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Nobodies

Eduardo Galeano

Fleas dream of buying themselves a dog, and nobodies dream of escaping poverty: that one magical day good luck will suddenly rain down on them – will rain down in buckets. But good luck doesn't rain down yesterday, today, tomorrow, or ever. Good luck doesn't even fall in a fine drizzle, no matter how hard the nobodies summon it, even if their left hand is tickling, or if they begin the new day with their right foot, or start the new year with a change of brooms.

The nobodies: nobody's children, owners of nothing. The nobodies: the no ones, the nobodied, running like rabbits, dying through life, screwed every which way.

Who are not, but could be.
Who don't speak languages, but dialects.
Who don't have religions, but superstitions.
Who don't create art, but handicrafts.
Who don't have culture, but folklore.
Who are not human beings, but human resources.
Who do not have faces, but arms.
Who do not have names, but numbers.
Who do not appear in the history of the world, but in the police blotter of the local paper.
The nobodies, who are not worth the bullet that kills them

[Eduardo Hughes Galeano (3 September 1940 – 13 April 2015) was a Uruguayan journalist, writer and novelist whose best-known works are Open Veins of Latin America, 1971 and Memory of Fire, Trilogy, 1982–6. Poem courtesy: holywaters.wordpress.com]

Editorial

The already chaotic political situation of the country has been further confounded by the partly anticipated dissolution of parliament on 26th June with general elections to be held on 17th August amid controversy about the 20th Amendment to the Constitution concerning changes to the elections system.

Little has been politically different between the two main Sinhala political parties except issues of personalities. In the past decade both UNP and SLFP suffered splits based mostly on personal issues: the former owing to leadership rivalry encouraged by vested interests, against a background of successive electoral defeats; the latter owing to internal contradictions aggravated by the authoritarianism of former President Rajapaksa, most of which remained dormant until Rajapaksa moved to contest for a third term. His recent announcement that he will contest the parliamentary elections has made the split a certainty. How the split will materialize depends on developments in the coming weeks amid attempts at reconciliation and could continue even if the warring factions field separate slates of candidates.

Although the UNP has superficially patched up differences, bitter personal rivalries still at work are bound to surface after the elections. Holding together the alliance that defeated Rajapaksa will be a challenge since partners are already disgruntled over sectarian interests.

What matters is not which alliance comprising incompatible political parties will come to power but what plans that any of them has to rescue the economy and resolve the national question. The media gleefully give the impression that the UNP will adopt foreign and economic policies agreeable to US imperialism while the SLFP, united or divided, will adopt policies that will be friendlier towards China. Recent events have shown that pragmatism dominates foreign policy and an anti-China policy by any

government is unlikely despite sections of US loyalists in the UNP craving for one. As for anti-imperialism, the SLFP has been good at making the occasional anti-imperialist noise for local consumption while in practice bowing to US and European Community pressures on matters of economic and social policy.

The country's economic policy has since 1978 been dictated by the IMF, the World Bank and other financial arms of imperialism. No regime has deviated from the line laid by imperialism. Electoral considerations did, however, slow down certain projects such as total privatization of education and health sectors. But state funded education and health continue to be systematically run down with gates wide open for private hospitals, private practice by government doctors, private schools under the guise of "international schools", and local and foreign private universities. The election pledge of 6% for education by Maithripala Sirisena, to which both the UNP and the SLFP subscribe, is likely to be fulfilled the way JR Jayawardane delivered on his election pledge of 8 kg of grain per person which gave the electorate the impression that the gain will be free or at subsidized prices, by offering 8 kg of grain at market price.

People are used to elected governments breaking promises. Yet public frustration and anger found expression as mass demonstrations on several occasions in the past few years, especially as the glitter of war victory wore off. It seemed ominous that the BBC, reporting the dissolution of parliament, chose to display below the news caption an image of President Sirisena flanked by the commanders of the Army and Navy. It is likely that future dissent in any form will be met with brute force.

The failure of the main presidential candidates to address the national question was not accidental. While Mahinda Rajapaksa adopted an openly chauvinist line, Maitripala Sirisena pledged that the country's security will not be compromised and that an internal inquiry will be conducted into war crimes, the former to placate Sinhala chauvinists and the latter the "International Community".

Leaders of minority nationality parties displayed their political bankruptcy by not demanding from the UNP a clear statement of its stand on key aspects of the national question. Resettlement and rehabilitation of the war displaced, release of persons arrested on suspicion of being terrorists and detained without charges, and withdrawal of excess troops from the North and East are matters on which positions need to be clear.

The narrow Tamil nationalist TNA likes to have it both ways by making loud pronouncements about national rights of Tamils while cosying up to the UNP, knowing well that the UNP will do little more than making a few symbolic gestures on the national question. Its rival, the Tamil National People's Front, for electoral gain, hints at a separatist agenda, but without plans, amid growing public displeasure with the TNA and the Northern Provincial Council which hardly addresses matters that concern the livelihood of the people. All Tamil nationalists are unwilling to take any stand critical of the US and India, even in maters where the people are affected. The reliance of Tamil nationalist leaders on the "International Community" to solve the national question while shying away from mass politics and mass mobilization will only weaken the struggle of the minority nationalities for their rights.

Disputes about the 20th Amendment on electoral reform which failed to materialize clearly revealed that the political leaders of the minority nationalities and parties such as the JVP and JHU are only interested in ensuring their parliamentary seats and privileges that flow from them.

In all, the country has not gained anything significant except for the passage of the 19th Amendment which curtailed some of the presidential powers and effectively made the notorious 18th Amendment null and void. The defeat of Rajapaksa was a symbolic victory against a chauvinistic dictatorial trend. Parliamentary politics cannot consolidate that victory. It is time for the people of all nationalities to build a genuine left, progressive democratic alternative.

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The Imperialist Myth of Sustainable Development □
a Third World Perspective

Deshabakthan

> **Freedom does not consist in any dreamt-of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves — two classes of laws which we can separate from each other at most only in thought but not in reality. Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with knowledge of the subject.... Freedom therefore consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature, a control founded on knowledge of natural necessity; it is therefore necessarily a product of historical development.** *(Engels, in Anti Duhring, 1877)*

Introductory remarks

The term sustainable development, defined in various ways, is strictly a contradiction in terms, and especially so in a global context with finite resources and where development is seen as ceaseless growth of consumption, even at supposedly sustainable rates. It is as true of the definition by the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) in 1987, which is hailed as a landmark definition: "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

What may be sustained, however, is human survival by placing sensible limits on what is widely perceived as development. However, sustainable development is generally discussed in terms of sustaining global economic development, without challenging the global economic order which threatens sustainability. Thus, we should be careful not to use the term "sustainable development" in an absolute sense but only as a means of prolonging the survival of the human race on this planet while ensuring that the human being realizes its full potential, subject to the constraints placed on it by nature and its laws.

Growing environmental awareness made the protection of the environment a key aspect of sustainable development, along with food security, health, availability of potable water and conservation of mineral resources among other frequently spoken topics. However, the issues seem be addressed mainly from the point of view of the advanced capitalist countries, so that the Third World enters the discussion only when developments there affect the advanced capitalist countries. Even where issues of development in the Third World are taken up, the attitude, almost without exception, is at best condescending.

This essay is meant to demand addressing of issues of sustainability in ways that will be duly inclusive of the Third World and its oppressed and exploited masses who are the main victims of imperialism.

The Capitalist approach to sustainability

Much has been written on environmental problems and their implications for human survival on the planet. While some writers still underplay the dangers facing humanity if the present pattern of energy production continues, many more recognize the problem. Approaches to solutions differ widely, based on differences in the assessment of the ability of the prevailing global capitalist system to respond to the problem. Both explicit and implicit defenders of the prevailing system respond with piecemeal solutions for each recognized issue and avoid a approach that require addressing the fundamental issues. Non-governmental organizations

(NGOs) — which are certainly not apolitical and mostly in the pay of imperialist powers — readily yield to pressure from their paymasters as well as governments when they address environmental issues.

Green politics emerged in developed capitalist countries in response to environmental issues, but generally stopped short of examining whether the environmental issues raised by the Greens can be resolved under the capitalist system. However, their contribution to environmental awareness has been commendable. There have been issue-based environmental analysts who have in course of time come close to the Marxist position which points to a direct link between the environmental crises and the capitalist system.

Many useful writings have been published by Marxist scholars and analysts on matters of sustainability and the environmental crisis, which have thoroughly exposed the duplicity of capitalism in passing solemn resolutions addressing environmental issues while doing very little to alter the conditions that give rise to them. Marxist scholars have also researched the works of Marx and Engels to expose the mischief of right wing analysts who claim that Marx's thinking was akin to the capitalist outlook on development, and established that the Marxist concept of development was the exact opposite and concerned creating a climate in which human beings realized their creative potential to the fullest.

Advocates of the capitalist system, especially the defenders of imperialist neo-colonialism and globalisation, find ways to blame the Third World for the environmental crisis. The increase in population and per capita consumption of food, energy and other essentials in Third World countries are presented as causes of shortage of food and water and degradation of the environment. At the same time consumption patterns imposed on the Third World by imperialism through the open economic system encourage the consumption of non-essential goods.

For capitalism, sustainability is essentially a matter of sustaining profit. Initially it concerned assuring forever the unrestricted availability of raw materials, cheap labour, captive markets and stable government at home

and abroad. Capitalism in its course of development into imperialism faced several crises which threatened its survival. But it overcame them through transferring much of the burdens of its own creation to the Third World. That has remained part of the imperialist strategy even as it shifted from colonialism to neo-colonialism, imposed its neo-liberal agenda on the Third World and adopted the imperialist scheme of globalization.

Capitalism and environmental degradation

Environmental sustainability became an issue for global capitalism to address, only after the threat that environmental degradation posed to life on the planet became public knowledge and environmental issues posed a political challenge to the capitalist state. In the past, health related problems resulting from industrial pollution which affected urban areas were addressed locally with no concern for the countryside, let alone global implications. Even today, there is partiality towards cities in dealing with matters of development ranging from the location of large industries and power installations to issues of transportation. Industrial pollution of major cities, once associated with capitalist industrial development, was addressed by shifting the sources of pollution to far away locations by creating industrial towns and zones. That approach was applied to issues of urban pollution by transport vehicles. Electrified public transport systems helped to shift emissions from urban centres to remote locations where power stations are located. The growing interest in electric motor vehicles is a more recent manifestation of the same approach.

Further, by outsourcing of industrial production, advanced capitalist countries benefitted economically through access to cheap labour, and natural resources, while shifting of large scale industrial production to poorer European capitalist countries and later to the Third World as well helped to ease the burden of environmental pollution associated with industrial production. It should be remembered that countries under colonial rule were denied industrial development, and there have been several instances where local industry has been wilfully wrecked, as in the case of the weaving industry of India. Today the role of industry in the

Third World is to provide a variety of industrial goods and occasionally services to the advanced capitalist countries without posing a threat to imperialist profit. Neo-colonialism has ensured that the Third World's industry increasingly depends on foreign investment and foreign markets so that the market for goods from a country and therefore its economy depend on its abiding by terms laid down by imperialism.

Industrial waste has proliferated in the past several decades to dangerous levels and to include many toxic substances. Dumping of industrial waste, including toxic waste, in unsuspecting countries, most often countries with corrupt regimes, continues despite the occasional detection and prevention of dumping. There are strict laws against transportation of toxic waste within and among countries of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) mainly comprising countries of Europe and North America and a few of their allies. But waste, often including environmentally harmful substances, continue to be shipped from OCED countries to non-OECD countries in the Third World for reprocessing, dumping in landfills or incineration. Shipping of toxic waste has been brought under stricter surveillance since the scandalous dumping of a toxic waste shipment in Abidjan in the Ivory Coast in 2006, which occurred despite the adoption in 1989 of the Basel Convention (to control of transport of hazardous wastes and their disposal).

There are strict national and international laws against dumping waste into the oceans, but waste disposal continues as direct discharge of industrial waste, surface runoff of contaminated water and ballast water discharge from ships. Waste disposal in the ocean also includes plastics and toxic substances. It should be noted that such pollution is directly related to development, sustainable and otherwise.

Japan released thousands of tons of radioactive water per day into the Pacific Ocean following the Fukishima nuclear power station disaster of 2011. Radioactive water continued to leak at the rate of a few hundred tons per day and is now intentionally released into the ocean owing to difficulties in storing nuclear contaminated water.

Massive spillage of oil has occurred by accidents in offshore oil rigs, damage at sea to oil tankers, delivery pipe leakage and acts of war. Deep sea mining is a relatively new environmental menace that damages the ocean bed at depths of between 1.4 and 3.7 km below ocean surface in the process of mining for precious metals over extensive areas. The lack of eco-technological experience in the process bears hidden risks whose full impact may not be known for decades.

The energy question

Energy related issues affect sustainability in two ways. One concerns the need to find new sources of energy to meet the fast growing demand for energy with no sign of slowing down. The other concerns environmental implications of energy consumption. While the emphasis has been on the emission of green house gases, especially carbon dioxide, there are other pollutants like sulphur from oil and heavy metals from coal, besides emissions like nitrous oxides and carbon monoxide produced by the combustion process. There has been much emphasis in the past decades on the reduction of emission levels, but benefits of reduction in emission levels are in good part offset by the rise in energy production.

Renewable energy is increasingly seen as a viable alternative to fossil fuel and nuclear fuel which pose serious environmental threat. The reality is that renewables are not entirely renewable and have an energy price tag on them which is currently paid upfront using fossil fuel. Both the manufacturing process and the remnants of renewable devices at the end of their useful life involve waste material with serious environmental implications.

What is generally ignored in the analysis of sustainability of resources and environment is the centrality of consumption to the problems to be resolved. The adverse impact of consumerism on the availability of natural resources extends to clean air and water as well.

There is a tendency to rank countries as energy consumers and environmental polluters based on the overall energy consumption and emission levels. What is forgotten is that many Third World countries produce goods for consumers in advanced capitalist countries so that the

energy consumption and environmental pollution by a country should strictly be assessed based on the energy input needed for producing all goods consumed in the country, including transportation costs from source of raw materials to delivery.

Similar criteria would apply to minerals and raw materials consumed, so that the ultimate responsibility for depletion of natural resources including deforestation and the loss of fresh water, decline of coral reefs and other environmental damage will lie with the consumer, who is also a victim of consumerism, which is part of the imperialist scheme of affairs.

That is not to exonerate the rulers of the countries of the Third World, who are often willing accomplices in the impairment of the human environment and depriving future generations of essential resources.

Sustaining the Third World

The tragedy of the Third World is that countries which could have been key players in resisting imperialism willingly adopted the capitalist model of development, while many others sleep walked out of colonial rule into neo-colonial domination. As a result, with few exceptions, Third world countries became sources of raw material for development, which they continue to be. Even China and India which have developed into strong capitalist economies are depleting their natural resources and wrecking their environment in the name of development, more to serve the demand for goods and materials needed at low prices in the advanced capitalist countries forming the imperialist network than to serve the need of their own people.

The degradation of the environment in the Third World has seldom been a central issue in the various projects undertaken by the Greens and NGOs in the pay of imperialism to save the planet. Imperialism has got away with callous indifference towards human and environmental tragedies for which it is directly responsible, as for instance the Bhopal tragedy of 1984 and continuing oils spills in Nigeria that have blighted the once fertile Niger delta. Some of these matters are talked about because of the scandalous scale of the tragedy, but again the tendency is to blame the victim.

Poverty has often been identified as the main cause of environmental degradation in the Third World. However, very few dare to point out that neo-colonial grip on the Third World is the cause of both poverty and environmental pollution in the Third World.

Besides expansion of mining for mineral resources in the Third World, which as earlier mentioned is a target for dumping of waste, the Third World, at present Africa mainly, is prime target for land grab leading to dispossession of farmers and using the land acquired by foreign investors to produce food and commercial crops for the global capitalist market. The adverse implications for environment and food security in the target countries together with the introduction by agro-monopolies of genetically engineered crops, which are heavy users of toxic agrochemicals and fertilizers that harm the soil, are altering the face of agriculture in the Third World. It will be long before the industrially advanced countries face the consequences and the harm too late to reverse.

The a large share of the burden of controlling accumulated pollution, like ozone layer depleting gases and green house gases — to which the main contributor has been the developed capitalist countries — is also passed on to the Third World.

The Third World will only become more polluted with life and livelihood increasingly unsustainable as long as it accepts the norms of development imposed on it. There is a need to get its priorities right and turn away from export oriented economies towards national economy and regional cooperation aimed at self sufficiency in essentials such as food, clothing, shelter and medicine.

It is the responsibility of all left forces and other fair minded people across the world to defend the right of the Third World to define development and its sustenance on their own terms.

Concluding remarks

Capitalism by its very nature is a system that can only ceaselessly expand or perish. Its capacity for production beyond what could be genuine human need has meant that it needs to expand by seeking and securing of raw materials, cheap labour and new markets. Over production required the creation of a consumer culture which necessarily implied a faster

depletion of natural resources and the generation of waste. Also in its quest for new resources for materials including fuel, imperialism has resorted to practices that are extremely harmful to the environment.

Capitalism offers various technological solutions, without compromising on its hunger for profit and therefore pressure to increase consumption. It is important to note that no technology can have an answer to the problems of environment unless consumption is based on need and guided by reason. A system based on greed and guided by ruthless urge to exploit fellow human beings for profit cannot be expected to care for the environment at the expense of profit.

Green politics cannot be unaware of the track record of imperialism, but it refuses to call for the replacement of capitalism with another more just and egalitarian system. Greens pose as the soft option to the capitalist classes by proposing reforms that will keep the environment clean without challenging a social order which only encourages consumption at home and abroad and in the process aggravates environmental pollution as well as poverty, hunger and disease in the Third World.

The challenge facing the Greens is whether they are ready to recognize capitalism as the source of the environmental crisis. Green politics avoids the question and is most unwilling to confront imperialism.

There is also the tendency to claim that socialist countries too have been guilty of harming the environment. But the point is that any such harm was not wilful damage except in the context of war and other threats to the survival of a people. Unlike capitalism, for which the profit motive reigns supreme, socialism concerns general welfare and any activity that is a threat to the well being and survival of humanity can be corrected or even arrested as necessary. The greater the say that the broad masses will have in the affairs of the state the better will be the prospects for sustenance of the human environment for posterity.

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In Memory of Comrade Soodamani

Communist Thought in Current Context

Comrade S.K. Senthivel

(A slightly abridged adaptation of the text of address by Comrade S.K Senthivel at the First Death Anniversary Commemoration Meeting in honour of Comrade IK Soodamani in Vavuniya on 30th March 2014)

Comrade IK Soodamani who was the subject of love and adoration by all members of the Party and the community in which he lived passed away an year ago on 29th March 2013.

Comrade Soodamani was an exemplary comrade who lived as a Marxist Leninist in word and deed from the time he embraced Marxism Leninism until his last breath. He worked for the cause of social change in accordance with the Marxist world outlook, and his life and work were marked by proletarian class consciousness and the spirit of class struggle, courage, sacrifice, dedication and service to the people combined with arduous work for the Party, which are characteristics of good communists throughout the world. Through his commitment to the Party and its policies and by being true to the people and the Party to the very end he has made an indelible impression in the minds of the people of the country.

The current social climate of Sri Lanka

In the current social climate of Sri Lanka, the entire people of the country are facing a variety of problems and crises and are subject to much pain

and suffering. More than 90% of the population lives a life of dearth, unable to fulfil their essential needs of food, clothing, shelter, health and education. They face difficulties in their daily lives in their struggle to find employment and adequate wages to meet these needs. These problems manifest themselves as poverty, malnutrition, disease and lack of access to education and other unfulfilled social needs.

Inequality, selfishness and competitiveness have become commonplace. A close look at this social trend will reveal a general absence of a sense of togetherness and social consciousness. Self-centred individualism seems to dominate everything and individuals have to varying degrees been driven into the capitalist mode of self-seeking competitive thinking. This not something that anyone has willingly accepted or chosen personally.

The Marxist approach

Marxism tells us that one's social being determines one's thinking. And we see that that the ideology of the society we live in has an effect on each of our activities. Thus it is necessary to think deeply about how the thoughts and deeds of the people are guided in the spheres of politics, society and culture. It is only then that we can understand the contemporary social environment in which we live and find appropriate solutions for the problems faced by the people.

What Marxism teaches us is that we should approach everything scientifically and historically and thereby raise questions of how, why and what for about each and determine the truth by finding the answers. That is what Marx meant when he famously said "Everything must be doubted". That meant that the truth can be determined by questioning everything and finding answers supported by evidence.

Marxist ideology comprised such scientific study of human history and social development. It is on that basis that Marxists study their social environment and come to conclusions. Hence they treat Marxism as a source of thought and a powerful tool of social transformation than as a dogma for worship. Marx asserted that "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it". This quotation is engraved at the bottom of Marx's tomb carrying his famous battle call "Workers of all lands unite".

A historical view of our classes

To understand the current Sri Lankan social structure and environment, we need to go back in time and take a historical view. Sri Lanka, like other countries, especially those of South Asia, has passed through a feudal phase. Ideology and thought characteristic of feudalism were followed in economic, political and socio-economic spheres of the feudal society. Amid this, the European colonists who arrived in Sri Lanka did not introduce in their colonies the capitalist system as developed in Europe. They were intent on appropriating the natural resources and human toil of Sri Lanka.

The feudal elite classes readily joined hands with them and thereby protected their property and wealth as well as won their confidence to secure various administrative posts and further enrich themselves. Be they Sinhalese or Tamils, they belonged to the class of landed gentry and high caste, such as the Govigama and Vellala.

It was under these colonial conditions that limited capitalist development took place in Sri Lanka and brought in its wake certain changes in the social, economic and political spheres. But there was little change in the ideological sphere. Neither the colonialists nor the feudal and emergent capitalist classes sought to eliminate the religious and cultural influences or to bring about changes in religious and cultural affairs. As a result, unlike in Europe where capitalism overcame feudalism and religion got isolated from the spheres of economics and politics, conservative religious and cultural ideology was not weakened. Thus, in the South Asian context, feudal ideology and thought, along with religion, culture and traditions, still shield the ruling classes.

Entry of neo-colonialism

Although Sri Lanka entered a new phase in the name of independence from British colonial rule, its affairs are still conducted according to rules laid down by foreigners. A new form of colonialism, which we call neo-colonialism, has replaced old colonialism. The World Bank, the IMF, ADB, WTO and other such bodies control the economy of Sri Lanka and keep it in their grip. At the same time, the UN and the bodies which come under it are the political tools of imperialism headed by the US. They act

collectively to safeguard the interests of neo-colonialism which has been thrust upon the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The neo-liberal economic policy of neo-colonialism has been in practice over the past four decades. The policies of liberalization and privatization which uphold imperialist globalization are gaining strength by the day. The economy of the country as a whole has been wrecked under the neo-liberal economic policy. Paddy production in Sri Lanka, once known as the paddy silo of Asia, is in ruin.

Likewise, production of paddy and other field crops in the Northern, North Central and Eastern provinces and in the Hill Country has been on the decline and faces ruin. The neo-liberal economic policy is bent on eradicating the status of Sri Lanka as an agricultural country. The tendency is for the production of tea, the main export crop, and other produce to decline, while privatization has finished off whatever industry that was established. Human resources are being shipped to the Middle East where our people are squeezed dry for modest wages. The plight of women is indescribably pathetic. At home, workers of both male and female are working in the state and private sectors are working for low wages; the plight of plantation workers is particularly bad.

Impact of neo-colonialism

The neo-liberal economy under neo-colonialism is carried forward by multinational companies, big capitalist ventures and transnational corporations. Information Technology (IT) contributes very much to the globalization of neo-liberalism. Although IT is considered to be the peak of development of human knowledge, it only benefits capitalist exploitation and imperialist global hegemony.

IT also has contributed to many negative social developments through modern communication appliances such as computers and mobile telephones. Modern communication appliances have, especially among the youth, been used thus far to promote social decadence in the form of drug abuse, alcoholism, theft, violence, murder, sexual abuse and paedophilia, which have contributed to destroying social awareness and social concern among the youth.

The neo-liberal economic policy has also created an unhealthy climate in which making money takes priority over all else, irrespective of the means used. This is the logical conclusion of the road taken by capitalism, since European colonialists plundered the gold and silver of the Native Americans and killed off many thousands in the process. It was this gold that provided the capital essential for the growth of industrial capital.

Marx and Engels have in their analysis of capitalism illustrated how money has degraded the value of people in every respect. They point out that capitalism has destroyed all old bonds between human beings leaving behind only transactions based on self interest, destroyed all freedoms other than the freedom to trade and reduced all human relations to monetary transactions.

Capitalism which accumulated money and gave it primacy has rid society of collective existence and development and encourages individual rivalries and the false faith that competition will lead to development. This exactly is what capitalist imperialism is doing all over the world through its programme of globalization.

Sri Lanka is yet another country that has fallen into the treacherous trap of imperialist globalization. Unable to escape from it, the people of the country are struggling with their burdens of sorrow. Meanwhile it is well known that a few percent of the population comprising the propertied wealthy elite and ruling political class that represents them are making money and enjoying all pleasures of life.

The national question

At this point, we cannot transcend the national question without understanding its importance since it has severely affected the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people. The war resulting from the unresolved national question has caused severe losses to the people of the North and East.

Those who have suffered loss of life and property and subjected to harsh displacement, still unable to recover from the effects of their losses, are undergoing inexpressible sufferings. The Rajapaksa regime and the chauvinist ruling classes have no political solution to offer for the national question. The government which boasts of a military solution secured

through war continues to place the North and West under military oppression.

The US and other Western imperialists contributed to transforming the national question into war in order to facilitate imposing on Sri Lanka their neoliberal economy under the scheme of imperialist globalization, and have succeeded in their mission.

Even today, rather than seek a political solution to the problem, they conduct political activities locally and internationally that would aggravate the national contradiction. Meanwhile, the ruling chauvinist capitalist forces, in the interest of retaining and prolonging their power over the state, tend to reject a political solution.

At the same time, the Tamil parties have neither a clear and far sighted common programme for liberating the Tamil people from Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism nor a policy based scheme to mobilize the people along the mass line. The Tamil parties have nothing besides a narrow nationalist stand that they would use to conserve their vote bank and thereby secure posts and positions at various levels. Apart from this, they have fully surrendered themselves to India and the 'International Community' comprising the US and its Western allies, on whom they have pinned their faith.

It is well known that the so-called "International Community" is using the Tamil people as their pawns to serve its own agenda. All parties other than the ordinary people affected by the Sri Lankan national question have benefitted by that, and continue to do so while the Tamil. Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people and ordinary toiling masses continue to suffer. Meanwhile, the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists continue to deceive the Sinhala masses and divert their attention from key issues.

Burdens of History

Apart from the above, the entire population appear to be distracted by conservatism and religious and cultural traditions. Superstitions enable the transformation of the faith of the people in religion and temples into thriving businesses that make money.

One form or another of naivety and blind faith is being nurtured within the political, economic and cultural spheres. Essentially, the people are fooled by these and blinded from seeing the social reality and the truth.

Also, besides class and national oppression in the Sri Lankan society, there is oppression based on caste and gender, which capitalist political parties with claims to leadership of communities avoid addressing. The people too persist with parliamentary politics in the politically naïve belief that it represents freedom and democracy. This is regrettable, but there is a need to patiently explain to the people about the truth and reality that is hidden from them in politics.

The Case for Communist Thinking

It is the above context that we see the need for communist thinking. Marxism is the foundation of communist thought. Of all ideologies that human history has seen, Marxism and communist thought represent the highest in seeking the path for the liberation of humanity. Until Marxism came into being only 166 years ago, there has been no philosophy or system of thought that pointed to the liberation and salvation of the toiling masses. It was only Marxism that that demonstrated that it is only the working class that can put an end to social inequality and injustice.

It is a historical truth that it was the scientific socialism put forward by Marxism that, even for a brief period of human history, eliminated social inequality and injustice. Thus Marxism and communist thought are not things that dropped from heaven but emerged out of the real need to combat exploitation, inequality, oppression and social injustice. Communist thought will raise its red flag of liberation wherever there is exploitation, inequality, oppression and social injustice, and it transcends differences of nation, race, religion, language and colour to call for proletarian internationalism.

The Significance of Comrade Soodamani

Comrade Soodamani embraced Marxism and communist thought at a very young age and travelled along that path for more than fifty five years in the firm belief that Marxism alone can liberate people from all manner of oppression. That belief was not pretentious or wanting in any way because he put into practice that belief by ceaselessly working for the

Communist Party. His contribution was such that there was hardly a meeting or activity in which he did not participate.

He was there among the people and shared in their joys and sorrows. He would take up the problems of the people and seek solutions on his own initiative and though the Party. No one but a handful of his political foes will deny that he was a wonderful comrade who lived a simple life and worked hard for the Party. He was no scholar but only an ordinary literate worker who advanced very much as a Marxist, communist militant, a servant of the masses and a ceaseless worker for the Party. That he was respected by the uneducated and academics alike surprised many.

Yet, he did not live a life of comfort. He lived on the modest income that he generated through physical work by persuading his family to live frugally. He also succeeded in ensuring that his family life, especially his partnership with his wife, did not deviate from his party political life. He had to face hard times. Poverty and illnesses troubled him. Displacement by war caused great suffering. His life was not smooth: he was attacked by political foes as well as the police.

Since he lived the life of a communist, his family had to face a variety of threats and rejection. But Comrade Soodamani stood firm with his chest erect and marched on as a communist. He lived as a steady red idealist so that in his last years even his opponents were amazed by him.

His memories are not mere personal memories but memories that show the way ahead to all of us, especially the youth who should learn from Comrade Soodamani's life as a communist, his spirit of dedication in carrying out Party work.

His was a life of service to mankind by choice so that no load could make him bow, and his life was one of sacrifice for all of us.

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Re-reading the Right to Self Determination

(Finding solutions from within and learning lessons from without)

Asvaththaamaa

Introduction

The right of self determination has been a central issue in the search of solutions to the Sri Lankan national question. The understanding of the concept has been marred over the years by issues of definition and, in Sri Lanka, it has generally been interpreted as a license for succession by its advocates as well as opponents. Secession is no end in itself, to neither imperialists nor Marxist Leninists who hold diametrically opposed views of the right of a people to nationhood and secession. Imperialism has often used secession as a means to further its expansionist ends. But that alone is no reason for a Marxist Leninist or anti-imperialist to oppose the right to secession. On the contrary, one should uphold the principle even more firmly. Marxist Leninists see the right to session as an inalienable aspect of self determination, which is, rather than a licence to secede at will, a proven means to avert secession and secure harmony among nationalities.

Secessionist movements have, as in Kashmir and Nagaland in India and East Timor in Indonesia, resulted from the forced annexation of regions without consulting the people concerned. They have also resulted

from the denial of national rights of a people, including the right to self determination as in the case of the Kurds, especially of Turkey. What is important is to understand the causes of the call for secession and examine whether the call represents the genuine wishes of a nationality or the interests of exploiting classes and external forces. Even if imperialism supports a secessionist movement, there is need for a careful study of the call for secession to assess the justification for it and seek means to address the issues.

This article re-reads the concept of right of self determination in the light of past experiences of Sri Lanka and explores the prospect of finding solutions to the Sri Lankan national question from within.

Understating the Right of Self Determination

The concept of self determination has its origins in the revolutionary ideology of the working class. Lenin developed it in the context of imperial Russia to unite the oppressed nationalities and defined the right to self-determination as the inalienable right of a nation to secede. Thus self-determination necessarily implied equality among nations coexisting voluntarily and without coercion within the framework of a state. Self-determination means the right of a nationality to secede from the state that includes it to either create its own independent nation-state or join another nation-state. This bourgeois-democratic right has, however, been denied by capitalist rulers and imperialist powers.

Lenin did not advocate secession *per se* and his core aim was the unity of the working class within national boundaries and between the working classes of advanced capitalist countries and the colonies. The case for secession was based on context. While Lenin argued the merits of large states with integrated industrial and financial ties, he also defended the right of oppressed nations to secede so that the proletariat could win the colonial masses to its side. Lenin was well aware of the incompatibility of revolutionary consciousness with national chauvinism when he wanted communists to defend the rights of oppressed peoples as a way to combat

chauvinism among the working classes of imperialist countries. This also meant that the workers and peasants in the oppressed countries would, in the course of their struggle, learn that workers in the imperialist country were their allies while their nationalist bourgeoisie were their enemy.

The ambiguous stand of the US on the colonial question and self-determination was apparent in its conduct in South and Central America and the Caribbean since the late 19th Century. Several Caribbean and Central American countries including Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti and Nicaragua came under direct US control in the 20th Century, and the US still holds on to Guantanamo, a part of Cuba, has military bases in many countries around the world, and still has its army of occupation in South Korea and in Okinawa, Japan although fighting ended in Korea in 1954 and in Japan in 1945.

While the Soviet Union looked favourably on independence as the way forward in Asia and Africa, colonialism rejected secession except when secession could serve to annex the seceded territory, as in Tibet in early 20th Century, or delay independence from colonial rule, as in the case in India. The colonial rulers were not interested in conflicts based on race, religion, nationality or any form of ethnic identity among their subjects unless it served their interests. Colonial 'divide and rule' did not include secession as long as colonialism could hold on to territory.

Lenin was clear that the defence of self determination was consistent with class struggle. While proletarian revolution in developed capitalist countries was the key aim, an alliance of the proletariat there with the masses in the colonies and semi-colonies — initially led by bourgeois nationalists — in the context of brewing revolutions in the colonial world could be decisive in overthrowing the capitalist system that had transformed into imperialism. Under colonialism, self-determination referred to the liberation of a country from its colonial master.

Following the liberation of colonies and semi-colonies, imperialist control took the form of neo-colonialism, with one or several imperialist powers indirectly controlling the economy of a former colony by various

means including terms of trade, foreign credit and development aid. Politics of identity came to the fore so that nationality, region, language and religion became fault-lines along which the people could be divided. That suited the local exploiting classes, since identity based differences served to divide the oppressed classes, as long as they did not lead to civil commotion threatening social stability and thereby their survival.

The national question in the post-colonial era involved contradictions vastly different from those in the colonial era. Thus self-determination needs to be seen from angles different from that at the dawn of the century when the national question concerned an oppressor nation and an oppressed nation. The situation where the main nationalities and national minorities comprising various ethnic groups united against a common enemy ceased to be with the removal of a visible oppressor such as a colonial master or an aggressor like German or Japanese fascism.

Contradictions between nationalities, ethnic groups and communities developed into powerful divisive forces as the new elite classes that took nominal control over the state of the former colony failed to fulfil the expectations of the masses who supported them in the independence struggle. The ruling classes exploited the contradictions among nationalities, religious communities and regions to divert attention from important issues concerning the economy and living conditions; and imperialism too benefited from it.

Secession and its discontents

The right to self-determination is not something to be applied blindly or to be imposed on a nationality or an ethnic group, regardless of context. A nationality seeks the right to self-determination or struggles to secede only when it feels that its identity or for that matter its very existence is under threat. Intervention by a Marxist party should aim at removing such threat, and that is best achieved by defending the right to self-determination. The opportunist left has presented the demand by a nationality for secession as the issue rather than the threat faced by it.

Imperialism and reactionary forces too have adopted the cause of the right to self-determination and encouraged secession in several countries. Carving out a white state from South Africa was a serious consideration on the eve of the success of the struggle against the white racist state. Imperialist support in 1960 for the secession of the mineral rich Katanga Province of Congo was designed to weaken the government of the newly independent Congo. Katanga and its leader Tshombe were cynically abandoned following the coup and the assassination of the Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in 1961, which placed the Congo under the control of imperialism.

Another classic case is Eritrea, which, with the blessings of the US, was forcefully federated with Ethiopia in 1952 and made a province of Ethiopia in 1962. When Eritrea sought to secede, the US sided with Ethiopia to crush the secessionist struggle until 1974, when a military coup overthrew 'Emperor' Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and set up a pro-Soviet government. Then the US changed sides to support the Eritrean struggle, and the Soviet Union competing with US for global domination sided with Ethiopia. After the pro-Soviet regime fell in 1991, the US and the Soviet Union switched loyalties, but nothing could stop Eritrean independence in 1992.

A point to note regarding the Sri Lankan national question is that imperialism has also resorted to using the grievances of ethnic groups and nationalities to weaken liberation movements as it did in Vietnam and Laos. It tried to weaken Nicaragua's Sandinista government in this fashion, but failed because of the wise handling of the national question by the Sandinistas. Also secession as an imperialist tool has now transcended ethnic identity. This brings new challenges for the concept of right to self determination and for the Marxist Leninists.

Struggles of oppressed nationalities are complex and continuously evolving, and no two struggles are alike. The differences are further accentuated by foreign intervention driven by hegemonic intentions. Thus there cannot be a universal Marxist Leninist position on the national question in the post colonial context. Imperialism, when it wants to stage a

'regime change' in a "less friendly country" it meddles in its internal affairs. The national question provides the pretext for intervention in the name of defending the human and fundamental rights of oppressed nationalities. It would also use the pretext of 'combating terrorism' when it chooses to support an oppressive chauvinistic regime.

In either event, it is through defending the rights of the oppressed nationalities and by working towards solutions based on the right to self-determination that Marxist Leninists can frustrate imperialist intentions and achieve unity among the nationalities. Marxist Leninist endorsement of the right to self-determination is not based on the faith that secession is the key to solving a national question. On the contrary, Marxist Leninists see the right to self-determination as the most effective means of ensuring unity among nationalities of a country subject to imperialist oppression.

The Marxist Leninist wish to avert secession in Third World countries arises from the position that the contradictions between the nationalities as friendly and a desire for solidarity among the oppressed people in their struggle against their principal enemy, namely imperialism. The Marxist Leninist approach to the national question thus emphasises the peaceful resolution of the differences, based on the principle of the right to self-determination. That does not prevent a Marxist Leninists from taking a principled stand on national oppression and the struggle for liberation. Marxist Leninists are obliged to support liberation struggles, even when they have a declared secessionist goal, not in the interest of secession *per se*, but to defend the rights of the oppressed.

It is important to recognise that the Marxist Leninist position on the national question is neither determined *a priori* nor developed in the abstract, but one that emerges in the course of social practice and in the context of objective conditions obtaining locally as well as internationally. Marxist Leninist support for liberation struggles is, contrary to what opponents of Marxism say, not despite emphasis on class struggle but based on it, and is a result of knowing the relationship between national and class oppression.

The Road Ahead

The socialist movement has from the time of Marx and Engels witnessed bitter debates and suffered painful splits, nationally and internationally, over questions concerning the nature of the state, the need for revolution to achieve socialism, and the case for a revolutionary armed struggle. Marxist Leninists rejected the parliamentary road to socialism not for lack of faith in democracy but out of their knowledge that in bourgeois parliamentary politics the dice are loaded against the working class. They also reject the prospect of peaceful transition from a capitalist society to socialist society, again not because they see violence as the only means of social change but because they recognize the violent nature of the bourgeois state and how violence is imposed on the forces of social change when the class interests of the bourgeoisie are threatened.

By revolutionary struggle Marxist Leninists do not mean plunging the country into civil war. To them, revolutionary struggle comprises a variety of activities by which the oppressed classes stake a claim on state power with the aim to overthrow the existing state machinery controlled by the ruling classes and replace it with a different kind of state dominated by the erstwhile oppressed classes who are the producers of wealth. In advanced industrial countries the working class could on its own capture power, while in less industrialised countries the working class needs to form alliances that are appropriate to the specific nature of the revolution and the context of the revolutionary struggle.

Marxist Leninists know that revolution is not armed struggle pure and simple. It includes a number of forms of struggle and the inevitability of violence is announced not out of a crave for violence, but out of the need to confront an enemy at home who is armed to the teeth and backed by imperialism, an even more heavily armed enemy of humanity. Resolution of both friendly and hostile contradictions involves struggle. Marxist Leninists reject the use of violence to resolve contradictions among the sections of the population who are potential allies against the principal enemy, even if the alliance is in the short term. To Marxist Leninists,

revolution is an act of love for mankind, and indiscriminate violence is therefore unacceptable; and revolutionary forces resort to armed struggle after a careful consideration of not just the military aspects but also the political aspects as well as implications for the masses.

Support from foreign governments for liberation struggles within a country is generally seen as a hostile act by countries and is rare except under special historical conditions. Principled support from governments for anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles and struggles against foreign occupation and aggression existed during the era of anti-colonial struggles and even after, but has faded away with the collapse of the Soviet Union and embracing of capitalism by China. Thus, given the fact that only global or regional powers intervene militarily in the affairs of other countries and that such intervention is invariably in the interest of the power concerned, genuine foreign government support for a liberation struggle can only be political.

Conclusion

To conclude, Tamil national struggle should become a genuine liberation struggle of the Tamil people that distinguishes between the Sinhalese masses and the ruling Sinhala elite classes who are also oppressors of the Sinhalese. Tamil nationalists should appreciate that the right of the Tamils to self determination automatically implies the same right for Muslims and Hill Country Tamils. That is why a re-reading of the right to self determination and an open debate on the subject are essential in the context of the present crisis and our past experiences.

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Electoral Reforms and Political Minorities

Problems with the First past the Post System (1947-1977)

Until the passage of the constitution of 1978, the electoral system of the country was based on the "first past the post" (FPP) scheme for all elected bodies from the village council to parliament. It had the advantage of stable parliamentary government in a situation with two main rivals for power, but at the price of representation not being in fair proportion to the votes received by parties and heavy bias against smaller political parties other than those with regional power bases. This was the case from 1947 to 1977 as illustrated by Schedule 1 which shows the percentages of votes received and seats won by major parties at four elections that marked major turning points in the political history of the country. Disparity between votes received and seats secured (see items in bold italics in Schedule 1), which was also distorted by strategic contesting of seats, electoral pacts and regional patterns of voting based on ethnicity, was much to the disadvantage of the loser among the main parties or alliances since 1952 (results not shown). All smaller parties except the leading Tamil nationalist parties with a strong regional base in the Northern and Eastern Provinces suffered.

The results for the left suggest that they were net gainers — except in 1977 when they lost representation altogether and only marginal losers in the elections of 1960 March and June, and 1965 (results not shown). That was because of deals with the SLFP in electorates where the left had significant support. The results of 1956, 1970 and 1977 make a strong case against the FPP system where the winning party gathered between around 20 and 63% more seats than the proportion of votes gathered by it while the main rival gathered between 70 and 80% less.

Schedule 1: Percentages of votes and of seats secured by major parties

Year:	1947		1956		1970		1977	
Party	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats
UNP	39.9	44.2	*30.9*	*08.4*	*37.9*	*11.3*	50.9	83.3
SLFP/MEP	-	-	44.9	53.7	36.6	60.0	*29.7*	*04.8*
All left	20.6	18.9	16.9	17.9	12.2	16.7	04.0	-
Labour	02.1	01.1	-	-	-	-	-	-
CIC/CWC	04.0	06.3	-	-	-	-	01.0	00.6
ACTC	04.4	07.4	00.4	01.1	02.3	02.0	-	-
ITAK/TULF	-	-	06.1	10.5	05.0	08.7	06.4	10.7
Others	29.2	22.1	12.4	08.4	04.6	01.3	05.6	00.6

(UNP - United National Party; SLFP/MEP Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna alliance led by SLFP; All left – parliamentary left parties; CIC/CWC – Ceylon Indian Congress, subsequently Ceylon Workers Congress; ACTC – All Ceylon Tamil Congress; ITAC/TULF Ilankai Tamil Arasuk Katci also known as Federal Party and the ITAC led alliance.)

Disparity between votes received and seats secured has been significant throughout. While the number of seats secured by the Tamil nationalist parties was somewhat in proportion to the Tamil population resident in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, Muslim representation was possible only as candidates of a Tamil or Sinhala nationalist party, and on occasion as independent candidates as there was no political party based on Muslim identity. The Hill Country Tamils who had reasonable but less than fair representation in 1947 were since denied elected representation until 1977 when the granting of citizenship to a section of the population between 1974 and 1977 enabled the election of a single MP in 1977.

Transition to the Current Electoral System

The method of election was changed in the constitution of 1978, nor for any of the foregoing considerations but for more sinister purposes. The system of government with an executive presidency was established in 1978 using the massive 83% majority secured in 1977. Thus the method of election which enabled that majority could under different circumstances grant a similar mandate to another party or alliance which could reverse the changes introduced by the constitution of 1978 and bring in changes which could harm the UNP. JR Jayawardane who led the UNP to victory

in 1977 was aware of this risk and designed the system of district-wise proportional representation (DPR) with a small national proportional representation (NPR) component so that no party was likely to secure a sufficient majority to undo his constitution. But the change also meant that in years to come no party could secure an absolute majority in parliament. Subsequent elections showed that Jayawardane was correct in his calculations, so that the UNP never faced a debacle of the kind that it did in 1956 or 1970, even when its share of votes was poorest in 2010, with the UNP-led alliance securing 60 of 225 (or 26.7%) of the seats with 29.3% of the vote.

Jayawardane did not take chances and introduced clauses that required a referendum to amend certain parts of the constitution and a ruling of the Supreme Court on certain others, as brought to light by the Supreme Court ruling on the draft of the 19th Amendment in April 2015.

Nevertheless, DPR had its merits. It enabled political parties like the JVP to secure seats in several districts. It also helped parties based on the support of Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities to secure seats even in regions where their presence was small but significant (order of 10% or so). While the Muslim Congress and the CWC benefitted from it, their success also led to splits and a proliferation of parties reflecting personal rivalries rather than political differences. It also let certain vested interests to buy into political parties by various means such as sponsorship of candidates and persuading a major party to nominate individuals named by them as candidates or elect them on the "national list".

The negative aspect of DPR was that it incorporated a preferential vote system to elect MPs from the electoral list of each political party which qualified for parliamentary seats in any district. The preferential vote intensified rivalries between members of the same political party who competed for parliamentary seats in a district. At times, intra-party rivalry and violence were more intense than inter-party rivalry and violence during parliamentary, provincial council, regional council and local

authority elections. Such rivalries wrecked the unity of the larger parties as each MP sought to outperform his party colleagues in his district.

Battles over Reforms

The clamour for reverting to the "first past the post" (FPP) scheme got stronger in recent years and "electoral reforms" were considered by the former government for some time, not out of concern for democracy but to moderate intra party conflict and, more cynically, to weaken smaller political groups which found ascendency under DPR. Various formulae had been suggested to placate allies of the two major parties who represented minority nationalities, and there has been no consensus on the matter as the Muslim and Hill Country Tamil parties would be big losers even under the best of compromises between the DPR and the FPP, unless there was a large increase in the number elected on a proportional basis, based on the district vote. An arrangement was arrived at in mid June was that the number of MPs will be increased from 225 to 237 with 145 elected on FPP basis at, 55 by DPR, and 37 by NPR. But disagreements persist with fresh proposals for a yet clearly undefined dual voting system also entering the argument.

In reality, DPR will benefit only the leading parties in any district and not smaller parties. Increasing the number of seats allocated for NPR would help some but not all of the smaller parties, as the national vote is the total of the votes gathered in all electorates by contestants from a party. The new system would still hurt political parties of the Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities, whose populations are dispersed across the country. Tamil political parties are losers too as a sizeable section of Tamils have moved out the North and the East in the years of conflict, and lack of resources will prevent Tamil political parties from fielding candidates in electorates without an adequately large number of Tamils.

DPR offered Muslim nationalist parties the opportunity to secure seats not only in the three districts of the Eastern Province with sizeable Muslim populations but also in the Districts of Mannar, Puttalam, Kandy,

Colombo and Kalutara. The Hill Country Tamils boosted their representation in the Nuwara Eliya District and had opportunity to secure seats in the districts of Badulla and, to a less extent, Kandy. The number of representatives of Hill Country Tamils will dwindle from the present seven to one or at best two, while that of the Muslims will fall by a third unless some Muslims are brought in on the national basis by the major parties. Hill Country Tamil and Muslim nationalist political parties, which despite serious flaws are the only organized defence of these minority nationalities against chauvinism, will suffer badly. A more serious victim of the FPP scheme is the JVP which, with its present strength, cannot secure a seat on FPP basis or DPR, even with an average of 10% of the votes in any district whereas the existing system would have allowed them to secure around five seats by DPR even with around 5% of the votes going their way in each district. To gather enough votes to secure a few parliamentary seats on the national basis the JVP will need a substantially larger allocation of seats. The JVP is, however, likely to secure one or two seats by NPR under the proposed reformed scheme

A worse victim of the FPP is the Jathika Hela Urumaya, which lost its shine since it peak in 2004 with nine seats and was at the mercy of a bigger party to gain three seats in 2010. Under the new scheme its seats by FPP and DPR could be zero. But it wants the forthcoming parliamentary elections to be held under the reformed scheme since the JVP and the Muslim and Hill Country Tamil parties will be big losers and in the hope that it will secure a seat or two at the mercy of a UNP-led coalition

Thus the proposed electoral reform (FPP 125, DPR 75 and NPR 25) designed to keep the number of MPs unchanged is highly discriminatory against the representation of minority nationality parties like the CWC and the Muslim Congress — with support strong in some districts but mostly scattered across other districts — as well as relatively weaker political parties like the JHU and JVP — with support scattered across the island. The Tamil parties will be not be significant losers but it must be noted that as in the past they will not benefit from the votes of likely

supporters who have moved out of their homes in the North and East during the past few decades.

Any significant increase in DPR will not benefit a small party unless it has strong support in a few districts and weak to moderate support in others. Typically a small party will require at least 30% of the vote in a district to secure a DPR seat whereas the requirement was around 10% typically or even 5% in districts like Colombo and Gampaha with a large number of sets. If the NPR seats are around 25 a small party will require 3% of the national vote to secure a seat.

Implications of Proposed Reforms

The analysis is done based on a hypothetical district wise voting pattern shown in Schedule 2 for three major parties, two weaker Sinhala sectarian parties and four minority nationality parties with a potential to gain parliamentary seats by FPP, DPR or NPR. The pattern is based on voting in the General Election of 2004, amended to accommodate shifts in the fortunes of some political parties and a hopefully educated guess of leading groups that could emerge from potential splits in alliances and alliances. A split in the SLFP is assumed with one faction carrying around 60% of the share of the popular vote, but with regional variations. Although this scheme of affairs will not be the case in reality, the purpose is to illustrate the implications of the kinds of reforms considered for seats won by strong, weak and regional political parties. The groups or parties are not named in the schedule in the interest of economy of space and in view of the volatility of the political scene since Presidential Elections in January.

The analysis assumes a 240 seat parliament with 160 FPP seats, 60 DPR seats and 20 NPR seats. The number of FPP seats that each party would secure is based on a guessed strength of each party in each constituency (which remain to be determined), the DPR on an estimate of seat allocation for each district (again uncertain at present) and the NPR on the national total shown in Schedule 2.

Schedule 2: Hypothetical voting pattern in general election 2015

District	Votes in 000s for Qualifying Parties									District total
	M1	M2	M3	S1	S2	R1	R2	R3	R4	
Anuradhapura	142.6	52.6	130.5	21.6	7.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	354.3
Badulla	175.7	60.4	102.2	16.5	3.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	358.7
Batticaloa	5.2	18.2	4.2	8.1	0.0	41.1	0.0	155.0	0.0	231.8
Colombo	401.8	214.7	160.3	53.1	90.6	0.0	31.2	0.0	0.0	951.7
Digamadulla	20.1	26.0	61.8	25.6	1.1	95.3	0.0	42.5	0.0	272.4
Galle	205.4	33.4	220.8	40.8	21.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	522.2
Gampaha	367.6	410.0	102.0	45.6	32.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	957.7
Hambantota	80.9	21.9	141.6	20.6	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	266.5
Jaffna	5.3	2.3	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	257.3	18.1	283.7
Kalutara	212.7	91.2	201.2	28.3	11.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	545.0
Kandy	270.9	178.1	90.1	29.5	10.2	35.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	614.5
Kegalle	176.6	103.1	105.3	22.9	9.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	416.9
Kurunegala	320.8	90.7	327.2	35.7	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	784.9
Matale	100.6	42.1	58.3	10.8	2.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	214.6
Matara	129.6	31.2	189.2	30.8	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	385.0
Monaragala	61.1	62.5	47.5	15.8	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	187.6
Nuwara Eliya	127.0	42.9	50.2	22.0	2.5	0.0	52.2	0.0	0.0	296.8
Polonnaruwa	70.7	90.2	8.6	9.6	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	180.5
Puttalam	115.2	42.8	98.7	14.0	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	273.3
Ratnapura	195.5	57.5	200.8	17.7	10.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	482.3
Trincomalee	13.7	17.1	18.8	3.8	0.8	61.2	0.0	65.0	0.0	180.4
Vanni	33.6	2.2	1.3	0.6	0.8	8.8	0.0	82.0	0.0	129.3
Party total	3232.6	1691.1	2320.6	474.1	226.3	242.1	83.4	601.8	18.1	8890.1
Percentage	36.4	19.0	26.1	5.3	2.5	2.7	0.9	6.8	0.2	100.0

Note: Labels M1 to M3 refer to major all island parties, S1 & S2 to Sinhala sectarian parties and R1 is a Muslim ethnic party, R2 is a Hill Country Tamil Party and R3 & R4 are Tamil parties of the North and East.

The hypothetical vote distribution of Schedule 3 assumes that 25% of Tamils (casting around 250,000 votes) and that 60% of the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils (casting around 480,000 and 240,000 votes, respectively) live outside regions where their respective ethnic parties will contest the elections. It is also assumed that 75% of them will opt for an ethnic party on the national ballot while the rest will vote for major political parties. The share of the national minority vote received by the major parties in regions where an ethnic party does not contest will decrease from a 80% to 20% for Party M1 and from 20% to 5% for Party M2, while others have no significant attraction for ethnic voters.

Schedule 3: Hypothetical vote distribution with separate national ballot

Party:	M1	M2	M3	S1	S2	R1	R2	R3	R4	votes
Party total (separate ballot)	2650.6	1545.6	2320.6	474.1	226.3	602.1	263.4	789.3	18.1	8889.5
Percentage	29.8	17.4	26.1	5.3	2.5	6.8	3.0	8.9	0.2	100.0

A shift of PR weightage from DPR to NPR will hurt regional parties with strong regional bases. Its implications for all island parties will be significant where a party comes third in many districts and therefore gains only a few seats on DPR. To benefit from NPR, a party would need to contest in as many electorates as possible to garner sufficient votes to qualify for seats. Thus small parties which contest most electorates across the island but come nowhere close to winning a seat or securing seats on DPR will benefit from shift of weightage of PR from DPR to NPR. Even then, potential voters may shun candidates of any relatively weak party, who are likely to be presented by stronger rivals as spoilers in a battle among leading candidates.

Schedule 4 shows separately the FPP and PR seats secured by the parties under three different schemes of PR seat allocation. Row A shows the number of PR seats secured by each party under a likely electoral reform to emerge (Scheme A, FPP 160, DPR 60, NPR 20); Row B shows the numbers for all PR allocation on national basis (Scheme B, FPP 160, NPR

80); and Row C the number for Scheme C with allocation as in B except that the entire NPR is based on a separate ballot with votes received as in Schedule 3. Schedule 5 shows the total seats won by the parties based on the analysis in Schedule 4.

Under Scheme B, the weaker Sinhala sectarian parties contesting in nearly all districts will benefit in terms of seats, while the three main parties will be noticeably affected by the shift of PR weightage from DPR to NPR. The stronger regional parties (R1 & R3) will be net losers, but only slightly, as they forfeit some of their DPR to weaker parties.

Thus for the PR component to ensure that the smaller political parties have a fair deal, two important measures should be combined. Firstly, all proportional representation should be based on the national vote. Secondly, and more importantly, the PR vote should be made independent of the FPP vote for the constituencies.

In other words, people should be able to vote for a candidate to represent their electorate independently of the party of one's choice so that can vote for a party even in an electorate where the party has not fielded a candidate. This is attainable with separate ballot papers: a constituency ballot paper to elect the constituency MP; and a national ballot paper to elect MPs nationally.

This analysis shows that the regional parties R1 and R3 stand to gain most while regional party R2 could lose slightly, unless is secures a larger proportion of the votes outside its region of main support. The weaker Sinhala national parties could gain a seat or two by increasing their NPR vote on a separate ballot as their role cannot be denounced as that of a spoiler. As the scale of this shift cannot be assessed, no estimate is made. The main losers will be the major parties that generally benefit from national minority votes. While they will not lose their FPP seats under the separate ballot system loyalties will shift towards parties with ethnic identity in the vote for the NPR.

Schedule 4: FPP & PR seats secured by parties under different schemes

Qualifying Parties				M1	M2	M3	S1	S2	R1	R2	R3	R4	Total
FPP seats secured				63	29	45	00	01	05	01	15	01	160
PR Scheme	*FPP*	*DPR*	*NPR*										
A	*160*	*60*	*20*	29	10	27	01	00	04	01	08	00	80
B	*160*	*00*	*80*	29	15	21	04	02	02	01	06	00	80
C	*160*	*00*	*80 Separate ballot*	24	14	21	04	02	06	02	07	00	80

Schedule 5: Total seats secured by parties under different schemes

	Qualifying Parties									Total
	M1	M2	M3	S1	S2	R1	R2	R3	R4	
FPP seats secured	63	29	45	00	01	05	01	15	01	160
PR Scheme A of schedule 4	92	39	72	01	01	09	02	23	01	240
PR Scheme B of schedule 4	92	44	66	04	03	07	02	21	01	240
PR Scheme C of schedule 4	87	43	66	04	03	11	03	22	01	240

The separate ballot paper facility for NPR is more democratic than the single ballot paper system for the following reasons.

1. It allows a voter in a constituency to express support for a party while rejecting its candidate with whom the voter is unhappy and *vice versa*. Thus a political party is compensated for the damage caused by a personally unpopular candidate and, on the other hand, a good candidate could get elected despite affiliation to a less popular party.

2. It allows small parties to gather votes in electorates where their support base is weak but significant. This will encourage small parties not to field candidates in each constituency to build their national vote and thereby distort the outcome with only marginal benefit for themselves.

Representation of ethnic minorities will, nevertheless, be less than what corresponds to their population. For example, Muslims who are 9% of the population will improve their representation from 9 to 11, to reach about

4.5% of the 240 seats. The plight of the Hill Country Tamils is even worse: improving from 2 to 3 seats or 1.25% for a people who form 4.5% of the population. The Tamils of the North and East lose out a little with around 9% of the seats for a population of over 11%.

Such ethnic considerations, although undesirable, are relevant because the country's politics is dominated by ethnicity, and the proposed electoral reforms are designed to reduce the impact of national minorities on policy making. A fair, but not truly adequate, way to compensate is to increase the NPR share with a dual ballot paper system.

Without the isolation of the election processes for constituency and national list MPs and boosting the national list to match the constituency list, small political parties will be denied effective representation. District wise allocation of seats by PR will not benefit smaller parties with fairly even support across the country and should be done away with as it mostly reinforces roughly what the FPP elections produce except for altering the way the two big parties share their PR seats.

Issues and Political Benefits

The system of two ballot papers is not without problems. While the constituency ballot paper is straightforward, the national ballot paper for the election of MPs nationally will need to accommodate a large number of political parties to the point of being awkward.

The number of parties on the national ballot paper could be restricted by confining it to (a) parties already represented in Parliament; (b) political parties or groups which field candidates in not less than a quarter of the constituencies so that parties that are unlikely to secure around 1% of the vote will not appear on the national ballot paper. The listing of the parties on the ballot paper could be in the order of strength in last parliament followed by unrepresented parties listed in alphabetic order.

An unfortunate aspect of increasing the representation of minority nationalities is that parliamentary representation has failed to bring political or social gain for oppressed nationalities since the interests of the

parliamentary parties have little to do with the aspirations of the nationalities. Parliamentary membership has been systematically abused for personal gain and political favours including cabinet posts when governments need a majority or have a fragile majority. That can only be rectified by the masses by publicly questioning their leaders.

A PR system is more democratic than a constituency based system, in matters of legislation and national policy, and can accommodate a wide spectrum of political views in parliament. The constituency based system is, however, effective in addressing issues at grassroots level and ensuring that the Parliament is attentive to the concerns of the people. If devolution of power is attainable, it may be possible to have a PR system for elections to the central parliament and in part for Provincial Councils. The FPP system may be the better option for local government. But no system can be democratic if the electoral process remains corrupt as it has been since 1978.

A likely beneficial outcome of the two ballot paper scheme is that regional parties, to strengthen their parliamentary presence, will need to appeal to voters outside their regions. This means that they have to adopt a less parochial approach that will bring them to terms with the reality that their respective communities are part of a multi-ethnic polity.

However, no electoral system in capitalist society can deliver social justice. The purpose of pressing for proportional representation here is to give voice to sections of population in fora, where there is a conscious attempt to deny representation.

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Remembering the Vietnam War

"We all grow up with the notion that the law is holy. They asked Daniel Berrigan's mother what she thought of her son's breaking the law. He burned draft records—one of the most violent acts of this century—to protest the war, for which he was sentenced to prison, as criminals should be. They asked his mother who is in her eighties, what she thought of her son's breaking the law. And she looked straight into the interviewer's face, and she said, "It's not God's law." Now we forget that. There is nothing sacred about the law. Think of who makes laws. The law is not made by God; it is made by Strom Thurmond. If you have any notion about the sanctity and loveliness and reverence for the law, look at the legislators around the country who make the laws. Sit in on the sessions of the state legislatures. Sit in on Congress, for these are the people who make the laws which we are then supposed to revere." ***[Howard Zin,* in *Voices of a People's History of the United States, Seven Stories Press, 2009, p. 487]***

Vietnam Today

Some wonder what Vietnam has achieved by winning its war of liberation forty years ago on 30th April 1975. Many still proudly remember the day the Vietnam War ended with the liberation forces taking Saigon and securing the surrender of the US puppet regime. Scenes of the hasty evacuation of the US embassy personnel and the last of the US marines from the roof of the US embassy are still fresh in the minds of opponents of US imperialism. It still is a day for communists to celebrate, almost on par with 5th November 1917 in Russia and 1st October 1949 in China.

It is against the above background that a review of the developments in Vietnam since the total liberation of South Vietnam, especially in the past two decades, leads to a strong sense of frustration in any socialist and anti-imperialist. Vietnam is now an impoverished country and a cheap labour source for global capitalism. Despite the socialist pretences of the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), the country had in the early 1990's embraced neoliberal economics and imperialist globalization. What is even worse is that its government is close to becoming a fully fledged US proxy. It is a bitter irony of history that Vietnam, arguably the worst victim of US war crimes, is now a staunch military partner of the US imperialist "Pivot to Asia" designed to isolate and threaten China.

Vietnam, which has been severely punished by its imperialist aggressor for winning the war and Vietnam, was not compensated for the massive loss of life and destruction inflicted on it by the US. Yet it reached an agreement with the US in 1993 whereby it has been forced to recognize the debts of the defunct US puppet regime that it overthrew. This was tantamount to Vietnam consenting to reimburse to the US a part of its costs of war against Vietnam. This indignity imposed on Vietnam was part of a deal with the US for the latter to lift the US embargo on Vietnam, which also required Vietnam to adopt free market reforms.

Vietnam also acceded fully to the terms and conditions laid down by the IMF on structural reforms involving devaluation, liberalization of trade and privatization, with disastrous implications for the economy as seen in South America in the 1990's. As expected, the IMF induced reforms have undermined free education and health care, and systematically wrecked state-owned enterprises forcing them to close or declare bankruptcy. Small enterprises too were badly hurt by harsh credit restrictions. The net result has been the loss of urban and industrial employment on a massive scale. Vietnam's industrial base is being destabilized to pave the way for the eventual taking over of much of the industry by foreign capital.

Imperialism has delivered, in the name of development, a devastating blow which seems to have subdued Vietnam, where, not long ago, tons of bombs and toxic chemicals used during the war failed to shake the spirit of independence the Vietnamese people. Achievements of past struggles and aspirations of the nation have been almost undone with a stroke of the pen. The CPV, besides accepting such humiliating terms of economic surrender, has paid a political price as well. Public reference to US brutality during its cruel war is now inappropriate. The leadership of the CPV still 'celebrates' the day of liberation and reunification but avoids reference to the evil deeds of US imperialism. The Vietnamese leaders now compliment the US for its positive role in the struggle against Japanese occupation during World War II. Such selective memory is not unique to today's Vietnamese leaders. The Chinese leadership too showed such traits since rapprochement with the US in the mid-1970s and especially since the restoration of capitalism under Deng Xiaoping.

The Scale of US Cruelty

The wilful harm inflicted on the people of Vietnam by US imperialism during the war which lasted a decade is summed up by Michael D. Yates in his essay "Honor the Vietnamese, Not Those Who Killed Them" (Monthly Review, May 2015) citing "Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam by Nick Turse (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2013).

- At least 4 million Vietnamese (the population of Vietnam being 19 million in 1960) were killed as a direct result of war, including at least 2 million civilians killed by the US armed forces, 1.7 million revolutionary forces and nearly a quarter-million South Vietnamese soldiers. Of civilian casualties, over 65,000 were North Vietnamese mainly victims of US bombing raids targeting factories, hospitals, schools and dykes.
- The number of wounded South Vietnamese civilians is placed at 5.3 million or more including between 8,000 and 16,000 paraplegics,

between 30,000 and 60,000 left blind and between 83,000 and 166,000 amputees.

- More bombs were dropped on Vietnam than by all sides in all previous wars throughout history, and three times more than by all sides in the Second World War.
- 19 million gallons (around 72 million litres) of herbicide poisoned the land and 9,000 of 15,000 hamlets were destroyed in South Vietnam.
- In the North, all six industrial cities were devastated; twenty-eight of thirty provincial towns, and 96 of 116 district towns, were levelled by bombing.
- The US threatened to use nuclear weapons thirteen times.
- After the war, unexploded bombs and mines took an additional 42,000 lives. Millions of acres lie un-cleared of live explosives.
- Nearly all of Vietnam's triple canopy forests were destroyed and Agent Orange and other defoliants seriously damaged the health of millions.

Besides the damage inflicted on Vietnam, the US struck Cambodia with three million tons of ordnance at 100,000 sites during the undeclared war on Cambodia, causing widespread social dislocation, destruction of crops, and starvation. In Laos, over 2.75 million tons of ordnance fell on more than 113,000 sites and destroyed the Laotian landscape.

The war was conducted most cruelly with total disregard for human life. As the enemy engaged in guerrilla warfare free of any set pattern of battle and it was hard distinguish the guerrillas from the civilians, the US armed forces chose to consider every Vietnamese, including women and children, as a potential guerrilla.

There was also a policy of subjecting people to mass punishment so that they dare not dream of supporting the guerrillas. The mass killing of 504 unarmed civilians in South Vietnam on 16th March 1968, known as the My Lai Massacre internationally, prompted global outrage when it became

public knowledge in November 1969. When the scope of killing and cover-up attempts were exposed opposition to war intensified within the US.

The attitude of the commanding officers was blatantly racist, and more than soldiers it was the officers who were bloodthirsty racist killers, who also saw in the war opportunity for career advancement. It should also be noted that weapons of mass destruction such as Claymore mines, tanks, helicopter gunships, battleships, B-52 bombers and chemical weapons including napalm, Agent Orange, white phosphorus and other substances not only killed people but also inflicted long term environmental damage and harmed the health of generations to come. (See comment by Marjorie Cohn on the extensive use of Agent Orange by the US in *http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/30519-agent-orange-terrible-legacy-of-the-vietnam-war*.) As witnessed more recently in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere, the US drew in its client states as partners in its crime to create the impression of an international mission against global social disorder.

Although many oppressive regimes adopt such policies and practices in putting down resistance, none has been a match to the US in terms of the scale and intensity of damage inflicted, lives destroyed, and harm to the economy and the environment. What is most disgusting is the systematic distortion of the reality by the ruling elite. See for example the listed aims of the programme "The United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration" organized by the US Secretary of Defence:

> To thank and honor veterans of the Vietnam War, including personnel who were held as prisoners of war (POW), or listed as missing in action (MIA), for their service and sacrifice on behalf of the United States and to thank and honor the families of these veterans.
>
> To highlight the service of the Armed Forces during the Vietnam War and the contributions of Federal agencies and governmental and non-governmental organizations that served with, or in support of, the Armed Forces.

To pay tribute to the contributions made on the home front by the people of the United States during the Vietnam War.

To highlight the advances in technology, science, and medicine related to military research conducted during the Vietnam War.

To recognize the contributions and sacrifices made by the allies of the United States during the Vietnam War.

(Source: *http://www.vietnamwar50th.com/about/*.)

The ruling classes and the mainstream media of the US have been working hard to create the impression that the US was the aggrieved party which was unjustly punished by the communists of Vietnam and their misguided sympathizers who weakened the resolve of the US Armed Forces to defeat communist terror. This is adding insult to injury to the people of Vietnam, and the pain is compounded by the conduct of the ruling elite of the CPV who are at pains to downplay the crimes against humanity committed by the US on Vietnamese soil.

What is tragic is that, the US, now posing as the champion of democracy and human rights and uses the Right to Protect (R2P) adopted by the UN as a pretext to invade countries, posing to protect the cruelly oppressed, has failed to prosecute all but a handful of its soldiers for the countless war crimes committed between 1965 and 1975 in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

What has been most positive amid all the tragedy was that, as the war prolonged, the morale of the US armed forces plunged and fewer and fewer would risk their lives for a futile exercise on foreign soil. Soldiers defied orders to fight, and even attacked their officers. This was among reasons why the US has, since its bitter experiences in the Korean War (1950-53) and the even more humiliating experience in Vietnam, been reluctant to commit its soldiers to battle on a large scale and has tended to use aerial bombing, including unmanned military aircraft such as the Drone as much as possible and train local forces to fight its battles.

The Importance of Vietnam's War Victory

The historical and political importance of the victory of the Vietnamese people should not be dismissed based on the betrayal of the revolution and the victory of the liberation struggle by those now in control of CPV that led the Vietnamese Revolution and later the struggle to liberate South Vietnam from US imperialist aggression.

To discredit the Vietnamese Revolution and the anti-imperialist war of liberation is as vile as contempt for the October Revolution or for the Liberation of China. Each betrayal was unique in its circumstances. Each of these victories has, nevertheless, contributed much towards the liberation of humanity, which cannot be taken away from it by the betrayals, and deserves not only the highest respect but also recognition as a valuable source of inspiration for ongoing anti-imperialist struggles across the globe.

Throughout the war, Vietnam was a source of inspiration for every liberation struggle. Thus Vietnam had the support of all socialist countries, the Non-Aligned Movement and anti-colonial resistance movements, most active in Africa at the time. China was consistent in its support from the outset while Soviet commitment was weak under Khrushchev whose historic mission was to appease US imperialism at the expense of the oppressed nations and people. Since 1968, the Soviet Union became the biggest supporter of Vietnam in material terms.

Eventually Vietnamese defiance of US terror made US foreign policy a failure and Vietnam won support even from liberal politicians in the US. With the US armed forces clearly not winning the war, US citizens defied the law in increasing numbers to refuse conscription while the anti-war movement gathered momentum among the youth so that US security forces were made to unleash violence against US nationals.

Thus the Vietnam War also proved to be a litmus test for the anti-imperialist credentials of national leaders and political parties. In Sri Lanka the UNP government sided with the US and the Tamil nationalist

Federal Party, a partner in the UNP-led government at the time, was even more vitriolic in its attack on the liberation forces of Vietnam.

The Vietnamese experience also has valuable lessons for victims of state oppression and parties to conflict who suffer the illusion that US imperialism and its allies will liberate them.

Nevertheless, the victory of Vietnam's liberation struggle has demonstrated two important historical truths: firstly that a militarily weaker force can defeat a far more powerful enemy if it has the overwhelming support of the masses and secondly that any just cause with universal significance will enjoy universal mass support. Victory does not, however, come quickly or easily, and demands perseverance and patience.

There are several historical lessons from the Vietnam War that deserve to be well remembered, although the Vietnamese ruling elite have long since chosen to ignore them.

Sources of Vietnam's Current Tragedy

The betrayal of the Vietnamese revolution goes a long way back to be blamed the collapse of the Soviet Union or the restoration of capitalism in China. During the international debate on the line of the communist movement in the 1960s, the CPV endorsed the Marxist Leninist position that there cannot be a peaceful path to socialism or liberation while imperialism remained a dominant global force. Although the CPV rejected the compromise with imperialism advocated by Khrushchev, it avoided open criticism of the Soviet Union for its erroneous line. Its silence on several international issues of the time was understandable in the context of its dependence on material support from the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union was meanwhile denounced by Marxist Leninists for its global hegemonic agenda and discouragement of liberation movements from persevering in revolutionary armed struggle. The Vietnam liberation struggle was no exception and, following the Soviet missile fiasco in Cuba, the Soviet Union was reluctant to associate with any armed confrontation

with the US. (See *Il'ia V. Gaĭduk, Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy Toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963, Stanford University Press, 2003*.) However, after 1968, especially since the death of Ho Chi Minh in 1969, the influence of the Soviet Union rose within the CPV. Chinese support for the liberation struggle was consistent to the very end of the struggle, and was not affected by the rise of Soviet influence in the CPV from 1968.

Following the liberation of South Vietnam and the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, Le Duan strengthened his hold on the CPV. After the Fourth National Party Congress in 1977, the pro-Soviet group led by him systematically purged the Party and state of Marxist Leninists and leaders friendly towards China. (For more details of the betrayal of the Vietnamese revolution see *A Drop in the Ocean: Hoang Van Hoan's Revolutionary Reminiscences, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1988; http://www.academia.edu/6236040/Hoang_Van_Hoan_and_the_Post-1979_Intra-Party_Purge_in_Vietnam*.) Besides, Vietnam was unhappy about rapprochement between China and the US in 1971-72, a result of China seeing the Soviet Union as the immediate threat to its security, following the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and armed confrontations across the Sino-Soviet border in 1969.

From 1975 Vietnam pursued a foreign policy that was inherently hostile to China and later subjected the local ethnic Chinese communities to racist persecution, which led to ethnic Chinese fleeing Vietnam in boats in large numbers in 1978-79. Vietnam was also encouraged by the Soviet Union to invade Cambodia with far reaching consequences for Vietnam and Cambodia and the relationship between China and Vietnam. The Central Committee of the CPV had in the early half of 1978 adopted a number of resolutions that effectively branded China as the most dangerous enemy of Vietnam.

The invasion of Cambodia occurred in December 1978 for the sole purpose of deposing Pol Pot as Prime Minister of Cambodia and replacing him with a Vietnamese loyalist. This was preceded by the signing of a twenty-five year mutual defence treaty by Soviet Union and Vietnam on

3rd November 1978, which constituted an integral element of Vietnam's preparation to invade Cambodia, and was reminiscent of the Indo–Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed between India and the Soviet Union in August 1971 before India formally joined the war in East Pakistan on 3rd December 1971. China responded to these developments with an invasion of Vietnam in February 1979 designed to punish Vietnam for its misdeeds. Militarily China achieved very little.

This escalation of conflict between China and Vietnam was in stark contrast with the way China led by Mao dealt with differences with the Vietnamese. Equally commendable was the way Ho Chi Minh ensured that good relations were maintained with China despite serious political differences. Poor handling of the contradictions by a China guided by the capitalist roader Deng Xiaoping and a Vietnam led by a pro-Soviet revisionist Le Duan led to conflict in a situation in which both countries had started to drift away from socialism and national interests dominated Chinese economic policy and Vietnamese nationalism took precedence over fraternal relations with a socialist neighbour.

Several progressive commentators have sided with Vietnam on matters where the Vietnamese were at fault. Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978 for the sole purpose of removing Pol Pot from power and installing Heng Samrin in power in Phnom Penh cannot be defended by anyone who is critical of US intervention in Iraq and Libya for the purpose of regime change. Those who endorse Vietnam's invasion unquestioningly accept Western media's accounts of genocide by the Khmer Rouge government in Cambodia, although they have dared to challenge imperialists' claims upheld by the Western media on many other issues.

The Western media have systematically exaggerated the killings by the Khmer Rouge regime in order to absolve the US; and in the process obliterated the context of a war wrecked country that the US left in runs. (See *http://www.chomsky.info/articles/19770625.htm*.) While accepting human rights violations by the Khmer Rouge, one has the right to expect from

progressive commentators at least as much understanding towards Pol Pot as towards Saddam Hussein, Ghadaffi and Assad.

Among factors that favour their bias against the Khmer Rouge have been their admiration for Vietnam and the belief that the Soviet Union was still socialist in the 1980's. This was despite the change in political direction away from socialism in Vietnam and its deliberately hostile and provocative policy towards China, encouraged by the Soviet Union since 1975. Denouncing Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia would not amount to an endorsement of the move by the US to use it as pretext to punish Vietnam in revenge for its own defeat in Vietnam.

Although Vietnam's transition from an anti-imperialist icon to a junior partner of imperialism was aided by the setbacks suffered by socialism in the last two decades of the 20th Century, Vietnam had lost its socialist direction even before the Vietnam War had ended. Various factors including the wrecking of its economy by the war and the surge of neo-colonialism in the 1970 are important. But the assumption of power by the pro-Soviet revisionist clique led by Le Duan and its acts of provocation against China by whipping up Vietnamese nationalism are bigger contributory factors. The rise of Chinese big nation chauvinism under Deng Xiaoping certainly contributed to the deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations, but the Le Duan leadership had turned hostile to China when its Vietnam policy was guided by Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai who were acutely aware of the historical errors of China's past empires and respected the sensibilities of the Vietnamese.

Concluding Remarks

It did not take too long for the ruling classes of the imperialist countries and the mainstream media to shed all sense of guilt about what the US and its allies did in Vietnam. The generation of US citizens which was angered by the war is mostly dead or has other more pressing matters to worry about. The media has systematically worked towards creating collective amnesia about certain aspects of the Vietnam War as they have

done in several other matters including the prime role of the Soviet Union led by Stalin in defeating fascist Germany and winning the Second World War through heroic deeds and sacrifice unmatched by the Allies.

Vietnam was not the first place where the imperialists divided and destroyed countries and their people. The UN was manipulated to allow the US to wage war in its name against the people of Korea. The US did not win the war, thanks to the heroic struggle of the Korean people and their Chinese comrades in arms. But North Korea was devastated and Korea remains divided to this day, much against the wishes of the people of the North and the South. Fifteen years after the Vietnam War the US bombed Iraq and invaded it thirteen years later. Today America is waging war in four Islamic countries in Asia, if one were to include Yemen where its proxy Saudi Arabia is doing the job for the US, and has been destabilizing a number of Islamic countries in North Africa.

The only lesson that US imperialism appears to have learned from the Vietnam War is that it should minimize its own casualties to reduce risk of protest at home. Nevertheless, the majority of the people did not endorse US entry into any of its recent wars, despite all manner of media manipulation. Thus, US imperialism is now fighting unpopular wars which have failed to deliver on expectations.

Vietnam today has little to offer by way of hope for the struggle of humanity for justice, equality and liberation. But that cannot take away anything from the people of Vietnam for the great contribution that they have made to humanity through defeating three imperialist invaders in succession within a matter of decades. Anti-imperialist Vietnam will remain an inspiration to every freedom loving human being daring to stand up against oppression, exploitation and injustice; and those memories are sacred to all defenders of human dignity.

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The US Foreign Policy Muddle

Failure in the Backyard

The collapse of the Soviet Union a quarter century ago was understood to mark the birth of a unipolar world accompanied by the end of socialism, end of revolution and end of history. The last decade of the 20th Century witnessed the shrinking of the number of states committed to socialism to an insignificant number, and it seemed that capitalism, more correctly imperialism dominated by the US, was destined to rule the planet forever. The US became more aggressive and arrogantly believed that no one would dare challenge its command. But soon things started to change, and the US received its first series of shocks from South America, which was thought to be fully under US imperialist control and leading the way for the Third World into imperialist globalization. The economic mess that globalization turned out to be in South America led to a change in public mood which was clearly hostile to political and economic domination by the US and to economic policies dictated to governments by the IMF.

The change in public mood was reflected in a succession of changes of government in South America. The extent to which the new governments would dare to defy imperialism varied, but slavish adherence to the line laid down by the US was certainly a thing of the past. Efforts by the US to isolate Cuba badly backfired. US conspiracies to remove Hugo Chavez from power in Venezuela and thereby frustrate the Bolivarian project failed miserably, as did US mischief in Bolivia and Ecuador which were close allies of Bolivarian Venezuela. Although that did not deter US imperialism from subverting democratically elected governments in South and Central America and the Caribbean, the net result was further isolation of the US in Latin America and the Caribbean. It also meant that the Cuba policy of the US was doomed to fail.

The isolation of the US in the region and the emergence of powerful economic and political groupings there asserting their rejection of political and economic dominance by the US forced the US to retreat from its arrogant and aggressive policy in Latin America and the Caribbean. The decision of the US to normalize relations with Cuba in December 2014 was an admission of failure of the US foreign policy in Cuba. That does not, however, mean that US has reformed. Fidel Castro, while welcoming the normalization of relations with the US, correctly expressed caution about US imperialist intentions.

The failure of the policy of direct intervention in Latin America has forced the US to avoid direct military intervention for now and leave the dirty work of regime change to its local proxies who will be generously aided and guided by subversive agencies such as USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives and the National Endowment for Democracy.

Stirring Trouble in Africa

The US did not lose time to economically and politically penetrate former European colonies in Africa, despite siding with the colonial rulers in every anti-colonial struggle in Africa. Its bid for influence in Africa, aimed at economic control of the continent, started in the north in the 1950s, and spread and strengthened as European colonial power declined. The US did not seek to establish permanent military bases despite the Soviet Union posing a challenge to US interests in Angola and Ethiopia in the 1970s. The success of the US in Africa since the1980s was such that it did not seek permanent military bases in Africa until this century, when it took over in 2001 the former French base of Camp Lemonnier (in Djibouti) following the "9/11" terrorist attacks in the US.

The US was in essence comfortable with the way economic and political influence shifted from the European colonists to the US, and did not hesitate to militarily intervene in any African country if the need arose. It is true that there been instances of serious conflict of interests with France in the ex-colonies of France (referred to as overseas territories by French

colonialists) especially in matters of trade, but in the past two decades France has mostly yielded to the US, and of late has acted as a US proxy in African conflicts, especially Libya, Ivory Coast and Mali.

The US misadventure in Somalia had a negative impact on US influence in the region, but the US has since the 1980's, particularly since the weakening of the influence of Soviet Union, developed a number of client states from among those who had already succumbed to imperialist pressure. A decade ago, the US unsuccessfully used Ethiopia as proxy to punish Somalia and subsequently changed its strategy to use the forces of African Union to fight its dirty wars against the Sudan and Somalia. US intervention in conflicts in Africa on various pretexts, including its indicated interest in helping Nigeria to fight the Sunni Muslim terrorist outfit Boko Haram with links to Saudi Arabia and several al Qaeda affiliates (See *http://www.globalresearch.ca/covert-ops-in-nigeria-fertile-ground-for-us-sponsored-balkanization/30259*) have been in neo-colonial fashion.

The expansion of US military presence in Africa has accelerated since the formal establishment of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2007. Having subdued all but a few African states resisting imperialist economic domination, the US has no serious military issues in Africa and has no case for a permanent military presence. Yet billions of dollars have been pumped into Africa in recent years to build bases, arm allies, gather intelligence, fight proxy wars, assassinate militants, and conduct hundreds of military missions, but without achieving the desired result. (*http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175981/tomgram%3A_nick_turse,_the_u.s._military's_battlefield_of_tomorrow/*)

It is the fast growing economic as well as political influence of China in almost every country in Africa which frightens the US and is a key factor in its drive to locate the headquarters of AFRICOM on African soil rather than in Stuttgart, Germany as at present. The African policy of the US to contain China has, however, failed thus far, even in the oil and mineral rich South Sudan, whose secession from the Sudan the US facilitated to punish Sudan for defiance of US imperialism and friendship towards

China. While US-China rivalry is on the rise in Africa there is no immediate prospect of armed conflict.

Encircling Russia

Having failed to bring Russia into its orbit, US imperialism had no option but to contain it. Since the post Yeltsin leadership of Russia reasserted itself as a global power, the US has done everything short of declaring war to punish Russia. The US was initially successful in implementing regime changes in countries of the former Soviet Union. But the pro-US and pro-West regimes that were established in those countries failed to deliver on the economy and encirclement of Russia failed on the Central Asian front.

Russia's refusal to cooperate with the US in its move to replace the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria — unlike on earlier occasions involving Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya — and its active support for al-Assad have frustrated the US mission in Syria (and thereby that in Iran) made Russia candidate for punishment. The coup in Ukraine led to the secession of the predominantly ethnic Russian Crimea from Ukraine and reunion with Russia, following an overwhelming mandate in a referendum. The coup also triggered the declaration of secession by the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, now in a state of civil war. Again, having failed in their mission to expand to the Russian border, the US and, less willingly, the EU have resorted to sanctions against Russia, but have thus far not only failed in their mission but also strengthened the hands of President Putin.

Encircling China

From 1949 until the restoration of capitalism in the 1980s in China, the US used its claim that communist China was a political threat to "democracy" as pretext to increase its military presence in the region. Interestingly, its China policy softened in the early 1970s in the context of China seeing the Soviet Union as a bigger threat than the US and the US seeking to contain growing Soviet influence in Asia. Interestingly, hostility to China returned

well after China ceased to be a "communist threat" to become a capitalist rival.

The policy of isolating China was evolved through the forging of a various regional alliances including the further strengthening of relations between India and the US, and the new ties with Myanmar. The US is also encouraging countries with territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea to provoke conflict. (See *http://rt.com/usa/179560-darwin-force-posture-agreement/*). While it is unlikely that the US will get directly involved in hostilities if they break out, it is participating in provocative joint military exercises with China's neighbours reminiscent of the naval exercises aimed at North Korea.

China has in response successfully used its economic power to build a number of economic and political strategies including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, the New Silk Road, the Maritime Silk Road, the BRICS New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

While the prospect of global isolation of China is weakening by the day, weakening China's influence in individual countries and dragging China into conflicts are seen as viable options for US imperialism. Again, Chinese diplomacy appears to have got the better of manipulations by the US in most countries, mainly because China has, unlike the US, its imperialist allies and even India, has handled state-to-state dealings with caution, avoiding meddling in the internal affairs of countries.

Getting it Wrong in the Muslim World

US involvement in the politics of the Arab World and Iran has more to do with the economics and politics of oil. The role of the US in the creation of Israel and its defence of Israel in the UN General Assembly and the Security Council against countless charges of war crimes, genocide and human rights violations against the people of Palestine and their supporters in the Arab world has led to an unfavourable impression of the US among most

Arab people and Muslims, especially after Israel's Six-Day War against Egypt in 1967.

The political crisis in the Arab world was the creation of imperialism, starting with the creation of artificial client states following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1919. The discovery of oil the Middle East in 1920 boosted the importance of the region to imperialism. Thus the creation of Israel in 1948 has also to be seen in the context of its usefulness to imperialism (the US in particular) in controlling access to oil. Control over oil was the motive for the British-US coup to overthrow Mossadegh, the democratically elected president in Iran in 1953.

Imperialism never had any interest in the Arab people; and the attitude of the West as a whole towards Islam has been based on suspicion and contempt. The US and British imperialists, nevertheless, maintained good relations with the most reactionary and dictatorial regimes in the Arab world and in Iran. The US and Britain responded negatively to progressive and nationalist regimes in the region. This fear was combined with a fear of communism, although it was the hostility of the US and Britain towards the regimes that succeeded the corrupt monarchs of the Arab world that persuaded the rebel regimes which had an uneasy relationship with communists as well as Islamists, to warm up to the Soviet Union.

The surge of popular will for change frightened the reactionary Arab monarchs and in turn cemented the relationship between the Arab rulers and US imperialism. Despite all pretences to the contrary, an alliance has always existed between the US, Zionist Israel and Sunni Muslim Arab states led by Saudi Arabia.

Political Islam has been a significant force since the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928 although it was ruthlessly suppressed under different regimes. Israeli oppression of Arabs, both Christian and Muslim, in Palestine, was an important factor that gave rise to strong Islamic political parties. Islam and Islamic fundamentalism emerged as political forces in the Arab world after the mid-1970s when anti-imperialist movements started to lose their momentum while

imperialism reasserted itself as neo-colonialism following setbacks suffered in the post Second World War decades of successful armed struggles against colonialism and imperialism. The national bourgeois leadership of the Third World lacked in initiative and started to compromise with imperialism while the left fragmented and weakened, mostly as a consequence of the erroneous line taken by the Soviet Union under Khrushchev. Many Islamic and Islamic fundamentalist political parties were populist and had an anti-imperialist if not anti-capitalist content to them, despite reservations about left politics.

It was, however, in Afghanistan that political Islam was put to use in the most cynical fashion by the imperialists with the support of the reactionary regime of Saudi Arabia, which had amassed tremendous wealth through the sharp increase in oil prices since the early 1970s. Islam was used as a political weapon to overthrow the secular pro-Soviet reformist regime. Besides the home-grown Islamist Taliban with its notorious religious intolerance, the CIA in collusion with Saudi Arabia was responsible for the creation of the Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organization al Qaeda.

With Saudi Arabia as its principal ally besides Israel in the Middle East, the US already had difficulty in maintaining a balance between Saudi Arabia and Shiite Iran ruled by Shah Reza Phalavi. The overthrow of the Shah by a popular revolution which was hijacked by the Islamists helped Saudi Arabia to persuade its anti-Shia agenda with the US.

An initial impression was created in the West, based on the resentment of the hostility of the Islamist regime in Iran, that Shia Muslims were violent religious fanatics. What is shown as Shiite fundamentalism, unlike Sunni fundamentalism sponsored by Saudi Arabia and member states of Gulf Coordination Council, mostly comprised local militant organizations with a predominantly Shiite identity seeking support from Iran under hostile circumstances, as in the case of the Houthi fighters in Yemen and the Hamas in Lebanon. The international media have falsely accused Iran of promoting Shiite terrorist rebels. (See *http://intelnews.org/2015/04/23/01-*

1684/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+intelNewsOrg+%28intelNews.org%29).

The origins and sources of sustenance of Islamic terrorist organizations involved in systematic terror in parts of Europe, West and South Asia and now Africa can be traced to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Gulf States and the US. Since the success of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, backed by the US, has deployed Islamic militants in Chechnya to subvert Russia and promoted Uyghur dissent in China's Xinjiang.

The US has been a willing partner in the Saudi project of escalating Sunni-Shia differences into major conflicts on a global scale. It is significant that Iran has generally distanced itself from Sunni-Shia conflicts and has addressed issues in terms of Islamic thought. That is not to argue that Shiite groups have been above sectarian violence or counter violence against Sunnis. But such violence has a stronger socio-political character than any religious basis.

The Frankenstein Monster of Fundamentalism

The US is mostly answerable for the creation and development of terrorist outfits starting from al Qaeda to the ISSIS and Boko Haram although funds and weapons have been channelled through various agencies (see *http://theweek.com/articles/447032/whos-financing-boko-haram*).

It is plain pretence for the US to claim that it is committed to fighting all Islamic terrorist organizations. What it has done is to use charges of a state sponsoring Islamic terrorism as pretext to invade a country as in Afghanistan and to an extent in Iraq; use Islamic terrorists as the fighting force to violently achieve a "regime change" as in Syria; and use terrorists to coerce governments (like Boko Haram in Nigeria) not to act against US interests. *(See http://leadership.ng/news/415983/fight-against-boko-haram-the-untold-story-of-us-involvement; http://www.globalresearch.ca/is-boko-haram-a-cia-covert-op-to-divide-and-conquer-africa/5431177).*

Although the US invasion of Iraq went wrong like the adventure in Afghanistan, the US as well as Saudi Arabia is keen to ensure that Iraq does not have a government that is friendly towards Iran. Although it is debatable whether the original intention of the US-Saudi-Israel axis of evil was to weaken Iraq by dividing it into three unstable warring countries with Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish ethnic identities, the present agenda points very much in that direction.

Following the failure in the mission of regime change in Syria, the plans for Syria too had to be to break up Syria, and the ISIS has been chosen to be the agent of change. It is significant that Bashar al Assad has pointed out that the Islamic State (IS) has expanded its influence and won more recruits since the beginning of US-led airstrikes targeting the group (*http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syrias-assad-claims-expansion-islamic-state-us-air-strikes-1883577729*).

The US has been drawn into yet another war in Yemen since Saudi Arabia launched on 25th March a massive bombardment of Yemen, which has thus far failed to dent the will of the Houthi fighters. The US, Saudi Arabia and their allies in the Gulf Coordination Council fear any popular insurgency, regardless of program. Thus the US accepts the Saudi story that the Houthis are Iranian inspired terrorists who need to be eliminated. Saudi Arabia has yet to realize that its options are an honourable peaceful retreat and embroilment in a conflict for which it will pay a big price, including humiliation at the hands of the Houthi.

Sobering Lessons from Iran

The US was misled by its anti-Iran prejudices deriving from events following the Islamic revolution in 1979, including humiliation resulting from siding with Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88).

Since 1979, the US imposed a number of sanctions against Iran that were designed to cripple its economy. They have for more than 45 years been a growing economic and social burden on Iran.

Having failed to subdue Iran's Islamic government or bring about a regime change through creating economic hardships and by political intrigue, the US, based on false information originating in Israel, accused Iran of planning to build nuclear weapons.

It was the US which helped Iran to launch its nuclear program in the 1950's which lasted until the 1979 Islamic Revolution which, to its credit, disbanded a clandestine nuclear weapons research program. Iran has also signed treaties repudiating the possession of weapons of mass destruction including the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Iran's first nuclear power plant was completed with assistance of Russian government and declared open on 12th September 2011 and Iran has been open about its plans for further nuclear power plants.

The negotiations initiated in 2006 between Iran and the P5+1 group of countries (the permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany) were repeatedly hampered by the US which for example in 2007 claimed that Iran was pursuing research with potential to produce nuclear weapons, but had not attempted to produce any. In November 2011, the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency claimed that it was likely that before 2003 Iran had undertaken research and experiments designed to develop nuclear weapons capability. Many Western nuclear experts saw very little new in the IAEA report which concerned activities prior to 2003 and were of the view that media reports exaggerated its significance. Iran responded with a threat to reduce cooperation with the IAEA.

Israel and Saudi Arabia have rejected any form of nuclear deal between P5+1 and Iran and have done their utmost to sabotage the settlement of the issue by exerting pressure on the US to pull out of the talks. Israel's relationship with post-revolution Iran was hardly warm except during the Iraq-Iran war (1980-89) when it supplied, in breach of US sanctions, arms and military expertise to Iran. Relations soured soon after and Israel has often threatened to attack Iranian nuclear sites, a threat which the Israeli

Prime Minister had implicitly repeated only a week before the deadline for the signing of the deal with Iran. (*http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.663060*). Israel has in fact carried out acts of sabotage of nuclear power projects and committed murders of personnel within Iran.

The President and senior US officials have a problem in accepting that Iran has not agreed to conditions which would undermine its sovereignty. Iran has been firm and denied US claims that Iranian negotiators had agreed in Lausanne to accept a demand that Iran allows the IAEA to inspect any site it considered suspicious anywhere in the country, including military bases. Clearly, the deal is not anything that the US wholeheartedly desired but something that is far too reasonable to reject and whose rejection will drive a wedge between the US and Europe at a time when the US badly needs the support of the latter.

The consequences of the nuclear deal will be far reaching for US foreign policy as well as its two main allies in the Middle East. Iran will be in a better placed to pursue its diplomatic offensive against them, and it will not take long for Saudi Arabia, its rival Qatar, Israel and by implication the US are thoroughly exposed as the sponsors of Islamic terrorism in the eyes of the vast majority of Sunni Muslims who are now misled by Saudi Arabia abusing its privileged position in the Islamic world.

The US which has unwittingly subscribed to anti-Islamic sentiments in the West by identifying global terrorism with Islam will invariably pay a big diplomatic price for its folly. Iran owes no favours to the US for 35 years of wanton harassment including a nine year war with a neighbour that cost heavily in human and material terms.

The choice is for the US is to seriously review its Middle East policy and its special relationship with Israel. But for a state that has become too dependent on military might for its survival, such wisdom would not come by easily.

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NDMLP Statement to the Media

25th May 2015

Gender-based Oppression and Violence

Comrade SK Senthivel issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party about oppression and violence directed against women in the context of the recent gang rape and murder of the schoolgirl, S Viththiyaa.

Acts of sexual violence, torture, rape and other forms of oppression comprise social cruelties that persist against women, females in their youth, female students and girls. One such instance concerns the gang rape and murder of S Viththiyaa a girl student of Pungudutheevu Vidhyalaya in the North. Campaigns of awareness and demonstrations denouncing those responsible for this wicked act continue among the people. The anger and opposition expressed by the people are just.

Meanwhile it is important to find what cause social decay and degeneration and sexual abuse and draw up a broad programme to protect women and the younger generation from them. All political parties, civil and public organizations and all socially concerned individuals should come forward to unite and act in that interest. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party calls upon all concerned, political parties especially, to transcend political stands and purposes to unite on the common ground of social interest and make their contribution to the drawing up of a common programme for socio cultural awakening.

Losses and destruction caused by the war on the one hand harass and torture the people. On the other hand, violent thoughts, revengefulness and perverse sexual tendencies manifest themselves as socio cultural decadence. There is in particular an environment where the youth have been subjected to pressures of consumer culture to become lacking in social outlook and social interest to suffer social decay. The proliferation of wine shops, the planned

promotion of drug abuse, penetration by degenerate commercial cinema and negative aspects of modern technology are poisoning society and killing human values. Tamil political parties and others parties, which do not pay any attention to these matters, cannot put an end to social decay by merely declaring aloud the demands designed for their political survival. Hence, the Party urges all parties and public organizations that are genuinely pro-people should, while combating the consequences of social decay, also come forward to identify the causes and act against them.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP News

Central Committee Circular to Party Branches and Members:
General Election 2015 & Party Congress 2015

Dear Comrades

1. It was resolved in the Emergency Meeting of the Party Central Committee on 27th June 2015 that that the Party will not be participating in the forthcoming General Elections and will conduct public meetings, seminars meetings with people and distribution of pamphlets during the period of election campaigns.
2. The Central Committee has resolved to hold the Sixth All Sri Lanka Congress of the Party on the 28th, 29th and 30th of August.
   - 2.1 Every member should from now on act to conduct the Congress successfully.
   - 2.2 The branches should be strengthened by recruiting new members in accordance with eligibility for membership.
   - 2.3 It is essential that all members participate in the Congress on all three days. Hence preparations should be made in advance.
   - 2.4 Every Party Branch should collect annual subscriptions, entry fees and special funds for the congress and send it in advance to the Central Committee.

2.5 Proposals and suggestions for inclusion in the Congress reports, resolutions and programmes should be sent within two weeks from this date.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary
01.07.2015

Nepal Earth Quake

The earth quake which struck Nepal on 25th April 2015 has caused death and destruction on a massive scale, killing many thousands, injuring tens of thousands in a country which is already a victim of extreme poverty and cruel exploitation by imperialism and regional hegemony. Structural destruction was extensive and included many monumental buildings in the capital Kathmandu and around.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party is deeply sorrowed by the event and has conveyed its deep concern and sympathies for the people of Nepal through three Marxist-Leninist/Maoist Communist Parties in Nepal. In the message sent to the central committees of the parties, Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party has expressed the faith that the Marxist Leninist and Maoist Communist Parties will set aside differences and work together to help the people of Nepal receive assistance locally and internationally to recover from the disaster that has struck them. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party expresses its support and solidarity to them.

Denouncing Gender Oppression

Jaffna: The Organization for Women's Liberation Thought had issued a call to the public to hold a rally on Saturday 23rd May 2015 to draw attention to issues of defence of the rights of women, opposition to sexual violence and in particular the rape and murder of the girl student Viththiyaa of Pungudutheevu Vidhyalaya. However, since there was a ruling by the District Court of Jaffna prohibiting demonstrations in Jaffna, representatives of organizations that gathered in Jaffna to participate in the demonstration conducted the demonstration within the premises of the Dhesiya Kalai

Ilakkiya Peravai on KKS Road, Kokkuvil in order to impress upon the police and the media the justification for the campaign.

It was primarily urged that a Special Court should be set up in connection with the murder of Viththiyaa and inquiries expedited through that court, the crime duly proven and the criminals punished. Several mass organizations including the Mass Organization for Social Justice, New Democratic Youth Front, Kalaimathy Women's Association (Putthur), Northern Province Women's Organization and the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party supported the campaign led by Ms R Yogamalar. Delegates representing the Organization for Women's Liberation Thought from different parts of the country also participated in the demonstration.

The incidence of anti-social activities using the murder of Viththiyaa as pretext and misleading of the people in wrong directions were denounced by the Organization for Women's Liberation Thought, which also expressed the view that women's coming forward to secure justice for themselves will yield the best results.

Matale: The Organization for Women's Liberation Thought conducted an awareness demonstration in Matale on 31st May 2015 against oppression of all women of the country and denouncing the gang rape and murder of the girl student Viththiyaa. Many women, men, young women and men, and students participated. Slogans raised in Sinhala and Tamil demanded justice for Viththiyaa, firm action against sexual monsters, and an end to making commodities of women and to oppression of women. Ms Priya Samayakaruppi, Ms Jezeema Hameed and Ms Udayasiri addressed the gathering. Comrade Suren, Matale District Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party and Comrade Sisira, Matale Organizer of the Frontline Socialist Party among others too addressed the gathering.

May Day Rallies

The NDMLP held very successful and well attended May Day rallies in three venues: Putthur (Jaffna), Vavuniya and Matale.

All three rallies were addressed by leading comrades of the party and representatives of trade unions and mass organizations.

Right to Housing and Land: Ratnapura

The Hill-Country Mass Organization for Social Justice, Communist Workers' Union, New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, Frontline Socialist Party and the Hill Country Social Studies organized a massive demonstration in Ratnapura on Sunday 29th March 2015 demanding the right of the Hill Country Tamils to individual housing with a village structure and 20 perches of land. They also called upon all democratic, left, progressive and civil society organizations to join them in the ongoing struggle.

Call for Release of Political Prisoners

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party participated in a public demonstration organized by the Movement for Equality in front of the Colombo Fort railway station on Saturday 28th March 2015 calling for the release of all political prisoners.

Meeriyabedda: Call for Social Justice by HMOS

The Hill-Country Mass Organization for Social Justice (HMOS), which has consistently demanded the right of the Hill Country Tamils to housing and land and recognition as a nationality, in May 2015 called on the people of the Hill Country to launch a mass struggle urging the right to housing and land, which is now at the fore as a primary need of the Hill Country Tamil people.

The HMOS also drew attention to the 200 years long history of the Hill Country Tamils in the country and their continued exploitation and oppression in the social, economic and political spheres under colonial rule and the rejection of democratic demands for livelihood and fundamental rights to livelihood, housing, health and education by successive chauvinistic governments that have ruled the country since independence and pointed out that the recent landslide disaster in Koslanda-Meeriyabedda bears further testimony to their history of tragedy.

It rejected the role played by Hill Country trade unions and political parties which lacked foresight and was driven by selfish political purposes, and renewed its call for the right to housing as a minimum fundamental right.

Water Contamination: Appeal to the President

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party sent the following appeal to His Excellency the President calling for an independent commission of inquiry into the contamination of well water by oil in the Jaffna peninsula.

11th April 2015

His Excellency the President P.G.M.Y. Sirisena
President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
Colombo
Sri Lanka

Your Excellency the President,

Appeal for an Independent Commission of Inquiry into
Oil Contamination of Well Water in the Jaffna Peninsula

Oil film initially observed in the latter half of 2014 in water from several wells in the vicinity of the Chunnakam Power Station in the Jaffna peninsula has now spread to wells several miles from the location of original observation. The evidence so far points to the contaminant being waste oil originating from the premises of the Chunnakam Power Station.

This is a serious matter which concerns the health and safety of a population which depends on well water for all its daily needs including drinking water. The oil contaminant has made the water unfit for human consumption and the problem has to be addressed at different levels.

Firstly, there is need for remedial action to meet the water requirements of the people. Supplying water by bowsers is neither feasible nor desirable as a solution in view of the scale of the problem as the water thus supplied will be just adequate for drinking purposes. The people are justifiably worried about health risks in using the well water for bathing and washing. Thus there is need for provisions to treat the well water to ensure that it is free of the contaminant and safe for human use.

Secondly, there is need to assess the extent of the damage caused by the contaminant and the risk of further spread. This is important to evolve strategies to contain the pollution and prepare for remedial action.

Thirdly there is need to identify the roots of the problem. This concerns knowing the cause and the scale of the problem and will help to set in place preventive measures to ensure that such events will not recur. It also means identifying the real culprits who should be made liable for the cost of meeting the water needs of the affected population, the cost of cleaning up, and potential costs relating to damage to human health, to cattle fed with contaminated water, and to crops affected by contamination of the soil.

The Northern Provincial Government has thus far underplayed the gravity of the issues and has shown unwillingness to investigate the source of the problem and the extent of damage. There is thus a need for a credible inquiry to restore the confidence of the public in the government.

Our Party has always taken a serious interest in matters affecting the well being of the people, and considers this matter serious enough to warrant investigation by an independent Commission of Inquiry comprising individuals who are technically competent to look into the various aspects of the problem to determine (i) the source of the pollution, (ii) the cause of the pollution, (iii) the person/persons responsible for the pollution, (iv) the extent of the damage and cost to government and community thus far and potential for further damage, (v) endangering of public health by wilful neglect and knowingly suppressing information, and (vi) appropriate compensation and penalty for the harm done by the pollution.

Our Party pledges its fullest support and cooperation including recommending technically competent persons without vested interests who could assist the Commission of Inquiry with its investigations.

Yours faithfully

S.K. Senthivel
General Secretary
New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party

cc. Hon. Ranil Wickramasinghe, Prime Minster
Mr. H.M.G.S. Palihakkara, Governor of Northern Province
Justice C.V. Vigneswaran, Chief Minister, Northern Provincial Council

2015: Africa's call to her children

Hulo Guillabert

This call comes from the bottom of my bosom
From the bottom of ages and eternity
From the bottom of mortified and bloodied centuries
And of all those years of raped sovereignty…
Africa calls you, yes YOU, YOU and YOU again…
ALL OF US
Come, she says
YOU my children, come deliver me,
Do not let me be mistreated again, pillaged, bowed,
Don't let me be rapped again and subjected to violence
Don't let me be grinded, bribed
Come to me my beloved children
Those who are close by me
Those who are far away but close to my soul
Those who are lost in the cold meanders of the enemies
Those who are just, those who are traitors, those who are vile
Those who are tired, haggard, bloodless and only want to sleep
Wake up, Wake up
Pick yourselves up
STAND UP my children STAND UP!

Come to the source of my humanity
Come replenish yourselves in my deep roots
Come regenerate yourselves in my ancestral spirituality
Come and sit by the corner of my sacred fire
Come to the shadow of my generous nature,
I am the nourishing Earth and I am abundance
My breast are always young and my milk succulent
My cascades gush refreshing and intoxicating
My precious stones shine from the bottom of all my cavities
All that will finally be for you, because I kept some for you
My wealth is limitless despite the pillages
My wealth is your great strength despite slavery
My wealth is your smile despite all the harsh tests
My wealth is your beautiful soul despite the perdition
You are POWERFUL BEINGS
At last Cloak in your magnificence
Reclaim your Power
I am waiting for YOU, I am Hoping for US...
STAND UP my children, STAND UP free from all chains
BEGIN THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE, EACH ONE,
EVERYONE, TOGETHER, UBUNTU, UNITED AT LAST!!!

[Hulo Guillabert is Director of Diaspora Noires Editions, and a Member of the Committee for the First Pan African Federalist Congress. The poem was published recently as a rallying call for African solidarity.]

A Worker Reads History

Bertolt Brecht

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?
The books are filled with names of kings.
Was it the kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?
And Babylon, so many times destroyed.
Who built the city up each time? In which of Lima's houses,
That city glittering with gold, lived those who built it?
In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished
Where did the masons go? Imperial Rome
Is full of arcs of triumph. Who reared them up? Over whom
Did the Caesars triumph? Byzantium lives in song.
Were all her dwellings palaces? And even in Atlantis of the legend
The night the seas rushed in,
The drowning men still bellowed for their slaves.
Young Alexander conquered India.
He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Phillip of Spain wept as his fleet
was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears?
Frederick the Great triumphed in the Seven Years War.
Who triumphed with him?
Each page a victory
At whose expense the victory ball?
Every ten years a great man,
Who paid the piper?
So many particulars.
So many questions.

Registered as a Newspaper in Sri Lanka

Utopia

Eduardo Galeano

Utopia lies at the horizon.
When I draw nearer by two steps,
it retreats two steps.
If I proceed ten steps forward, it
swiftly slips ten steps ahead.
No matter how far I go,
I can never reach it.

What, then, is the purpose of utopia?
It is to cause us to advance.

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