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My brothers in the Streets

Mongane Wally Serote

Oh you black boys,
You thin shadows who emerge like a chill in the night,
You whose heart-tearing footsteps sound in the night,
My brothers in the streets,
Who holiday in jails,
Who rest in hospitals,
Who smile at insults,
Who fear the whites,
Oh you black boys,
You horde-waters that sweep over black pastures,
You bloody bodies that dodge bullets,
My brothers in the streets,
Who booze and listen to records,
Who've tasted rape of mothers and sisters,
Who take alms from white hands,
Who grab bread from black mouths,
Oh, you black boys,
Who spill blood as easy as saying 'Voetsek'
Listen!
Come my black brothers in the streets,
Listen!
It's black women who are crying.

[South African poet Mongane Wally Serote (born 8th May 1944) was involved in Black Consciousness when he was finishing high school in Soweto. Because of his poems expressing themes of political activism, development of black identity, and images of revolt and resistance, he was arrested by the apartheid government under the Terrorism Act in June 1969 and released without charge after nine months in solitary confinement.]

From the Editor's Desk

The hike in fuel prices by over 20% on average, with kerosene, the fuel most commonly used by people in rural areas and in the plantations, going up by nearly 50%, had immediate impact on the prices of many goods and services. The government responded to protests by private bus owners and allowed a 20% rise in the cost of public transport, but ignored protests by ordinary people, except for promises to some sectors of some kind of relief, which was inadequate as well as liable to abuse and subsequent non-implementation or withdrawal.

Mass protests were held across the country against the price increases. When fisher folk angered by the price hike demonstrated on 15th February in the coastal town of Chilaw the Special Task Force of the Police responded with bullets, killing one and injuring several. On 17th February, one hundred thousand plantation workers participated in a one-day strike organised by trade unions affiliated to the right-wing UNP and its allies.

The government, by organising a demonstration denouncing UNHCR interference in Sri Lanka and the impending US-sponsored resolution at the 19th Session in the UNHCR beginning 29th February, turned the tables on the JVP and the UNP before they could take advantage of the popular discontent and mobilise opposition to the government.

The US-backed UNHCR resolution, while noting that Sri Lanka has failed to implement the reconciliation measures prescribed by its own Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, calls for more concrete action towards reconciliation and addressing of accountability issues, based on the recommendations of the LLRC.

The resolution which calls upon Sri Lanka to act on the LLRC report effectively ignores the flawed nature of the report and its inadequacies. Thus, unlike in the cases of Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan, the US does not seem hell bent on punishing Sri Lanka. What it seems to desire is having Sri Lanka back in its orbit, if not fully, at least the way it was a decade ago.

The efforts of the US to control Sri Lanka have also to be seen in the context of its plans to encircle China. Admiral Robert Willard, Chief of the US Pacific Command told a US congressional hearing on 2nd March that US Special Forces teams were in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives and India for counter-terrorism operations. While the governments of India, Nepal and Sri Lanka rushed to deny it, the US did not; and that is a strong hint of US intentions in South Asia.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party has repeatedly pointed out that the unwillingness of successive governments to find a solution to the national question based on autonomy for the nationalities and the principle of the right

to self determination that was at the root of the national crisis. The Party called upon the Mahinda Chinthanaya government to address sincerely the problems created by the ruthless conduct of the war, especially in its final months. The Party also stressed that an independent and full inquiry into excesses committed during the war could have defeated the call for foreign meddling as well as the case for an international inquiry.

What the government has achieved is to enable the US and the West, through the agency of the UN and its Human Rights arms, to make a case for intervention when they desire. We know that foreign intervention is driven by the interests of the foreign power concerned and has little to do with the interests of the people in whose name intervention takes place.

Sections of the government fear that the US is planning a 'regime change' in Sri Lanka. That seems a remote prospect at the moment. What seems to be the intention is to 'correct' the 'waywardness' of the Sri Lankan government in the conduct of its foreign affairs. The issue of human rights only provides the pretext for the US to exert pressure on the government.

The vulnerability of the government to US pressure has been demonstrated by the pleas by the Sri Lankan government to the EU for the restoration of GSP+, the behind the scenes deals with the IMF, where it agreed to a whole range of conditions relating to reducing state control of the economy and government expenditure, and the provision of free or state-subsidised health, education and other public needs. Various moves by the government to fulfil its pledges to the IMF have met with strong public protests.

The state has become increasingly repressive. It is now suppressing freedom of assembly in the North, with the prospect of its extension to the rest of the country. Such moves too add to the case for foreign meddling and even a regime change with foreign backing. But what is certain is that no regime change will bring about a democratic government. The options that the West seeks are either a right-wing regime with a democratic facade or a military dominated government. The feasibility of such options is enhanced by the continued increase in defence spending even after the end of the war nearly three years ago. The concerns of the US and the West for human rights do not include the growing role of the armed forces in the country's affairs.

It is thus up to the people of the country to defend its independence and sovereignty by mobilising themselves as a force to restore democratic rights and resolve the national question on a just basis and thereby free the country of foreign domination and revive and restore the national economy. The left, progressive and democratic forces of the country, especially among the Sinhalese, should shoulder a major part of this urgent historic responsibility.

Three Choices before the Tamil People

Comrade SK Senthivel

*(Approximate translation of article in Tamil in Sudar Oli, Tamil daily,
2nd February 2012)*

The Aftermath of the Tragedy

The Tamil people of the North-East have crossed the blazing river of a war of national oppression. The real life experiences that they have had during three decades of military action surpass any description. The bitter experiences reached their peak during the final three years of the war, and the misery, sorrow, pain and losses suffered by the people especially during the final months of the war were unprecedented in the history of the island.

Even today, they remain a people unable to recover from the impact and ill effects of the events. The whole of it was presided over by the ruling elite class which carried out the chauvinistic oppressive measures.

Meantime, the policies and tactics, along the path of *ahimsa* as well as the path of armed struggle —adopted in the name of opposing chauvinistic oppression by a succession of political leaderships which led the Tamil people— have failed. Not only did they fail, they did not even help to secure the basic minimum rights of the people.

As a result, two and a half years after the end of the war or the defeat of the armed struggle, only political frustration and bitterness remain among the Tamil people. Despite the people voting in elections and electing members of parliament and members of local government, a vacuum of political uncertainty persists among the Tamil people.

Competing Interests

Attempts are being made by two groups to take advantage of the political vacuum to establish their respective standings. One section comprises the

state and forces allied with it. These elements seek to thrust indirectly among a people who are broken in spirit the chauvinistic position that they uphold by offering favours, concessions and development projects. Such actions form part of their political programme.

At the same time, several rival Tamil nationalist leaderships seek to carry forward their politics based on their respective stands. This is evident in the political sphere of the North-East as well as in the political sphere of the Tamil diaspora.

The common feature here is that, whether at home or abroad, Tamil nationalism has thus far not questioned any of the fundamental issues internal to it, so that Tamil nationalism still remains as old wine in new casks.

In the field of active politics, no Tamil leadership has shown the courage to question the Tamil nationalist politics of the past. Likewise, there is no sign that the Tamil nationalist leaderships that function among the Tamil diaspora under various names are willing to find a political path by learning from past experience. All seek to be shepherds to the Tamil people and seem unwilling to share the joys and sorrows of the people and gain from their experiences and gather the political insights that emerge from them.

Under such prevailing conditions, there is a need for deep political thought among the Tamil people. That seems to be a historical necessity. The political basis for any political thought in the interest of the people should emerge from among the broad masses. Any political leadership that denies or defies it cannot offer leadership of any benefit to the people.

Options before the People

Based on this, there are three kinds of political choices before the Tamil people, and they need to be viewed in the context of past historical experience. Let us firstly identify the three choices.

1. Continuing to follow the politics of the vote bank, i.e. parliamentary politics, comprising consensus, bargaining and challenge;
2. Carrying forward the politics of struggle based on the secessionist agenda in the name of Tamil Eelam or any other;
3. Carrying forward the line of mass struggle with the toiling masses as the fundamental and primary force in a way appropriate to the objective conditions of Sri Lanka by taking into account the historical experiences thus far.

Let us now look at the above three options in some detail.

The Option of Political Bargain

If we look at the politics of consensus, we can see that Sir P Ramanathan and his relatives had participated in administering colonial rule. While they were loyal to the colonial masters, they also belonged to a Colombo based elite class.

It was through them that Tamil nationalist politics took form in the 1920s. The Tamil nationalist leadership which emerged in this manner was amicable and accommodating towards the colonialists as well as the political leadership of the Sinhala elite. A continuation of this form of politics was evident up to the time of the politics of consensus of the Tamil Congress initiated by GG Ponnambalam.

It was when this politics of consensus failed to produce results that the politics of protest and political bargaining came to the fore under the Federal Party led by SJV Chelvanayakam. It was out of frustration with such politics that the demand for Tamil Eelam was put forward. It was with the votes secured on that basis that the Tamil United Liberation Front (dominated by the FP) won a large number of seats in Parliament. Until A Amirthalingam, the leader of the TULF, became the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, it was parliamentary politics based on a vote bank that held sway.

The politics of bargaining was also conducted on occasion amid the politics of challenge. The net achievement for Tamil nationalist politics through these lines was zero. Meanwhile, the Tamil nationalist stirrings enabled Sinhala chauvinism to reinforce its position at the helm of state power. This in turn enriched the Tamil nationalist vote bank. It is precisely the continuation of such Tamil nationalist domination of parliamentary politics that the Tamil National Alliance—or those who wish to reactivate the Federal Party—are carrying forward. This is like serving up stale porridge. The question is whether the Tamil people are ready to accept it as a choice.

The Option of Reviving the Secessionist Agenda

Besides this, there is another policy put forward by the Tamil Nationalist People's Front. This was proposed by Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, a successor to the tradition of the Tamil Congress, and his allies. Their thesis is that, since a Tamil nation and a Sinhalese nation exist in Sri Lanka, the Tamil nation should secure its rightful place by exercising its right to self determination.

That in essence is a rephrasing of the demand for Tamil Eelam. The same position is being touted by the supporters of the cause of Tamil Eelam among the Tamil diaspora functioning as a variety of organisations. Those who operate as the Trans-national Government of Tamil Eelam, the World Tamil Forum and various organisations among the Tamil diaspora in Europe are

stressing the demand for Tamil Eelam. Using the phrases of Tamil nation and self determination, these forces are upholding what has failed at home and abroad and are stubbornly putting forward arguments in its defence.

This expectation is more prevalent among the Tamil diaspora than among Tamils in Sri Lanka, and has an audience in the US and the West. Consequently the advocates of this line argue that the Tamils should await the occasion when the Tamil nation and the International Community meet at a common point. They believe that it will be a point of intersection like in the case of Kosovo and, of late, the Sudan.

They put forward their two nations demand with the attitude that the recurrence of tragedies like the one at Mullivaikkal is an acceptable price to pay for the purpose. They would like the US and the West to invade Sri Lanka on that pretext. Proposals of this nature comprise another option before the Tamil people.

A Critique of the Narrow Nationalist Options

The above two options are not things that have cropped up recently. Although they had been there from time to time, under different leaders in different forms and names since the 1920s, they were of the same essence.

What Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, GG Ponnambalam, SJV Chelvanayakam, A Amirthalingam, V Pirapakaran, R Sampanthan, Mavai Senathirajah, Suresh Premachandran and Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, based in Sri Lanka, and Visuvanathan Rudrakumaran and Father Emmanuel, living abroad, have offered the Tamil people is a matter for thought.

There is no question that all of them refused to accept chauvinistic oppression in Sri Lanka and resisted it. But what they sought to achieve through their resistance is a matter for debate in the context of practice.

An Option reflecting the Aspirations of the Masses

Thus it is necessary for the Tamil people to give thought to a third option that transcends the two kinds of option put forward by the two categories of Tamil nationalists. This option is distinct from all policies that have been put forward prior to it. It argues that the policy for the liberation of the Tamil nationality should be put forward based on the problems, demands and feelings of the ordinary people comprising the peasants, workers and other toiling masses who constitute the vast majority of the Tamil people.

Such a policy should, instead of being an expression of an attitude of ruling class arrogance, be one reflecting the aspirations of an oppressed nationality. At this stage it is important to draw the attention of the Tamil people to a

matter concerning leadership. Thus far, in the drawing up of the basic Tamil nationalist policy and its implementation, faith has been nurtured that 'they' will secure victory. In other words, the belief has been propagated that the members of parliament, leaders of militant movements and their likes will win liberation. No broad-based mass struggles or uprisings have been carried forward whereby the people could determine their own fate. Participation of the people has been restricted if not denied. The people were drawn in to fit into the agenda of the leadership. Uniting the people on a broad basis has so far not been people tried or tested.

The just demands of the Tamil people should be tailored to suit the objective reality of Sri Lanka. It certainly has to be autonomy within a united Sri Lanka, based on the principle of the right to self determination. This demand without a secessionist agenda should be taken among the Sinhalese people.

Thus far, the Tamil leadership has neither told the Sinhalese people about the just demands of the Tamil people and about acceptable solutions to their problems nor sought to gain their support for the just cause of the Tamil people.

The Way Forward for the Tamil People

It is therefore more important to explain matters to the Sinhalese people than to India, the US and the West. That will add strength to the Tamil people and weaken Sinhala chauvinists. It is also important that the message that mass struggles are necessary should reach the entire people.

It is such a third option that is necessary for the consideration of the Tamil people and for their advancement.

Thus one cannot accept spontaneously and emotionally the proposals by the Tamil parliamentary political leadership, other Tamil nationalists besides them and the Tamil organisations among the diaspora. It is not possible for the Tamil people to carry forward their political journey like sheep by allowing themselves to be led by the upper class elite, not taking into account the self interest hidden behind the deluded visions held out by the elite.

Hence it is important that the young generation should think and act in a way that will move them on to a new level of thinking, at least a progressive level of thinking, in dealing with the problems facing the Tamil nationality.

Imperialist Grip on Sri Lanka

(A brief comment)

Comrade E. Thambiah

*[Text of the second paper presented by Comrade E Thambiah, International
Organiser, New-Democratic Marxist Leninist Party at the 3rd Anti-Imperialist
International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 27-29 November 2011]*

The Background

Sri Lanka is an island 65,610 square kilometres (25,332 square miles) in extent with a population of around 25 million comprising Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Upcountry Tamil nationalities and distinct communities including indigenous people (Attho), Burghers and Malays.

While remnants of a feudal culture still has an influence on life in Sri Lanka the big/comprador bourgeois classes and bureaucrat capitalist classes comprise the ruling classes and come predominantly from among conservative Buddhist bourgeoisie. The neo-colonial state of Sri Lanka rules over the workers, peasants and other toiling masses as well as small traders, middle classes, women, youth and the oppressed nationalities.

Sri Lanka was a colony of the Portuguese starting 1505, until the Dutch took over 1658 only to cede Sri Lanka to the British who ruled the country from 1796 until 1948. Until 1815, it was only the maritime region that was under direct colonial control, and the whole of Sri Lanka was brought under one rule in 1815 by the British. In 1948, the British, noted for their divide and rule strategy, transferred state power to the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie and imposed a Westminster style of parliamentary rule based on a constitution drafted by the British. It should be noted that there was no significant popular struggle against the British colonial rule calling for independence, and that the plea for

independence was only nominal and lacked in anti-imperialist sentiment. The constitution did offer some concessions to the minority nationalities, but they were inadequate safeguards against onslaught by an aggressive majority.

Post Independence Politics

The country has since 1948 been ruled by two major political parties namely the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). The traditional left parties, namely the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL), which by 1960 had taken the parliamentary road got into alliances with SLFP and have been partners in government from time to time.

The United Front government with Sirima Bandaranayake as Prime Minister and led by the SLFP, with the LSSP and the CPSL as partners, introduced a so-called republican constitution in 1972, whereby direct domination by Britain over Sri Lanka was ended. The constitution also ensured that Buddhism and the Sinhala language enjoyed special status, making explicit the discrimination against the minorities and moving one step further in institutionalising Sinhala Buddhist majority rule. Notably, during this period, Sri Lanka played an important role in non-aligned movement.

Inviting Foreign Domination

The Constitution of 1972 was replaced by another in 1978 under the UNP which in 1977 secured an unprecedented electoral victory. The new constitution introduced the Executive Presidency and facilitated the surrendering of the sovereignty of Sri Lanka to imperialism. This was carried out by adopting an open economic policy and openly siding with imperialism, in contrast to the earlier foreign policy of non-alignment.

Indian expansionist forces, resentful of rising US dominance over Sri Lanka, took advantage of the burning national conflict in Sri Lanka and forced JR Jayawardane, the then President of Sri Lanka, to sign a 'Peace Accord' with India in 1987, which made Sri Lanka submit to India.

During the rule of UNP between 1977 to 1994 most of the major state owned enterprises including plantations were sold/leased out to multi-national companies. In 1994, when the SLFP-led coalition came to power with Chandrika Kumaratunga as President, it declared an "open economy with a human face" and set Sri Lanka along the path of imperialist globalisation. In late 2005, Mahinda Rajapaksa took over the relay of the executive presidency. He is not against the Imperialist Globalisation; but he does not want to be questioned by any foreign country about his fascist rule and alleged war crimes committed on the Tamil people by his security forces during the period

of the Military Operation against the LTTE, the separatist militant movement in 2009.

Making a War out of the National Question

Almost all the governments after 1977 have waged war in the Tamil areas as well as engaged in peace process, allegedly to find a 'political solution'.

The oppression unleashed by successive Sri Lankan Governments on Tamils compelled the Tamil youth to engage in armed resistance against the Sri Lankan security forces and press for a separate state in the name of "Tamil Eelam" for the Tamils in North-East of Sri Lanka, as already proposed by the traditionalist reactionary Tamil parliamentary political leadership. Eventually the LTTE took full control over armed resistance to the security forces of the Sri Lankan government.

Apart from the neo-colonial economic attack during the periods of war, the so-called peace process, and the post-war period, foreign forces have tightened their grip on Sri Lanka. Prior to the 1990s, Indian hegemonic forces were most dominant Sri Lanka. During and after 1990s, US, Western and Japanese imperialist forces increased their influence. They meddled in the Sri Lankan national question through Norwegian facilitation in the peace talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government. Although the US and European imperialist forces did not use the secessionist demand of the LTTE as blackmail armoury against Sri Lanka, they used the peace process to increase their influence and, since the end of the war, have taken up the issues of human rights and war crimes, but not in the interest of the Tamils.

Wrecking of the Peace Process and Resumption of War

From the outset, India took various measures to undermine the peace process facilitated by Norway. India's chances improved when Mahinda Rajapaksa, with a feudal, Sinhala conservative attitude and hostility towards the peace efforts, came to power. India's intentions were to annihilate the LTTE and to implement the Provincial Council System which was set up under the Sri Lanka-India Accord of 1987, which as the intended solution to the national question failed to assure even minimally the national aspirations of the Tamils and even less the other oppressed nationalities. Mahinda Rajapaksa, with no desire to implement the Provincial Council System, sought only military action against the LTTE and strengthened his ties with China, Pakistan, Vietnam and Russia.

When he resumed the war, however, not only the above countries and India but also US and Britain—with their vague demands on the application of international humanitarian laws— offered support to the military action. After

the end of the war, competition has been very high among the foreign forces to control Sri Lanka. India and China have made their shares even greater through their economic aggression in Sri Lanka. US and countries of the European Union upholding the issues of human rights and war crimes to threaten the Sri Lankan state. US and Europe sponsored moves through the UN against Sri Lanka seem to be strong.

Post-War International Issues

While India gives an impression of neutrality, Pakistan, China, Russia, Vietnam, several countries of the Middle East, including Iran, and Latin American countries such as Cuba and Venezuela oppose moves against Sri Lanka by the US, European countries and the UN, based on issues of human rights and war crimes.

It appears that the US and European countries are against the Sri Lankan government and India, Pakistan, China, Russia, Vietnam, Middle Eastern countries including Iran, and Cuba and Venezuela support the Sri Lankan government. But, each country has its own agenda to safeguard its interests. Developing countries and weaker states seem to be supporting the Sri Lankan State in order to secure solidarity from Sri Lanka in facing challenges posed by imperialist and big countries. But imperialists and big countries, irrespectively of whether they support or oppose Sri Lanka, have their own imperialist or hegemonic interests in Sri Lanka. Contradictions between imperialism and local oppressors are not permanent but those between imperialism and the people are permanent.

Troubles in Facing the Problem

Generally all the people of Sri Lanka may understand the vulnerability of Sri Lanka to imperialist and foreign hegemonic activity. But divisions based on ethnicity and nationality remain an obstacle to their joining a united platform or arrive at a common understanding against imperialism. The opinion propagated among the Tamils by their reactionary leadership is that they can use imperialism to win their right to self-determination and whoever speaks against the Sri Lankan State is their friend. The Tamil leadership has gone to an extent of asking the Tamils to follow Zionist Israel to establish separate Tamil state. The elite of the Tamil diaspora is trying to bring pressure upon Sri Lankan Government through their 'Trans-national Government of Tamil Eelam'.

On the other hand, the opinion propagated among the Sinhalese by their chauvinistic leaders is that the Tamils are in the hands of imperialism, and that their demands are manipulations by imperialism. Thus the Sinhalese have

been made to believe that Mahinda Rajapaksa and others who oppose Tamils are anti-imperialists.

So it is evident that, in Sri Lanka, imperialism has succeeded to divide Sri Lankans based on ethnicity in order to prevent the emergence of a powerful anti-imperialist mass movement in Sri Lanka as well as created a climate where the majority nationality support the oppressor.

Imperialist Inroads

Like anywhere else, in Sri Lanka too, imperialism wants the full submission of the state, through its acts of oppression, to imperialism, if this is assured, imperialism may forget about the issues of human rights and war crimes against Sri Lanka even the call for the political solution for the national question.

Imperialism and foreign hegemony are not only dominating Sri Lanka through international political means such as the use of the national question and military cooperation, but also through their enormous economic interests in Sri Lanka. The US and countries of the European Union have a big say in Sri Lanka through their GSP concessions.

The US and some of the European Countries are dominant in the export trade of Sri Lanka; and the US has taken over phosphate mining in Eppawela. India has made a Defence Agreement as well as Free Trade Agreement with Sri Lanka and is most dominant in Sri Lanka's import trade. Besides control over the oil tank farm adjoining the Trincomalee Harbour, based on the 1987 Peace Accord, India has already taken over the control of fuel oil trade of Sri Lanka. India is highly aggressive about the CEPA agreement covering a wide variety of services and about oil exploration in the Mannar Bay. It has already taken over the Kankesanthurai Cement Factory in Jaffna peninsula and building railways and highways. It has acquired a large extent of land in Sampur for thermal power station in the Eastern Province, and is greedy to grab the mining of mineral sands in Pulmoddai and Thirukkivil. Indian companies are controlling tea production and trade in Sri Lanka as well as several other cultivation schemes. They have also taken steps to set up factories as joint ventures and on their own.

Chinese aid to Sri Lanka has many fold superseded India's. China is constructing an international harbour in Hambantota and several highways; and has established a thermal power plant in Noraichcholai. As a result of the growth of the Chinese capitalist economy, China has established a big market expansion in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has now become a crucial strategic point in the expansion of sea power of China in this region.

Japan has established its domination over Sri Lanka through technology transfer, motor vehicle business and undertaking the Upper Kothmale Hydro Power Project.

Globalised imperialist culture has invaded Sri Lanka in different names and shapes. The toxic movie culture associated with Hollywood, Bollywood and Kollywood has made aggressive inroads among Sri Lankans of all nationalities.

The IMF which has granted massive loans to Sri Lanka while the war intense has also imposed severe conditions upon Sri Lanka. It has demanded a reduction in the budget deficit by a half, making it unavoidable for Sri Lanka to increase taxes as well the prices of goods. There is also pressure to reduce state funding for free education and health as well as to reduce if not abolish state pensions. A condition also has been imposed that Sri Lanka should be fully transformed into a tourist destination.

The above comprises part of the important evidence relating to the grip that imperialism and foreign hegemony have on Sri Lanka.

The Necessary Response

Beside the movements against British colonialism not being strong or united, no strong anti-imperialist mass movement has emerged since 1948, except for spontaneous struggles against imperialism on specific issues. The anti-imperialist stands of the so called the main left parties of Sri Lanka are mostly very much confined to their May Day slogans which invariably coincide with safeguarding the oppressive Sri Lankan state.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, in contrast, is continuously taking forward its anti-imperialist programmes in word and deed, locally and internationally.

Besides small groups, the International Solidarity Peoples Forum is marching forward as a united mass movement against imperialism in Sri Lanka which is strong in both its theory and practice against imperialism. It has a clear vision of handling the contradiction between the imperialism and local oppressor as well as that between imperialism and the people. It observes the Anti-Imperialist Day on the 1st day of January each year. This organisation too needs more strength and ground to build up a strong anti-imperialist movement in Sri Lanka.

Nationalism and Nationhood under Neo-colonialism - 4

The Politics of Identity

Imayavaramban

The term 'identity politics' has been in use since the 1970s. Although the term evolved in the context of black liberation movements in the US, it has not been confined to race or ethnicity based politics. Notably, the Black Panther Party of the US combined identity politics with Marxist class analysis and working class consciousness. The concept of identity politics has since extended beyond issues of class, gender, race and nationality to cover a wide variety of socio-cultural groups and interests. While intellectual sources of progressive identity politics can be traced to the feminist studies of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and work on decolonisation by Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), it was only in the 1990s—following the strong emergence of political movements making identity politics a substitute, if not a challenge, to class struggle and left politics—that the term became intellectually fashionable

Identity politics claims to empower oppressed communities through raising collective consciousness. Young (Iris Marion Young. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton University Press, 1990), for example, defines identity politics as a mode of organising which is intimately connected to the idea that some social groups are oppressed; i.e. that one's identity as a woman or as an ethnic minority could make one vulnerable to cultural imperialism (including stereotyping, appropriation or taking away of one's group identity), violence, exploitation, marginalisation, or subjection. Yet, not all socio-cultural groups and interests that pursue identity politics represent oppressed sections of the population. Some, like white racist groups or high caste elite which complain of aggression by rival groups and threat of losing their identity, are, in reality, on the side of imperialism and bourgeois oppression.

Much of the literature on identity politics is on political movements in capitalist countries of the West and concern issues of gender, colour, sexuality, and cultural identity— especially of immigrant communities resisting assimilation to the 'national culture'. Elsewhere, identity politics mostly

concerns indigenous rights, nationalist calls for regional autonomy or even secession, and issues of caste and religious identity.

Despite early postmodernist interest in identity politics, especially feminism, postmodernism and identity politics seem to have parted company in the West. However, proponents of identity politics in South Asia continue to draw on postmodernist ideas to reject class and class struggle as well as to isolate identities from each other, by emphasising the particular or local at the expense of the general or universal. Ironically, such identity politics, in the process of seeking commonness or even uniformity within a group to buttress its cause, has often hurt the case for common identity.

In India, Dalit politics, besides its failure to unite the depressed castes as a social or political force, has caused divisions among the oppressed castes along caste lines or even narrower bases, mainly for reasons of opportunist politics and rarely owing to contradictions of Dalit identity. Thus identity politics now represents a loose alliance of distinct social groups subject to oppression, neglect and denial or suppression of identity.

Whether to accept or reject identity politics is not the real question facing the Marxist left or other progressive forces. What matters is to recognise how a particular form of identity politics fits into the broader pictures of class struggle as well as its manifestation as anti-imperialist, anti-hegemonic and national liberation struggle. It is equally important to examine how one form of identity politics relates to other forms of identity politics.

Unlike the identity politics of Black communities in the US, especially in the 1960s, which showed radical and left ideological tendencies, middle class feminism and Dalitism fast deteriorated to take anti-left positions and form alliances with oppressive caste and class forces.

Also, nationalist projects in countries under colonial or semi-colonial domination stood for liberation from imperialist domination; and were therefore endorsed as progressive by Marxist Leninists, who castigated the nationalism of oppressor nations as reactionary. However, following the end of colonialism and the emergence of neo-colonialism as the prime mode of imperialist domination in the former colonies, nationalism, now dominated by national bourgeois interests, not only compromised with imperialism but also become an oppressor of minority nationalities and national minorities including indigenous populations. That in turn has led to the emergence of new ethno-political identities and strange alliances where imperialism could side either with a minority group to encourage secession or with the oppressor state to brutally suppress any liberation movement.

Dalit politics in India, by dissociating itself from the left, which it has viewed as a hostile force, has not only weakened itself but, more importantly, hurt the just cause of unity among the oppressed castes. The way caste politics evolved in India —whether based on the overall system of caste oppression or

on issues specific to an oppressed caste— ensured that it finally served the interests of the ruling elite. In contrast, in Sri Lanka's north, the struggle against caste oppression developed under Marxist leadership and culminated in a prolonged mass struggle against caste discrimination and oppression launched in the 1960s. An alliance of progressive forces, including members of the 'upper castes', led the struggle which won broad-based mass support.

Politics based on identity will exist as long there is identity-based oppression. Struggle against identity-based oppression will thus invariably assume the identity of the oppressed. That in itself is not reactionary or counterproductive. The progressive content of a struggle will be determined by the way it relates to other just struggles. Any just struggle strengthens itself by making common cause with just struggles by other groups suffering similar or different forms of oppression by a common oppressor or group of oppressors. When a struggle isolates itself from other just struggles it is doomed to fail, and the resultant frustration allows it to be exploited by reactionary forces, including foreign imperialists.

A general weakness of identity politics has been that that it takes up issues, often based on a single contradiction or closely related issues, selected so as to maximise unity within a group. There is also an aversion for taking up broader issues so that coalitions of identity political groups fail to sustain themselves as strong partnerships in their struggle against oppression.

While identity political activists taking up issues of caste, region and religion have on occasion flirted with nationalist and feminist causes in the Indian sub-continent, hostility towards Marxism and the left movement is still a common feature. This could be more due to a desire of the leaders to preserve their political territory from 'intruders' even at the risk of weakening the struggle. The tendency of identity politics to emphasise matters of culture, language, ethnicity, region, caste etc. while avoiding economic oppression is particularly significant; especially since the role of imperialism in sustaining the system of social oppression is seldom touched upon, except for the occasional anti-imperialist posturing lacking in anti-imperialist essence. It is thus not surprising that identity politics attracts NGO sponsorship through various community based projects in order that identity politics would remain isolated from mainstream political issues.

Avoidance of the issues of economy and class by intellectuals who promote projects of identity politics could be due, among other factors, to the social aspirations of bourgeois intellectuals and their general belief —reinforced by the elitist mass media— that socialism has lost out since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Also various post-modernist and other 'postmodern' theories promoted by elitist academic establishments in the West, especially the US, keep coming to the rescue of politically bankrupt intellectuals in diverting attention from the central issues facing society.

Proponents of feminist, ethnic, caste and other forms of identity politics have unsuccessfully used the notion of shared experience and identity as a means to define or establish a political identity. Also, tragically for identity political groups, they have, in the process of authenticating an imagined unique identity for a group, based on its difference from and opposition to the 'other', acquired for themselves some of the salient features of the oppressive hierarchy, which they claimed to differ from and stand in opposition to. This weakness persists in many narrow nationalist organisations, Dalit political groups aspiring for parliamentary political power, middle class feminist organisations, and groups that are overly assertive of their sexuality.

Each form of identity politics, by overemphasising a particular identity in an idealised form, has not only excluded the prospect of unity and solidarity with other just causes but also ignored the oppression of large sections of its own constituency, based on other identities that they concurrently possess.

Many of us know that caste or caste-group based identity politics has been in conflict with gender based identity politics, with each seeking to downplay the importance of the other to the point of ignoring oppression based on the latter. Nationalism, especially in times of national conflict, has often sought to defer, ignore or even reject the need to address gender, caste and class oppression within the nationality. Politics of culture and sexuality often avoid any reference to bigger issues of social injustice, and any form of alliance with other identity political groups has been issue based and short lived.

There is a tendency for advocates of identity politics to portray Marxists as another identity political group taking up the cause of the working class at the expense of other identities. Nothing could be further from the truth, and those who know the emphasis that Marxists have placed on gender oppression from the outset and the principled stand taken by Marxism Leninism —Marxism in the era of imperialism— on national liberation and struggles against oppression based on race and caste. Marxists have also been in the forefront of defending the rights of tribal groups in every sphere of activity, ranging from cultural rights to economic rights against exploitation and plunder by imperialism as well as the local bourgeoisie.

While a trade union could restrict its cause to defending the rights of the working class, or even a section of the working class as we see now, Marxists address the entire political and economic system and recognise important contradictions besides the class contradiction —which again is not just the one between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat— and seek to address them alongside issues of class oppression and exploitation, and at times with higher priority.

Thus it will be wrong for Marxists —not dogmatists posing off as Marxists— to be indifferent towards any form of social oppression. While Marxists need to oppose oppression of human beings on any basis, they also need to address

the problem in the context of the bigger picture, namely class and class struggle, the neo-colonial mode of imperialism and the current imperialist agenda of globalisation. To Marxists, the national question is important in the context of neo-colonialism —although not in the way it was in the colonial era or in the way the politics of chauvinism and narrow nationalism present it.

Identities exist, but not uniformly and uniquely shared within a group to justify assigning it a political identity isolated from other identities. It is true that identity politics has thus far mostly served to undermine the universal goal of human liberation. But that is no argument for rejecting the causes for the emergence of identity politics. Identity is important in a world divided on the basis of identity. Understandable fears exist among communities about assimilation by more powerful identities; and, as long as oppression based on identity exists, the case for identity based struggles will also exist. The question is whether such struggles could succeed in isolation from other just struggles.

Of all forms of politics opposing oppression in its various forms, only Marxist Leninist politics has demonstrated the ability to distinguish between hostile and friendly contradictions and thereby resolve issues of conflicting interests posed by the proponents of identity politics. Thus Marxist Leninists can not only find common cause with any identity based just struggle, they can also act as a force that can unify a whole wide range of oppressed groups against an oppressive system upheld by imperialism.

It is true that politics of national liberation has the potential —although limited— to work with other identities for a common cause. Although it is bound to fail when it comes to addressing the cause of humanity as a whole, it could by addressing social injustices within its community strengthen its struggle for emancipation. Supporters of such nationalist projects can easily become allies of Marxist Leninists and other progressive forces, at least in the short and medium term.

However, when nationalism chooses to be narrow and ignore other just causes in the name of unity, and to side with imperialism and reaction in the name of strategy or tactics, it isolates itself from the oppressed majority only to be used by imperialism and reaction for their narrow projects.

Marxist Leninists thus owe it to the people to distinguish the just causes underlying identity politics from the agenda of identity politics and device means by which the issues could be addressed without the oppressed falling prey to imperialist schemes.

Oppose Fuel Price Hike

NDMLP Statement to the Media

14th February 2012

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, in his statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party denouncing the massive fuel price hike announced by the government late on 12th February, said that the harsh increase in fuel price announced by the government is an act that has delivered a severe blow to the entire working people of the country. The fuel price hike is a result of the failure of the economic policy of the Mahinda Chinthanaya government which is denying democratic, trade union and human rights and taking a fascist path. As a result, the workers, peasants, fisher folk, government and private sector employees, who have already been struggling to meet living expenses in the face of price increases, have been plunged into further crisis in their everyday life. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly condemns the government's anti-people measure of increasing fuel prices that would torment the entire working people. The Party takes the view that the people have no option but to take to the streets against these price increases, and announces its support for all such people's struggles.

The statement added that unbearable burdens were heaped on the people by the Budget that was passed two months ago. In particular, the 3% devaluation of the Rupee caused an increase in prices of goods. With prices rising and wage increases denied, increasing the prices of petrol, diesel and kerosene by Rs 12, 31 and 35 per litre, respectively, is a direct assault on people at all levels. The one-day strike launched by private bus owners has led to a 20% increase in bus fares. For people already suffering under a rise in cost of living, this increase in fares has become an added burden. The increase in price of diesel has in its wake caused an increase in price of all goods. As a result of it, food prices will increase further. Likewise, the increase in price of kerosene has severely affected people with the lowest standard of living such as the rural peasants, the fisher folk, and the Hill Country plantation workers. The economic crisis which has thus far been covered up with the veil of chauvinism is in the open and has also fully exposed the nature of the ruling class. The capitalist ruling class which had been killing the people of the North-East has now started to kill the entire workers, peasants, fisher folk and

other toiling masses through its price increases. At this juncture, the only way forward is for the entire people to unite, irrespective of differences of race, language and religion, and take to the streets in struggle. The Party points out that there is no other way and declares that it is in support of such mass struggles and is participate in them.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

A Critique of the LLRC Report

NDMLP Statement to the Media

23rd December 2011

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party in his statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party on the Report of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee, observed that the Report has been produced, sidelining, ignoring and hushing up important issues like finding a political solution to the national question and the investigation of war crimes and human rights violations. The report has no meaningful proposals to offer for providing the necessary relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation for the Tamil people who have been experiencing destruction and misery and whose lives suffer the consequences of war. The LLRC, through its report, displays a tendency to justify and assert the chauvinist stand and wartime activities of the Mahinda Chinthanaya government.

The statement added that, despite boasts by the government that the LLRC would achieve great many things, the LLRC has meddled in matters that did not come within its purview and made comments in ways that do not question chauvinist hegemony. That is, while its mandate was to draw lessons from the peace process, its failure and consequences, and to enable reconciliation, the LLRC went beyond its mandate to make biased statements about war crimes and rule that no war crimes were committed. It has thereby issued the government and its armed forces a certificate of commendation. At the same time, it has made woolly statements about the thousands who have been abducted and gone missing. Besides, the LLRC has failed to properly examine evidence given before it regarding abductions and disappearances.

The Report, which in very general terms states that the Tamil people have problems, has nothing that identifies the problems or their gravity. It offers neither the means for finding short or long term solutions for the problems of the Tamil people nor proposals to that effect. Instead, it has paid its fullest

attention to putting forward suggestions that endorse the actions of the government and the armed forces.

The LLRC is, thus, just another in the series of commissions that are appointed when problems reach crisis proportions to deflect and cover up the underlying issues. Beyond that there is no significance of any kind for the report of the LLRC. Besides, there is little to learn from the report of the LLRC except for the waste of time and huge sums of public funds.

The country and its people suffered destruction and setbacks as a result of denying the rights and demands of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities and sharpening the ethnic, religious and linguistic contradictions. No due lesson could be learnt nor could reconciliation be achieved without taking this into account. If genuine reconciliation is to be achieved in the country, steps should be taken that would affirm the rights of all nationalities based on equality, the right to self determination and autonomy.

To leave these aside and to uphold the hushing up, rationalisation, eye wash and deflection of issues found in the report will only create further complications and crises relating to the national question; and meet with the resistance and struggle of the people. The global and regional powers will seek to transform such a situation into opportunities for them to intervene. The Party forewarns with a sense of caution that such a situation will bring great harm to the country and the people.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

Anti-Imperialist Day and 53rd Cuba National Day

The International Solidarity People's Forum marked the Anti-Imperialist Day and the 53rd National Day of Cuba on 1st January 2012 with a Liberation Cultural Evening held from 4.00 to 6.30 p.m. at the Kailasapathy Auditorium of the Deshiya Kalai Ilakkiyap Peravai in Colombo-6.

The first part of the Liberation Cultural Evening was a seminar chaired by Comrade E Thambiah, International Co-ordinator of the NDMLP and addressed by Comrades MK Abu Yoosuf, S Vijayakumar and Marx Prabbakar. The seminar was followed by cultural programme and a tea party.

Comrade Thambiah in his address from the chair urged the need for international solidarity against imperialist oppression and its agenda of globalisation and for close collaboration between left, progressive and anti-

imperialist forces. He also informed the audience of positive developments taking place internationally on the anti-imperialist front and the prospect of developing international solidarity among anti-imperialist forces.

Comrade MK Abu Yoosuf addressing the Seminar under the title “Imperialist encirclement and the future of Syria and Iran” drew attention to the way the popular uprisings in the Arab World have been subverted and to the dangerous intentions of the US and Israel in Syria and Iran and their possible consequences. He called for international solidarity against US intervention and subversion.

Comrade S Vijayakumar who spoke on “Imperialist threats and the challenges of Cuba and North Korea” explained how the US has tried for more than half a century to overthrow the socialist government of Cuba and maintained military tension in the Korean peninsula and blocking the reunification of Korea. He noted that despite embargos imposed by US on Cuba and US efforts to isolate North Korea, the two countries have successfully defended the sovereignty and independence of the countries.

Marx Prabbakar in his address on “the imperialist threat and the future of Sri Lanka” outlined how imperialism has tightened its grip on Sri Lanka and how the Sri Lankan government by adopting an unwise policy on the national question is playing into the hands of imperialism. He urged that, to save the country from imperialist strangulation, the progressive forces should act to unite the masses of the country by addressing the national question and resisting the agenda of imperialist globalisation.

The Cultural Programme was chaired by Comrade B Mahendran, National Organiser of the NDMLP. The programme included the recital of revolutionary songs in Sinhala, Tamil and English.

Comrade Sanmugathasan Remembered

The Sanmugathasan centre for Marxist-Leninist Studies marked the 19th death anniversary of Comrade N Sanmugathasan (Comrade Shan) with a seminar held at the Kailasapathy Auditorium of the Deshiya Kalai Ilakkiyap Peravai in Colombo-6.

The Seminar was chaired by Comrade S Sivasegaram and addressed by Comrade E Thambiah on the subject “The Validity of Marxism for the Liberation of the People of Sri Lanka”, and Comrade M Mauran on the subject “Marxism in our Cultural Environment”.

Comrade Sivasegaram outlined the political career of Comrade Shan and his prominent role in defending Marxism Leninism against revisionism and

Trotskyism. He commended the exemplary commitment of Comrade Shan to Marxist ideals and the dedication with which he carried out his political work as an activist and as leader.

Comrade Thambiah in his address rebutted the claim by reactionaries that Marxism is outmoded, by explaining what Marxism is, through the negation of mischievous misinterpretations of Marxism by its enemies. He went on to explain not only that Marxism was relevant but held the key to the continued survival of mankind. He added that Marxism is not dogmatic and is a growing science which has continued to be developed constructively. He urged the need to read, understand and build on the Communist Manifesto and Das Kapital in the context of developments during the last century and especially in the context of imperialist globalisation.

Comrade Mauran drew attention to the impact of feudal thinking and superstition that prevents people from finding even simple scientific solutions to problems, and explained that such weaknesses are exploited by reactionary forces, including narrow nationalists, to prevent people from solving their problems by relying on their own strength. He pointed out that the tendency to rely on leaders with supernatural powers and on foreign powers to solve our problems are maladies of social attitude that need to be addressed and overcome and that Marxists have to play a major role in overcoming reactionary thinking and feudal attitudes.

Several members of the audience participated in a lively discussion that followed the seminar.

Anonymous poem

Marx Prabhakar

You take the form of a hound and
poke your muzzle
into every corner.
You pursue me with passion
to discover
the kind of my reading and
the joy of my pleas.
You seem keen to collect information
about my colleagues.
You show interest in getting access to
the list of books that I request
from the library, poring through my notebooks.
You send your agents
to take a close look at my movements.
You avoid your uniform,
take the form of an office colleague,
and sit beside me in a show of camaraderie.
You hang about in the restaurant
more than you need.
You win my heart
in the form of an artiste
to obtain phone numbers.
You systematically record
my telephone wavelengths
and listen keenly.
Failing in every venture, and
weary of your chores, yet
you re-enter the arena to act.
Even if all your efforts put together
to provoke me, posing as a friend,
persist
you cannot sever from me
the elevated thoughts
for the liberation of the toiling masses
that have germinated, sprouted,
and spread their roots deep
unto the end of my life.

Sri Lankan Events

Shooting at Demonstrators

A 27 year old fisherman was killed on 15th February in Chilaw, a coastal town, when members of the Special Task Force of the Police, on orders from a senior officer, fired at demonstrators protesting increases in fuel prices. Besides the government's imposing of a curfew in Chilaw that day to prevent rioting, security forces were present in large numbers at the funeral of the slain fisherman, at which thousands paid their respects.

Rough handling of protests by the police is not new, and on the same day, the police fired tear gas and used water cannons to disperse a peaceful demonstration led by the JVP in Colombo. What is worrying is the impunity with which the police and security forces carry out such repression, and the increasing frequency of such events.

An Interesting Cartoon

The Daily Mirror published in mid-February a cartoon in two parts. In the first, on the left, a soldier points his gun towards the north while a man of the south looks on calmly. In the second, on the right, the gun turns southwards pointing towards the man, now looking petrified. The cartoon was in response to the killing of a fisherman protesting against the fuel price hike.

The Mirror, which rejects the right of minority nationalities to self determination, is not a lover of the working class, and disapproves of strikes, irrespective of the cause. It is also in constant fear of a Chinese takeover of the dominant role in Sri Lanka that it wishes to reserve for the West. The cartoon has deeper implications than probably intended, and it may be noted here that the anti-terrorism legislation of 1978 was put to use a decade later to kill tens of thousands of Sinhala youth.

Putting Troubles to Advantage

The Geneva Sessions of the UNHRC was a timely gift to the government of Sri Lanka, which used it to deny the main opposition parties the opportunity to take advantage of the public anger about the hike in fuel prices. Pro-government protests against the impending UNHRC resolution on Sri Lanka took the wind out of the sails of the opposition parties, which lack a principled stand on the issue of war crimes and have failed to call for a proper inquiry into the alleged crimes.

TNA's Dilemma

The TNA dodged attending the 19th Sessions of the UNHRC in Geneva, pleading that, in view of the risk of violence recurring and the civilian population becoming victims, nothing should be done which could exacerbate tensions under the present unstable situation. It was taunted by its nationalist rivals for 'failing in its duty', and by some government spokespersons claiming that the TNA was on a weak wicket as it once backed the LTTE. It was a 'no win' situation that the TNA created for itself, by letting itself to be manipulated by Indian policy makers.

As an afterthought, the TNA leader, under pressure from colleagues, wrote to the member states of the UNHCR on the eve of the Sessions that it endorses the resolution to be tabled at Geneva, declaring that the government of Sri Lanka has not yet done enough to implement the recommendations of the LLRC or comprehensively address the issue of accountability.

It is doubtful if anyone is convinced by either move of the TNA.

Free Marketing Education

Fear that the government is planning legislation to privatise university education has been there for some years, and students are at the forefront of opposition to such a move. Successive governments have since 1978 undermined state funded higher education by underfunding universities and enabling foreign universities to operate colleges in Sri Lanka. The demand for such colleges has swollen owing to inadequate expansion of higher education and the rising number of students who qualify for higher education.

Protests can slow down the wrecking of state funded universities. But privatisation of higher education and the entry of foreign players cannot be stopped unless the erroneous higher education policy of successive governments under the misguidance of the IMF is reversed.

The Last Refuge

The two bourgeois parties, the UNP and the SLFP, have been the final refuge of Sri Lankan Trotskyites of all shades. Unlike 'Stalinists', Trotskyites could seldom tell the difference between national and comprador bourgeoisie. Thus in which bourgeois party they end up in the eve of their left career is irrelevant. The NSSP, which splintered many times over the past three decades, despite revolutionary proclamations, seems to have divided itself between the UNP and the SLFP, with one section claiming to save the country from the UNP and the other from the SLFP.

World Events

ASIA

Maldives: Foreign Hands behind the Coup

President Nasheed, the first democratically elected President of the Maldives, was forced to resign at gunpoint on 7th February after three-weeks of protest and a police mutiny. The haste with which India, followed by the US and UK, recognised the new regime sent a clear message to anyone finding it hard to decide whether the coup was planned at home or abroad. Significantly, the new head of state Waheed Hassan has already added to his cabinet loyalists of the former dictator Maumoon Gayoom.

The US did not bargain for the angry response of the people to the coup, and beat a hasty retreat to retract on 10th February its hasty recognition of the new regime. However, Robert Blake, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, who met Hassan and Nasheed separately in Male on 11th February echoed the comments of Hassan to dismiss Nasheed's demand for an immediate presidential election, claiming that it is "too early" to hold one. Reflecting the cavalier attitude of the US, he brushed aside Nasheed's call for an independent investigation into his overthrow and the police and military witch hunt against his supporters to demand that Nasheed and his supporters should join a "unity government" with the very persons behind the coup. Nasheed rightly refused.

On the same day, India's Manmohan Singh sent his special envoy to the Maldives. The special envoy met with both Hassan and Nasheed and urged the need to speed up a political process to form a "broad-based coalition government that could restore peace and stability", making clear that India and the US have common goals in South Asia despite continuing rivalry.

Indian resentment of growing Chinese influence in the Maldives has been there, and the growth of trade relations with China since Nasheed took over has irritated India, despite Nasheed's tour of India in February 2011 to enhance cooperation in trade, investment and security, and his use of the opportunity to reiterate his pro-India stance. With tourism accounting for 28% of the GDP and more than 60% of foreign exchange receipts, it is hard for the Maldives to antagonise the West either.

The reliance of the Maldives on China's investment, trade and goodwill persisted despite India enhancing its investment, trade and economic

assistance. Although the visit of Wu Bangguo, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress, to Male in May 2011 persuaded India to make fresh gestures of goodwill towards the Maldives, there appear to have been other plans as well.

Nasheed, in his op-ed in the New York Times on the day after the coup (www.nytimes.com/2012/02/08/opinion/in-the-maldives-strangled-democracy.html?_r=2) gave useful insights into the politics of the Maldives, and concluded with a remarkable statement: "The problems we are facing in the Maldives are a warning for other Muslim nations undergoing democratic reform. At times, dealing with the corrupt system of patronage the former regime left behind can feel like wrestling with a Hydra: when you remove one head, two more grow back. With patience and determination, the beast can be slain. But let the Maldives be a lesson for aspiring democrats everywhere: the dictator can be removed in a day, but it can take years to stamp out the lingering remnants of his dictatorship".

[Other sources: www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/06/17/china-india-rivalry-maldives.html; www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2011/10/71448_space.html]

Nepal: Revolutionaries Fight Back

The Two Line Struggle

The genuine revolutionary forces still face an uphill task to overturn the effects of the compromises made by the UCPN(M) leadership, especially Bhattarai and Dahal, with the reactionary Nepal Congress and the opportunist CPN-UML. The revolutionary forces are actively pursuing a multi-front strategy of winning over cadres at every level and stirring up political discussion within the UCPN(M) as well as among the masses. An important document by Mohan Baidya, Vice Chairman of the Party titled "On problems of the party and their resolution" submitted to the Party Central Committee addresses the problems facing the Party as well as the Nepal Revolution in considerable depth. (See southasiarev.wordpress.com/2012/01/04/new-central-committee-document-by-kiran/).

The document was in response to the failure of the report by the Party Chairman Dahal to the Central Committee to recognise and acknowledge the complexity of the current political climate, the reality of the class struggle and the two-line struggle. Vice Chairman Baidya warned of the threat posed by the consolidation of a conspiracy to liquidate the process of great people's war initiated in 1996, and urged continuing the revolutionary line to offer a robust challenge to it.

The paper presented by Baidya was a clear reiteration of the short and long term goals of the Party, namely revolutionary new people's democracy and socialism, respectively, and a firm rebuttal of efforts to confuse the two and thereby capitulate to the reactionaries and settle for bourgeois democracy. Compromises made by the leadership on issues such as peace, constitution, disarming of the PLA and the terms of its merger with the Nepal Army, and the controversial deals with the CPN-UML and later the Mahdesi parties, going in parallel with the abandoning of mass struggle could all be traced to problems of outlook, linked with ideology, strategy, programmes and political line, and problems of procedure mainly concerning democratic centralism.

The paper had an impact, and forced both Dahal and Bhattarai to retreat, but rectification of the wrong line is some way away; and Bhattarai's recent reversal of the decision to legalise the takeover of land by peasants during the People's War leaves little room for hope about reforming revisionists and opportunists.

What is certain, however, is that the government led by Bhattarai and the writing of the constitution in the spirit in which it was to be done will be wrecked by the reactionary forces which will in the meantime consolidate their position with help from US imperialism and the regional hegemonic power. The people cannot allow themselves to be taken unawares and the case argued by Baidya for rectification of the errors by the Party has been made stronger by recent developments in Nepal.

Retaining Seized Lands

Feudal landlords and reactionaries have always claimed that revolutionary seizure of lands for cultivation by landless peasants is criminal theft. It was, however, shocking when the leaders of the Maoist Party —Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)— who abandoned the People's War to adopt a bourgeois-constitutional path promised to return the peasant-liberated lands to the landlords to make peace with landlords and capitalists. Struggle ensued within Party, which forced the Party to order its leadership (now in government positions) to reverse this capitulation.

On 26th January the secretariat of the standing committee of the Party urged the government, not to withdraw its decision of 12th January to legalise land transactions carried out by during the period of people's war. But, when the opposition parties, the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), condemned the legalisation and obstructed the Parliament from 17th January demanding the revoking the decision to legalise, Bhattarai yielded and on 9th February announced the scrapping of the Cabinet decision to legalise war-time transactions of property and land deals, confirming that he has fully compromised with the parliamentary political system.

Although Bhattarai shielded himself behind a Supreme Court order asking the government to halt the move, the call by revolutionary forces within the Party for his resignation as prime minister is all the more justified since by continuing in the post he can only implement the agenda of the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML.

[Source: revolutionaryfrontlines.wordpress.com/2012/01/26/nepal-land-to-the-peasants-or-returned-to-the-landlords/]

Disaffection with Erroneous Line

The political line of Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai —also Vice Chairman of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)— and Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Chairman of the Party are meeting with increasingly critical responses from Maoist cadres and the oppressed masses. The people have expressed their rejection of compromises made with the reactionary political parties and Indian expansionism. As a result, Dahal conceded at a closed-door meeting of the party on 19th January that he had erred in compromising with the parliamentary parties. He also admitted that he had seriously violated the party's fundamental principles while making compromises over peace and constitution drafting, and pledged that he would no longer enter into any such consensus against the party's fundamentals.

[For additional related information:
revolutionaryfrontlines.wordpress.com/2012/02/22/nepal-as-leaders-abandon-revolutionary-path-disqualified-and-disarmed-veteran-fighters-prepare-a-new-wave-of-struggle/#more-21695]

Unhappy Cadres

On 5th February, members of the Maoist Young Communist League locked the party's offices in western Nepal for depriving them of financial packages on par with People' Liberation Army personnel as pledged by the leadership in 2007, closing down indefinitely the offices of nine district committees of the Party those of two state committees.

Already disqualified PLA combatants have since December 2011 been agitating in support of their demands from the Party and the government for their honourable rehabilitation. The protesters demanded PLA identity cards, rehabilitation for physically disabled YCL members, relief packages on par with the PLA, and integration into the Nepal Army (NA) on equal terms, among other things.

Philippines: US Bases, Not Again

On 16th February, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) today assailed the US government for seeking to establish another Subic Naval Base in the Philippines, a little smaller perhaps, to service ships and troops being "rotated" in the Asia-Pacific region.

As a result of public protests against foreign military presence, the Philippine Senate voted in 1991 to close major US military bases in the country, and the US naval base in Subic Bay was closed down in 1992. US imperialism has since been itching to regain its military foothold. Under pretext of training and arming Filipino soldiers to fight al-Qaida-linked militants in Mindanao, the US in 1999 thrust on the government of the Philippines an agreement allowing hundreds of American troops to return in 2002 for military exercises and training. Since then, 500 to 600 US "counterterrorism" troops remain in Mindanao.

The CPP statement said that the plans of the US to set up a mini-Subic military base, service facility or exclusive dock in the Philippines have come into the open as US officials have announced plans to rotate in Australia, Singapore, Hawaii and the Philippines at least 3,300 troops from the Okinawa base in Japan. The statement also drew attention to US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta testifying before the US Senate Armed Forces Committee that the Obama government is working to forge an agreement with the Aquino regime like the one forged with Australia to allow the US military to regularly dock American warships and maintain "rotational" presence.

Earlier, US officials had announced the scrapping of plans to transfer the 8,000 US troops based in Okinawa to the US base in Guam. The plan now is to transfer 4,700 troops to Guam and "rotate" the rest in Asia-Pacific countries. The CPP has pointed out that the plan to set up facilities in the Philippines for the regular docking of US warships will effectively bring back US military bases in the country, and that the US wants to use the Philippines as a platform for its power-projection, China-containment and interventionist operations in the region.

The CPP accused the Aquino regime of being too willing to provide its US masters with all the facilities they needed, and has called on the Filipino people to fan the flames of patriotism and stand up against the imperialist machinations of the US to use the Philippines as a platform for their hegemonic plans.

[Sources: www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1990/KMF.htm;
philippinerevolution.net/statements/oppose-special-facilities-for-rotational-docking-of-american-warships-and-spy-planes-cpp]

India: Fighting Arrogance & Apathy

An All India Strike

On 5th February Gurudas Dasgupta, General Secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress, affiliated with the Communist Party of India, said that the joint call by the trade unions for a strike on 28th February as the biggest show of unity by the working class and the poor. He said that all major trade unions including those affiliated with the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party as well as the trade unions affiliated with the right-wing Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and the Muslim League in Kerala agreed to participate. The trade union organisation of the ruling Trinamul Congress of West Bengal earned the distinction of refusing to participate.

The leaders of the main trade unions had together toured across the country to canvass support for the strike in protest of low wages, 10-hour working days under miserable working conditions, job cuts, unemployment, and the rising number of contract labour jobs, among others. They are said to have kept the strike outside the purview of politics for the sake of trade union unity.

Dasgupta said that while the government had time for talks on crisis management with Kingfisher Airlines, facing a financial problem it had no time to talk to the trade unions, and that Parliament too failed to carry out its responsibility to the trade unions.

The most that the strike could achieve is some increase in class awareness among workers and drawing the attention of the broad masses to the worsening conditions for the workers. To expect more from trade union struggles will be naïve. Thus, Marxist Leninist parties while supporting the strike had called for the strengthening of the struggle against liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation.

Kashmir: Protecting Killers

The region faces power cuts of up to 16 hours a day despite bitterly cold winter temperatures as low as -16°C. On 3rd January, outside the main gate of a power plant near Baramulla town, hundreds of villagers were protesting against frequent power cuts. Paramilitary troops belonging to the Central Industrial Security Force opened fire on the protesters, killing one and injuring two others. The killing triggered protests from locals and shops and other business establishments remained closed on 6th January across Kashmir.

The state government, in a bid to prevent reprisals from the surrounding community, arrested five CISF officers allegedly involved in the killing. But the Government of India counsel sided with the CISF which has invoked the

Armed Forces Special Powers Act to get bail for the accused, countering Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's argument that the Act was inapplicable to the arrested CISF personnel. He also added that there was need to get sanction from the Centre under AFSPA for prosecuting the forces. Irrespectively of where this tug-of-war between the central and state governments will end, the reality of Kashmir is that the Indian state presents its problem in Kashmir as a terrorist problem instigated by Pakistan, and not a political problem needing a solution based on Kashmir's right to self determination.

[Sources: www.kashmirawareness.org; www.risingkashmir.com]

The Terrorist Bogey

On 19th February, Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram, during a top level review meeting at the Raj Bhavan in Guwahati, expressed concern over growing Maoist activities and influence in Assam and their links with insurgent outfits of the state such as the United Liberation Front of Asom, National Democratic Front of Bodoland and Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front as well as Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI and outlined strategies to counter the threat. Chidambaram had also stressed on increased border vigil as Myanmar has emerged as a hub of NE-based 'terrorists' with most of the insurgent outfits of the region having base in that country. Tarun Gogoi, Chief Minister of Assam told the media that he has demanded an increase in security forces deployed in Assam from 86 to 125 companies of paramilitary forces.

Highlighting of terrorist threat by the Indian state has often been to make a case for ruthless military action which could hurt the public at large as well as to clear the ground for big investors to move in. It also provides justification for prolonging in the name of security draconian legislation like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act which is in force in Assam.

[Source: www.thestatesman.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=400667&catid=36]

Convenient Conspiracies

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was counting on the sell out by the AIADMK, DMK and other political leaders over the anti-Kudankulam struggle, to commission the nuclear power plant at Kudankulam. To his dismay, protests are gathering momentum at old and newly proposed nuclear plant sites, with a countrywide resistance campaign scheduled for 11th March. Manmohan Singh, in desperation, has come out with the theory that US-based NGOs are behind the campaign to undermine the Russian-aided Kudankulam project.

Unfortunately for him, there are too many holes in his theory for it to hold water.

If US-based NGO's are a source of trouble, why has the government encouraged them over the past two decades and more? If US-based NGOs are opposing the Russian aided nuclear power project, who is behind the opposition to the proposed plant in Jaitapur using French knowhow? Manmohan Singh has not produced a shred of evidence in support of his theory and all inquiries have shown that the support for the protests is entirely indigenous. One thing is clear: Manmohan Singh realises that the stock of the US in India is on the decline, like that of his government.

[Source: *Red Star Weekly* 5th February 2012]

Cyclone Thane: Indifference of ADMK Regime

Cyclone Thane which hit Puthuchcheri (Puducherry) and the Kadalur and Vizuppuram districts of Tamilnadu on 30th December 2011 caused unprecedented damage to infrastructure, crops, fishing boats and nets, and houses (especially huts) and the total green cover in the Puthuchcheri (Puducherry) district of the Union Territory of Puducherry(Puthuchcheri). 400,000 huts were damaged in Kadalur (Cuddalore) and Vizuppuram districts. A million acres of farmland in the districts of Kadalur, Vizuppuram, Nagai, Thiruvaarur, Kaanchipuram, Thiruvallur, Tanjavur and Ariyalur suffered disastrous damage. A CPI (ML) team led by Balasundaram, Tamilnadu State Secretary, published on 6th January 2012 the findings of its investigations in several affected villages on 4th January.

Besides an estimate of the extent of damage and harm to the livelihood of the people, the study, found that the relief work provided by the Government was severely lacking, especially in the light of the Meteorological Department, Chennai warning on 24th December 2011 about the likely severity of the cyclone with wind speeds of around 150 km/h. The study pointed out that *the warning was repeated for several days but the ADMK government of Tamilnadu remained inactive, and that lay at the root of the severity of the damage. The Congress government of Puducherry fared even worse not only by failing to take precautionary steps but also by being callous in its response.*

Relief offered by the government (2500-5000 Indian Rupees) is inadequate even to erect a hut, and paddy cultivators are demanding Rs 10,000 per acre lost. The government has offered a paltry sum of Rs 3,600 as compensation to cashew farmers in Kadalur earning Rs 30,000 annually from their gardens, which now lie in total waste.

The AICCTU and the Movement for Protection of Roofless held massive protest demonstrations in front of the District Collector's Office on 10th January denouncing the state government of Puthuchcheri for its lethargy, and

demanding immediate release of Rs 20 billion by the central government as interim relief to the Union Territory of Puducherry (Puthuchcheri).

The study also drew attention to the failure of the state government of Tamilnadu, which has been accused of misappropriating tsunami relief funds, to erect coastal shelterbelts —required in the wake of the tsunami of 2004— which would have attenuated the severity of Thane, which had penetrated 107 km inland. It added that the failure to follow guidelines under Disaster Management Act on preparedness, management, relief and reconstruction contributed to the severity of the disaster.

[Source: *cpimliberation.wordpress.com*]

China: Rising Democratic Struggle

Rural standoffs against the state have usually ended with the arrest of the ringleaders followed by increased security presence. However, the 11-day stand-off of the village of Wukan against local government authorities ended in the afternoon of 22nd December 2012, with the villagers securing the release of one of the village's three detained leaders, one on the same day and the other two four days later.

A deputy secretary of the Communist Party in the Guangdong Province who negotiated with village leaders pledged to grant all of their initial demands including the release of their representatives and the return of the body of Xue Jinbo, a village leader who died in police custody, and to conduct direct negotiations with the pro-tem committee, chosen by villagers, whose members were earlier denounced by the government as criminals.

In September 2011, residents of Wukan accused local officials of stealing more than \$110 million owed to them for the sale of over 80% of their arable land to developers, and marched on the county seat. Although initially the protests caused destruction of property of local government offices, since the formation of the pro-tem temporary committee, the struggle was nonviolent. Significantly, unlike in tens of thousands of other protests across China each year, the local officials were forced to flee Wukan on 11th December 2011, leaving the town in the hands of the community.

On 31st January 2012, less than two months after staging a bold protest against official corruption and chasing away their local leaders, the villagers cast independent ballots in the first step to determine the leadership of their seaside village in Guangdong Province.

Whether the spirit of Wukan will be sustained is an open question. But rebellion against the corruption and callousness of the state is on the rise in South China.

In another unrelated development, residents of Haimen, a town of 130,000 people 120 km from Wukan, demanded the removal of a coal-fired plant because it was damaging their health. About 30,000 people went on strike in support of the demand, and riot police fired tear-gas and beat demonstrators. Demonstrators claimed that more than 100 were badly beaten by the riot police and that a 15-year-old boy was killed.

Such militancy of the masses has to be seen against the background of worker's protests in South China, mainly in the motor spares manufacturing sector in mid-2010 and more recently in late 2011 by factory workers in the industrial cities of Shenzhen and Dongguan.

[Sources: southasiarev.wordpress.com/2011/12/29/wukan-protests-spread-across-south-china-another-arab-spring/; chinastudygroup.net]

Myanmar: The Democratic Mask

The military dictatorship which took in power in 1962 made way for an elected government to be formed in March 2011, following elections in November 2010, which were severely flawed. That, however, provided the US with the pretext to make open gestures of friendship towards the regime, which is still dominated by the armed forces.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Myanmar in November 2011 amid signs that trade embargos against the country could be withdrawn following forthcoming by-elections at which National League of Democracy leader and long standing democracy campaigner Aung San Suu Kyi is allowed to contest. Following the visit, and the release of 651 political prisoners in January, the US on 13th January announced its intention to post an ambassador in Myanmar.

Myanmar had suspended the unpopular Chinese-funded Myitsone dam and hydro power project just before Clinton's visit; and this was seen as a sign of Myanmar edging towards a foreign policy more independent of China as well as a snub to China to please the US in preparation for Clinton's visit.

An insightful comment on the developments in Myanmar by Jason Burke (www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/05/democracy-finally-coming-burma) was published in the Guardian on 5th January, where he exposed the cynicism of both the West and the Burmese regime. He said, citing Latt, presidential advisor, that the government is considerably more enthusiastic about the prospect of Suu Kyi in parliament than many of her supporters: "We need an opposition here. We need a strong NLD. The reforms will continue. Sometimes they will go slowly. Sometimes quickly. But they will continue. This is democratisation and that is the mission of the government".

Burke observed that it was the process that William Hague —seen as the face of the ‘International Community’— sought to reinforce when he visited Myanmar on 5th January, and that, while the visit was largely welcomed by pro-democracy campaigners (and Aung San Suu Kyi), others were wary, fearing that the adulation lavished on Suu Kyi, especially in the West, could be a trap and her cult status a potential danger. They worry that the sight of their leader taking a seat in Parliament will be taken to mean that the problems in the country have been solved.

He added: “Normal relations will be established— not least because Burma is an important element in the ongoing effort to roll back Chinese influence in the region. Trade will follow the flag. The current American and European Union sanctions on Burma will be lifted and businesses will begin to move in to exploit an untapped market and a country with fantastic natural resources. As long as Aung San Suu Kyi remains in parliament, the argument goes, the authorities will have the fig leaf they need”.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Reuters reported on 11th January that a delegation of US business leaders, including Microsoft chairman Bill Gates, was expected to visit Myanmar soon, as another sign of strengthening U.S. ties with the long-isolated Myanmar, despite sanctions.

China has been, at least externally, very calm about the developments in Myanmar. Significantly, not long after the visit by Clinton, the Chinese ambassador to Myanmar had met with Myanmar's leader and with Suu Kyi on her request. Thus, Western hopes for sidelining China in Myanmar, let alone using Myanmar to encircle China, are unlikely materialise in a hurry. US dreams of breaking the Myanmar – North Korea – China axis too seem farfetched, because the West and India badly need access to the markets in Myanmar as well as a share of its oil and other resources. What it is likely is that the military, which will continue as the real power behind the parliamentary facade in Myanmar, in much the same way things have been in Egypt and for long in Thailand, will take advantage of the power rivalry to enrich itself and consolidate its power.

The struggle for democracy is thus far from over and will inevitably pass through a phase of deception before campaigners for democracy realise that they have been short changed. Meantime the West will make the most of the new business opportunities to plunder, while it will be business, nearly as usual, for China which holds other cards besides its huge investments to bargain with Myanmar and efforts by India to increase its influence, perhaps less successfully than the rest.

The campaign for democracy needs to address issues of democracy at mass level to restore genuine democracy and act to address the national question of Myanmar involving minority nationalities and communities accounting for over 30% of the population so that related issues will not be

manipulated by the military and other anti-democratic elements as well as foreign hegemonic forces to undermine the democratic struggle.

Afghanistan: Imperialist Arrogance

New York Times warned that the killing of two US soldiers by a man in an Afghan army uniform on 23rd February was a pointer to the fallout from the burning of several copies of the Koran by US military personnel in the third week of February. What the Times and other Western media fail to realise is that the burning of copies of the Koran is only symbolic of the arrogance and racism which have dominated the thinking in the West since the days of colonial occupation. Interestingly, the Times—which never criticised the flawed foreign policy of the US— has quoted a Muslim female lawmaker who accused Iran and Pakistan of behind-the-scenes manipulation to see the American military under pressure.

President Karzai has once again found himself in the unenviable position of safeguarding US interests in Afghanistan while retaining the support of his own allies in Parliament and elsewhere, including former mujahedeen leaders, who have no choice but to side with the angry public. This time Obama was not slow to apologise for the incident and pledge to investigate it. But that has not been enough to stop the growing wave of violent protests and arracks on US military personnel, leading to fresh American worries about the strategy for 'withdrawal' planned for 2013. .

Newt Gingrich, a Republican hopeful for presidential candidacy, on the other hand, harshly criticised Obama for his apology, calling it an "outrage" and insisting that "It is Hamid Karzai who owes the American people an apology, not the other way around".

The US apology will not cut much ice with the Muslim world, which is bitter over earlier incidents of desecration of the Koran at the American-run detention facilities in Guantanamo Bay, Afghanistan and Iraq since the initiation of the unholy US crusade against 'Islamic terrorism'.

[Source: www.nytimes.com/2012/02/24/world/asia/koran-burning-afghanistan-demonstrations.html?_r=1&nl=todaysheadlines&emc=tha22]

Iran: Fighting on Several Fronts

The IAEA Menace

IAEA, the UN nuclear watchdog which in its report of 8th November 2011 suggested without any evidence that that Iran was about to produce a nuclear

weapon. Its report of 24th February seems to be a pathetic attempt to make the earlier claim more convincing. It reports that that Iran had accelerated its uranium enrichment program, a matter which Iran has made no secret of. On the contrary, US intelligence analysts insist that there is no hard evidence that Iran has decided to build a nuclear bomb. These assessments are consistent with their finding of 2007 that Iran had abandoned its nuclear weapons program years earlier. Critics in Israel and some European countries complain that Iran has made great strides in enriching uranium, the most difficult step toward building a nuclear weapon. But what is important is that it does not in any way demonstrate intent to develop nuclear weapons.

While the US intelligence agencies now seem cautious about their sources of information, especially since the thoroughly discredited intelligence assessments of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the International Atomic Energy Agency merely echoes views which comprise part of the agenda of the US and Israel to create a pretext to subvert Iran militarily or otherwise. But the fact remains that no one has any evidence to suggest that Iran intends to build a bomb. Nevertheless, as we have seen in the past six decades, neither US nor Israel need a valid pretext to start a war, so that the threat of war against Iran remains, irrespectively of Iran possessing the technology to build nuclear weapons.

The UN Security Council is being used to bring economic pressure on Iran, and China and Russia too have yielded to American pressure to allow sanctions to be imposed on Iran. The recent EU announcement of sanctions on Iran's fuel exports, a freeze of the country's central bank assets, and an oil embargo set to begin in July has backfired badly on Britain and France. Iran, in what seemed to be a pre-emptive blow, halted oil sales to the two countries in late February, in view of their hostile attitude, and laid down conditions for oil export to other European countries. Iran made it clear to the ambassadors of six European countries who visited Tehran that it now seeks guarantees of payments, three to five year contracts and a ban on unilateral cancellation of contracts by buyers, and that all of these should be considered if Europe wants continued trade and oil relations with Iran.

Iran also had warned in January that if sanctions affect its oil sales, it would choke off the Strait of Hormuz through which 20% of the world's oil exports pass. Serious analysts of the Middle East think that Iran is not bluffing.

[Sources: www.shanghaidaily.com; www.usatoday.com]

Israeli Assassinations

Prof. Ismael Hossein-Zadeh's article "The Assassination of Iranian Scientists: In What Way is Iran a Threat to Israel?" of 17th February in Global Research (www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=HOS20120217)

&articleId=29360) explains that the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, assisted by various covert operations agencies of the US and its allies was behind the assassination of Iranian scientists.

He challenges the justification of these criminal acts in terms of Iran posing an “existential” threat to Israel, and points out that Israel and the US know that Iran’s nuclear program does not entail arms production. He argues that the real threat is Iran’s national sovereignty, independence from imperial powers, unwavering exposition of and challenge to the Zionist project of “greater Israel” and defence of the right of the Palestinian people to their land and homes.

He traces Israeli terrorism to the time of its founding and identifies the historical role of Mossad as an assassination squad, whose recent targets comprise scientists, peace negotiators, peace activists and anyone seen as a serious obstacle to the Zionist project. He also lists a number of instances where Israel has attempted criminal acts of mass murder and sought to pin the blame on the Palestinians or unfriendly Arab states.

The recent spate of killing and kidnapping of Iranian scientists and industrial ‘accidents’ due to sabotage is a means of intimidation of the Iranian intellectuals— the scientific community in particular. Its purpose goes beyond hampering the Iranian nuclear power project. The aim is a regime change through political destabilisation, whereby the Zionists and their master, the US could have a government of their liking in Iran.

Syria: Imperialist Mischief

On 26th February, amid calls for a boycott by opponents of the regime claiming that the referendum and promises of reform were a ploy by Bashar al-Assad to placate critics and quell the 11-month uprising, Syrians voted (89% in favour with a total polling rate of 57%) in support of a new constitution. In Homs and Idlib, where conditions remained turbulent, voters were prevented from participation. The draft constitution unveiled in early February allows a multi-party system which will end the legal basis for the five-decade long hold on power of the ruling Baath Party. But it gives the President, who can be elected for two seven-year terms, the power to name the premier and government and, in some cases, veto legislation. The US, as expected, rejected the referendum and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in a statement in violation of Syrian sovereignty, warned that there was “every possibility” that Syria could descend into a civil war and urged Syrian troops to disobey orders.

Pepe Escobar in his article “What is the GCC up to in Syria?” in Asia Times (www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/NA31Ak04.html) denounced the Saudi-controlled Arab League for presenting a UN draft resolution designed to oust

Assad in the name of an “Arab solution to an Arab problem”. The Syrian government rejected the resolution as “blatant intervention in its internal affairs. The resolution became irrelevant in the context of China and Russia using their veto against US-led moves in the Security Council.

Notably, the Arab League on 28th January suspended its monitoring mission in Syria, which refused to blame the Assad regime alone for the tragic situation and faulting the armed wing of the Syrian National Council as well. Further investigation would have exposed the devious role of Saudi Arabia and Qatar who have been financing and arming the militants to stir trouble even in some suburbs of Damascus.

Escobar notes that, while no objective conditions exist for a NATO bombing of Syria, the geopolitical axis comprising the NATO, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Israel will relentlessly pursue its agenda in the Middle East, namely exercising total control over any Arab Spring-related transition (as in Yemen); averting changes to the status quo (as in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco); outright repression (as in Bahrain); and having it both ways (as in Libya). While the Saudi-controlled GCC managed well the “transition” in Yemen and moderately in Egypt, Syria seems a tougher project for Saudi Arabia and the US.

Meanwhile, UK-based Amnesty International and US-based Human Rights Watch chose to side with the US-backed belligerency. AI held a global “day of action” to denounce Syria for “crimes against humanity” and accuse Russia and China of betraying the Syrian people, while HRW denounced the actions of Russia and China in the UN Security Council as “incendiary”. (www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=FOR20120221&articleId=29422). It is uncertain whether these champions of human rights miss the imperialist and Saudi agenda in Syria because they separate ‘human rights’ from its politics or because of an inherent tendency to choose targets that meet with the approval of their respective ruling classes.

The Baath Party rule in Syria led by Bashar al-Assad has a record of anti-democratic repression, but has positive features as well, like its secularism and anti-Zionist stand. Also despite compromising with imperialism and permitting a corrupt capitalist class to thrive, it is not an ally of imperialism. The forces seeking its overthrow comprise a mix of reactionary elements religious fundamentalists and outright mercenaries, alongside whom are progressive forces that want a genuine democratic change in Syria. The present resistance to Assad is dominated by the most reactionary forces in the pay of imperialism, Saudi Arabia and its allies. Thus to support efforts to overthrow of the Assad regime with foreign backing will amount to let Syria go the way Libya did. Besides, the implications of a ‘regime change’ in Syria for the region are negative from the point of view of the global anti-imperialist struggle. Thus progressive forces, especially in Syria, should distance

themselves from the imperialist agenda and find other ways to pressurise the Syrian regime for greater democracy and progressive policies.

AFRICA

Nigeria: Dragged into Instability by the IMF

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and largest oil producer, is being systematically thrown into chaos and a state of civil war. Nigeria despite its oil wealth is one of Africa's poorest countries, and most of its oil is exploited and exported by Shell, Mobil, Chevron and Texaco. Italy's Agip too has a stake and, more recently, Chinese state oil companies have sought oil exploration and infrastructure agreements with Nigeria.

Owing to Nigeria's failure to build its domestic oil refining capacity, most of the petrol and other petroleum products consumed are imported. Thus, to shield the population from the high costs of imported fuel, the government subsidised fuel prices. Under pressure from the IMF, the government removed price subsidies. President Goodluck Jonathan, who had promised the major trade unions that the subsidy would be removed gradually in four-stages to ease the economic burden, announced on 1st January an immediate full removal of subsidies, which led to a sudden surge in petrol price from 65 to 150 naira (US\$ 0.35 to 0.93) per litre as well as to price increases in essential goods and services, and to mass anger and a wave of strikes which brought Nigeria to a standstill by mid-January.

The protests, which coincided with a fresh campaign of attacks by the militant Islamic group Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, took the country to the brink of disaster and forced the government to back down and agree to use its oil revenue to cap essential fuel prices. The trade unions called off the strikes, but the root causes of the problem remain.

Other sinister motives have been attributed to the IMF pressure on Nigeria (globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=28900). In May 2010 just after President Jonathan was sworn in, China signed a massive \$28.5 billion deal with Nigeria to build three new refineries, which does not fit in with the plans of the IMF the US and the Anglo-American oil giants. China State Construction Engineering Corporation Limited's deal to build the oil refineries in Nigeria is the biggest deal that China has made in Africa, and would significantly reduce the \$10 billion annual bill for imported refined products. As of January 2012 the three refinery projects were still at the planning stage, reportedly blocked by powerful vested interests profiting from a corrupt import system.

Nigeria was also seeking added Chinese investors for its energy, mining and agribusiness. China has already won four prospective oil blocks and the

construction of a double track Lagos-Kano railway Also, Nigeria which holds around 79% of its foreign currency reserves in US Dollars and the rest in Euro or Sterling, all of which are in trouble, was also considering investing 5 to 10% of its foreign exchange reserves in China's currency, the Renminbi (RMB), in view of the prospect of the RMB becoming reserve currency. The move of a major oil producer away from the US dollar, added to similar recent moves by India, Japan, Russia, Iran and others, augurs bad news for the continued role of the dollar and the US cannot be happy with that.

However, while IMF pressure to lift fuel subsidies faces massive popular resistance, Chinese expansion in Nigeria too is in the balance. The new wave of terror killings and bombings by the mysterious and suspiciously well-armed Boko Haram also suggests manipulation by a wealthy Muslim state acting on behalf of other forces.

Somalia: Empire Strikes again

Abayomi Azikiwe, editor of Pan-Africa News Wire, in his article "Imperialist-driven War on Somalia Raises Casualties" pointed out that western-backed military intervention in Somalia has aggravated hostilities and led to more deaths and injuries since Kenyan, Ethiopian and AMISOM forces escalated their military campaign. (panafricannews.blogspot.com/2012/01/imperialist-driven-war-on-somalia.html)

The US, its imperialist allies, Israel and the UN are propping up the Somalia Transitional Federal Government, and backing the African Union Mission to Somalia and the Ethiopian troops in their military attacks on the Al-Shabaab in several regions of Somalia. The attacks are also supported by the presence of flotillas of naval vessels of the EU in the Gulf of Aden, ostensibly to fight "piracy". Also, US drone attacks in the past several months have killed hundreds of Somalis.

Kenyan forces entered southern Somalia in October 2011 allegedly in response to incursions by Al-Shabaab into Kenyan territory. But Azikiwe explains that the invasion had been planned with the US for nearly two years, and points out that the US has kept accusing Al-Shabaab of links with Al-Qaeda to justify intervention.

Despite recent claims by the US-backed puppet regime and its foreign military allies that Al-Shabaab has been driven out of most of its key regions of control, Al-Shabaab is still offering a formidable resistance to the western-backed military units.

Just as Pakistan is paying a heavy political and economic price for letting itself to be used by the US in its war in Afghanistan, Kenya too is paying a price for its role in Somalia. Despite claims that the Kenyan military is already

halfway through its operations to subdue Al-Shabaab, the latter has raided Kenyan territory in Wajir, destroyed an administrative police camp at Gerille and took five military and civilian personnel into custody.

The Nairobi-based Inter-Regional Information Network, an agency of the UN said in January that “Security, service delivery and economic activity in north-eastern Kenya have deteriorated considerably since October 2011, when the country’s military forces deployed in neighbouring Somalia in an effort to eradicate the Al-Shabaab militia. Food prices had also increased in northern Kenya with local traders unable to import goods from Somalia.

The London conference of 23rd February on Somalia is now thoroughly exposed as a shameful attempt by the UK and its clients to boost the war efforts in Somalia. (See: *nakedchiefs.com/2012/02/27/kenya-ethiopia-uganda-burundi-smile-like-siamese-cats-at-london-somalia-meet-but-what-the-hell-is-going-on-in-kismayu/*)

Meantime the plunder of oil resources in the relatively peaceful parts of Somalia, namely Somaliland and Puntland, goes on unchecked. Political destabilisation of Somalia has also encouraged secessionist forces in Puntland to push their agenda and for Somaliland to assert greater autonomy.

In the breakaway region of Puntland, where the leadership of the area has sought international recognition independent of Mogadishu, a Canadian oil and gas exploration firm working in partnership with two Australian companies has begun drilling at two wells known as Shabeel-1 and Shabeel North-1 in the Dharoor plains, where it has been claimed that 300 million barrels of recoverable oil may exist. Such activities indicate a bigger agenda behind the military interventions in Somalia, since the US and the West are exporting more oil than ever from the African continent, a trend that could continue for decades.

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

Uruguay: Protest by Landless Peasants

Uruguay’s landless peasants’ movement, dubbing itself as the Shaggies, encouraged eighty landless peasant families to take over a 400 hectare farm in the Artigas region in the far north of the country in January, and continue its occupation. Artigas, bordering Argentina and Brazil has an economy based on farming and non-industrial mining for amethysts. It also has sugar cane plantations and a sugar mill that has been troubled for over six decades. The ruling Broad Front coalition which was elected in 2004 and again in 2009, pledged to distribute land to the “shaggies”, but has so far not done so.

The movement inspired by the MST, the landless movement in Brazil, plans to stay on for a while to send “a strong message to the government and the people of Uruguay”. Whether the occupation will end up as an internal battle among the partners of the Broad Front or expand into a wider struggle remains to be seen.

[Source: *en.mercopress.com/2012/01/16/landless-peasants-with-80-families-occupy-and-take-over-farm-in-north-of-uruguay*]

Bolivia: Contradictions among the People

Bolivia's new constitution, drawn by an elected constituent assembly and adopted by a referendum, granted unprecedented rights to the indigenous majority. But transforming of Bolivia, victim of centuries of colonial pillage, poses tough challenges. A recent issue comprises protests and counter-protests since mid-2011 about a highway which would cut through the Isiboro-Secure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS), and threatens to polarise Bolivian society and divide the indigenous groups that constitute the social base of the government of Evo Morales.

Community leaders in the TIPNIS Sub-central region objected to the lack of consultation and concern over the potential impact of the road on local communities and threatened to march to the capital La Paz to oppose the proposed roadway. The march was backed by the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB), which unites 34 lowland indigenous peoples, and the Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ), comprising 16 small indigenous communities. Ten weeks later, the march reached La Paz in October; and the protesters succeeded in persuading Parliament to approve a law banning a highway through TIPNIS.

The highway is essential to Bolivia's three main national indigenous peasant groups and nearby coca-grower unions for their communities to access basic services and markets for their produce. Hence, a counter-march was initiated in December, by the Indigenous Council of the South (CONISUR), which includes some indigenous communities within TIPNIS and in “Poligono Seven” (a heavily populated zone within TIPNIS region but not part of the collective title, and home to outside indigenous peasants settled in the area in search for land to till).

When the CONISUR march arrived in La Paz in January 2012, the government asked the leaders of the TIPNIS Sub-central to meet with CONISUR leaders to resolve the dispute. But the request was rejected by CIDOB and the TIPNIS Sub-central, and parliamentarians met with CONISUR to discuss a new law to allow TIPNIS communities to decide the fate of the project.

The Parliament decided on 9th February to pass a law approving a process to consult indigenous communities within TIPNIS about the roadway. The new law, designed to place the future of the project —seen by the government as a strategic necessity to develop Bolivia— in the hands of those that will be most affected has stirred fresh debate. Meantime, the government has called on Bolivia's main social organisations to help to draft a new law to set the legal parameters for future consultations —a right enshrined in the new constitution— to establish a framework for greater popular participation and overcoming the rising number of local conflicts over various development projects.

Whether the new moves will help to rebuild fractured alliances and expand participatory democracy or be exploited by reactionary forces to deepen rifts among communities and among supporters of Morales depends on the sensitivity and far sight with which the government handles the issues.

Critics of the new law, including CIDOB and TIPNIS Sub-central leaders, reject the consultation process as a means to reverse the government's decision to suspend the road project and make way for the road to be built.

Commenting on the government's handling of the TIPNIS dispute, Garcia Linera, Bolivia's Vice President, on 4th February admitted that the government had erred in not consulting the communities about the highway and on the law banning the highway.

The issues are not straight forward and one needs to recognise the hidden agendas of vested interests that instigate trouble and divide the indigenous people to bring about a regime change.

[Source: www.greenleft.org.au/node/50081]

EUROPE

Struggling European Economies

On 3rd March Xinhua reported that the EU's top leaders, who concluded their first day of the spring summit on 1st March, for the first time in almost two years shifted their focus from handling a debt crisis to spurring growth. (news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-03/02/c_131442180.htm).

The European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso declared after the meeting that it is the time for the EU to move from "the crisis mode" to "the growth mode". The 'shift' seems partly because the austerity measures to end the debt woes led to rising unemployment and another recession looming over the region. Unemployment in the 17-nation Euro Zone hit a record 10.7% in January, with Spain at 23.2%. The Euro Zone economy shrank by 0.3% in the

last quarter of 2011 and the EC expects the economy of eight of the seventeen countries in the Euro Zone to shrink in the first quarter of 2012.

However, little seems to have emerged as concrete proposals to spur growth, while leaders of 25 of the 27 countries pledged to enforce the EU's deficit-cutting and debt reduction rules more strictly by signing a German-driven fiscal compact treaty on Friday.

Greece: Burdening the People

Five days after a successful 24-hour nationwide general strike on 7th February, half a million protesters gathered outside the Parliament in Athens on 12th February to protest against the caretaker cabinet's austerity measures which were being debated in Parliament. Besides them many thousands protested across Greece against the measures. Adoption of the measures was necessary to secure the next €130 billion lending package from the European Community Bank and the IMF to avert bankruptcy. The protests and police response were violent: 45 buildings were set ablaze and 25 protesters and 40 officers were injured. The Parliament passed the plan regardless by a vote of 199 to 74.

The Communist Organisation of Greece in its statement of 13th February saluted the protesters, amid terrorism and blackmail by the establishment. Rejecting the deal as amounting to enslavement of Greece, the statement concluded: "The intensified crisis of the political system is an opportunity for the promotion of a social and political front that will put a stop to this illegal regime and set the country in a different course, materializing what the people want and claim for. A social and political front which will pave the way for the salvation of the people and the country: Real Democracy. Independence. Productive reconstruction. Stop the payments NOW – Not one more euro to the loan sharks. We can break the chains. The fight continues!" [democracyandclasstruggle.blogspot.com/2012/02/greeks-look-to-left-for-solutions.html]

Protests continue and people, bitter in the knowledge that they are being burdened under pressure from the EU merely to protect the big banks, gather in large numbers to object to every austerity measure that is announced.

Meantime, the possibility of exclusion of Greece from the Euro Zone is now openly discussed. The statement by German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble that "Europe is better prepared for a Greek default than two years ago" and by his Greek counterpart, Venizelos, that "there are many in the Euro Zone who don't want [Greece] any more" are indicative of evolving trends. Exclusion of Greece will have implications for other Euro Zone economies, and could mean the eventual unravelling of the EU.

For Greece, expulsion could be a blessing since what it needs most is a revolution.

Source: www.todayszaman.com/news-273237-the-genie-is-out-of-the-bottle-the-eurozone-without-greece.html

Italy: Attempt to Outlaw Communism

Party of the Committees to Support Resistance – for Communism (P-CARC); Association for Proletarian Solidarity (ASP); and Struggling Workers Union (SLL) issued a statement on 21st January denouncing attempts by the state to outlaw communists and communism in Italy.

Trial was opened on 8th February 2012 at the Assize Court of Bologna against 12 comrades who are/were part of the (new) Italian Communist Party ((n)PCI), P-CARC and the ASP. The statement explains that the charges are political and are aimed to declare the (n)PCI a criminal organisation and therefore to declare that belonging to it is a crime. A conviction of the comrades could lead to the indictment of any other member and collaborator of the (n)PCI.

On 1st July 2008 the Judge for Preliminary Hearings, Rita Zaccariello of the Court of Bologna made a nonsuit judgment because “there were no facts”. That judgment temporarily stopped the crusade against the (n)PCI and its allied forces, which Public Prosecutor Paolo Giovagnoli was conducting for more than 8 years, on behalf of the state.

On 20th January 2011, the Supreme Court, upholding the action of the Public Prosecutor Giovagnoli and of the Prosecutor’s Office of Bologna, overturned the judgment of 2008. The General Attorney Giovanni Salvi advocated the cancellation of the nonsuit judgment and approved the restarting of the proceedings.

Democracy and Class Struggle, a Maoists English blog, declared on 21st January (democracyandclasstruggle.blogspot.com/2012/01/trial-of-comrades-in-bologna-on-8th.html) that “the trial of comrades in Bologna on 8th February 2012 is not only an attack on democracy in Italy but also on the resistance in Europe! Start organising your protests now! The news of the prosecution of 12 members the (new) Italian Communist Party and the CARC and ASP on the 8th February 2012 as part of a renewed campaign against Communism in Italy should send shivers down the spine of all involved in Europe in resistance to austerity and attacks on democracy. These are our brothers and sisters in struggle who have been at the forefront of resistance in Italy.”

Injustice

Christopher Van Wyk

Me, I cry easy if you're hurt
and I would've carried the crosses
of both the murderer
and the thief
if they'd let me
and I'd lived then.

I grasp helplessly at cigarettes
during riots
and burn my fingers
hoping.

My nose has never sniffed tear-gas
but I weep all the same
and my heart hurts
aching from buckshot.

My dreams these days are policed
by a million eyes
that baton-charge my sleep
and frog-march me into a
shaken morning.

I can't get used to injustice
I can't smile no matter what

I'll never get used to nightmares
but often I dream of freedom.

[The poetry of South African children's book author, novelist and poet Christopher van Wyk (born 1957) was inspired by the Soweto uprising of 1974 .]

DAY OF PEACE *

Daramfon Bassey

**The world is corrupt
There are people crying
The world is corrupt**

There are people Dying

**There are children who are orphaned
Because of the world corrupt**

**But one day
Peace will be in world
And then the people crying
Will be stop their cries**

**But one day
Peace will be in world
Children will be happy
And children will live a better life
When peace will come**

In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Written for the International Day of Peace
by Daramfon Bassey (11 years)
Benin City, Nigeria
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Phone: 071 4302959; Fax: 011 2473757; E-mail: newdemocraticparty@hotmail.com

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