands in the way of this development. The chauvinistic government of Sri Lanka and the hegemonic state of India concur on this. The manifestation of this is evident from the activities of the Mahinda Chinthana government during the past three years.

India has resented the influence and interference of the US, the West and Japan in the Sri Lankan national question. There lies the essence of the inherent rivalry for regional hegemony. Having realised that the international allies of the LTTE had a foothold in the US and the West and knowing the implications of Norwegian facilitation and the role of Ranil Wickramasinghe in it, India began to make its moves; and the Mahinda Chinthanaya government made way for it. Indian hegemonic diplomacy started to act on the economic, political and military fronts. Norway was eased out of its role as facilitator. That was followed by closer ties on the military and political fronts with Sri Lanka, through which there were attacks on the LTTE in the Vanni, military success and a ban on the LTTE.

The US and the West, caught in a dilemma in the context of their strengthening ties with India, found themselves unable to do anything in Sri Lanka and maintain an embarrassed silence. The US and the West are on a low key in the face of the bellowing by the Sri Lankan government about its war against terrorism, since they had already banned the LTTE and Sri Lanka followed suit. Under the conditions, it is only the support from Tamilnadu that is a voice of consolation to the Tamils. But anyone who knows anything of the acrobatics of Tamilnadu politics will also know that it is not a sincere and unanimous voice. The political parties of Tamilnadu can only plead with the central government of India but cannot compel it to do anything. It has not happened in the past and it will not happen in the future either.

The central government of India will not come forward to bring an end to the war in Sri Lanka, since the war in Vanni was commenced on its signal. It has provided military assistance in many ways including the supply of arms. After all this, for the Tamil side to plead with the central government and the Tamilnadu state government is a show of weakness arising from the lack of a policy of self-reliance in struggle.

The Tamil parties conduct themselves in a manner where they seem to plead that, irrespectively of whether they are struck, kicked or spat on by India, India remains their master. Is this not an insult to “the self respecting Tamil race”? It is, however, not possible to change this attitude of expectations on the part of the Tamil leadership. Their reactionary politics is marinated with it.

Members of the Tamil National Alliance made several trips to meet the Indian premier Manmohan Singh, but failed to have even five minutes of hearing. It was said that Sonia Gandhi had pledged to Karunanidhi that Pranab Mukherjee will be sent to Sri Lanka. But the one who turned up was Shivashankar Menon who discussed matters of mutual interest. The unending pleas of the TNA which fail to appreciate the implications of these developments only further humiliate the Tamil people. Rival Tamil leaders will not free themselves of this. One after the other they will seek to define themselves as devotees of India. Indian hegemony thus seems to have penetrated at various levels.

In contrast to this, there is a need for the emergence of honest and far-sighted political forces from among the Tamils. Past experiences need to be studied; and decisions should be based on a long-term view of how the right to self-determination within a united Sri Lanka can be won, and about the policies and principles appropriate to the decisions. There should be clear decisions about who their friends and who the enemies are. The ordinary Sinhalese in the South should be persuaded that it will be possible to build a united, strong and prosperous Sri Lanka by the establishment of autonomies and autonomous units for the nationalities as a political solution to the national question.

No struggle could be won merely with brave fighters and modern weapons alone. The struggle should be a people’s struggle where the people decide their own fate and become the heroes of the struggle. On the other hand, a handful of fighters, however brave they may be, cannot fight on their behalf and win. This is the lesson that history has taught us. That “people and the people alone are the motive force of history” should be an unforgettable lesson of history. In a true struggle of the people, the people have never been defeated. The final victory is always theirs. That requires taking a clear and correct line of struggle. To seek the bases for it is what is essential today for the Tamil people.

[Translation of article in Tamil, Puthiyapoomi, Jan-Feb 2009]

Thoughts of Comrade Shan amid the Current Crises

S. Sivasegaram

If someone writing the history of Sri Lanka dedicates a chapter to political leaders free of criminal acts such as corruption, deception and fraud, the chapter will not have many pages. If political integrity is an added qualification, it would have even fewer pages. Anyone reading it will have room to complain that it is mostly about leaders of the left movement. The names of contemporary parliamentary left leaders are, however, likely to be rare occurrences in the chapter.

The importance of the contribution of N Sanmugathanan (Comrade Shan, 3. 7. 1919 – 8. 2. 1993) is not only that he was guided by the strict norms that he had set for himself in his private as well as political life. The younger generation does not know the worth of the contribution of the left to the politics of Sri Lanka because of the planned blacking out by the media and side-lining by the establishment. Yet, the crisis faced globally by capitalism has triggered fresh interest in left ideology and Marxist economics in many capitalist countries. Although the impact of the crisis has already been felt in Sri Lanka, little is spoken about it owing to attention being diverted towards the war in the North. Yet, nothing ceases to be because anyone or everyone chooses not to talk about it. In a matter of months, certainly during the year, the impact of the global economic crisis will be most painfully felt in this country. But the crisis of capitalism in itself need not propel any country towards socialism or a leftward revolutionary change.

Capitalism can divert the attention of people in other directions. It has succeeded in doing so many times. Several fascist governments had come to power in Europe from the 1920s to the 1940s. Fascism forced the Second World War, which also led to its defeat, mainly as a result of the strong resistance put up by the Soviet Union. But fascism did not die. It is kept alive by capitalism. Forces of evil that can resurrect and activate fascism exist in all countries. The raw material for fascist

revival is inherent in Hindutva, Sinhala Buddhism, Christian fundamentalism, and Muslim extremism and other such ideologies. Fascism could also emerge from narrow nationalism and regionalism. Thus, not merely the liberation of mankind but its very survival depends very much on the resurgence of the left movement.

The national question and the war, which is the manifestation of the problem in its highest form are not really about the conflict between two nationalities. Inseparable from it are imperialist globalisation, and the denial of democratic and fundamental rights of the people. One cannot view in isolation the challenges faced by the media, law enforcement and the judiciary. The grave economic crisis awaiting the country is a consequence of the crisis of global capitalism, the aggravation of the national question by chauvinistic capitalism and the resultant armed conflict. That is why it will not be possible to find solutions in isolation. The struggle against each form of oppression could address a single issue. Action against each individual crisis could draw attention to the particular crisis. But the chance of success of any struggle is diminished when problems are not seen as part of a whole and the interrelationship between struggles is ignored. Such an approach by those who take up the struggles will make them party to the crime of inviting home the very forces that are scheming to take the country along the path of destruction. That is why careful attention has to be paid to the social, political and economic crises confronted by the country and the resultant challenges.

Some thought that chauvinistic oppression, imperialist exploitation and dominance, and regional hegemony were at loggerheads with each other, and vainly hoped that the struggle against national oppression could take advantage of the contradictions. Now, besides the economic downfall faced by the country, there is a great risk of the establishment of a fascist dictatorial government. The 'international community' and the regional hegemonic power, while appearing to denounce that trend, are acting behind the scenes to encourage it. And they will continue to do the same. We have seen in several countries that 'combating terrorism' has become a way of endorsing fascism.

The challenges facing the country including the national question, the war of national oppression, imperialist globalisation, regional hegemony, foreign military domination over Sri Lanka, the fast approaching economic disaster and the fascist threat may seem diverse. However, if the nature of the contradictions that underlie the challenges is correctly understood, the struggles to resolve the contradictions will

be strengthened through the isolation of the enemy and the emergence of the people as a powerful fighting force.

To this day, if we seek instances in the history of the world where national liberation, resistance to fascism, opposition to war, struggles against various forms of oppression, and safeguarding the sovereignty of countries have converged, we would find them again and again in a Marxist Leninist political party, a liberation movement guided by Marxism-Leninism or a socialist state. Thus what we need most today is a people's movement guided by a principled Marxist Leninist ideology. It is on that basis that it is more necessary than ever before to emphasise the importance of the contributions of Comrade Shan.

Comrade Shan belonged to a period a little after that of the founders of the left movement in Sri Lanka. When he entered politics, the left movement had suffered its first split. Notably, it was only in the left movement of Sri Lanka that a majority of the left sided with Trotsky in the pretext of opposing Stalin. Comrade Shan played an important role in establishing that, on the pretext of opposing Stalin, the Trotskyites really opposed Lenin, Marxism-Leninism and the international communist movement. He displayed great skill in putting forward his arguments coherently, logically and based on facts, so that none of the learned theoreticians in the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP, meaning Lanka Equal Society Party) could successfully counter his arguments.

His role in the Communist Party was not limited to theoretical work comprising political analysis, theory, debate and polemics. He worked as a party cadre alongside other party cadres, and as a partner in their problems and hardships. It was such dedicated work that enabled the building up the Ceylon Trade Union Federation led by the Communist Party as the largest working class trade union organisation in Sri Lanka in the years following independence from direct colonial rule in 1948. I state this not as a personal achievement of Comrade Shan but as a commendable contribution by him to an achievement by the party cadres and the vanguard of the working class who worked shoulder to shoulder with him.

If the responsibility of a Marxist Leninist fighter stops at building up the trade union and the party into major establishments, then there is not much difference in substance between him and a highly capable administrator of a private business corporation. To ensure that the party and the trade union movement remain clear and firm in their commitment to their ultimate goal, struggles no less vigorous than those needed for building up the party and the trade unions should be

continuously carried out within them to see that they do not deviate from their revolutionary road.

The electoral success of the left parties in the election to the first parliament tempted some in the leadership of the two left parties to believe that they could capture state power through parliamentary elections. However, the convincing victory of the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People's United Front) alliance headed by the national bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party under the leadership of SWRD Bandaranaike in 1956 led to different forms of opportunist thinking among some leading members of the left parties. Unprepared to bring about a revolutionary political change through mass struggle and lacking the prospect of securing a parliamentary majority through the electoral process, they thought in terms of coming to power through an alliance with a capitalist party, namely the national bourgeois SLFP. In fact, the Viplavakari Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Revolutionary LSSP) led by Philip Gunawardana, the 'father of Trotskyism' around 1947 had already taken that road in 1956 and formed an alliance with the SLFP. The Trotskyite LSSP was the next to be tempted. The conduct of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union following the rift in the international communist movement since the ascent to power of Khrushchev in the Soviet Union encouraged such thinking inside the Communist Party in Sri Lanka. The crisis precipitated by Khrushchev in the international communist movement had its repercussions in Sri Lanka and inner-party debates that began in 1963 were followed by a split in 1964.

The split was not just the break-up of the party into two opposing factions. The issues that led to the split were intensely debated in the party branches and among the members of the trade unions. The active political work that Comrade Shan carried out at various levels in the party and within the trade union organisation resulted in a large section of the party membership and an overwhelming majority of the trade union membership choosing to continue their political and trade union campaign under the leadership of Comrade Shan when the party finally split in 1964. This demonstrated the importance of continuing political work inside the party and affiliated mass organisations; and more importantly that political debate is not only for those in leading positions, experts and theoreticians; but by right a matter for the entire membership, and very essential.

To say that people can achieve liberation and socialism through parliamentary elections and by rejecting armed struggle is to distort

Marxism. Thus those who took that position were called revisionists and their ideology revisionism. The ideological struggle that Comrade Shan led against revisionism demanded more effort and energy than the one against Trotskyism. Yet, with the support of many good party comrades who stood by him, he was able to build a Marxist Leninist wing of the party that was stronger than that of the revisionists. It was then that desperate elements in the revisionist leadership descended to the level of drawing particular attention on public platforms to the fact that Shan was a Tamil. Sometime after, Rohana Wijeweera, who was in Russia on a scholarship and was 'expelled' from there planted himself in the party led by Shan and started to use a communal line to undermine Shan and the party. He was expelled when his misdeeds were exposed following his participation in the anti-Tamil demonstration in January 1966, led by the SLFP. Nevertheless, the party and the left movement suffered losses as a result of the misdeeds. Wijeweera played a major part in spreading communal venom within the left movement; the JVP never recovered from its effects and has remained a Sinhala chauvinist party.

The revisionists and the LSSP when they joined the SLFP-led communal demonstration in January 1966, Comrade Shan roundly denounced their action; and it was he who firmly declared that the politics of the JVP was not Marxist and that it was anti-working class and chauvinistic. The tragic failures of its insurrections of 1971 and 1988-89 that cost the lives of tens of thousands of Sinhalese youth were the result of the wrong ideology of the JVP.

It should be noted at this juncture that the only struggle for social justice in the country that wholly achieved the targets that it set for itself was the campaign against untouchability, launched in October 1966. Also, it was the only armed uprising in the country which was not defeated. Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought played a central role in making it possible.

That struggle comprised putting into practice the concepts of putting the people first, broad-based unity, mass politics and mass struggle. It inspired the Tamil youth to reject the parliamentary path and take up armed struggle. But the youth failed to draw the important lessons of putting the people first and broad-based unity, let alone mass politics and mass struggle. Instead of self-reliance many opted for foreign support; and emphasised arms at the expense of politics. We have witnessed the consequences over the past thirty years.

There are several kinds of critics of Comrade Shan. Some assess the value of his contributions and their correctness or otherwise in historical context and respect him as an important Marxist of Sri Lanka. There are others who disagree with him but regard highly his honesty and dedication. There are yet others who to reject his policies resort to nit-picking and personal abuse. Shan has also been a target for those who have lost their way to find refuge in anti-people camps and make a career of abusing anyone who does anything worthwhile.

What is our need today? Do we accept imperialist globalisation? Do we accept chauvinistic oppression and war? Do we accept permanent hostility between nationalities? Do we endorse oppression based on caste, religion, race, language, region and gender? If our answer is 'NO', we need answers concerning the means to oppose them.

Can struggles succeed when they are based solely on region, caste, race or religion? What kind of result will such an approach yield? If that approach will not help, how do the oppressed people strengthen themselves and their struggles?

Can foreign powers be trusted? Can violence without political guidance be relied upon? Can we trust any struggle in which the people do not participate? Questions that proliferate in this manner converge in one place; and that is the path of mass political struggle. It covers among other things broad-based unity, mass struggle, people's war and mass politics.

Comrade Shan is prominent among those who showed us the way there. That is his political significance.

He spent a good part of his political life to arrive at Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought. That path of struggle was not something that was found from books alone. It was discovered through a life-long experience of dedicated practice. It is only through enriching it on the basis of contemporary experience and taking it to the people to be further refined by learning from them that the country, its nationalities and the toiling masses who comprise the vast majority of the people could become free and prosperous.

[A slightly amended translation by the author of an article in Tamil in the *Thinakkural*, 7th February 2009 to mark the 15th death anniversary of Comrade N Sanmugathan on 8th February 2009]

NDP Diary

NDP Statement to the Media

Attack on MTV

7th January 2009

“The brutal attack and arson attempt on the MTV media network carried out by armed unidentified individuals at night comprises an attempt to kill media freedom. These attacks have been carried out in a planned manner by forces that are intolerant towards points of view and scenes that they dislike. The New-Democratic Party strongly denounces these attacks of a fascist nature. There is no reason to believe that the government will take due action on the matter, and the Party emphasises that it is the people and democratic forces who should provide the due response” said Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Party in a statement issued by him on behalf of the Politburo of the Party denouncing the attack on the MTV media network.

The statement added that the present government when it assumed power pledged to give protection to and guarantee the freedom of the media and freedom of expression. But, during the past three years of rule, from north to south, media and media personnel from all parts of the country have been subjected to attacks and murder. Tamil, Sinhala and English media, and media personnel have been attacked and even killed by armed individuals arriving in vehicles without number plates. On another side, media personnel have been detained for long periods without inquiry under Emergency Regulations. It is as a continuation of this trend of events that the MTV media network was attacked and set on fire in the early hours of yesterday. It is meaningless to ask the government to identify the organisers and the armed men involved in the incident. That is likely to fall on deaf ears, since thus far due steps have not been taken and no legal punishment handed out for attacks on the media and murders of media personnel. No effort has been made in that direction by the government in the due manner. Under such conditions, it can only be expected that the recent incident will be subjected to the same kind of dragging on and covering up that have taken place in the past. The stand of the New-Democratic Party is that it is only the people and democratic forces who should respond to it through united and determined protest action.

S.K. Senthivel
General Secretary, New-Democratic Party

NDP Statement to the Media

Killing of Lasantha

9th January 2009

“The murder in broad daylight of Lasantha Wickrematunge, well known journalist and editor of the Sunday Leader, illustrates that an environment has emerged, in which the country and its people are being dragged into a gloomy dictatorship. Lasantha’s murder has raised among people the frightening question as to whether a process has been set in motion by which media personnel bold enough to criticise and politicians with dissenting viewpoints are annihilated outside the law, using unidentified armed individuals. The New Democratic Party strongly denounces this murder. At the same time, it has doubts as to whether the government will act with due concern in connection with this murder. This is because, so far, the government has not conducted proper inquiries or taken the necessary steps regarding murders of journalists and attacks on the media” said Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Party in a statement issued by him on behalf of the Politburo of the Party denouncing the murder.

The statement added that the English weekly, Sunday Leader has various political criticisms and exposed concealed information. Also, Lasantha himself had talked on various matters and expressed opinions. Anyone could accept or reject them. The opinions and criticism expressed could even be incorrect. But the fundamental rights of a journalist and an editor cannot be denied with bullets. During the past three years Tamil media personnel have been killed or have gone missing. On the same lines, now Lasantha’s speech and writing have been brought to an end with bullets. This act deserves the strongest condemnation and protest. The question arising among the people is whether such planned murders will continue to be staged behind the scene of winning the war.

S.K. Senthivel

General Secretary, New-Democratic Party

NDP Statement to the Media

Call for a Political Solution

15th January 2009

“The national question that lies at the root of the war cannot be resolved by intensifying the war, capturing territory enclosing towns and villages in the North-East, and declaring victory. Victories secured through the war effort could help to hold on to state power and to continue in power, but cannot show the way to the prosperity of the country or to democracy, peace and

normal living conditions in the North-East. Therefore it is the urgent duty of the government to put forward a set of proposals for autonomy that is acceptable to the Tamil people to deal with the national question and to provide protection and guarantee for the lives and livelihood of the four hundred and fifty thousand people caught up in the war. Today, the people in the Vanni are in a desperate situation where they are unable to obtain the necessary food, clothing, shelter and medicines and are in fear for their lives. Besides being Tamils, they are citizens of Sri Lanka. The New-Democratic Party emphasises that therefore they should not be victimised in any way, and that it is the duty of the government to provide them with full protection, their basic needs and consolation” said Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Party in a statement issued by him on behalf of the Politburo of the Party on the ongoing war in the North and the dangers faced by the people.

The statement added that during the last century the national question was developed from an oppressive chauvinistic perspective and transformed into war. The two political alliances that have been in power thus far had, for the sake of their feudal and capitalist class interests and imperialist approval, denied the democratic rights and the right to livelihood, and the ethnic, linguistic and regional aspirations of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people and carried out national oppression. As a result, unity among the people was destroyed in a planned way. Even after thirty years of cruel war, a military solution is being pursued for the national question, rejecting its political reality. It is believed that the military successes that are being gained will eliminate the basis for the national question and the just demands of the Tamil people. If such erroneous political judgments are to continue, a climate of war will persevere through the whole of the century. The chauvinists and the capitalist ruling classes and foreign forces may gain from it, but not the nationalities of the country, including the Sinhalese. The unfortunate situation will continue in which the country and the people will bear more and more destruction and sorrow.

Thus, the path for the salvation of the country and the people is not militarization. Instead, the urgent prime task today is to put forward a political solution to the national question based on the right to self-determination with autonomy to the traditional homeland of the Tamils in the North-East within the framework of a united Sri Lanka in a way that the Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people could coexist, based on equality, democracy and peace. For the government to emphasise and carry forward military victories and militaristic approaches means future dangers for the entire people including the Sinhalese. The war and military successes provide excuses for the grave economic problems faced

by the country and the sufferings of everyday life. The ruling classes cannot fool the people in this way for very long.

It is therefore that the New Democratic Party emphasises the need to propose a set of political proposals for the national question that will be acceptable to the Tamil and Muslim people and find an appropriate solution through negotiations involving all the parties concerned.

S.K. Senthivel

General Secretary, New-Democratic Party

NDP Statement to the Media

Support for NDP Candidates

10th February 2009

The trade union and political leadership of the Hill Country Tamils that cannot secure the national and fundamental rights, the right to livelihood and demands for higher wages are back with the usual deceptive, bogus pledges and are splashing out of money to seek votes in the forthcoming Provincial Council Elections. It is shameful and lacking in self-respect for the Hill Country Tamil leadership to contest under the betel leaf and elephant symbols of the chauvinistic, capitalist parties that have come to power in turn and racially suppressed and oppressed the Hill Country Tamils. This is reactionary conduct seeking to mortgage to the chauvinists the unique national identity, fundamental rights and the right to livelihood of the Hill Country Tamils.

The Hill Country Tamils, especially the youth, should think of this situation and act with far sight in this election. Likewise, the people of the North-East who live in the Hill Country should reject the reactionary trade union and political leadership of the Hill Country that is crawling up to the oppressive government to secure posts and deceive all the working people. At the same time, the Hill Country Tamils and the Tamils of the North-East who live in the Hill country should, in order to strengthen the policies of the Party, vote for the New-Democratic Party that is carrying forward alternative politics and the path of mass struggle there. The Central Committee of the New-Democratic Party appeals to them to vote for the independent group led by comrade E Thambiah and contesting under the 'kettle' symbol in the Nuwara-Eliya District" said Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Party in a statement issued by him on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party on the Central Provincial Council elections. The statement added that the people of the Hill Country should identify and reject the untrustworthy leaders who have thus far been incapable of putting forward demands for the fundamental rights, the right to livelihood and demands for higher wages. The Hill

Country people should identify during these elections the leaders who posed as supporters of the struggles of the Tamils of the North-East and at the same time got ministerial posts in the government and supported the war and the state of emergency.

If the people understand that the ruling UPFA and the opposition UNP are chauvinistic parties, they would necessarily understand that there is no self-respect in voting for the Hill Country Tamil leaders who are contesting on the lists of those parties. The New-Democratic Party is the only party that is carrying forward alternative politics and the path of mass struggle in the Hill Country. It is on that basis that it conducted a mass campaign against the disastrous Upper Kotmale Scheme. Those who betrayed the campaign to win favours for themselves are asking for votes without shame or self-esteem. But five young members of the New-Democratic Party who were in the lead of the struggle are being victimized by continuous detention for two years now under Emergency Regulations. Besides, there are hundreds of young men and women held in prison. These are matters that are essential for the people of the Hill Country to pay attention to, analyse and raise questions.

Therefore, the Central Committee of the New-Democratic Party appeals to the people to avoid falling for deceptive language and minor favours granted by splashing out money, and think well before they vote. It appeals to them to put it to practice by voting for the NDP contesting under the 'kettle' symbol in the Nuwara-Eliya District and demonstrate the strength of people's thought and of the working class.

S.K. Senthivel

General Secretary, New-Democratic Party

NDP Statement to the Media

Unconditional Release of Comrades

12th February 2009

Five leading members of the New-Democratic Party, namely V Mahendran (teacher), R Jayaseelan (teacher), S Suhesanan (teacher), S Mohanraj (teacher appointee), N Krishnapriyan (teacher appointee), had been detained in prison under Emergency Regulations. Comrades Mahendran, Mohanraj and Krishnapriyan were unconditionally discharged by the Colombo Magistrate Court on 13th February 2009.

In the first week of February 2007, some Sinhalese journalists and political dissenters were arrested in Colombo and elsewhere. The five NDP comrades from the Hill Country were arrested during their investigation by the Terrorist Investigation Department of the police, claiming that they

had links with those investigated. In the past two years, following investigation in detention in the TID and Boosa, they were transferred to the Colombo Remand Prison. The Party campaigned for the release of the five Party comrades and other Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese political detainees. Legal measures and mass campaigns were conducted in particular for the release of the Party comrades. A 100,000 signature campaign launched on May Day 2008 was carried forward across the country. The Party also had a fund raising campaign for the detainees, which received sympathy and support at home and abroad. As a result, three of the comrades have now been freed. The party expresses its gratitude to the comrades for the strength of will that they showed during detention and to all the people outside who have supported and cooperated in the campaign for the release of the detainees. The party appeals to the people to continue with their support and cooperation for the legal measures and mass campaigns for the release of comrades S Suhesanan and R Jeyaseelan.

S.K. Senthivel

General Secretary, New-Democratic Party

Political Detainees **Free at Last**

Ten of twenty-four party comrades and friends who were arrested under Emergency Regulations and held without trial or charges for over two years, and for whose release the New-Democratic Party campaigned actively and took legal measures, were released in mid-February by the Colombo Magistrate's Court for lack of valid grounds for their detention. The released comprise the three NDP activists V Mahendran, S Mohanraj, and S Krishnapriyan; and Suresh Kumara, T Udayaratne, Sarathkumara Fernando, Ajith Kumara, RM Sarath, Lasantha Ranjan Silva, and Jagath Udayakumara. Suresh Kumara was not released from custody despite the court order since the police claimed that investigations are due on other unspecified matters.

New Democracy thanks all those who supported the campaign for the release of these victims of politically motivated harassment and shares with all the joy of the news of the release. The New-Democratic Party has pledged to continue with its legal action for the release of the remaining detainees and appeals for sustained support until the last innocent victim is freed from custody. The Party is also committed to its campaign against arbitrary arrests, and for the release of long-term detainees without trial, irrespective of race, religion, caste or gender.

Celebrating Cuba National Day

Free Cuba Turns Fifty

1st January 2009

The International Solidarity People's Forum (ISPF) celebrated the 50th National Day of Cuba and the Anti-Imperialist Day in Colombo as Liberation Cultural Evening on 1st January 2009. The gathering, chaired by Comrade E Thambiah, central Co-ordinator of the ISPF was addressed by Comrade Vasantha Dissanayake of People's March, and TG Meenilankco. Ambassador for Cuba, Mrs. Nirsia Castro Guevara also attended amid her busy schedule to briefly address the gathering and convey revolutionary greetings from Cuba. The features of the cultural evening included welcome address by I Loganathan, international peace song by T Pradeesh, songs of peace and liberation by Sunanda Pushpakumara of the Mobile Artists Group, the Agneema Group, Rashika and Kanthi from the Friends for the Future, T Mirudhula, T Prutivi, S Thevarajah, T Kalalakshmi and S Gowri. The Evening concluded with a tea party and vote of thanks by S Nanthamohan.

Great Victory

Pradeesh Thambiah (10 years)

***If all men were one man
What a great man he would be
If all rulers were one ruler
What a weak ruler he would be
If all the countries were one country
What a great country it would be
If the great country supports the great man
And the great man puts down the weak ruler
What a great victory it would be***

Sri Lankan Events

Murder of the Media

The Sri Lankan media had its good times, and its bad times, now the times seem ugly. The media were never unbiased. The press overplayed its hand more than occasionally and suffered harsh treatment by the state in the 1970s. Yet, unlawful attack on the media with state backing is a child of the 1980s, with beginnings in the North. It was also then that journalism became a life-risk career. Terrorism became the pretext for attacks on Tamil newspapers and journalists, in the north. However, harassment of Tamil journalists has been island-wide since the 1990s. Such ethnic discrimination seems to have come to an end in recent times, with a sharp rise in the number of Sinhalese journalists injured and killed and media establishments attacked violently. Besides, several Sinhalese journalists are in detention without trial under Emergency Regulations based on suspicion that they are 'Sinhala Tigers'. The tolerance of the Sri Lankan state towards the media is at an all time low so that several reputed journalists have fled the country in fear for their safety. Sri Lanka is now ranked very low by Reporters sans frontiers (RSF) in its Annual Worldwide Press Freedom Index. While the RSF has its class bias and overlooks imperialist meddling, the fall of Sri Lanka from a rank of 51st (among 139 countries considered) when ranking began to 165th (among 173, or the ninth worst) in 2008 is worrying. What will the ranking be after the episodes of January 2009?

Courting Trouble

When the Supreme Court ruled on 28th November that the hedging deal that made the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation liable for around US\$ 750 million to the banks was irregular and ordered the CPC to suspend payments and in keeping with the ruling called for the suspension of the CPC officials, it was in fact doing the CPC and the government a favour. The government was unhappy about the embarrassment but the CPC complied. When on 17th December in a follow-up ruling the SC ordered a reduction in petrol price from Rs. 122 per litre to Rs. 100 or less, the CPC, under government pressure, refused to comply. Besides, open threats were made about impeaching the Chief Justice (CJ). The consequence of the non-compliance has been that the SC has rescinded all earlier rulings relating to petroleum, so that the CPC now stands liable to pay the banks. Independence of the judiciary in Sri Lanka has been seriously flawed since 1978; the SC and some District Courts have acted with courage on several

occasions, although subject to the built-in bias against the oppressed sections of the population. Yet the case for the independence of the judiciary is strong and needs to be defended strongly in a context of collapsing law and order in the country. The setting up of the Constitution Council without further delay is a prerequisite to protect what is left of the independence of the legal and law enforcement arms of the state.

Declaration of Real Independence

It was interesting to hear from spokespersons for the government that Sri Lanka will soon celebrate its real independence when the LTTE is finally defeated. While it is doubtful if such victory can mean independence of any kind, there is one important admission that what has been called independence of this country for sixty-one years was after all not real independence. That was something that the Marxist Leninists have been saying since the British colonialists transferred power to an elite loyal to them and changed the mode of control from the colonial to neo-colonial, where the master is not visible and the mode of control is through economic devices.

There is a need for liberation and true independence. That cannot be achieved as long as the national oppression and other forms of social oppression are allowed to go on unchecked.

Provincial Councils: War Wins Elections

The government has scored unprecedented victories in the elections to the Central and Wayamba (North Central) Provincial Councils. Polling was low at around 60%, and many in the Central Province were unable to vote because they had not been issued their national identity cards. Yet, there is no argument that ruling alliance scored a convincing victory. Yet, it was not the performance of the government in dealing with the economy, law and order, employment and other such matters that enabled the victory but the military success in the Vanni, especially the armed forces taking control of the two major urban centres under LTTE control.

The JVP suffered a deserving humiliation, for having encouraged the war and blocking peace efforts at every turn; and the poor performance of the UNP is a reflection of its lack of a convincing political alternative to offer to the people. The poor performance of the two major Hill Country Tamil parties too is a sign that their monopoly of politics in the Hill Country is on its way out.

International Events

Palestine: Genocide in Gaza

When Israel launched its fierce air attack on Gaza on 27th December 2008, it did not need an expert on Middle East affairs to see that the real target was not Hamas, which has been ruling Gaza in political isolation from the West Bank, but the people of Gaza. Little was left for imagination. The scale of the genocide shocked many, but did not surprise those who knew Zionist Israel and its imperialist master. An invasion designed to choke Gaza out of existence except at the mercy of the aggressor followed the week-long killing spree by aerial bombing.

It was not hard to guess how the Arab neighbours of Palestine, let alone the US and its hypocritical European allies would respond. Four days after attacks commenced, President Mubarak of Egypt in a televised address defended his decision not to open the border with Gaza except for humanitarian purposes and derided by innuendo the Hamas as “seeking political gains at the expense of the Palestinian people”. However, Jordan and Saudi Arabia— solid American allies put on the defensive by the violence —avoided blaming Hamas publicly. Ibrahim al-Amine, chairman of the board of *al Akhbar*, a newspaper aligned with Hezbollah, was dead right when he noted that “Israel would be satisfied with a compromise, but the Arab regimes want to finish Hamas completely”.

The Israeli attack put the onus squarely on Egypt, the only other state bordering Gaza, and left Saudi Arabia and Egypt in a worse quandary than in 2006, when they sided with Israel against the Shiite Hezbollah in Lebanon. The fault lines of then resurfaced: Syria called for an emergency Arab summit, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia blocked it. As in 2006, these US allies tried to defend their treachery by stirring fears about Iran and its Shiite influence, but found no buyers as the issues at stake had become clearly political. The outrage even led to a sense of trans-sectarian unity, with Shiite figures like Hassan Nasrallah of the Hezbollah extending their influence in the Sunni Arab world, as in 2006.

After 22 days of destruction that killed over 1300 Palestinians including over 400 children, injured over 5000, rendered over 100,000 homeless, and cost the life of 13 Israelis, Israel declared a ceasefire on 17th January. Israeli Premier Olmert vainly boasted that that Israel had met all its goals and that Hamas had suffered a major blow, and threatened to respond with force to rocket attacks into Israel. Also, by saying that the ceasefire was in

response to the peace efforts of Mubarak, he exposed it as a move designed to destroy the credibility of Hamas and deflect the tide of world opinion against Israel. Sadly for the two leaders and their imperialist backers, Hamas is bruised but hardly broken. Hamas along with Islamic Jihad, al Nidal, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and al Saeqa announced on 18th January a one-week ceasefire for Israel to pull out and vowed to fight on as long as Israeli troops remained in Gaza.

When President Chavez expelled the Israeli ambassador from Venezuela on 5th January in response to the Gaza attacks and called for hauling the Israeli Prime Minister before the International Criminal Court for aggression against Gaza and the killing of over 500 civilians, Hamas humiliated the Arab supporters of the US, with a press release on its website commending the step by Chavez as one that no “Arab country that maintains relations with Israel dared to take”. Portraits of Chavez were prominent in demonstrations against Israel in most Arab countries. Mass anger made even US allies like Turkey, with close ties to Israel, to call for debarring Israel from the UN while it ignores UN calls to stop the attack; Qatar and Mauritania suspended ties with Israel. When Venezuela and Bolivia broke ties with Israel in mid-January, they demonstrated that the spirit of human and social justice can soar above the boundaries of sectarianism of all kinds.

Cuba, current Chair of the Non Aligned Movement, backed by Russia, China, the Islamic Conference, Latin American states, and Arab and African groups at the UN, submitted a resolution to the UN Human Rights Council on 12th January denouncing the systematic violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people and the huge destruction of their country by Israel. The hypocrisy of western capitalist states and allies was exposed when the resolution calling for the deployment of a team of international observers to probe into the huge Israel aggression of Palestinian territory was put to the vote: 33 voted for with only Canada against. The 13 abstentions comprised EU member countries, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ukraine, Switzerland, and South Korea.

Thus, what Israel has actually achieved, except for the reconfirmation of US backing for it to do the dirty work for the US in the Middle East, was international isolation, unqualified criticism of its ‘over reaction’ by many countries, and scathing criticism from the usually docile UN for the tank attack on a UN school in the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahiya. The invasion has reinforced Palestinian defiance, and increased the support for Hamas in the West Bank, where many have deserted the ruling PLO to side with Hamas.

(20.1.2008)

The US: Class Struggle Back on Track

On 5th December 2008, in Chicago, the owners of Republic Windows and Doors (RW&D) declared financial ruin; abruptly laid off the 260, mostly Latino, workers; and were set to shut down. The United Electrical Workers Union (UE) members, rather than accept their plight, occupied the factory and stayed in occupation in shifts, a tactic not seen in the US since the 1930's. The crisis came when RW&D's creditor, the Bank of America (BoA), flush with \$25 billion from the bail out by the US government, refused to extend credit to the company whose sales fell from \$4 million to \$2.9 million in November. The workers demanded \$1.5 million in severance and vacation pay due to them. Company officials said that the bank will not let them pay. The bank said that it is not its concern whether a company complies with the relevant laws or honours its commitment to its employees.

What started as a resolute act of 260 workers fast became a national symbol of working-class resistance in a crisis-bound economy. Hundreds of union members and officials from Chicago and elsewhere came to the factory to express solidarity and to donate food and badly needed funds. The fight-back won support beyond the ranks of organized labour, and crystallized mass anger about the \$700 billion bailout of Wall Street. Democratic politicians, from President-elect Barack Obama down to Chicago aldermen, felt the pressure to declare support.

Press coverage was favourable too: besides highlighting the issues, the media used their resources to investigate the employer. Confirming the earlier suspicion of the workers, *The Chicago Tribune* reported that the company was involved in the purchase of a non-union window factory in Iowa to move to. Journalists uncovered evidence that the BoA refused repeated requests to extend credit to the company, despite infusion of bailout funds. Thus, when UE made BoA the target of a rally on 10th December, about 1 000 people turned out on short notice.

The occupation ended victoriously six days later when the BoA and other lenders to RW&D agreed to a settlement of \$1.75 million to cover eight weeks of pay owed under federal law, two months of continued health coverage, and pay for all accrued and unused vacation. The workers have not stopped there, and are seeking ways to restart the factory and to operate it as a worker-run cooperative. They are also filing charges against RW&D for failing to give them sufficient notice of plans to shut the factory down. (The management gave only three days' notice, and refused to negotiate with the union about the closure).

This struggle is of exceptional importance because of its boldness in responding to the economic crisis and how it affects working people. This

boldness could set an example for future confrontations and therefore deserves the attention and support of all workers. The Republic Windows and Doors victory is a victory for all workers in America, and is a clarion call for more unions everywhere.

[Sources: upsidedownworld.org; workerscompass.org; ueunion.org]

Nepal: Resolving Differences

The Maoists of Nepal have once again proved the pundits of political affairs wrong. Anticipation that the differences within the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) on the new constitution and on the immediate goal of the CPN(M) would lead to a split in the ranks failed to materialise.

Differences do exist. The Party Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dalal (Comrade Prachanda) among others takes the view that Nepal should be declared a Democratic Republic, whereas leaders like central committee member Mohan Baidya prefer a People's Republic. Differences are there about the tactical and strategic aspects of the party's programme and its implementation. But, significantly, the CPN(M) has achieved consensus by open discussion and debate. Rival proposals in the form of working papers presented by comrades Prachanda and Baidya were thoroughly discussed and debated by delegates of the CPN(M) at a meeting of the Central Committee in December 2008 and the differences were resolved amicably. The national cadre conference of CPN(M) in November 2008 endorsed the 'People's Federal Democratic National Republic' as the party's working policy by synthesizing the two schools of thought. The different points of view and related arguments have been reported in fair detail in the *Red Star*, the national magazine of the CPN(M). Given below is the Editorial of the *Red Star* of 20th -31st December, 2008.

Maoist decisions

The recent Central Committee Meeting of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has taken many important measures to tackle the political situation developing in the country. The nation is being seized by anti-people elements. These problems are clearly been seen amongst the parliamentary parties as well as in the old bureaucratic set up.

There are many obstacles in the process to resolve outstanding problems. For instance, obstacles are being created against the integration of the PLA and the Nepal Army and the development of a new national army. Against the spirit of several agreements and understandings, the parliamentary parties are trying to split the Constituent Assembly, which could effect writing a new constitution for a new Nepal. The parliamentary parties are talking about forming an "alliance" against the Maoist led government. It

was necessary for the CPN-Maoist to come out with a bold and historic decision, the measures the Party has taken seem timely and urgent to tackle these challenges.

The most important aspect of the Kharipati National Convention and the subsequent CC meeting is to develop the Party into a new type. The feudal and the comprador bureaucrat capitalists, the anti people elements hoped that the Party would split in the course of the great debate. Instead, the CPN-Maoist emerged as united and centralised. Unlike the debate in the past, this debate has opened a new chapter to solve the problems of exercising the inner party democracy which was much important issue in the international communist movement so far.

A second decision of the CC meeting is to unify with revolutionary parties and organisations thus polarise the revolutionary movement. The present political situation demands the unity of Communist revolutionaries to overthrow the semi-feudal semi-colonial mode of production and establish a sovereign state. Only after the establishment of such a state can the New Nepal be brought into being. The unity with different revolutionary parties and organisations will garner that energy to meet the challenges of the present time.

Another important decision of the CC meeting is to make united fronts with nationalist and republican forces. This is very urgent for several reasons. Even though the government has been formed under the leadership of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), the problems of nationality, democracy and livelihood could not be solved due to obstacles by reactionaries. The struggle against reactionaries is the urgent need of the moment. Only by exposing and politically defeating those elements can the Nepalese people build a new Nepal. Since the CPN-M has decided to form a United Front with nationalist and republican forces, this will enable the entire nation to fight against the reaction and establish a People's Federal Democratic National Republic.

Finally, the CC decided to carry out campaigns for awareness, for nationality and development that will revitalise the party rank and file and the entire people in relation to understanding MLM and carrying out development projects.

The principled stand of the CPN(M) in government also had an effect on the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist), known for its opportunist politics. *Nepal News* reported on 20th December that Deputy Prime Minister Bam Dev Gautam, speaking at a national assembly of landless farmers organised by the Federation of All Nepal Farmers, assured that "the landless peasants as well as all the downtrodden communities will be entitled to own land as per the land reforms program", and accused his party, CPN(UML), of hampering the smooth functioning of the

government, and warned that "the party should not forget, when it censures the government, that [it] is a part of the coalition government".

India: New Directions for Mass Struggle

A land mine explosion on 2nd November aimed at the convoy of West Bengal's Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and Union Minister for Steel and Mines, Ram Vilas Paswan returning from the inauguration of the Jindal Steel Works special economic zone (SEZ) in Salboni in West Midnapore District in West Bengal led to an unprecedented chain of events. What started as protests against police brutality in the second week of November evolved into an uprising against state oppression.

Much of the 5000 acres acquired for the project including tracts of forest was reportedly vested with the government for distribution among landless adivasis (aboriginal people). It was callous to set up an SEZ with a polluting steel plant in the middle of a forested area, dispossessing people of their land, and denying their means of survival. But in September 2008, Jindal, with active support from the state government, had got SEZ status for the acquired land so that regulations for industrial plants, including an Environmental Impact Assessment, could be circumvented.

The explosion was blamed on Maoist insurgents in Salboni and adjoining Lalgarh. In the face of government fury, the police, who ritually follow any Maoist attack with harassment of adivasi villagers, went on a rampage. Arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention by the police were followed by a reign of terror in 35 villages comprising the adivasi belt of Lalgarh. The patience of the long suffering Santhal adivasis of the Bankura-Purulia-Midnapore area wore thin, and they encircled the Lalgarh police station on 6th November and held the policemen captive.

On 7th November, as the ruling CPI(M) "observed" the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution across West Bengal, ten thousand Santhal men and women armed with traditional weapons isolated Lalgarh from Midnapur and Bankura to deny entry to police vehicles, in the way it was done in Nandigram. By evening, they disconnected telephone and electricity lines, virtually converting a vast area into a liberated zone. Their apex social organization, the Bharat Jakat Majhi Madwa Juan Gaonta, which led the struggle, admitted that it was the movement that guided the organization in this instance. Smaller adivasi organizations, that were active in the struggle openly called for armed resistance as the only way forward.

Adivasi demands were based on their traditional ways of dispensing justice, and did not look up to the formal judicial process which was weighted

against the poor and marginalized. The administration arrogantly rejected the demands, but conceded that compensation can be considered. The adivasis rejected this "offer", and the upsurge spread over an even wider area encompassing Dahijuri, Binpur, Jhargram and Bandowan. The slogans now included demands to end dispossessing adivasis of their land, forests and water in the name of development and industrialization. Thus the struggle against state oppression is being transformed into a bigger one against dispossession and marginalization.

The adivasis denied political leaders access to the movement, and insisted on negotiating in the open and not behind closed doors. Even traditional leaders had to talk directly with the adivasis before talking to the administration. The people of the ten villages in Lalgarh set up individual village committees and a coordinating committee to negotiate with the administration. The democratic nature of the upsurge foiled attempts by the administration to "control" the movement, and forced political parties like the local Trinamool Congress to express support, despite the silence of the state leadership. The state government which had asked the central government for paramilitary forces to help to quell the uprising was forced to accede to the bail of the three teenage students arrested by the police and to send the officer-in-charge of Lalgarh police station on extended leave.

By late November, agitation spread to other parts of the state and hundreds joined in a rally in Gazol town in Birbhum Zilla to demand basic amenities and protest against police excesses in their villages. When the Forward Bloc yielded to pressure from the district leadership of the CPI(M) and put off the agitation by its adivasi wing, adivasis adopted a new banner 'Birbhum Adibasi Unnayan Gaonta' (BAUG) to join the protest.

Police re-deployment in camps set up on 18th December, despite agreeing to withdraw the camps after discussion with adivasi leaders, led to strong protest and refusal by the adivasis to attend a meeting called by the block administration to discuss development schemes. Duplicity on the part of the authorities has made the adivasis even more suspicious. Thus while the protest movement agreed on 8th January not to dig up roads as it affected the local people, it stuck to its stand of continued boycott of the police.

What was witnessed in Lalgarh is of historical moment where a long oppressed people rose, and dared to confront their oppressors and contest the logic of "development" that destroys their lives and livelihoods.

(Sources: www.sanhati.com 13.11.2008, 08.01.2009; *The Statesman* 19.12.2008; *The Telegraph* 09.01.2009)

India: Drawing the Wrong Lessons

Responses from the religious rightist parties and the media establishment to the terrorist attacks of 26th to 29th November 2008 in Bombay were as expected. The Indian government responded in ways that sought to placate the reactionaries and side strongly with US imperialism by pledging to take a tough anti-terrorist stand.

No Indian government has done serious soul-searching about the root causes of social violence in India, comprising not just wanton acts of terror, the worst of whose kind was witnessed in Mumbai, but also criminal acts of sectarian violence against religious and ethnic minorities. There is also a tendency to lump all forms of militancy against the state or the existing social order as terrorism, ignoring provocation and of brutal state terror by the armed forces, the police, and state-sponsored paramilitary forces.

No form of state violence justifies such acts of terror, whose victims are often innocent civilians. They facilitate further militarization of the state and the undermining of democracy by the suppression of dissent through anti-democratic legislation.

Mainstream media discussion of the terrorist attack sought to implicate the government of Pakistan by harping on the relationship between the ten armed men who held Mumbai to ransom for three days and terrorist outfits based in Pakistan. This approach was politically as expedient to the ruling alliance which has lost much of its credibility as to the BJP-led Hindutva alliance, backed by forces of religious fundamentalism, which only a few months earlier perpetrated murderous violence against Christians in Orissa and Muslims in Maharashtra.

The government promptly introduced its Amendment to the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and the National Investigation Agency Act. If past experience is anything to go by, the Bill, as many who are concerned for democracy and social justice fear, means a return of the notorious POTA and TADA of earlier decades if not worse.

US imperialism, the designer of terrorist outfits linked to subversive state and non-state agencies in Pakistan and India, rushed to capitalise on the situation. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice dashed to India specifically to pledge support to India in its 'war against terrorism' and increase US pressure on the beleaguered government of Pakistan to do its bidding in the provinces bordering Afghanistan, where the armed forces of the US are already breaching Pakistan's sovereignty.

Against this background, the joint statement released simultaneously to the press in Pakistan and India on 30th November 2008 by sixty concerned citizens of India and Pakistan offers a constructive approach.

We urge upon the governments of India and Pakistan to immediately take the following steps:

1. Cessation of all hostile propaganda against each other;
2. Joint action to curb religious extremism of all shades in both countries;
3. Continue and intensify normalization of relations and peaceful resolution of all conflicts between the two countries;
4. Facilitation of trade and cooperation between the two countries and in all of South Asia . We welcome the fact that the Srinagar-Muzaffarab and Poonch-Rawalakot borders have been opened for trade and that the opening of the road between Kargil and Skardu is in the pipeline.
5. Immediate abolition of the current practice of issuing city-specific and police reporting visa and issue country -valid visa without restrictions at arrival point, simultaneously initiating necessary steps to introduce as early as possible a visa-free travel regime, to encourage friendship between the peoples of both countries;
6. Declaration by India and Pakistan of No First Use of atomic weapons;
7. Concrete measures towards making South Asia nuclear-free;
8. Radical reduction in military spending and end to militarization.

(Courtesy: CommonDreams.org, Tuesday, December 2, 2008)

Pakistan: After-Shocks of Mumbai

While the Indian political elite finds it expedient to blame Pakistan for the terrorist attacks of 26.11.2009, the Government of Pakistan is caught between denial of involvement and inability to cooperate with the Indian authorities in ways that may show it as weak in the eyes of its people, and the Islamic militants especially.

It is true that the government was not responsible for the attack. It is also true that it has no control over sections of the armed forces and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), some of which are under the influence if not control of imperialist agencies such as the CIA. Details of the militants' plan as revealed by the only survivor of the group of attackers, however, point to elements of the ISI and the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba LET, and a naval commando unit for training them.

Escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan apart, the crucial question is whether Pakistan will succumb to Washington's pressure to effectively clamp down on the already banned LET and the ISI forward section officers whose collusion resulted in the Mumbai saga.

Militant organizations like the LET and its sponsors want to embroil Pakistan in a war as does US imperialism. The militants want a war with

India to plunge the whole region into a 'holy bloody war', while the US wants a total war against all militants siding with its enemy in Afghanistan, especially as the situation in NWFP is spiralling out of control with militancy spilling over from the tribal areas into this province.

The already weak government of Pakistan is in an unenviable position. Antagonising the militants will push them into acts to destabilize it. Defying US pressure could compel Pakistani armed forces to pull out the Swat Valley and Bajaur Agency, leaving the region open for the Taliban-led insurgency in Afghanistan, and escalation of hostilities that will push the militants into more attacks on India and dire consequences for the entire South Asia. However, with no extradition agreement in place between the two countries, India has agreed to trying the terror suspects in Pakistan; and it will be in the interest of peace in both countries to cut down on rhetoric and concentrate on cooperation.

The Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party (CMKP) of Pakistan in its statement on the Mumbai attacks called upon the Pakistani government to cooperate with India to root out the criminals behind the attacks. The statement also warned the Pakistani media and public against falling into the trap of responding to Indian bellicosity by whipping up an atmosphere of war in Pakistan. It pointed out that such war hysteria will weaken democracy in Pakistan, strengthen extremists, and even result in a reversal to military rule. It also called on the people of Pakistan to recognize that India and Pakistan have a mutual enemy in religious extremism (whether justified in the name of Hinduism or Islam) and appealed to the people to work for a South Asia based on peace and goodwill between people of all religions and all nations.

US imperialism, out of desperation due to its inability to make headway in Afghanistan, accuses Pakistan of failing to deal with lawlessness. But it has no moral right to do so, since it was the US that dragged Pakistan into a mess in its Afghan border region while undermining democracy by supporting unpopular military regimes. The democratic and progressive forces need to mobilize the masses against US imperialist meddling and breach of Pakistani sovereignty. To resist US imperialism cannot be to give in to sectarianism and religious extremism.

Thus, as pointed out in an earlier statement of the CMKP, people of Pakistan have three major tasks ahead of them: resisting military rule; resisting US imperialism; and resisting fundamentalism. The tasks which became interlinked by the US invasion and war in Afghanistan have become even more closely interlinked since the Mumbai attack.

Mali: Rising US Military Presence

Far from its Asian battlefields, the US is opening another front of its 'war against terrorism'. In Kati in landlocked Mali, a former French colony in West Africa and the world's fifth-poorest country, US Green Berets train African soldiers to guard their borders and patrol vast, largely ungoverned expanses against infiltration by 'al Qaeda's militants'. The US covets Mali's northern desert for strategic reasons and uses Islamic militancy as pretext.

In 2008, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) invested about \$9 million on counter-terrorism in Chad, including a small part on existing civilian programs to make the people more US-friendly. USAID was also building FM radio stations in the north to link far-flung villages to an early-warning network. The training in Kati is to use impoverished Mali to patrol the Sahara. The government has yielded to US pressure to let US and European military trainers conduct exercises. The double standards of the Western media warn of an 'al Qaeda threat' to Mali, but not the breach of Mali sovereignty by US military operations, and ignore that Islamic militancy in the region rose after the general elections of December 1991 to National People's Assembly of Algeria were cancelled when the first round predicted victory for the Islamic Salvation Front.

Mali is one of the few countries in the region having good relations with most neighbours, and the US seeks to take advantage of it to enhance its influence. If Mali had a security concern, that was the nomadic Tuareg tribesmen, divided by colonial rulers between Niger, Mali, Algeria, Libya, and Burkina Faso, but not now. What the US is seeking to do is to make Mali and other African countries party to its 'war against terrorism' and integrate them militarily into a network to control mineral rich parts of northwest Africa. The US activity in Mali is part of a bigger plan to extend 'counter-terrorism training and assistance' beyond the Middle East as already in progress in the Philippines and Indonesia. A five-year, \$500 million African project of the US Departments of State and Defence includes Algeria, Chad, Mauritania, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia, with Libya on the verge of joining. The process of militarising Mali against the perceived enemies of the US, could transform Mali into a cauldron of conflict, internal as well as external.

[Source: New York Times]

Somalia: End of an Episode

Somali president Abdullahi Yusuf resigned on 29th December 2008 after the 'parliament' overruled his announcement of 14th December dismissing the prime minister, Nur Hassan Hussein, whose plans to draw moderate

Islamists into the government Yusuf disapproved of. The UN-backed transitional government of conflict-ravaged Somalia, formed after the invading US-backed Ethiopian troops drove the ruling Islamist forces out of the capital Mogadishu in December 2006, was based in the market town of Baidoa, and relied heavily on the invading forces to battle Islamic militias and on US backing for its survival.

The Ethiopian intervention set off a bitter guerrilla war, which killed thousands of civilians, drove nearly a million people out of Mogadishu, and cost the lives of hundreds of Ethiopian soldiers. The lawlessness also spilled onto the seas off the Horn of Africa, where international vessels are routinely hijacked by suspected Somali pirates. Ethiopian occupation ended in January under a cease-fire deal, and the invading forces withdrew amid joyous celebration across Somalia.

Somalia's Islamist movement made a steady return, with various factions again controlling much of the country, and are now in control of the capital Mogadishu. A relatively new group, Ahlu Sunna Waljamaca, presenting itself as a moderate Islamic organisation, is fighting the leading Islamist group, al-Shabab. But some observers suspect that the newcomers could be a cover for clan-based warlords seeking to exploit the current instability. If the past is anything to go by, with the Ethiopians gone, the various factions will unleash their firepower on one another in a scramble for political power. There is also fear that the Ethiopians may stay on for some time in rural Somalia or near the border. There has been no decision about the 3000 African Union troops based in Mogadishu to protect the tottering transitional government, still hoping to bring Islamist leaders into its fold.

The US, which was behind the Ethiopian intervention, is seeking to replace the African Union troops with a stronger UN peacekeeping force. There is, however, reluctance among members of the UN to undertake such a commitment. With or without the UN involvement, thanks to continuous US meddling since the 1970s, Somalia faces a long wait for stable government and a longer one for lasting peace.

[Sources: CNN.com, Guardian.co.uk]

Europe: Troubled Times

Greece: Surging Militancy

On the night of Saturday 6th December 2008, hours after the police killed 15-year-old Michael Kaltezas by shooting him in the back of his head, angry youth took to the streets in Athens and other Greek cities. The protest went on even after a police officer was charged with premeditated manslaughter.

A letter of apology to the boy's parents from the unpopular prime minister, whose government is tainted by a series of corruption scandals, had no impact on the protest. On Sunday 7th, the interior minister offered to resign but the prime minister declined the offer; and by then a key demand was for the government to resign.

Public support for the protest was overwhelming. Ordinary Greeks threw flower-pots against the police from the balconies of their upper-floor apartments; they took videos of police actions from their balconies and distributed them to the media to expose police brutality. Militant workers occupied the central offices of the General Confederation of Greek Workers in Athens to counteract the designs of the union bureaucracy to distance its membership from the youth revolt; and to protest the poor management and mediation of workers' struggles by the union. Town halls in Athens and Thessaloniki were occupied to hold general assemblies in support of the protests which also sparked sympathy protests across Europe.

The global mainstream mass media highlighted unruly violent conduct of a section of the youth and damage to property but played down the root causes of the anger, especially the failing economy, with 22% youth unemployment, and political frustration. However, alternative media like the website www.indymedia.org gave a fuller picture. Generation 700 Euros', a group defending the 56 percent of Greeks under 30 pointed out: "Young Greeks, even those up to the age of 35, make up a silent majority of overworked, underpaid, debt-ridden and insecure citizens,".

Nikos Raptis, a Greek political commentator associated with the website *Znet*, in an interview published on *Znet* on 24th December 2008 criticised the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) for insisting that, no matter how many the demonstrating youths, this was not an "uprising" and insinuating that the "Coalition of the Radical Left" (a formerly Euro-Communist split from KKE) was condoning the violence. The Communist Organization of Greece (KOE), a member of the Coalition accused the KKE leadership of trying to prevent students under its wing from participating in the protests and, like the corrupt leadership of the Socialist Party (PASOK), colluding with the establishment.

Encouragingly, the mood created by the protests also persuaded the Greek government to cancel a planned US shipment of ammunition from Greece to Israel. The international media claimed that the Pentagon took that decision in light of the proximity of the destination of the shipment (Ashdod in Israel) to Gaza, while the Greek media held that the Greek government called it off. Notably, on 10.01.2008, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine called upon "the Greek movement, the Greek people and all international progressive forces to halt the planned shipment of US arms to Israel from the Greek port of Astakos", and in the next two days

tens of groups across the country responded by calling in turn for a demonstration and blockade of the port. It was only a day later that the shipment was cancelled: a small but very significant victory.

The protests of the youth are far from over and mass anger is still there. The challenge faced by the genuine left is to mobilise the strong feeling of the youth and the public to build a genuine left political alternative for Greece in the face of the impending economic disaster.

[Sources: New York Times, www.indymedia.org, Guardian.co.uk]

Anti-Government Riots across Europe

Riots due to public anger at failing economies rocked several parts of Europe. They are a sign of things to come: fresh rebellion and old-fashioned state repression.

Iceland. Icelanders besieged the Parliament in Reykjavik on 20th January 2009 night amid angry protests against the neo-liberal government that led the country into bankruptcy. On 26th January Prime Minister Geir Haarde announced the immediate resignation of the coalition government comprising his Independence Party and the Social Democrats formed in May 2007, whose approval rating fell from 72.0% to 20.3% according to a poll in late January while that for the opposition Left Green Party soared to 32.6% from 14.3% in 2007.

Iceland was among the most prosperous European countries until the crisis with average annual growth at 4%, peaking at 7.7% in 2004, and 4.9% in 2007; but expected to shrink by 9.6% in 2009 and see no growth in 2010. Unemployment, once almost unknown was expected to reach 7.8 per cent in 2009 and 8.6 per cent in 2010. Public demands by demonstrators for the resignation of the prime minister built up since late November 2008, after the small north Atlantic island state, secured a package of more than \$10 billion in loans from the IMF and several European countries to help it rebuild its shattered financial system.

[Source: New York Times]

Lithuania. On Friday 16th January 2009, while Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius held an emergency cabinet meeting, an estimated 7 000 demonstrators calling on the government to resign attacked the parliament building in Vilnius and chanted “Thieves come out”. The protest organised by the Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation, denounced public sector wage cuts and tax increases which the government claimed were necessary to save the country’s battered economy. Police dispersed the crowd with tear gas and rubber-tipped bullets, and arrested 86 people.

The protests come two days after similar events shook Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, and follows from riots protesting International Monetary Fund (IMF)-agreed austerity measures in Latvia earlier in the week.

[Sources : New York Times, www.Euroactiv.com]

Latvia. On 13th January hundreds of demonstrators frustrated by rising unemployment and tax hikes and blaming centre-right coalition government of Prime Minister Ivars Godmanis for the economic woes clashed with riot police in the capital, Riga turned violent following a peaceful anti-government protest rally attended by 10 000 people, the largest since Latvia broke off from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Until recently the economy of Latvia, which joined the EU in 2004, was among the fastest growing in the EU but underwent a dramatic reversal in fortunes to be expected to shrink by 5% this year. In recent months, public opinion has increasingly demanded that the people be given the constitutional right to dissolve parliament through referenda, and President Valdis Zatlers too stepped up criticism of the government, but stopped short of threatening to dissolve the legislature.

Meanwhile, Latvian Member of European Parliament Tatjana Zdanoka used the occasion of her president's address to highlight increasing levels of anti-Russian language discrimination in Latvia and lash out at President Zatlers for supporting laws that blatantly discriminate against Russian speakers, who make up one third of Latvia's population.

[Sources : New York Times, www.Euroactiv.com]

Bulgaria. In Sofia on 14th January some 2,000 students, farmers and green activists also took up stones, snowballs and bottles against their parliament building and demanded the government resign. A total of 150 were arrested and around 30 injured in Bulgaria's worst riots since 1997. The reasons for the unrest are varied. Students were protesting over the death of one of their number in an apparently random criminal attack, blaming the government for failing to ensure security. They were joined by farmers angry about low prices for their produce and problems with EU subsidies often diverted by corrupt administrators.

[Source: New York Times]

Other Concerns. Fears have been expressed that Romania, which joined the EU with Bulgaria in 2007, may be the next to suffer major breakdowns in public order since factories are closing down almost daily and major companies are threatening massive job cuts.

There has been a noticeable swing to the 'left' in several European countries where the left suffered serious setbacks and neo-liberalism was on the rise, as

witnessed in Slovenia where a centre-left government was elected in September 2008, and the Czech Republic where the Social Democrats swept the board in October 2008 in elections for a third of the seats in the senate by winning 23 of 27 seats. More recently in the state of Bavaria in Germany Social Democrats defeated the conservative Christian Social Union, which ruled Bavaria with an absolute majority for nearly 50 years. But these are only indications of disappointment with the failure of the capitalist system, in which the centre-left still has faith.

Another risk concerns the rise of fascism; and attacks on ethnic minorities, could be used to divert attention from the economic crisis. For example, the Czech Republic, also hit badly by the economic crisis, recently saw its worst street violence for years when 700 members of the far-right Workers' Party clashed with riot police in the town of Litvinov when they were prevented from marching into a mostly Roma area.

[Sources : New York Times, www.guardian.co.uk]

Latin America: Time for Change

Cuba Joins Rio Group

Member nations of the Rio Group, founded in December 1986, comprising all Latin American countries but Cuba until now and most Caribbean countries, at the 27th ministerial meeting held in Zacatecas, Mexico in November 2008 agreed to accept Cuba as a full member, to accommodate the wishes of many Latin American and Caribbean member countries. Thus, Cuba joins an authentic Latin American and Caribbean organization excluding participation by countries from other regions, notably the US. This signals the changes underway on the continent and the failure of the US policy against Cuba.

Cuba: Praises from EU

On 10th November 2008 Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid praised Cuba's response to Hurricane Paloma that struck the island at the weekend: "The 2008 hurricane season is one of the worst Cuba has faced for many years. But the country has a highly effective disaster response system and thanks to this, many lives have certainly been saved". He pledged that the commission would be ready "to provide further emergency support if needed, to help tackle any suffering resulting from Hurricane Paloma, in solidarity with the people of Cuba, who have been hit severely by three hurricanes in three months."

Hurricane Paloma, a category four storm, hit Cuba at the end of the hurricane season. The Cuban authorities evacuated more than a million people before Paloma struck. The commission, through its Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO), is currently funding five relief projects in Cuba from a 2-million-Euro allocation provided after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike earlier in the summer. Michel also assigned a technical mission to Cuba to identify existing needs and possible further commission support. Disaster preparedness is just one of the areas being considered for joint-action between Cuba and the European Commission since the re-launch of bilateral cooperation in October.

[Source: news.xinhuanet.com]

Nicaragua: Sandinistas Win Municipal Elections

On 20th November 2008, the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) of Nicaragua announced the final results of the 9th November municipal elections. Of the 146 municipalities contested, the Sandinista Party (FSLN) won 105, the alliance led by the reactionary Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) 37, and the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance four. The defeated PLC counted on an opposition majority in the National Assembly to introduce a bill to annul the elections; but was told by the president of the CSE, an independent branch of government with seven magistrates that the constitution gives the CSE the exclusive power to organize elections and declare the results, including nullification.

The PLC showed its anti-democratic teeth by expelling from its ranks two of its CSE magistrates and one alternate magistrate, for upholding the CSE decisions. Former Nicaraguan president Arnoldo Aleman, a PLC leader, provoked trouble with threats to reject the results "through all necessary paths"; PLC attempts to stir trouble by rejecting the results as fraudulent were confronted by Sandinista supporters. Two people were killed in the ensuing violence which took its toll on both sides of the media divide.

The US State Department, knowing that the PLC was losing, rejected the results even before they were announced, and the Secretary General of the US-dominated Organization of American States (OAS) joined in chorus. Nicaragua denounced the US government for trying to destabilize the government by criticizing the local elections and the OAS secretary-general for overstepping his authority. Nicaragua has seen worse twenty years ago. Sadly for the US, Latin America is no more the backyard that it was to launch another counter-revolution using a criminal gang as in the 1980s.

[Sources: nicanet.org, earthtimes.org]

El Salvador: Leftward Drift

The Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) presidential candidate Mauricio Funes claimed success in the municipal and legislative elections of 18th January, with the FMLN becoming the country's leading political force by increasing its number of seats from 32 to 35 in the 84-member parliament and 43% of the national vote, with the reactionary Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA) at 32 seats (down from 34) and 39% of the national vote. In elections to the 262 city councils, the number of FMLN mayors rose from 58 to over 80 to gain control of administrative centres that had been rightwing bastions, some strategic, like La Union. If the FMLN maintains this momentum Funes should win the presidency on 15th March.

[Source: Granma Daily]

Paraguay: Mounting Public Pressure

Three days of protest involving 15 000 people in Asuncion and 45 000 nationwide started on 5th November 2008 amid clashes with the police. The main demands were the impeachment of the members of the Supreme Court and the removal of the attorney general, all nominated by the former right-wing government that ruled Paraguay for nearly the entire 20th century (including the 1954-1989 military dictatorship). The demands also included the release of protesters arrested in earlier weeks, and plots of land for landless farmers.

The protest involving 50 social and labour organizations, and including doctors, teachers, indigenous people and farmers was organised by the Social and Popular Front (FSP). It was joined by organisations like the Homeless People and Slum-dwellers' Movement demanding decent housing, and the Public Transport Workers Union calling for compliance with the country's labour laws, and ended after preliminary agreement with the newly elected left-of-centre president Fernando Lugo, including the creation of a National Council on Agrarian Reform made up of representatives of the ministries of agriculture, education and health, campesino organisations and civil society groups and the development of a social assistance programme for rural communities.

Agribusiness and landowners, responsible for the wholesale destruction of forests by ranchers to create pasture land, then launched their two-day protest on 15th December demanding an end to 'invasions' of large estates by landless farmers who targeted large-scale producers of transgenic soybeans. The landowners parked tractors and machinery along the sides of roads in provinces with large-scale farming activity. But the measure drew fire from small farmers' associations, and was denounced by the FSP

who accused it of “cloaking itself in slogans designed to lie to Paraguayan society, like ‘work for everyone’, which is ironic given that the soybean growers exploit their workers”.

[Sources: upsidedownworld.org, ipsnews.net]

Bolivia

On 25th January Bolivia adopted by 61.43% to 38.57% its new 411-article charter enshrining radical policies to extend state control of the economy and tilt Bolivia in favour of its underclass and which its supporters hope will empower the indigenous majority and roll back half a millennium of colonialism, discrimination and humiliation.

The passage of the constitution, seen as not going far enough by critics on the left and as going too far by conservative and racist elements resentful of the political power of the indigenous people can only be a beginning. Reactionaries are bitter in defeat and are sure to make trouble. Their attempts to reverse the gains of the oppressed will be helped by the global economic crisis and subversion by US imperialism. Thus Morales and the cause of the oppressed in Bolivia need the fullest backing of all progressive forces in Bolivia and elsewhere.

[Source: www.guardian.co.uk]

Venezuela: Bad Losers

The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) stunned hostile pollsters and most the mass media by winning 58% of the popular vote and 72% of the governorships in the elections of 23rd November 2008. The PSUV received one million votes more than in the last election, held on 2nd December 2007, and retained its high level of support in the context of several radical economic measures, including the nationalisation of major cement, steel, financial and other private capitalist monopolies and despite decline in oil prices (from \$140 to \$52 per barrel). The PSUV won in 18 of the country's 24 major cities; and the electorate, notably, was discriminating in its support for candidates, and did not blindly identify with President Chavez.

Rather than acknowledge defeat of the clients of US imperialism, the media, like their masters, fooled themselves by drawing attention to a minor gain here or a close finish there to conclude that Chavez is losing ground and could be overthrown soon. President Chavez disappointed them again by handsomely winning the referendum of 15th February 2009, free of some of the controversial proposals that led to the narrow defeat of the earlier one in 2008, and will be able to contest for presidency when his term expires in 2011.

Memories of Ché

Udhayadheepan

**Let us think of Comrade Ché
Let us honour the life he lived
Let us gather the light of his experience
Let us shake this world**

**The Ché who frightened
US imperialism to death
Is no more with us
But his thinking has nurtured us
Let us learn more, let us grow further
Let us hold high Marxism
Let us liberate humanity**

**A death before its time
Sorrowed this earth
But his thoughts gathered momentum
To unite three continents
And yield broad-based bonds**

**Let us unite with the people of Cuba
Let us be people of this world
Let us destroy imperialism
Let us make a new world**

**Ché called for two, three Vietnams
Let us call for several hundred Cubas
Let us not just dream
Let us take it to heart
 Make Revolution,
 Build a New World**

The Brighter Side of Philip Gunawardena

Philip Gunawardena: the Making of a Revolutionary, Charles Wesley Ervin, Social Scientists Association, (2nd revised edition) Colombo 05, 2008, pp. 47+iv, Rs 300.00.

The book gives a hagiographic account of the life of Philip Gunawardena, known in Trotskyite circles as ‘the father of Trotskyism’ in Sri Lanka. Following a brief account of Philip’s family background, the author outlines his political life from vague beginnings in the early 1920s in the US where he was a student to the first annual congress of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party in 1936.

The book has an explicit Trotskyite bias and does not miss an opportunity to fault a communist party anywhere, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in particular and of course the leadership of Stalin. The author gleefully quotes a number of people including the likes of Jayaprakash Narayan and comments on historical events in Europe from a Trotskyite perspective, but in isolation from the global picture. Of the 38 pages of text excluding the footnotes, only a small fraction concerns the political life of Philip, which is admired mostly for his ‘anti-Stalinist’ line, which did not become public until the closet Trotskyite faction in the LSSP was ready to force a split in the party by denouncing the Comintern and expelling the communists who defended it.

Interestingly, the author gives credit to Philip for his “sensible conclusion that the preconditions for forming a communist party...did not exist at that point” (p. 25) when he arrived in the island in November 1931, and for assembling a small team of talented men who share his goal of forming a Marxist party, less than two years later in 1933. Yet the party that was formed in 1935, when conditions were even more favourable, did not call itself a communist party. Philip is hailed when he poses as a great revolutionary hero, and also when he declares that his party is not quite revolutionary. The author also goes out of his way to cast a slur on SA Wickremasinghe by questioning his left credentials (pp. 29-30).

Despite all his revolutionary bravado, Philip was the first left leader to compromise with Sinhala chauvinism and to participate in a government led by the national bourgeoisie in 1956, and even more remarkably, to

participate in a government led by the comprador bourgeoisie only nine years after. Did the unmaking of the revolutionary have its roots in the making? The book does not even hint at an answer.

-SJS-

Marx Deserves Better

***Karl Marx Revisited*, Ed. Michael Fernando *et al.*, Godage International Publishers (Pvt) Ltd, Colombo 10, 2008, pp. 192, Rs 600.00.**

The book comprising a collection of fourteen articles, four in English, nine in Sinhala and one in Tamil, edited by Michael Fernando and others was published on behalf of the Committee for the Commemoration of the 190th Birth Anniversary of Karl Marx. Since the book is a trilingual publication, the editors could have provided summaries of each article in the other two languages. Strangely, only the article in English by Sivasegaram has such summaries, but not quite faithful to the source.

The book has appeared when capitalism faces its worst global crisis since the Great Depression of 1929-31, and when even ardent capitalist social economists admit the relevance of Marx. A reader is justified to expect articles that explain not only the relevance of Marxist theory and practice today but also how they could be further developed to carry forward the struggle for social justice. Attempts of that nature seem to exist in the articles by Kumar David, Vickramabahu Karunaratne and Sivasegaram in English and Jayathilaka de Silva, DEW Gunasekara and Tissa Vitharana in Sinhala. But most of these articles fall well short of expectation, and some of the better efforts do not cover sufficient ground. The article in Sinhala by Sumanasiri Liyanage suggesting ways to make Marxism as 'comprehensive' as liberalism and nationalism reflects confused thinking, as does the article in English by Carlo Fonseka titled "Is Marxism a Science?". The article by Jayadeva Uyangoda in Sinhala is a useful survey of studies of Marxist theory by important modern thinkers, but says little more than that Marxism is a useful theoretical tool. Several of the articles are sub-standard for publication in a book of this nature.

Given the need for such a volume and the quality and value expected of it in the context of a global economic crisis, the volume is disappointing as it seems poorly planned, poorly executed and wanting in purpose.

-SJS-

Life and Change in a Chinese Village

The Unknown Cultural Revolution, Dongping Han, Monthly Review Press, New York, www.monthlyreview.org, December 2008

The Unknown Cultural Revolution challenges the established narrative of China's Cultural Revolution, which assumes that this period of great social upheaval led to economic disaster, the persecution of intellectuals, and senseless violence. Dongping Han offers a powerful account of the dramatic improvements in the living conditions, infrastructure, and agricultural practices of China's rural population that emerged in this period. Drawing on extensive local interviews and records in rural Jimo County, in Shandong Province, Han shows that the Cultural Revolution helped overthrow local hierarchies, establish participatory democracy and economic planning in the communes, and expand education and public services, especially for the elderly. Han lucidly illustrates how these changes fostered dramatic economic development in rural China. *The Unknown Cultural Revolution* documents a neglected side of China's Cultural Revolution, demonstrating the potential of mass education and empowerment for radical political and economic transformation. It is a bold and provocative work, which demands the attention not only of students of contemporary Chinese history but of all who are concerned with poverty and inequality in the world today

Consequences of China's entry into global capitalism

The Rise of China and the Demise of the Capitalist World Economy, Minqi Li, Monthly Review Press, New York, www.monthlyreview.org, January 2009

In recent years, China has become a major actor in the global economy, making a remarkable switch from a planned and egalitarian socialism to a simultaneously wide-open and tightly controlled market economy. Against the establishment wisdom, Minqi Li argues in this provocative and startling book that far from strengthening capitalism, China's full integration into the world capitalist system will, in fact and in the not too distant future, bring about its demise. The author tells us that historically the spread and growth of capitalist economies has required: low wages, taxation, and environmental costs, as well as a hegemonic nation to prevent international competition from eroding these requirements. With the decline of the economic power of the United States, its current hegemonic role will deteriorate and the unprecedented growth of China will so erode the foundations of capital accumulation—by pushing wages and environmental costs up, for example—that the entire capitalist system will be shaken to its core. This is essential reading for those who still believe that there is no alternative.

(continued from inside front cover)

Seeing these conditions, I told the emissary:
He doesn't know what the History teaches us.
When a night murders a sun
A new morning carves out a new sun.
Therefore, this is my reply to my enemy:
I am neither greedy for favour, nor afraid of revenge.
He takes immense pride in his sword's power
But he can't judge the grandeur of a pen.

My pen is not the character of that protector
Who takes pride in besieging his own city.
My pen is not the bowl of that debased
Who bestows praises upon the usurper.
My pen is not the tool of that burglar
Who breaks the roof his own house.
My pen is not the companion of that night-thief
Who throws up a lasso on the unlit houses.
My pen is not the rosary of that preacher
Who keeps counting the moments of his prayer.
My pen is not the scale of that arbiter,
Who keeps two masks for his face to cover.

My pen is the safekeeping of my people.
My pen is the law-court of my conscience.
That's why, whatever I wrote, I wrote with passion of life.
That gave to my poems the supple of bow, and the tongue of arrow.
Whether I lay cut here, or be spared, I believe
Somebody will wreck this wall of oppression.
I swear for my torment-stricken life
The voyage of my pen will not be futile.

The passion of love did not get a nature that weakens the lover.
Instead of seeing the height of the cypress, you are gauging its shadow!

Translated from Urdu by Arjumand Ara
Courtesy: **Radical Notes**, Internet Journal

IT IS AMUSEMENT TO GOD

R Murugaiyan

**The wind that endlessly blew and whirled
The rain that poured without a lull
The damage they did was far too great.**

**They wandered all over by jeep and truck
Bullock cart, boat, and bicycle
They ploughed through ditches and mud
To carry out flood relief tasks –
At the end of duty
The head of administration
Descending from his car, bemoans–
“It is amusement to God
But the government is choking to death”**

**In his role as an organ of the state
Perhaps he has the right!
The officer bemoans.**