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Our Freedom

Sivaramani

**Dearest friends,
still searching for mirrors to comb your hair?
Much time goes waste adjusting the sari.
No, friends. No.
Let us put off for a while
eye shadow and lipstick
for our younger sisters to have love and music.
Let our young shoulders bear the burden of duty.
Let us forget the days
when we shed tears
because the pleats of our dresses were not pretty.
Let us put behind us those shame filled days.
In many lands
people still employ begging bowls.
Comrades, will we too win
freedom with a begging bowl?
Even if we lose all
we want not freedom for a few of us.
We want not
a freedom with manacles.
Comrades
we will win freedom
after we make
a manacle for all manacles.**

(Written in the late 1980s)

From the Editor's Desk

The chauvinistic ruling class which caused the war, led it to victory and cares little for the disastrous consequences of the war is back in the saddle. Likewise, the Tamil political leaders who led the Tamil people towards loss of life and property and disablement are back in their parliamentary seats. Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalist leaders, who get elected to parliament for their own advancement and not that of the people, too have returned to parliament.

It is almost a year since the war ended. But the national question is nowhere nearer a solution than before the war. The people who lost most by the war are still in a state of misery. Close to a hundred thousand are still behind barbed wire fences, unable to return to their homes. Those allowed to return have not been provided with necessary resources to return to normal existence. Much of the war ravaged Vanni, mainly to the east of the A-9 highway, is still unavailable for resettlement by its former residents and has a strong military presence. The government policy on resettlement and rehabilitation is guided by chauvinistic considerations.

The country's foreign and domestic debt are at crisis levels and there is rising pressure from lending agencies on the government for 'reforms' — meaning economic hardships for the people and the economy being subject to foreign control and domination.

The number of persons detained by the police and the armed forces without formal inquiry or trial is unknown, but has certainly risen from hundreds to many thousands. Very little information is available on the whereabouts of people reported missing since the end of the war and reportedly taken for questioning about connections with the LTTE. Detainees also include many Sinhalese, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils held in remand prisons and detention centres for several years. Legal intervention has enabled the release of only a minority of detainees.

Corruption, crime and social violence have escalated in the past few years and the media has been particularly targeted for attack. The legal system of the country is a shambles and the police and the judiciary, with some remarkable exceptions, are severely politicised. The number of active soldiers per million of population is among the highest in the world and set to rise even after the end of the war.

Given the steamroller majority that the ruling alliance has in parliament and the number of opposition MPs waiting to cross over, there is little excuse for the government not to find a just solution to the national question. But that is unlikely to happen, and excuses will be made of chauvinist dissent to finding a viable solution. Foreign meddling including Indian pressure — motivated by considerations other than concern for Sri Lanka's Tamils — can at best lead to eye wash reforms that will go nowhere towards a solution.

More importantly than before, disaffection with government is bound to grow on the economic front when the government, in the process of dealing with its fiscal problems and imperialist pressure, begins to burden the working classes. Protests and strikes have never been treated kindly in the past and the treatment is likely to be harsher as the protests increase in numerical strength, intensity and frequency.

The state will adopt a combination of strategies to deal with protests. Firstly, it would seek to divert attention away from problems by pointing to residual terrorist problems, and secessionist efforts — although confined mainly to a section of the elite among the Tamil diaspora.

Secondly, it will resort to repression. Intimidation of the media is likely to be followed by near absolute control of the media and suppression of dissenting views. The police and armed forces that had been built up in the name of fighting a war against terrorism will be turned against protesters. That is not something new to the country, which has seen the legislation against Tamil terrorists being used to kill tens of thousands of Sinhalese youth in the South less than a decade later in 1988-89.

Although the national question remains the main contradiction, its resolution cannot be isolated from issues of economics, democracy, and human and fundamental rights and, as importantly, political, economic and military domination and intervention by imperialist and hegemonic powers.

The post-war situation is one of impending national crises on several fronts, whose solution demands mass political struggle based on and guided by the broadest possible and principled alliance of the left, progressive and democratic forces of the country.

Parliamentary General Election 2010

Election Manifesto of the New-Democratic Party

Introduction

The entire people of Sri Lanka are facing acute crises and problems at two levels. One concerns the failure to resolve the national question caused by chauvinistic capitalist oppression. The other concerns the economic crises and problems that developed as a result of class oppression. Besides these, people have to struggle against a variety of problems faced by them in their daily lives. In all of these problems, the ruling classes comprising the government and the opposition factions are on one side and the overwhelming majority comprising the working people are on the other. Another fact that needs to be noted is that the imperialist forces of global hegemony and forces of regional hegemony have continued to meddle and tamper with the national question which is the main contradiction, and in the economic issues arising from the class contradiction, which is the fundamental contradiction. The effects and consequences of the above factors are been experienced as sorrow and suffering by the people at all levels of the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of society. Hence we briefly place before the public in the Election Manifesto of the New Democratic Party the basic political stand and the demands put forward by the Party.

The National Question and the Tamils

The New Democratic Party has consistently emphasised that the national question is the principal contradiction in Sri Lanka. The end of the war has not brought the national question to its end. Since chauvinism is even more closely bonded to the state machinery, national oppression against the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil

nationalities has intensified further. The three nationalities are affected in different ways according to their specific conditions of existence.

Generally, all three minority nationalities are subject to discriminatory treatment. Their right to education in their mother tongue and the right to conduct their affairs in their language are unlawfully denied to them. Besides, allocation of places in higher education, vocational training and the professions are unfavourable to them. In addition, owing to chauvinistic oppression against the Tamil nationality being implemented as a chauvinist war of national oppression in their traditional homelands, Tamils have suffered loss of life, disablement, and loss of property on an unprecedented, massive scale. Several hundred thousands have been forced to be displaced within the country and abroad. Amid this, in addition to land already appropriated from Tamils for establishing “High Security Zones”, planned colonisation of Sinhalese is being intensified with the aim of reducing Tamils to a minority in their own territories.

Besides those in the open prisons called “Refugee Camps”, thousands are languishing in prisons and detention camps, as terror suspects, without trial or inquiry. Not merely Tamils and Hill Country Tamils but also Muslims and Sinhalese are put through such suffering for political reasons. The main cause for this situation is planned chauvinistic oppression by the state. Yet, attempts to resolve the national question, firstly as parliamentary deals, secondly as peaceful campaigns and thirdly as armed struggle, based on the claim that the Tamils could by themselves resolve the Tamil national question, failed. There were two fundamental reasons for the failure. Firstly, at no stage was the liberation struggle of the Tamil nationality carried forward as a mass struggle. That was the reason why weapons gained prominence while democratic practices were rejected. Secondly, the struggle with a narrow nationalist outlook was isolated from the struggles of other oppressed people. As a result, the struggle of the Tamils tended to rely on and side with Western powers and to deny support and even be hostile to struggles against imperialism and hegemony. As a result, the liberation struggle of the Tamils became isolated within Sri Lanka as well as internationally. It was because the three stages of struggle were guided by the same incorrect, upper class, elitist thinking that they pushed the Tamil people into a great tragedy. Thus there is a need to be freed from these errors, unite the Tamil people on a working class basis, create militant solidarity between them and other oppressed people and carry forward the fourth stage of the struggle. The New Democratic Party made clear its

observations on the matter even before the struggle of the LTTE faced downfall.

Muslims

Since the Muslims are spread throughout the country, they face different kinds of oppression according to the environments in which they live. Also, their livelihood and small trade have been subject to attack by fanatically chauvinistic gangs, Muslims in different parts of the country have from time to time faced fierce chauvinist attacks. Tamil narrow nationalism has, in addition, targeted Muslims and carried out massacres. The expulsion of Muslims from the North in 1990 was a major act of cruelty against them. The government, while on the one hand engaging in activities that divide the Tamils and Muslims, has been colluding with chauvinistic gangs in seizing land and property from Muslims, and denying the Muslims their rights.

Hill Country Tamils

The Hill Country Tamils have, since deprivation of their right to citizenship in 1948, have struggled for their existence. The Sirima-Shastri Accord of 1963 was a great injustice perpetrated against them. Cruel exploitation of their labour and their expulsion of many from the plantations following the nationalisation of the plantations facilitated the implementation of that accord. Efforts have intensified to suppress the political voice that they may have through the right to vote that they won as a result of a prolonged struggle. Planned Sinhala colonisation and schemes like the Upper Kotmale Scheme designed to destroy plantations on the one hand and chauvinist attacks against them on the other persist. The so-called leaders of the Hill Country Tamils are accomplices of the chauvinists in activities designed to prevent the identification of the Hill Country Tamils as a distinct nationality. The people need to recognise the true nature of such leaders.

The Way to a Solution

In the current situation where the national question is being exacerbated and the minority nationalities are severely oppressed, the New-Democratic Party emphasises that, without resolving the national question, it is not possible to resolve other problems faced by the country. From that position, the New-Democratic Party has consistently put forward the following idea as the basis for a long-term solution for the national question.

A just and lasting solution to the national question is possible only through rebuilding the country as a multi-ethnic, multi-nationality entity with autonomous regions for the nationalities and autonomous structures to preserve the unique identity of communities without a contiguous territory, based on the principle of the right to self determination within the framework of a united Sri Lanka which treats all nationalities and national minorities as equals.

Immediate Steps

At the same time, taking into account the consequences of the war and the direct impact of chauvinistic attacks, the New-Democratic Party urges the following immediate steps.

- **All the people displaced as a result of the war should be immediately resettled in their own homes.**
- **Normal life should be restored for people affected by war, through reconstruction and rehabilitation.**
- **All losses due to war should be compensated and opportunity provided for communities to rebuild their lives based on self-reliance.**
- **Military camps should be removed from areas in which civilians live in large numbers.**
- **All those under detention without trial or inquiry should be released forthwith and due compensation paid for the injustice done to them.**
- **Planned colonisation should be stopped forthwith, High Security Zones done away with, and the right of communities to their traditional territory respected.**
- **Acts of communal hatred affecting the life and livelihood of Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people should be ended immediately, and firm action taken against those who provoke communal hatred.**
- **The legal right of all speakers of Tamil to education in their mother tongue and to carry out all affairs including matters relating to the state in Tamil in any part of the country should be safeguarded.**

- **Provocation of hatred towards the Muslims and acts of violence directed against Muslim communities should be prevented.**
- **Moves to appropriate land belonging to the Muslims in their traditional areas should be prevented.**
- **Hill Country Tamils should be recognised as a nationality and their right to existence in regions in which they have lived for several generations should be affirmed.**
- **The Hill Country Tamils, especially the plantation workers, should be given an adequate wage increase, and be granted the legal right, opportunity and means to possess their own homes and land in order to maintain an independent economic existence by developing cultivation and animal husbandry.**
- **Educational and employment opportunities should be enhanced for the Hill Country Tamil community, which is still backward in education and employment.**

Social Oppression

The well being of any nationality of Sri Lanka cannot be isolated from that of other nationalities. Hence, one cannot isolate or view in isolation the liberation of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people from the interests of the country as a whole. Likewise, we cannot ignore oppression based on class, caste and gender, nationally and within each community. It should again be reminded here as a lesson of historical experience that the tendency to be blind to social oppression, on the pretext of the liberation struggle of the Tamil people and unity of the nationality, has in no way helped the liberation of the Tamil people.

Many trade union rights and other legal rights won by the workers through struggle have been lost under the liberalised private sector economy, which is part of capitalist globalisation.

Several obstacles exist in society, which prevent the victories scored in the struggle against castism under the leadership of our Marxist Leninist party from leading to a total elimination of caste domination. Tamil narrow nationalism has been an accomplice to those evil forces.

While education and employment opportunities for women have increased, their work load too has increased. Besides that, there is also an increase in sexual harassment in their places of work. Thus, besides oppression based on caste, nationality and class, working women suffer gender-based oppression within the family and outside. Neither armed

struggle nor urban employment has helped working class women to win liberation. The concerns of feminist campaigners remain confined to the boundaries of the well to do middle class.

We never accepted the argument that the unity of the nationality or of the community will be wrecked by raising issues of social oppression. The New Democratic Party has not exempted any social injustice. It has struggled against all forms of social oppression including chauvinistic oppression. Thus the following demands are included in the Election Manifesto of the Party.

- **All trade union rights denied to the working class following the Open Economic Policy should be restored. All employment sectors should without exception be given the right to organise as a trade union.**
- **The rise in prices should be arrested, the cost of living controlled, and wage increases should be granted.**
- **The rights of working people including workers, peasants and fisher folk should be assured.**
- **Untouchability, caste-based discrimination, disregard and oppression that are still practiced as a result of residual caste ideology should be fully eliminated.**
- **In addition to strong legal action against all social violence against women, the idea of gender equality should be emphasised in all social institutions including schools.**
- **Sections of the people who remain backward on the basis of class, gender, caste and region should be granted special concessions in education, higher education and employment.**

Alternative Political Path

To win the above demands, it is important to build a new front of mass struggle that brings together all nationalities and national minorities along an alternative political path based on broad unity of the people. It is only through the total rejection of the narrow Tamil nationalist outlook which portrayed the Sinhalese people as enemies and acting on the basis that the broad masses of Sinhala working people are an ally that it will be possible to defeat the chauvinism afflicting the Sinhalese people and enable them to accept the rights of other nationalities. Through that, it will also be possible to salvage the struggle of the Tamil people against national

oppression from the tendency to isolate the Tamil people from other nationalities of Sri Lanka, and thereby carry forward the struggle.

Global domination by the US and the regional hegemonic ambitions of India, besides contributing to the transformation of the national conflict into war, have been obstacles to finding a just solution to the national question. The imperialist grip on Sri Lanka has tightened during the past three decades. Sri Lanka is now a major debtor nation. Sri Lanka, without a national economy, depends on earnings from the sale of its labour power in the international market, directly or indirectly through means such as the garment industry. Hence, it is important to rescue the sovereignty and the economy of the country from US-led Western imperialism and from Indian hegemony. All foreign involvements that seek to use the national question for purposes of intervention and domination in trade, political and military affairs should be opposed.

The New Democratic Party has never believed that useful political change can be brought about through the parliamentary system. It has never propagated such faith among the people. The importance of this election to the Party is the opportunity that it provides to take correct ideas among the people and thereby mobilise the people along an alternative political path.

The people by studying, understanding and supporting the stand of the Party will be strengthening the struggle for their rights. We pledge that, with the strength of that support, the New Democratic Party will work resolutely with the people, within and outside parliament, to mobilise the people and advance along the path of struggle.

If the people will grant us parliamentary representation at this election, we pledge that we will continue to be an honest political force which is true to the people and act to build a new political culture and advance our political cause.

Parliamentary Elections 2010 Lessons and Way Forward

Narasimha

The Sri Lankan parliamentary general election produced few surprises. Voting patterns had not changed since the military success of the government in the East in 2007. If voting in the presidential election was anything to go by, the United Peoples Freedom Alliance, the ruling coalition, was destined for a massive victory. Like victories in earlier elections, including the presidential election, the UPFA victory was blemished by charges of abuse of state resources including state controlled media, and intimidation and violence, mostly on the part of the ruling alliance. That the UPFA would secure a comfortable parliamentary majority was known to the two already disheartened opposition alliances led by the UNP and the JVP, respectively, so that their campaign themes progressively became ones of denying the UPFA a two-thirds majority.

The UNP as well as the JVP knew the implications of a UNP-JVP alliance for its survival, let alone credibility. The advantage that the JVP gained by having the defeated and incarcerated General Fonseka in their Democratic National Alliance melted away as the government added to the woes of Fonseka with evidence of further financial irregularities. That Fonseka won a seat in Colombo was a consolation, but with minimal political significance — except as a minor irritant to a government that is hell bent on persecuting him.

If the number of seats won by the parties was calculated based on the electorate-based first-past-the-post system that existed up to 1977, the UNP would have won under a mere 9 seats (4.5% of 200 seats) compared with 8 seats (5.3% of 150 seats) for the SLFP in 1977 when it suffered its worst ever electoral defeat. The JVP, like the parliamentary left in 1977, would not have won a single seat as well as finished third at best in every electorate. The parallels are too tempting to ignore between an opportunist left leadership that took the parliamentary path, formed an alliance with a chauvinist capitalist

party and, when forced to quit the alliance, faced political oblivion, and the chauvinist pseudo-left JVP which, nearly three decades later, took the parliamentary path, formed an alliance with a chauvinist capitalist party and, after being forced to quit the alliance, faces political oblivion.

The tragedy is that none of the three major political groups has any plan or policy to deal with the national question or free the country of political and economic domination by global and regional powers. Although spokespersons for the UPFA government continue to respond aggressively to criticism on matters of human and fundamental rights and war crimes, it is unlikely that the government is willing to break with imperialist globalisation and adopt a firm anti-imperialist stand. What compounds the tragedy is the lack of a credible left organisation in the South.

The current global situation and global power rivalries will help Sri Lanka to slip through the human rights and war crimes nets and avert economic sanctions. But the government, despite its show of defiance, will yield to imperialist pressure owing to the dependence of the fragile economy on the West. The consequent economic burdens on the people will lead to popular discontent and protests which the state cannot afford to let develop. Given the highly militarised, and politicised state machinery, prospects for democracy and human rights are bleak. But neither the UNP nor the JVP is a viable political alternative or in a position to mobilise the masses along the path of popular resistance.

The system of political parties has degenerated since 1977. The ease with which political parties have fragmented in the past decade, especially its latter half, and the ease with which politicians switch loyalties have reduced political parties to interest groups without serious differences in policy. Thus there is a need for a serious political alternative to emerge among the Sinhalese.

Tamils in the North have effectively boycotted three elections in a row — each more assertively than the earlier one. Tamil participation in the East was better owing to concern about loss of Tamil representation in parliament — but far from enthusiastic. Some see this as a negative feature indicating undesirable apathy. Some others take no notice of the pathetically low polling rate and interpret the verdict of the Tamil voters in terms of the number of seats secured or the fraction of the valid votes received by the parties.

Such analyses miss the point that non-participation in elections is a strong political statement — a stronger statement under the

circumstances would have been spoiling the ballot paper or voting for the NDP which used the election as a means to campaign for an alternative political path based on mass mobilisation and struggle. The verdict is loud and clear for any who wish to hear: The Tamil people think that the parliamentary system cannot address their problems — let alone solve it.

The people saw no option before them which they could believe in. An expression of that position is no sign of apathy but conscious rejection of the parliamentary options before them. The people kept off despite the many millions of rupees spent by the Tamil National Alliance and even larger sums spent by the ruling alliance. Independent groups of 'intellectuals' and others funded by the government and a 'Dalit' group with large sums of money from dubious foreign sources — as well as encouragement by the government — failed to attract the voters. Even a separatist agenda with candidates known to be close to the LTTE failed.

The claim by the TNA that it has a mandate from the Tamils is hollow. It lost 8 of the 22 seats that it held. The number of votes that it received was a pathetic one-third of what it polled in 2004. The 'bargaining position' *vis-à-vis* the ruling alliance that it hoped for went up in smoke and, having already sold out to the Indian ruling elite, it cannot mobilise the people for any form of struggle.

There is a political vacuum waiting to be filled among the minority nationalities, especially the Tamils. There is no parliamentary political alternative to fill that space, as every possible parliamentary option has been tested and proven to be not just a failure but also a cruel betrayal of the trust placed by the people on it. That vacuum is not there forever, and will be filled by what the people will see as a viable alternative. If the genuine left fails to give the necessary leadership, reactionary forces could move in.

The government is unlikely to offer anything to the national minorities that would displease the chauvinists on whom it has become increasingly dependent. Besides, keeping the national question simmering is to its advantage. Indian pressure on the Sri Lankan government has its limitations, partly because India has no interest in solving the Sri Lankan question a just manner, based on the principle of the right to self determination, since such a solution has its undesirable implications for India's approach to its own national question. Besides, India's economic interests in Sri Lanka will override any wish to bringing peace and political stability to Sri

Lanka. India will, at best, settle for an eye-wash solution that will short change the already inadequate 13th Amendment of 1987.

Without a solution to the national question, Tamil nationalism will remain strong as will Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalism. What needs to be done is to encourage the newly emerging forces of minority nationalism — especially Tamils with a bitter experience of the conservative, reactionary Tamil narrow nationalism of the past — to adopt a progressive approach. That means not only the rejection old conservatism and an isolationist narrow nationalist approach but also willingness to join hands with all struggles against oppression based on class, caste and nationality. It will also demand a clearly anti-imperialist stand and resolute opposition to capitalist globalisation and its liberal economic corollaries.

The NDP needs to play a leading role in the remoulding of Tamil nationalism and Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalism as progressive forces free of their earlier narrow and parochial outlook and in mediating between progressive tendencies among the different nationalities as well as build working class solidarity.

Voting in the general elections were an all time low at a few points over 50%, indicating that the people are losing enthusiasm for the existing political system, and the impending economic burdens are likely to add to their frustration. The ruling classes will seek to divert attention from economic issues as well as from rising state oppression by aggravating national contradictions. If the left, progressive and democratic forces fail to intervene, the forces of fascism will prevail, with support from foreign imperialists and the regional hegemonic power.

Thus the outcome of the general election has thrown a fresh challenge to the genuine left in the country to mobilise the masses against the consolidation of a repressive state as well as the threat of fascism. The New Democratic Party, as the main Marxist Leninist party in the country has a major role to play in uniting the genuine left among the Sinhalese to mobilise for that historic task.

Post-Poll Politics in Post-War Sri Lanka

Asvaththamaa

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past.

- Karl Marx

Introduction

Sri Lanka had its first post-war parliamentary general election in April 2010. The ruling United People Freedom Alliance won a landslide victory but in the process new trends have emerged, that will decide Sri Lanka's future and need to be analysed in the post-war context. Competitive elections are the lifeblood of democracy in the West and theoretical formulations that strongly influence the subfield of democratization define democracy largely in terms of competitive contests for votes to occupy public office (Dahl 1989, 1998; Schumpeter 1976). Even scholars wary of the "electoralist fallacy" of equating elections with democracy (Schmitter & Karl 1991; O'Donnell 1998) do not suggest that democratization can occur without instituting competitive elections at some point. Consequently, competitive elections have become the cornerstone of the process of democratization and to many an end in and of themselves — as showcased in the US-led campaign in Iraq. This raises many questions on the concept of 'democracy'.

In Western liberal democratic tradition, elections mean 'democracy at work'. But the reality is that representative democracy brings very little to real democracy. Dangerously naïve generalisations hailing electoral democracy make it hard to understand its reality. Such regression into intellectual infancy occurs when people begin to notice that the victims and perpetrators often exchange roles on a regular basis, in the name of democracy. For the West, democracy is, in the least, a political system based on free, competitive and regular elections. It presumes space for opposition movements and political parties representing a significant

range of voter choice and whose leaders can openly compete for and be elected to positions of power in government (Schumpeter 1976). The concepts of 'liberal' (Diamond 1996) and 'substantial' democracy (Kaldor & Vejvoda 1999) extend the key elements of free competition to include political and civic rights (freedoms of speech, association, religion etc.), the notion of the rule of law, inclusive citizenship and civil society. This is how the West seeks to interpret democracy. Since the recently concluded elections in Sri Lanka fit these definitions, can one say that democracy has returned to Sri Lanka? The elections have only opened a Pandora's Box, and attempt is made in this article to examine and explain the dangers of reducing democracy to elections.

The elections were broadly welcomed as a post-war attempt to restore fully fledged democracy to a country which was torn by civil war. Has it been achieved? There are two kinds of response to the question. One is that elections were held and people voted, therefore democracy is back. The other is that the turnout was low and only around 20% voted in the North, once the hotbed of conflict, so democracy has yet to return. Both positions set off from the same 'liberal' perspective that uses elections as the denominator to quantify democracy, and are misleading. Whether free and fair elections can restore democracy and ensure peace in a post-war scenario will also be examined in this article.

The Dilemma of Democracy

In the mid-1970s, two-thirds of all states in the world could be called authoritarian from a Western liberal perspective. The proportion has fallen dramatically; less than a third is now called authoritarian, and the number of parliamentary democracies is growing (Potter *et al.* 1997). Democracy has become the fundamental standard of political legitimacy today. But the reality has been that the state has been re-articulated so that authoritarianism is exercised in the name of democracy. Several highly authoritarian states are considered to be democratic. In India, "the biggest democracy in the world" the state is at war with its own people in many regions.

The point to be noted is that return of democracy or a democratic state does not guarantee citizens their legitimate rights. Democracy has become a means by which one gains the legitimacy to be reckoned with despite the practice of non-democratic or liberal democratic values. This has been the case with Sri Lanka as well. The notion of democracy and its interpretation are not questioned by the ruling party and the opposition, which are both elitist and equate democracy to free-market capitalism. So they uphold the position that elections are the only way to retain democracy, the only game they know and play well to pass the 'power' ball back and forth between themselves.

“Modern democratic states” want other states to play the game of equating elections to democracy. The players who share the game among themselves become very uncomfortable when someone starts to question their notion of democracy or calls upon the public to boycott elections. This was witnessed in the Sri Lankan Presidential election of January 2010.

At present, the United National Party (UNP) — the main parliamentary opposition party — protests that there is no democracy in the country. But the moral and ethical right of the UNP to say this is questionable since it ruled the country in a way much like what it is now. One can even say that the ruling party took its cue from the UNP. This goes to show that, as suggested earlier, that such concern for democracy is meaningless when ‘victims and perpetrators often exchange roles’ for the same political motive. No one really wants to change the system to make it equal for all and ensure everyone’s rights.

The idea of a political community of fate — of a self-determining collective — can no longer meaningfully be located within the boundaries of a nation-state alone. Some of the most fundamental forces and processes which determine the nature of life-chances within and across political communities are now beyond the reach of individual nation-states. The system of national political communities still persists — but articulated through complex economic, organisational, administrative, legal and cultural processes and structures which limit and check its role. If such processes and structures are not acknowledged and brought into the political process themselves, they may bypass or circumvent the democratic state system.

In liberal democracies, consent to government and legitimacy for governmental action depend upon electoral politics and the ballot box. Yet, the notion that consent legitimates government, and that the ballot box is the appropriate mechanism whereby the citizen body as a whole periodically confers authority on government to enact laws and regulate economic and social life, becomes problematic as soon as the nature of a relevant community is contested.

Voting in the North

The general election was the third election to take place in Jaffna since the three decade long civil war, with its roots in Jaffna, ended. The voter turn out has been very low — at around 18-20% — in all three elections, and pessimism about the present political system dominated the public mood. In fact, the “International Community”, NGOs calling themselves Civil Society, intellectuals, academics and social figures called for integration, pleading and promoting the view that elections will return the Tamils in the North to mainstream politics. But the people frustrated

all attempts to return them to the system. This is a unique phenomenon in Sri Lankan politics and an important trend in the post-war electoral context that needs to be carefully addressed.

Why did the people stay away from voting? Why the pessimism? What does electoral politics hold for the Tamils in the North? These questions need answers. But the government and the elected representatives from the North do not want to know, because the answers will reveal that the people in the North do not accept the government, or have faith in the government or their elected representatives. This is a pitfall that naïve belief that 'elections bring democracy' leads to.

But the government and the elected representatives discuss the verdict of the people based on their share of the votes cast. The government says that it will talk to the elected representatives from the North, and the elected representatives say they have the mandate of the people, although only around 18% had voted. The democratic issue at stake is whether the government and the so called 'representatives of the Tamils of the North' care about the people in the North or their concerns. The answer seems to be in the negative because, soon after the war ended, the government proceeded to hold elections to the Jaffna Municipal Council, when many people felt that the elections were untimely, since 300, 000 fellow Tamils were held behind barbed wire in security camps. But greed for power and opportunism got the better of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and other Tamil political parties and they chose to contest. Despite the near total rejection of the polls by the people, the TNA and the government declared that democracy has returned to North. The logic was cruelly simple: elections mean democracy; the North has had elections; therefore democracy has returned to the North.

Chauvinism to the Fore in Colombo

The general perception that Sinhala chauvinism is a child of the Deep-South of Sri Lanka and is kept alive by the politics of the South was proven false by the recent parliamentary elections. The distribution of preference votes gathered by Wimal Weerawansa and Champika Ranawaka — extreme advocates of Sinhala chauvinism, with the latter fringing on fascism — showed how deeply embedded Sinhala chauvinism has become among the educated Sinhala middle class. Both contested in Colombo to come first and third, respectively, in the list of preferential votes in the district. This can be understood only with insight into the way Sinhala chauvinism grooms itself. Asserting that Sinhala chauvinism prevails among the toiling Sinhala masses only serves to deny the prospect of working class unity transcending ethnicity. To construct the Sinhalese as a group of chauvinists and the Tamils one of narrow nationalist extremists will destroy the prospect of the two nationalities working together for a common cause. The elite and the educated middle

class in Colombo, in their self-interest, play a vital role in segregating the nationalities. To that end, they opt for ultra nationalist politicians to represent them. A matching trend was evident in the North, where the educated urban middle classes voted for the TNA to keep their nationalistic project alive. The two approaches share a common purpose in not wanting the working class to unite, for such unity poses a threat to their elitist aspirations.

Wealthy, intelligent and fairly open liberal societies have bred fascism in the name of patriotism. Moreover, the ideological and organizational route of the fascists has been re-oriented through democracy. Fascists have thus been foremost in inventing a “crisis of democracy” and propagandising it. Fascists saw themselves as political visionaries who would create a new society in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. It is no different in Sri Lanka today. In a speech in Berlin in 1933, the young French sociologist Raymond Aron, who was later to become a noted champion of liberalism and democracy, attested that the “totalitarian regimes are authentically revolutionary, [while] the democracies are essentially conservative”. Fascism was not only reactionary and conservative, but also a capitalistic. Thus, in the Sri Lankan context, Sinhala nationalism, patriotism, Sinhala chauvinism, religious extremism and capitalism fall in line only in the fascist context; and the educated middle class has chosen fascists to represent them in parliament. History tells us that all fascists were imperialists and racists. Modern day fascism uses the pretext of democracy to come to power and draws its sustenance from nationalism at large. Anti-Semitism, acceptance of parliamentary democracy, celebration of militarism, and imperialism have been the characteristics of fascism.

Rethinking Democracy

Fareed Zakaria, Editor of Newsweek International, refers to as liberal democracies a number of states with formal voting that can claim to be democracies in some sense, but many of which use elections to legitimize autocracy in the name of democracy. In many formal democracies, elections have not only failed to resolve ethnic conflicts but also exacerbated them because they are so threatening to the losers who know that they risk losing all. Zakaria notes in his insightful article:

Once an ethnic group is in power, it tends to exclude other ethnic groups. Compromise seems impossible; one can bargain on material issues like housing, hospitals, and handouts, but how does one split the difference on ethnicity? Political competition that is so divisive can rapidly degenerate into violence. Opposition movements, armed rebellions, and coups in Africa have often been directed against ethnically based regimes, many of which came to power through elections (Zakaria 1997: 36).

Thus, democracy is no panacea and can even increase the potential for violent conflict between competing ethnic, religious, and regional communities. Elections as the key democratic device have served to deepen ethnic differences and leave problems unresolved. There are several other instances where relatively free elections have repeatedly failed to produce regimes acceptable to all ethno-religious factions and instead turned into opportunities for the winners to reward their ethnic supporters, but leave others dissatisfied.

The problem with generalisations about democracy is not only that there are large differences between individual systems, but also that many of those who propose to spread democratic reforms around the world, particularly Americans, hardly realise how democracy evolved in the West, where it originated, and how it developed in the Anglo-American context and in a very different way in France. Great Britain, France, and the US are the three major power examples of democratic development, but 21st Century advocates of democratization rarely reflect on how the three countries became “democratic”.

Anthony Marx’s comparison of the US and South Africa forcefully makes the point that white nationalism was consolidated after wars between white communities, by marginalizing blacks and defining them as “others” who were not part of the nation. In a more recent work (Marx 2003) he extends this argument to the origins of French and English nationalism that united disparate regions and communities by defining on religious grounds the excluded, hostile “other”. English national unity was forged on anti-Catholicism in the 16th and 17th Centuries, and French nationalism on anti-Protestantism. Thus, the comforting story of how the French, English, and Americans overcame communal divisions by being inclusively “civic” and democratic is belied by historical reality, and all had their share of internal wars and persecution of selected communities. He also suggests that creation of unity from diversity requires the exclusion of some and finding an enemy against whom to unite a majority. Only when that is achieved and there is a strong sense of nationhood can democracy work because different communal interests then become secondary to an overriding national cause. Bargaining instead of engaging in civil war becomes relatively easy, and democratic elections can pick winners and losers amicably. Because of shared national values, losers need no longer fear dispossession. A consistent theme of Tilly (1975) is that there is ample evidence that all strong European nations emerged from warfare that united them against outsiders, and that democracy, where it emerged, did so through struggles that were often violent.

Where does this leave us, other than to urge states beset by ethnic, religious, or sectional conflicts to decide whom to persecute and exclude to unite “the nation”, and then to get involved in desperate wars with

neighbours to integrate those who constitute “the nation”. Is this the way to establish a national unity that enables stable democracy?

To create a working democracy, it may be necessary to create a sense that the nation becomes the central political identity of all, or almost all within the state's borders (Greenfeld 1992). That involves tolerant assimilation of some kind, as in the case of white immigrants in the US. So can forced assimilation as in France where many ethnic and religious minorities acquired a French identity. Segregation will survive as long as segregated communities remain marginalized to the point of irrelevance, and yet it will serve to unite a majority against the segregated minority as was the case in the US for almost a century after the Civil War. Achieving full democracy in the US meant ending segregation to move towards some form of tolerant assimilation. (Many Americans call it multi-culturalism, but it is mislabelling of the reality). Genocide and ethnic cleansing can also work. In a way, the Western notion of liberal democracy prescribes new genocides or brutal attempts to assimilate recalcitrant communities to dominant national identities, in the pretext of creating the harmony necessary for democracy to work

Thus to maintain ‘democracy’ — as understood in the West — scholars argue that “to promote tolerant democracy the elites of various communities based on region, ethnicity, or religion had to be reassured that they would not lose their property, local power, or opportunities to gain from being part of the state. However, it is at least, if not more, important to protect communal leaders, that is, the elites who are also seen as the protectors of their communities against other competing groups”. (Barany & Moser 2009) It is needed to restate a new articulation is needed to rethink democracy from a completely different lens. Only by doing that democracy in actual terms can be bought back into the political arena to explain it for the most of the Third World.

Conclusions

We hear a great deal about “the triumph of liberal democracy”, yet there is much to object to in our own “actually existing democracy” and the project of a critical social theory of the limits of democracy in late capitalist societies remains as relevant as ever. Sri Lanka is a good example for the occurrence of autocracy and exclusion of ethnic minorities in the name of democracy, which illustrates the invalidity of Western notions of democracy. Many who call for restoring democracy do not call for a democracy where rights of the people are ensured but for the return of nominal electoral democracy as understood in the West. Most of them want to prolong at any cost the capitalist market oriented system in Sri Lanka. Return of democracy is to them the state abiding by the conditions laid down by the IMF conditions to privatise the economy. Their concern for democracy was that they did not control their fair share

of the market and, once that share is assured, questions of democracy and human rights violations will cease to exist. Then, along with the “International Community” they will become strong supporters of the state. Hence the struggle for real democracy is manifold and poses enormous challenges. Taking up the challenge is the only way to restore the rights of the people in Sri Lanka.

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NDP Diary

NDP Statement to the Media

Revolutionary May Day 2010

28th April 2010

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Party issued the following statement to mark the forthcoming May Day.

The main questions that are bound to be raised on the May Day of this year will be about the ways and means that the President and the government headed by him will use to deal with the impending economic crisis, the daily woes of life suffered by the workers, peasants and other toiling masses, and the lack of a solution to the national question, which was the cause of the war. Will the answers to these questions be truthful and democratic? Will, on the other hand, solutions be dodged, democracy denied and a dictatorship put in place, using the power of parliamentary majority and dominance by the family? The President and the government headed by him need to give the due answer to these questions on this May Day. The New Democratic Party emphatically demands it on this May Day.

Following the victory in the war last year, President Mahinda Rajapaksa has won the presidency with executive power, parliamentary governmental power and domination by his family. The expectation of the people is about what blessings the President who has accumulated all this power and the government headed by him have to offer the people to face the enormous problems faced by them.

The daily soaring cost of living should be controlled and wage increases granted to workers in the state and private sectors. The Workers' Charter introduced by the present President some years ago and then abandoned should be duly introduced and implemented. In particular, the plantation workers in the Hill Country who have been denied their due increases in wage should be granted wage increases in keeping with the cost of living. Besides, solutions should be found for essential problems faced by them such as housing, land, education, employment opportunities and health.

At the same time, the environment of triumphalist arrogance of winning the war should be changed and a just solution should be put forward for national question. At the same time, due relief and

compensation should be granted without partiality and delay to people who have been affected by war, are displaced and are suffering. They should be resettled in their own habitat and rehabilitated.

Along with these, the State of Emergency and legislation such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act should be repealed. All persons detained without inquiry in prisons and detention camps should be released. Guarantees should be given to ensure that the restrictions, attacks and killings faced by the media so far will not continue. Democratic, trade union and human rights should be duly observed and a democratic and free environment created for the people to live in peace.

Also, the plunder of national resources by foreign multi-national companies in the name of development should be stopped and liberal imports and infiltration of private capital halted. It is thus that the trend of neo-colonisation of the country can be arrested. If President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his government fail to take urgent planned actions to that end, a situation will arise in which the workers, peasants, other toiling masses and the oppressed nationalities will be compelled to get on to the streets to struggle to win their rights. Those in power should realise that, at this moment, when an international situation is developing in which the working people and other toiling masses are struggling for their rights, it is inevitable that struggles will break out in Sri Lanka too against forces of foreign domination, and should act accordingly. Otherwise the workers, peasants, other toiling masses and the oppressed nationalities will have no way but to carry forward struggles. This is the May Day Message of the New-Democratic Party.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDP Statement to the Media

Let us Build a New Political Base

14th April 2010

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Party released the following statement to the media on behalf of the Politburo of the Party the following statement on the recently concluded parliamentary general election.

The people of the North have expressed their deep frustration and disgust in the recently concluded parliamentary general election. The low polling rate of 18% is a consequence of that. By this they have delivered a mighty blow to the leadership of political dominance that carried forward the reactionary policies of Tamil nationalism and delivered the Tamils

into a political desert. It is ridiculous for the Tamil National Alliance, which secured a mere 9% of the total vote by lavish spending and other dubious means, to boast that it represents the Tamil people. The results of the election have shown that it only represents the elite and conservative sections of the Tamil people and not the vast majority comprising the toiling Tamil public.

At the same time, there are others who have submitted to chauvinistic parties and acted as their agents to carry forward their politics of concessions to win the votes of the working people by plunging them into a new form of slavery. The sums spent for the purpose is said to be in crores of rupees. Besides, there were several independent groups launched by the ruling alliance that have spent crores of rupees to buy votes and thereby develop a culture of bribery.

Under these conditions, the New-Democratic Party contested the elections, putting forward a clear political line and emphasising alternative politics for the people. It used the occasion of the election to point out the need for the working people to carry forward alternative politics for the people, transcending electoral politics, and to seek the approval of the people for it. Its purpose was that this stand should be carried forward by working class forces in the North-East and the Hill Country. It should be noted that the Party, in the course of its journey towards alternative politics for the people, emphasised among the people during its election campaign the need for the emergence of a progressive form of Tamil nationalism and its advancement in solidarity with genuine left, democratic and progressive forces.

That the voting in the parliamentary general election was low at a little over 50% for the country illustrates the growing frustration of the people about the bourgeois parliamentary system. At the same time, frustration among the Tamil people manifested as a polling rate of 18%.

On the one hand, all reactionary forces and the media strove to uphold, in the name of Tamil nationalism, the Tamil conservative politics of domination. Some of the media cast aside their cloaks of media norms and neutrality to expose their true selves. Guidance and plentiful funding from foreign forces, especially the Indian ruling classes, were behind them. The low polling rate humiliated them.

On the other hand the two chauvinistic parties who, without putting forward a programme or pledge regarding a political solution for the basic problem of the Tamils, offered minor concessions through their agents and used their power, financial resources and irregular practices, secured only a modest number of votes. The general election has shown that, although they have secured parliamentary seats with such small number of votes, none of them could gain as votes the approval and support of the vast majority of the people.

The two chauvinistic parties used various irregular practices and financial resources through the leaders of trade union and political domination to secure the votes of the Hill Country Tamils. The Hill Country Tamils have fallen for the usual acts of deception. It is by exploiting the backward and politically unenlightened condition of the Hill Country Tamils through their respective devious agents comprising leaders of trade union political domination that they have secured parliamentary representation of the Hill Country Tamils.

Under such circumstances the Party, based on its policy and proposing an alternative politics for the people, contested the general election in the Districts of Jaffna and Nuwara Eliya with its Marxist Leninist left identity. It has contested the election, firm in principle and without surrendering its leftist individuality to any ruling class party, and in a way that evoked confidence among the new generation.

The Party takes this opportunity to thank all those who dissented with the degenerate ways of bourgeois parliamentary politics to vote for it, and local and foreign friendly forces who supported it. The Party pledges to persist in its line of mass struggle to carry forward alternative politics for the people, transcending electoral politics.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDP Statement to the Media

NDP in the Parliamentary Elections

27th February 2010

The New-Democratic Party is contesting the forthcoming parliamentary general election as independent groups in the Jaffna District and the Nuwara Eliya District. In the Jaffna District, Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the Party is the leading candidate, and in the Nuwara Eliya District, Comrade E Thambiah, National Organiser of the Party is the leading candidate. In the Jaffna District the Party is contesting as Independent Group 6 and in the Nuwara Eliya District as Independent Group 5. In both districts the symbol is “the kettle”.

The Party, contesting the election on the theme “Towards an alternative politics for the people”, appeals to the people that they should vote with clarity and far sight in a way that will let them decide their own fate. Through that, it will be possible for them to reject the conservative politics of dominance and create a basis for the mass political path along which the left, democratic and progressive nationalist forces can mobilise. The Party believes that it could be the starting point for the

alternative political journey for the people. It appeals to the people of the North-East and the Hill Country to use the general election fully to mobilise towards that alternative politics.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDP Parliamentary Candidates

Jaffna District (Independent Group No. 6)

Comrades SK Senthivel; K Kathirgamanathan; TV Krishnasamy; K Anandakumarasamy, K. Pancharatnam; A Thangarajah; K Sothilingam; K Mahadevan; S Thavarasa, S Anpukkarasu; T Krishnakumar; and T Ramkumar.

Nuwara Eliya District (Independent Group No. 5)

Comrades E Thambiah; U Jayaratnam; D Vethanayagam; P Thamizhvanan; M Thiruchelvam; M Sivaraj; L Janan; V Prabakaran; V. Vasanthakokilan; and S Vimalraj.

NDP May Day Rallies

Jaffna

The New-Democratic Party held its May Day rally in Jaffna at the Trimmer Hall. Comrade K Kathirgamanathan, Secretary, Northern Regional Organisation of the NDP, chaired the May Day Rally, which was addressed by Comrades SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the Party, S Thevarajah, Member of the Politburo, K Thanikasalam of the Dhesiya Kalai Ilakkiyap Peravai, TV Krishnasamy, K Panchalingam of the Nava Lanka Trade Union, teacher's trade unionist M Thiyagaraja and other trade union delegates. The rally emphasized the need for the people to charter an alternative political path with a fresh political outlook that would reject narrow nationalism of all kinds and be firmly anti-imperialist and anti-hegemonic, and demanded rehabilitation for people who suffered losses owing to the war and rights of the working people and called for an alternative political path for the people.

Hatton

Comrade E Thambiah, National Organiser of the NDP chaired the NDP May Day Rally in Hatton held at the Shakthi Hall. He called for the unconditional release of all the political prisoners, and exposed the rising neo-colonial attack and the imperialist and hegemonist control over post-

war Sri Lanka, citing conditions imposed on the government to approve loans secured at the height of the military operations.

The Rally demanded the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and other repressive laws, the lifting of Emergency Regulations, the release of all political prisoners, a just political solution the national question, the recognition of Hill Country Tamils as a distinct nationality and ensuring their national aspirations, a wage scheme with fair and regular pay rises for the plantation workers, a university for Hill Country Tamils, and ensuring an appropriate proportion of women in employment and in representation in all elected bodies including Parliament.

Comrade V Mahendran announced the events. Comrade S Paneerselvam, Secretary, Hill Country Organization of the NDP and Member, Walapane Pradeshya Sabha, Comrades S Rajan (Students' Wing), Ranjan (Proletarian New Democratic Workers' Union), V Dinakaran (New Teachers' Path), Manel (Women's Wing), Mahendran (Cultural Wing), and Suren (Youth Wing) addressed the Rally. Comrades T Pradeesh, John, Siva Rajendran, Ganesh and V Dinakaran rendered revolutionary songs.

Ratnapura

The first ever May Day rally of the Party in the Ratnapura District was held at Kawaththa jointly with the United Left Workers Union. The meeting was chaired by Comrade Ganapathy of the ULWU and addressed by Comrades Mohanraj Nelson, Pushparajan, Vijayakumar and others. The rally highlighted the problems of the plantation workers, and called for a new path for the working class in the face of the deepening political and economic crisis.

Vavuniya

Comrade K Soodamani chaired the May Day Seminar of the New-Democratic Party in Vavuniya. The national and international political situations and the future of the working class struggle and struggles for liberation were discussed in some detail.

[Excerpts of speeches at the NDP May Day meetings will be published in the next issue of New Democracy.]

Sri Lankan Events

The Bread Crumb Queue

While the scramble for ministerial posts is still on among the left out government MPs, opposition MPs are desperately searching for pretexts to break ranks with their parties and erstwhile partners to creep into government. There are signs that at least two of the thirteen MPs of the Tamil National Alliance are ready to jump the queue even before the TNA leadership can broker— jointly with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress — a deal with the government, of course with the help of their patrons in Delhi. Mano Ganesan, leader of the Colombo-based Democratic People's Front, infuriated by the denial of a parliamentary seat following his defeat in Kandy and refusal of a national list seat by the UNP leadership — struggling to meet demands from within the UNP for the handful of national list seats — has threatened revenge, so that his brother Prabha Ganesan, elected from Colombo, can make up for lost time in the ranks of the government. Discontent with the leader of the UNP is bound to lengthen the queue at the gates of the ruling alliance. But President Rajapaksa has only a few crumbs left to throw, and can pick and choose the beneficiaries at will.

The Revolt in the UNP

The quarrels within the UNP about the leadership concern rearranging the political hierarchy and have little to do with policy. The reforms that are debated are about “changing the pillow to cure a persistent headache”. The leader's lack of charisma was a factor that contributed to poor performance at elections since 2005, but the more important reason is that the UNP has no political alternative that appeals to the people.

By the 1980s the UNP succeeded in destroying the SLFP as a party of the national bourgeoisie. It now faces an amorphous power group called the United People's Freedom Alliance and a leader who have surpassed the UNP in exploiting presidential powers and using chauvinist war mongering to hold on to power. The UNP has little choice but to wait passively for the UPFA government to lose popularity, but what it could find is the emergence of a fascist dictatorial regime in the face of massive public protest. The UNP, which created the Frankenstein monster called the Executive Presidency, is the least eligible to mobilise the people against such dictatorship, and is more likely to find itself as a partner in that dictatorial regime.

The Presidential Pardon

Reputed editor and columnist JS Tissanayagam whose arrest in March 2008, detention, and sentencing to 20 years in jail in August 2009 met with strong protests across the world, which also found expression in, nevertheless highly deserved, awards for courageous journalism from the *Reporters Sans Frontieres* and the Committee to Protect Journalists in 2009, as well as being named the Foreign Journalist of the Year at the British Press Awards in 2010. He was released on bail in January pending the outcome of the appeal against his sentence and granted a full pardon by the President on 3rd May. The presidential pardon has been welcomed nationally and internationally. But several journalists remain detained for indefinite periods by the state under the same laws and emergency powers. Thus the struggle to rid the country of the repressive laws and the State of Emergency should be intensified.

Snubbing the Media

Who is minister for what matters little in a government dominated by the extended First Family. But some of the appointments are symbolically significant. The brief appointment of Mr Mervin Silva as junior Media Minister seems to be a clear signal to the mass media — which has during the past five years been protesting about violence, threats and restrictions against the media, and pointed at Mervin Silva as a major culprit — about where they stand vis-à-vis the government.

Telling off the Big Powers

Now that the elections have been won, the need to foul mouth the West for raising issues of human rights and war crimes could diminish. Also the imperialist masters are now more conciliatory in their comments, in anticipation of better cooperation from the government — not so much in matters of human and fundamental rights — but in matters that concern imperialist globalization and global domination. Cabinet changes will allow toning down on the attacks against imperialist meddling without loss of face, but not altogether as long as matters of human rights and war crimes are raised to maintain appearances that the 'democratic' West is still concerned about such matters.

Their Evening

Uurvasi

**On a day that dragged on without shade –
sun blazing, the sorrowful caw of a lonely crow.**

**The quiet of the midnight
when the *murungai* at the fence shed leaves in silence.
The lapwing screeches in loneliness.
His *vetti* swings on the clothes line.
Fear freezes the heart:
mind suffers the suffocation of waiting alone and awake.**

**What made a deep impression in my mind
early this evening returns: fear begins to tug –
that evening with darkness frozen within.
Five jeeps together stirred dust.
The south westerly wind blew hard –
they dragged him away, fear gathering deep in my heart.
Only the gecko on the wall uttered something.
In fear, the roof sheets clattered softly.
The child at my feet screamed –
neighbours gathering in curiosity.
He walked away with them –
outstretched rifles pressing at his back.
The impressions made in me by the hands
bearing fifty rifles made a burden of sorrow.**

**That evening –
was theirs.**

(written probably around 1980)

World Events

ASIA

Afghanistan: Deepening Trouble

The website *Icasualties.org* said that number of US troops killed in Afghanistan passed 1,000 in March, coinciding with one of the biggest offensives against the Taliban in the Marjah District of Helmand. The escalation of war has added more to the misery of civilians many of whom have been killed by indiscriminate bombing by the forces of occupation. Civilian killings rose from 1523 in 2007 to 2118 in 2008 and 2412 in 2009, and have added to the anger of the people against the foreign troops. The casualty rate for 2010 is likely to be far more.

Embarrassed by the civilian killings and worried by falling popularity, President Hamid Karzai turned on his US allies. On 1st April, three days after Barack Obama's first visit to Afghanistan, during which Obama asked Karzai to address corruption in his administration, Karzai hit back by blaming foreigners and in particular Peter Galbraith, the US diplomat who worked for the UN in Kabul until 2009, for the charges of fraud that tarnished his re-election in August 2009. Galbraith made matters worse by suggesting in a public response to Karzai that Karzai's "mental stability" was in question and that Karzai could have a drug abuse problem. Attempts by Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton on 2nd April to ease the situation failed and Karzai went on to repeat his claims to Afghan MPs and rhetorically threatened to "join the Taliban" if foreigners continued to interfere in the country's affairs. Although he regained some popularity among the people by standing up for Afghan sovereignty, the ruling elite was displeased with implications for the critical Afghan-US relationship. Thus the Afghan government, in a move seemingly aimed at smoothing relations with the US, announced that the much criticised head and deputy head of the country's election commission has stepped down and will not oversee September's parliamentary vote.

The worsening relations between the US and Karzai and developments in the region can only make things worse for the US-led forces. But US imperialism is unlikely to learn that its war is unwinnable until its final defeat.

Sources: *irinnews.org*, *guardian.co.uk*

Indonesia: Killers Exposed

Investigative journalist Allan Nairn risked possible arrest by exposing that US-backed Indonesian armed forces assassinated a number of civilian activists in 2009. His article of 19th March in “*Democracy Now!*” described how Kopassus, Indonesia’s special forces, armed and trained by the US, ran a program of assassination of political activists, and charged that General Sunarko, a Kopassus general in Aceh, coordinated the assassination of at least eight activists of the pro-independence Partai Aceh in 2009 in the run-up to the local elections there. Sunarko who guided the militias that burned 80% of the buildings in Timor and conducted massacres on a massive scale in 1999 was trained by mobile training teams of the US Pacific Command in jungle warfare, logistics and many other subjects, as recently as 2006.

Since Nairn broke the news of the assassination program, the Indonesian press has been buzzing with the allegations. The Indonesian army had threatened to charge him with criminal defamation, which could mean a sentence of four to six years. On 24th March, Nairn challenged the Army to arrest him. His trial could embarrass not just the Indonesian Army but also the US officials, who have been arming and training an Indonesian army that has been killing civilians.

Nairn reminded that the Indonesian military has always been getting military aid from the US, much of it curtailed after the 1991 massacre in Dili, East Timor and almost completely stopped since the 1999 massacre across East Timor following the overwhelming vote for independence. In recent years US military aid has been slowly restored.

According to Indonesian defence sources 2800 Indonesian military personnel are being trained in the US, which is now selling some weapons and equipment to the armed forces. The CIA and other covert US units are involved in extensive programs with the Indonesian military and police, and Obama wants to encourage that trend. If Obama not stopped by Congress and the US public from going ahead with his plan, it will effectively be the ultimate green light to the Indonesian armed forces and their dreaded special forces, Kopassus, to do what they want to the public, and survivors of their terror are very worried about this.

Comment based on

www.democracynow.org/2010/3/24/exclusivejournalist_allan_nairn_facing_possible_arrest

www.democracynow.org/2010/3/19/exclusiveindonesian_forces_tapped_by_obama_for

www.democracynow.org/2010/1/6/obama_has_kept_the_machine_set

India: People Resist

Maoists strike a deadly blow

Near dawn on 6th April, Maoist fighters killed 76 members of the 62nd Battalion of the paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force and critically wounded eight others in the Dantewada District, Chhattisgarh at a location surrounded by hilly terrain and dense forest, on the Chintalnaar-Tademetla road, 540 km south of the state capital. The members of the CPRF returning to Chintalnaar after a three-day 'area domination' operation were entrapped by Maoist fighters who retreated without loss into the forests. The state government has since sought the assistance of the 'anti-Naxal' Greyhound Force in Andhra Pradesh and the Special Operation Group in Orissa to fight the Maoists.

Leading human and democratic rights organisations have held that the deaths were a fallout of the government's policy of pursuing 'Operation Greenhunt' and denounced the government's policy of waging war against its own people. Democratic and progressive forces across India have pointed out that the tribal people had justly opposed MOU's signed by the state governments with mining and other industrial conglomerates and the consequent land grab, forest displacement, and river water privatization, and called for the peaceful resolution of the issues without forcing the will of the government on the people.

Sources: *dnaindia.com*, *indianvanguard.wordpress.com*

Operation Greenhunt in Orissa

The much-delayed anti-people offensive, Operation Greenhunt along the Orissa-Chhattisgarh border was launched in the last week of March by the Border Security Force, backed by the Special Operation Group of Orissa police and the CRPF and armed with sophisticated weapons, GPS systems, night-vision binoculars, landmine detectors. The combined forces, despite day and night operations and deep forays into the jungles of Malkangiri and Koraput, had no tangible result to show.

The combined forces seek to gain foothold of the areas before the onset of monsoon in early June. The Operation scheduled to start in October 2009 was delayed owing to friction between the State police and three battalions of CRPF stationed in southern districts.

On 2nd April, around 7000 tribal people staged protests against Operation Green Hunt. Led by Kanda Reddy Unnayan Sangha (KRUS), the protesters, holding posters and banners, marched towards the District Headquarters, Malkangiri demanding an end to Operation Green Hunt

and presented a memorandum to the authorities that the tribals will be the worst affected in the anti-Maoist operation since they will be caught in the fighting and will not be able to go into the forest to collect forest produce. They also demanded supply of drinking water, health care and other basic facilities in tribal villages.

Source: *southasiarev.wordpress.com*

Nepal: Emerging Situations

Threatening peace

Despite the 28th May 2010 deadline for the drafting of the New Constitution drawing close, little progress has been made by the 22-party coalition government cobbled up in India and led by Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, owing to disagreements on the structure of the national government and the creation of federal states.

Comrade Basanta, member of the Central Committee of the United Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist, in an interview with the Party of the Committees to Support Resistance – for Communism, Italy in March, observed: “... we are now in the constituent assembly to draft a new constitution that opens the way forward to resolving the fundamental contradictions of the society. However, the domestic and foreign reactionaries are conspiring to dissolve the constituent assembly, impose presidential rule and push the country into civil war in order to maintain the status quo. Till the last we will be struggling hard to write people's constitution and establish a people's republic from the constituent assembly but we will not at any cost let them reverse the process. We are prepared to defeat them by people's insurrection if the reactionaries impose unjust civil war upon the Nepalese people”.

On 31st March, Comrade Baburam Bhattarai, Vice Chairman, UCPN-Maoist, in response to statements hostile to federalism and secularism, said that the People's War was not over yet and that the Maoists could continue the war until their goal is won. He added that “We had decided to develop People's Liberation Army (PLA) to seven divisions during the Chunbang meeting with an intention to lead both the peaceful and the armed movement together so as to achieve our goal.”

On 6th April, Comrade Prachanda, Chairman, UCPN-Maoist, during a rally marking the fourth anniversary of a popular uprising against the monarchy, demanded the resignation of the government for hampering the peace process. He called for a "national unity government" led by the UCPN-Maoist to save the faltering peace process, and warned of agitation

to dislodge the government to uphold civilian supremacy and national integrity, and for the timely drafting of a new constitution.

The United Nations' Political Mission in Nepal, whose useful role in upholding ceasefire in Nepal has been resented by India, has indicated desire to quit when its term ends this year, owing to difficulties created by government politicians. The death in January of former Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, who enabled the entry of the Maoists to mainstream politics in 2006, and whose commitment to peace and democracy are held in high esteem by the Maoists, does not auger well for peace in Nepal.

The Nepal Army is said to be restive and high ranking generals met in March to discuss in secret strategies in the event of a failure to draft the constitution on time. Rookmangud Katawal, the controversial former Nepal army chief, said on 9th April that democratic forces have got weaker after Koirala's demise and that the army will not remain quiet if there is bloodshed and turmoil in the event of the Constituent Assembly failing to promulgate the new constitution in time.

On 1st May, between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people took to the streets in Kathmandu in a dramatic show of force by the UCPN-Maoist, demanding a return to civilian rule and a democratic process of creating a new, pro-people constitution. With the government refusing to step down, an indefinite general strike has been called from 2nd May in what the Maoists call a final push to resolve the struggle for power between the poor majority and Nepal's elite. If Nepal is plunged into another prolonged civil war it will clearly be the making of the opportunist ruling alliance prompted by miscreants in India.

Sources: *telegraphnepal.com, thehimalayantimes.com, greenleft.org.au*

Condemning Indian land grab

Between 25.12.2009 and 03.01.2010, Nepal's Parliamentary Committee for International Relations and Human Rights visited 15 districts of Nepal adjoining India; and declared in its report of 17th March that India has occupied vast tracts of Nepali lands at several locations. The Committee concluded that almost all along Nepal's open border with India, Nepali territories are being illegally occupied by India, and blamed past unequal treaties with India for Nepal's trouble in its relations with India, including the border encroachment issue. It recommended the scrapping of the unequal treaty of 1950 between India and Nepal.

Source: *southasiarev.wordpress.com*

Pakistan: Killings continue

On 11th April, Pakistani military killed nearly 100 people in air raids in tribal areas in the country's northwest, in attacks carried out on Saturday in the Orakzai and Khyber regions near the Afghan border.

In Orakzai, 54 people said to be "militants" by the Pakistani army were killed during clashes at a checkpoint near the town of Baizoti. In another raid more than 42 people, allegedly members of Lashkar-e-Islam, were killed in the Tirah area of the Khyber region. The death toll could rise as dozens of others were also injured in the air strike.

The air strike was said to be launched on a tip-off that a meeting of the Lashkar-e-Islam group was going on in Tirah, according to government officials. But according to local witnesses a tribal meeting was hit, following which nearby residents came to pull people out of the rubble. Then a second and, maybe, even a third wave of attacks hit them." The violence came as a Pakistani military offensive against Taliban-allied fighters in Orakzai entered its 18th day.

The UN announced on Friday that the deteriorating security situation in Orakzai and Kurram has forced 200,000 civilians to flee since November last year.

Source: english.aljazeera.net

Kyrgyzstan: A Setback for the US?

Kurmanbek Bakiyev, President of Kyrgyzstan who took power in 2005 in the "Tulip Revolution" — one of several US sponsored 'colour revolutions' — fled the capital, Bishkek, on 7th April following bloody protests against his corrupt, repressive rule.

The demonstrators got the better of the riot police after a day of violent clashes leading to the killing of more than 40 and wounding of over 400 by riot police firing live ammunition into demonstrators who gathered around government buildings. By the morning of 8th April, opposition officials occupied many government buildings in the capital, and demanded formal resignation by Bakiyev. But Bakiyev had told Russian radio that he was in southern Kyrgyzstan and had no plans to quit.

The coalition of opposition parties named former foreign minister, Ms Roza Otunbayeva as head of the transitional government. Notably, the opposition was angered in early 2009 when the Obama administration

persuaded Bakiyev — whom it called an autocrat — to let the US retain rights to the military base, Manas, used to supply troops in Afghanistan.

Responses in the American media suggest that the US is most concerned about a backlash that could affect the American military supply line into Afghanistan, and already flights into the base at Manas had been suspended leading to a delay in the scheduled transport of troops and equipment to Afghanistan.

US attitude toward Bakiyev has made the new government look more to Russia than to the US, and even rebuff the US. It is, however, possible that the US will bribe its way into retaining its base.

Sources: *New York Times*, *Dawn.com*

Thailand: Crackdown and Crack-up

Tens of thousands of “Red Shirts” supporting the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship occupied an area in a historically important part of Bangkok since March 2010. The government declared a state of emergency on 7th April, and the night of 10th April, on orders from the government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, heavily armed troops fought pitched battles in an attempt to wrest back the occupied area from the protesters. It was the worst violence between troops and protesters in Thailand since 1992, when 48 people were killed. The death toll was heavy at 21 (including four soldiers) and several hundred people were injured. The protesters remained defiant and paraded through Bangkok slain comrades and mock coffins on the 12th and 13th demanding the prime minister's resignation. They also set up checkpoints in Bangkok to keep troops at bay.

Abhisit sought to dig in his heels and keep in power his 16-month old government which came to power through backroom deals shaped by the country's powerful military. But pressure mounted from various quarters including the Army, which suggested early elections to resolve the confrontation. Thailand's Election Commission delivered a further blow on 12th April ordering the dissolution of the ruling Democrat Party for alleged misuse of campaign donations. Abhisit announced on 6th May that parliament will be dissolved in the latter half of September to pave way for fresh elections.

The protests that started as a campaign in support of the fugitive former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra have now outgrown the goal of returning Shinawatra to power. The demand for dissolution of parliament and fresh elections have been met; but the issues brought out

by the expose of the chasm between Bangkok's rich and the marginalised rural millions will take long to resolve.

The military crackdown confirmed that the current conflict was class war unlike those of 1973 and 1992 when university students and the middle class of Bangkok rebelled against military dictators.

The left in Thailand is weak and needs to be organized and united, based on a long term anti-imperialist strategy, with campaigns for a genuine democracy and rejection of the role of the armed forces and the police in political affairs. The left has the opportunity to do so by fully being with the masses in the present struggle.

Sources: *ipsnews.net*, *english.aljazeera.net*, *shanghaidaily.com*

The Philippines: Fighting On CPP, NDF and NPA stand on elections

The Communist Party of the Philippines declared that candidates in the reactionary election must recognize the revolutionary government.

Fr. Santiago Salas, spokesperson for the National Democratic Front—Eastern Visayas, while cautioning the people against the Arroyo regime scheming to grab power in the event of election failure, pointed out in his statement of 12th March that “...there are already two governments in the country, two different laws, two different systems of life. If the reactionaries want to campaign in the areas controlled by the revolutionary movement, they must recognize the revolutionary government. This is so because the revolutionary government is safeguarding the best interests of the people, ensuring law and order, and taking care that current programs and policies are not upset by the entrance of candidates in the reactionary election.

“Furthermore, reactionary politicians are only permitted access to the revolutionary areas and not endorsed in any way.... The revolutionary movement does not believe in the election, but many people still hope that it is the means for change. For the revolutionary movement, the people’s democratic revolution is the way to change, and armed struggle is the principal means of struggle.

The New People’s Army of the Philippines made the following observation on the forthcoming elections in the Philippines: “The NPA views elections under a reactionary state as a power struggle amongst various factions of the ruling classes. It neither participates nor can it decide the outcome of these elections. On the other hand, the NPA

upholds that the genuine democratic elections that reflect the peoples' choices take place among local organs of political power organized in revolutionary base areas in the countryside."

Successful tactical attacks by NPA

On 8th March, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) lauded the New People's Army in Mindoro for its successful tactical offensive on 6th March that practically wiped out a platoon of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro. The number of soldiers wiped out in the ambush was the biggest loss so far for government forces this year.

The NPA has stepped up its tactical offensives nationwide and in the first 67 days of 2010 at least 40 AFP officers and soldiers had been killed and 43 wounded in action. The CPP has directed the NPA to launch more tactical offensives in an effort to implement its objective of reaching the strategic stalemate stage of its people's war by mid-decade. Several division-size operations launched in different regions by the AFP since the start of the year have consistently been rebuffed by NPA.

The CPP pointed out that "the fascist enemy forces are bound to commit more and more military fumbles and political foul-ups in their desperation to suppress the Filipino people's revolutionary resistance and stop the relentless growth of people's war nationwide".

Source: *philippinerevolution.net*

Palestine: Zionism in action

Mossad's murderous reach

On 19th January, Israel's international secret police, the Mossad, sent an 18-member death squad to Dubai using European passports, supposedly 'stolen' from Israeli dual citizens and altered with fake photos and signatures, to assassinate the Palestinian leader, Mahmoud al Mabhouh. Mossad had openly stated that Mabhouh was a high priority target who survived three previous assassination attempts, and Israel did even care to deny the murder. Investigation and interrogation of two captured Palestinian Mossad collaborators by the Dubai police confirmed that the Mossad was behind the killing.

Israel's conduct only affirms its publicly-stated policy of violating the sovereignty of any country to kill or abduct its opponents. Israeli law, in proclamation and practice, deems that Israeli actions abroad supersede

the laws and law enforcement agencies of any other state. Most Western critics resent the Mossad mess up since it has made it harder for Western powers to provide Israel with diplomatic cover for its operations abroad. The core issue is that Mossad's acquisition and alteration of official British, French, German and Irish passports of dual Israeli citizens underscores the cynical and sinister nature of Israel's exploitation of its dual citizens in the pursuit of its murderous foreign policy goals. Mossad's use of passports issued by four sovereign European nations to Israeli citizens in order to murder a Palestinian in a Dubai hotel room raises the question of to whom 'dual' Israeli citizens really owe their allegiance and just how far they are willing to go in defending or promoting Israel's overseas assassinations.

(This comment has drawn on the brilliant essay by James Petras titled "Mossad's Murderous Reach: The Larger Political Issues" accessible at www.countercurrents.org/petras220210.htm, among others.

The Jerusalem 'compromise'

Reputed British freelance journalist Jonathan Cook, now based in Nazareth in Israel for over a decade, warned that it would be unwise to assume that the crisis over settlement building in East Jerusalem indicates that the Obama administration plans to get any tougher with Israel on the form of such statehood than its predecessors. He added that the US President lacks the courage to confront Israel.

Benjamin Netanyahu's plans for building of Jewish settlements in occupied East Jerusalem seemed a thorny issue for the White House. But the Obama administration has eased its stance on it since Netanyahu climbed down on two issues of even greater importance to it.

Firstly, Netanyahu agreed to make a "significant gesture" to Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, probably in the form of a prisoner release, providing the pretext for the embittered US favourite Abbas to attend the peace talks overseen by George Mitchell, the US special peace envoy. Secondly, Netanyahu has conceded that Israel will discuss the "core issues" of the conflict — borders, Jerusalem and the Palestinian refugees — ensuring that the negotiations are substantive rather than formal, as he had intended.

The concessions could break up Netanyahu's far-right coalition, to the delight of the US administration which wants Tzipi Livni, the leader of the "centrist" opposition, to join Netanyahu in a new, "peacemaking coalition".

The signs are that Obama will be just as ready to accommodate the Israeli stand on East Jerusalem as the Bush administration was to back

Israel's position on keeping the overwhelming majority of West Bank settlers in their homes on occupied Palestinian land.

Having lost patience with Netanyahu's lip service to Palestinian statehood, the White House appears to have decided that its credibility in the Middle East depends on dragging Israel to the negotiating table. Obama may hope that the outcome of such a process will make US troops safer in Iraq and strengthen his hand in the stand-off with Iran. But it is doubtful that the US actually has the stomach to extract from Israel the concessions needed to create a viable Palestinian state.

Source: *ramallahonline.com*

PFLP stand on negotiations

Comrade Khalida Jarrar, member of the Political Bureau of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in an interview with Jerusalem News Net on 8th April, 2010, called for the development of a united Palestinian strategy that strengthens Palestinian resistance and rejects the failed and dangerous path of negotiations with the occupation.

She emphasized the importance of the political struggle at an international level, stressing that the US is a strategic ally of the Israeli occupier, and that its attempts to replace international law with its own demands, as well as the impositions of conditions upon Palestinians, must be rejected entirely. She said that such conditions only benefit the occupier and that there is nothing to be gained for the Palestinian people by participating in such charades.

She said that any return to "direct" or "indirect" negotiations is a concession to US and Israeli pressures and dictates, and only encourages them to continue their practices of escalating settlements, land confiscations, home demolitions and arrests, empowering and providing cover for their ongoing war against Palestinians.

Further, she said that it is urgent that Palestinian political leaders turn to building Palestinian strength, unity, and national cohesion on the basis of support for people's resistance and clear national principles. Palestinian leaders, she emphasized, have a duty to support and enhance the people's steadfastness in confronting an ongoing, criminal, colonial, racist occupation.

Comrade Jarrar expressed dismay that the Palestinian internal reconciliation is at a standstill, which continues to put the people at a disadvantage despite their ongoing steadfastness in confronting the occupier. She called for elections of a new Palestinian National Council including all forces, as called for in the Cairo Declaration of 2005 laying out a plan for an inclusive, democratic Palestine Liberation Organization,

the establishment of unity among Palestinian forces, and a thorough policy review that rejects negotiations and strengthens resistance.

Source: www.pflp.ps/english

Iraq:

An electoral setback for the US

The radical Shiite leader Moqtada al-Sadr who was effectively driven into exile in Iran two years ago is now in a position to decide who runs Iraq. The inconclusive results of the general election of 7th March left the State of Law bloc led by the outgoing prime minister Nouri al Maliki with 89 seats as opposed to 91 seats for the *al-Iraqiya* (Iraqi National Movement) coalition led by former prime minister Ayad Allawi, with neither group having the 163 seats necessary in the 325-member parliament to form the government. That has placed the National Iraqi Alliance with 70 seats dominated by al-Sadr's group with 40 seats.

Al-Sadr, who believes that the US still has the upper hand, distrusts the US; is implacable about the continuing presence of US forces in Iraq; and has vowed to remain in exile until they leave. He organised an informal 2-day referendum in which another former prime minister, Ibrahim al-Jaafari garnered nearly a quarter of the votes while al-Maliki and Allawi came far behind.

A news commentator for Gulf News observed: "Washington has spent \$900 billion, lost 4386 soldiers and caused the deaths of more than a million civilians. Now, Iran is calling the shots".

On 26th April a Special Elections Court disqualified a winning candidate from the *al-Iraqiya* on charges that he was a loyalist of Saddam Hussain's Ba'ath Party, with the possibility of losing another seat to the State of Law bloc as a result of the disqualification of 51 other losing candidates on the same grounds. That will make *al-Iraqiya* the biggest group with 91 seats, but not alter the overall picture.

Sources: gulfnnews.com, themajlis.org, nytimes.com

Genocidal attack exposed

On 5th April, WikiLeaks (www.wikileaks.org) released a classified US military video depicting the indiscriminate slaying of over a dozen people in the Iraqi suburb of New Baghdad including two news staff of Reuters — which has been trying to obtain the video through the Freedom of Information Act, without success thus far. The video, shot from an Apache helicopter gun-site, clearly shows the unprovoked slaying of a

wounded Reuters employee and his rescuers. Two young children involved in the rescue were also seriously wounded.

US military lawyers are also reviewing the video and, depending on their findings, could reopen an investigation into the incident, Pentagon officials told the Reuters news agency. The leaked footage that has been widely watched online around the world is the latest twist in a three-year saga that has raised questions about the US rules of engagement in battle and the safety of journalists covering wars. The exposure of this war crime and violation of human rights has called into question the eligibility of the US to threaten action against other countries for war crimes and violation of human rights.

Source: www.collateralmurder.com

AFRICA

Egypt: Challenging Mubarak

Protests against an emergency law in effect since 1981 and lack of reforms under President Hosni Mubarak regularly take place in Egypt but are often swiftly quelled. Yet the protests are becoming more frequent and the protesters more militant.

Workers' protests have been on the rise in recent months, and on 30th March some 550 workers from the Tanta Flax and Oils Company continued to protest for the fifth day in the company's factory after early retirement packages were not paid by the Saudi investor who bought Tanta Flax when it was privatised in 2005. A fifteen day sit-in in February led to agreement on an early retirement package of 40,000 Egypt Pounds and the equivalent of two months' wages for over 400 workers who had opted for early retirement. February saw a number of protests by medical staff on matters of wages and fair treatment and by physically disabled persons demanding their right to welfare.

On 12th April, dozens of Egyptian protesters chanting slogans against Mubarak scuffled with police outside a prosecutor's office in central Cairo during a protest against beatings and arrests at an earlier pro-reform demonstration. Two opposition members of parliament at the protest later went to the public prosecutor's office to file a complaint against police for beating up and arresting 90 people during a demonstration last week. The clampdown on that demonstration, in which police also

confiscated reporters' cameras, sparked protest from the US State Department and human rights groups.

Mohamed ElBaradei, former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), last year hinted at his desire to contest the presidency. In early April he called upon opposition parties to boycott the forthcoming parliamentary elections due this autumn to deprive President Mubarak's regime of legitimacy. But it is unlikely that his request will be heeded by the Muslim Brotherhood opposition bloc or political parties in the pay of the government.

The Egyptian state and state-controlled mass media have already started to tarnish the image of ElBaradei, in what is a clear sign that Mubarak sees in ElBaradei a challenge to his authoritarian power.

Sources: www.france24.com, www.zawya.com, www.ikhwanweb.com

Somalia: US Help to Escalate War

The US-backed transitional government, widely accused of corruption, controls only some parts of Somalia including part of the capital, Mogadishu. Having failed to take Mogadishu in a major offensive in May 2009, the government is to make another bid in April to capture it. The US, which has been providing covert training to Somali intelligence officers, logistical support to peacekeepers, fuel for the manoeuvres, surveillance information about insurgent positions, and money for bullets and guns, has thus far channelled its support through African Union peacekeepers. It now seems that covert US forces will participate in the anticipated offensive. US justifies escalation based on fears of Islamic fundamentalist links between Somalia and Yemen.

Meanwhile the refugee crisis is growing out of hand. Since the beginning of the year, the conflict forced more than 100,000 Somali civilians to flee their homes across the country. Somalia is among countries generating the highest number of displaced people and refugees in the world, with more than 1.4 million internally displaced persons and over 560,000 living as refugees in nearby countries.

The World Food Programme on 11th March welcomed an investigation into its operations in Somalia, after a New York Times cited a UN monitoring group report alleging that at least half of its supplies to the war-torn and poverty-stricken country were diverted by contractors, radical Islamist militants and even UN staff.

Source: nytimes.com

Niger: Condemning the Coup

On 18th February soldiers burst into the presidential palace and detained Niger's President Tandja Mamadou and part of his Executive, in a weekly meeting with him. Those who staged the coup announced that their objective is to turn Niger into an example of democracy and a good government and that those military officers belong to an army faction that was dissatisfied with Mamadou's violation of the presidential terms of office limits.

Niger became independent from France in 1960 and had several periods of military rule. Mamadou was first elected in 1999 following a coup in which the then-leader of the military-led government was assassinated; and then for a second 5-year term in December 2004. He was due to step down on 22nd December 2009 as the constitution restricts presidency to a maximum of two terms. In the course of his second term Mamadou sought to amend the constitution to let him to stand for a third term. In May 2009, the Niger national assembly refused to back his plans for a referendum to allow him a third term.

In August 2009, Mamadou held and won the referendum on a third term, which the opposition boycotted. The opposition also boycotted the parliamentary elections held in October. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) opposed the elections and suspended Niger from membership, while the US called on ECOWAS to impose full sanctions against Niger.

The African Union, the UN and several countries including France have condemned the coup, as did ECOWAS. Initially, the foreign minister of Senegal, who was acting as an ECOWAS envoy, was prevented from landing in the country. He has since been admitted and has held talks with the new military junta.

Niger's global importance is that it holds the largest uranium deposits in the world and could have oil reserves. But it is one of the least developed and poorest countries in the world.

France, 76% of whose energy comes from nuclear power, gets 40% of its uranium from Niger. It is claimed that Mamadou had the discreet backing of French President Nicolas Sarkozy to extend his presidency, following the signing in early 2009 of a production deal with Areva, a French government-owned company, which the last 30 years Areva maintained a virtual monopoly over Niger's uranium reserves. China has, however, secured the right to prospect for oil in the Agadem oilfield in the east of the country near its border with Chad and in two uranium deposits at Azelik and Teguida, implying an end to France's sole claim to Niger's resources.

The political and military elite of Niger saw an opportunity to renegotiate deals for resources, and control of the government ensured access to uranium revenue and potential income from oil. The prospect of Mamadou getting control of that wealth and consolidating his position at the expense of other factions of the elite appears to have led to the coup. The new junta has not shown itself hostile to French interests. But if there were a perceived threat, France would not hesitate to intervene militarily; and France has forces in neighbouring Gabon, Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire.

Source: *globalresearch.ca*

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

CLACS: A Big Step Forward

Latin America took a historic step forward at the Unity Summit of Latin American and Caribbean Nations on 22nd and 23rd February in Cancun, Mexico by announcing the creation of a regional organization, provisionally named the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CLACS) comprising 32 Latin American and Caribbean countries, and excluding the US and Canada. This is an inevitable outcome of the increasing independence of Latin America over the last decade on national, regional and global issues. The continuation of the foreign policy of former President Bush by Obama, as manifested in the overthrow of the democratic government of President Mel Zelaya in Honduras last summer, has catalysed the creation of this organization.

Some of the declarations and positions taken at the Summit were revealing: The Summit issued a statement backing Argentina in its dispute with the UK over the Malvinas (called Falklands by the British) since the 19th century, which led to a war in 1982. It also condemned the US embargo against Cuba. These and other measures would hardly have been possible to pass in the Organisation of American States, which has long been manipulated by the US — early this century to build support for the coup that overthrew Haiti's elected president and recently to avert strong measures against the Honduran dictatorship.

Also, notably, Brazil had moved towards the same positions as Venezuela and Bolivia on Iran and other foreign policy issues, and has strongly supported Chávez.

Source: *venezuelanalysis.com, ibtimes.com*

Haiti: Attempts to Recolonise

The article titled “The Militarization of Emergency Aid to Haiti: Is it a Humanitarian Operation or an Invasion?” by Michel Chossudovsky (globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=17000) explains how the US — in the pretext of providing emergency aid to Haiti hit by a deadly earthquake in January — is seeking to establish itself militarily in Haiti. Attention is drawn in the article to the US sending three amphibious ships to join aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson, guided-missile cruiser USS Normandy and guided-missile frigate USS Underwood.

The article contrasts the rescue and relief teams dispatched by various civilian organizations with the ill-defined humanitarian mandate of the US military. It points out that there were no reports of negotiations regarding US troops entering Haiti when US President Obama and Haitian President Préval spoke on the phone, and that the decision to deploy troops was taken and imposed unilaterally by the US, taking advantage of the lack of a functioning government in Haiti to legitimize, on humanitarian grounds, the sending in of a powerful military force, which has effectively taken over several governmental functions.

The detailed article draws attention to the reality that twenty thousand foreign troops under US military command will be present in the country. It warns that militarization of the aid will undermine the high degree of solidarity, courage and social commitment that the Haitian people have shown in their response to the disaster and pleads with US citizens to forcefully oppose the decision of the Obama administration to send US combat troops to Haiti since there can be no real reconstruction or development under foreign military occupation.

Honduras: Resisting Repression

The US and Europe, not surprisingly, have recognised the presidential and parliamentary elections of November 2009 despite objections about their irregularity, the doubtful turnout and the repressive conditions under which they were held by an illegal military-controlled regime. Ten countries in Latin America have refused to restore diplomatic relations with the Honduran regime headed by Porfirio Lobo.

Demonstrations continue in Honduras calling for reform of the constitution and protesting about corruption and rights abuses since Zelaya was ousted last June. As protests grow stronger the unlawfully elected government has resorted to criminal repression.

On 23rd March while a group of seven Honduran lawyers were presenting information to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission in Washington on systematic abuses against the members of the National Popular Resistance Front — a broad alliance of social and political forces that emerged hours after the coup d'etat of 28th June 2009 — a death squad comprising heavily armed masked men in civilian clothes killed José Manuel Flores, a prominent FNRP member, and a teacher at Tegucigalpa's San José del Pedregal high school in front of his students.

On 25th February, around 10,000 people set off from the capital Tegucigalpa's main university to the presidential palace. But they were blocked by soldiers and diverted to the parliament in the city centre instead. Six teachers' unions backed the protests and called for classes to be suspended nationwide.

On 26th March several thousands marched in Tegucigalpa demanding an end to the escalation of repression, and opposing the neo-liberal policies of the new government.

Sources: *momento24.com*, *www.democracynow.org*

Paraguay: Peasants in Protest

In Asunción, the capital of Paraguay, thousands of militant farmers marched on 25th March demanding that President Fernando Lugo follows through on his campaign promises for agrarian reform, including distribution of land to poor farmers, and access to health care, education, better homes and roads for rural communities. Lugo's failure to meet the demands after a year and a half in office has led to protests against his administration. The demands also concern the soy industry, where for long, large producers of soy have used violence and intimidation to displace small farmers. The toxic pesticides used by soy producers are serious health hazards for the campesinos (small farmers), which also poison their water sources and kill crops and livestock.

Campesino leaders complained that Lugo has continued the same discourse as previous presidents and not followed through on his promises, and that since the end of the dictatorship in 1989 no government has responded to the needs of the campesinos. They declared that if the demands of the marchers are not met they would have to resort to their standard strategies of direct action such as the occupation of lands and the blockading of highways.

Source: *zcommunications.org*

Colombia: Mass Resistance

Narco New Bulletin reported on 1st March that in the municipality of Puerto Leguizamo, the Puerto Piñuña Police Station and four other police stations were occupied for 63 days by over 6000 families from eight indigenous communities situated along the Putumayo river, demanding an end to military and paramilitary harassment, negotiations with the government over coca eradication efforts and a commitment to social development. Coca eradication moves were not accompanied by crop replacement or improvements to local infrastructure, but rather, along with military/paramilitary threats, led to the forced removal of inhabitants. At first the government turned a deaf ear toward calls for negotiations but was finally compelled by the popular movement to enter into a dialogue. Eventually the government signed a 45 point accord promising more social investment and a gradual and voluntary crop substitution program. Over 5000 members of indigenous communities occupied the Piñuña Negro police station in Putumayo. The struggle was successful and there were similar struggles in Putumayo and the neighbouring state of Nariño.

This mobilization had caught the attention of US solidarity activists concerned about US support of the Colombian military and for eradication campaigns that cause displacement in places like Puerto Leguizamo. Military aid and eradication campaigns have been major components of Plan Colombia, which has received some \$7 billion in funding from the US. Plan Colombia has been officially described as both part of the War on Drugs and as a war against Colombian insurgents. However, in each, the plan has been a failure. Cocaine production in Colombia is actually on the rise. Meanwhile, there has been a reconstitution of guerrilla forces and newly announced unity between the two largest such armies, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Army of Liberation).

Source: *narconews.com*

Chile

A powerful earthquake of magnitude 8.8 which struck Chile in the morning of 27th February killed around 500 people and caused damage to 500,000 homes and affecting two million people. Chile was initially reluctant to call for foreign assistance, but help poured in. It is important however, that Chile, thanks to its economic and political strength, was able to resist foreign meddling, especially that of the US on the pretext of helping the victims, as was the case in Haiti. A second earth quake that struck Chile on 4th was of magnitude 6.3 (strength only 1/300 of the one a

week earlier) was relatively less harmful. Cuba was prompt to send medical resources to Chile at the request of authorities.

Sources: *nytimes.com*, *cubanews.ain.cu*

EUROPE

Turkey: Souring Relations

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided not to partake and instead send Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor to the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington in April 2010 over Egypt and Turkey's plan to file a motion demanding Israel to open its nuclear facilities for international inspection. Israel, the sole nuclear-armed power in the Middle East has a nuclear stockpile of several hundred weapons of various types, including boosted fission and enhanced radiation weapons i.e. neutron bombs, as well as nuclear artillery shells.

It should be noted here that Turkey had taken Israel to task over launching an attack on Gaza in December 2009 and has continued to be critical of Israeli conduct. Yet it is unlikely that the relationship has soured to a point of no return or weakening the close military alliance between the two countries brokered by their patron the US in the 1990s.

On 4th March a US House of Representatives Committee approved a resolution describing massacre of one and a half million Armenians during the First World War by the Ottoman Empire as genocide. Turkey responded by recalling its ambassador to the US. Although White House sought to distance itself from the resolution, it is interesting that the resolution came at a time when Turkey's relations with Israel showed signs of strain and Turkey seeks to warm up to Iran.

Sources: *www.presstv.ir*; *guardian.co.uk*

Greece: Growing Public Anger

On 11th March, all Greece came to a standstill as a result of the second general strike in less than a month. More than 150,000 people took to the streets of Athens against the austerity measures in a mass protest marches that have led to extended battles in the Greek capital. The Athens march is estimated to be the largest in 15 years, and has demonstrated the resolve of the working class to fight back against the capitalist onslaught. In every corner of Greece, popular anger over the

government's latest neo-liberal assault on job security, pensions and social services led to a series of general strikes involving hundreds of thousands of militant workers. The Greek government's moves are at the behest of the European Union, which is seeking to make Greek workers carry the burden of debt generated by Greek governments in collusion with major banks such as Goldman Sachs.

This should be seen as part of a broader international struggle by working people against capital's drive to make ordinary people pay for the global financial crisis it caused. But Greek strikers have drawn on an indigenous political culture with deep roots — a culture that validates the people's right to rise collectively as agents of change.

Source: greenleft.org.au

Italy: Immigrants as the Issue

Tens of thousands of people rallied across Italy on 1st March to defend and extend the rights of immigrants. Since 2001, migrants in Italy have suffered increasing legislative and political persecution. The rally was part of a growing multi-focused resistance to the Berlusconi government. In Rome, thousands from groups representing immigrant communities and supporters joined the protest. There were larger marches in other cities, with 20,000 in Naples, a centre for African agricultural workers, and 10,000 in Padua.

The xenophobic, neo-fascist Northern League stirred anti-immigrant feelings in the relatively wealthy north of Italy and — like neo-fascists in the rest of Europe hit by the economic crisis — made gains in the local elections at the expense of Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* as well as the 'left'. Voting was, however, a record low at 64.2 per cent, down by 8 points from the previous regional elections. The 'left' made modest gains elsewhere in Italy since its heavy defeat in 2008.

Sources: greenleft.org.au; english.aljazeera.net

France: Strikes over 'Reforms'

Nationwide strikes called for by all major trade unions — in the wake of the 21st March regional run-off elections in which the opposition Socialist Party won 23 of France's 26 regions — mobilized over 500,000 in the streets of French cities, including about 60,000 in Paris on 22nd March as part of a campaign to resist right-wing reforms planned by President Nicolas Sarkozy. The strike attracted elementary and secondary public school teachers, fighting not just cutbacks, but an authoritarian

reorganization of the whole teacher education programs well as other categories of working adults, school-age youth, and undocumented workers from Mali, calling for legalization and decent wages.

Sarkozy reshuffled his government in response to the electoral defeat, notably replacing the labour minister. The new labour minister Eric Woerth has sworn to press on with changes to the pension system — the most controversial reform proposed.

Source: *workerseducation.net*

The Netherlands: War Casualty

The Dutch government became the latest casualty of the Afghanistan War. In late February, the Labour Party in the Netherlands walked out of the ruling coalition government to protest the extension of the Dutch deployment in Afghanistan, despite earlier agreement on total pull out. 58% of Dutch want out of Afghanistan, compared to only 35% who want to stay. It's part of a larger trend. Public opinion throughout Europe has decisively turned against the war. But it isn't the European left, by and large, that has taken advantage of this anti-war sentiment. After all, European social democrats — the British Labour Party, the German Social Democratic Party, the French Socialist Party — have been compromised by their early support of the war in Afghanistan.

Source: *english.aljazeera.net*

UK: Blair's Legacy

After Tony Blair destroyed the last semblance of socialism in the party, his successor Gordon Brown did little to change course. Labour voters were embittered by deception on many matters including getting Britain into war against Iraq. The failing economy did not help either. Although Labour despite its weak performance — down from 35.3% of the votes cast in 2005 to 29.2% — has denied the Conservatives a parliamentary majority, the surge of neo-fascism is a matter for concern. (The British National Party has increased its share of the vote from 0.7 to 1.9%).

The Conservatives could form a minority government or a coalition with the Social Democrats. Whatever the outcome, British parliamentary politics has lost even the semblance of a left political party. The prospect of building a genuine left party requires the distancing of the working class, the left and progressive forces from the Labour Party.

Source: *news.bbc.co.uk*

Call To Account!

Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930)

**The drum of war thunders and thunders.
It calls: thrust iron into the living.
From every country
slave after slave
are thrown onto bayonet steel.
For the sake of what?
The earth shivers
hungry
and stripped.
Mankind is vaporised in a blood bath
only so
someone
somewhere
can get hold of Albania.
Human gangs bound in malice,
blow after blow strikes the world
only for
someone's vessels
to pass without charge
through the Bosporus.
Soon
the world
won't have a rib intact.
And its soul will be pulled out.
And trampled down
only for someone,
to lay
their hands on
Mesopotamia.
Why does
a boot
crush the Earth — fissured and rough?
What is above the battles' sky -
Freedom?
God?
Money!
When will you stand to your full height,
you,
giving them your life?
When will you hurl a question to their faces:
Why are we fighting?**

Translation: Lika Galkina with Jasper Goss, 2005

Fragrance of Peace

Irom Sharmila*

*When life comes to its end
You, please transport
My lifeless body
Place it on the soil of Father Koubru*

*To reduce my dead body
To cinders amidst the flames
Chopping it with axe and spade
Fills my mind with revulsion*

*The outer cover is sure to dry out
Let it rot under the ground
Let it be of some use to future generations
Let it transform into ore in the mine*

*I'll spread the fragrance of peace
From Kanglei, my birthplace
In the ages to come
It will spread all over the world.*

**Irom Sharmila is a Manipur Peace Activist
Courtesy: <http://manipurfreedom.org>*

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