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*Draft Proposals
for a Common Programme*

Critique of the FLSP Programme

New Democratic Revolution

State-Civil Society Dynamics

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Refugee Mother and Child

Chinua Achebe

No Madonna and Child could touch
that picture of a mother's tenderness
for a son she soon will have to forget.
The air was heavy with odours
of diarrhoea of unwashed children
with washed-out ribs and dried-up
bottoms struggling in laboured
steps behind blown empty bellies.

Most mothers there had long ceased
to care but not this one; she held
a ghost smile between her teeth
and in her eyes the ghost of a mother's
pride as she combed the rust-coloured
hair left on his skull and then –
singing in her eyes – began carefully
to part it... In another life
this would have been a little daily
act of no consequence before his
breakfast and school; now she
did it like putting flowers
on a tiny grave.

*[Achebe (b 1930) is a highly reputed Nigerian novelist, poet, professor, and critic.
Source: Chinua Achebe, Beware Soul-Brother, and Other Poems, Nwankwo-Ifejika, 1971]*

From the Editor's Desk

The threat to democracy in Sri Lanka since the end of the war continues to accelerate. The armed forces increasingly dominate the daily life of people in the North-East even after the war has ended; and the denial of democratic rights is worse than it was during the conflict. The unwarranted attack on the students in November 2012 within the university premises in Jaffna and the subsequent arrest of student leaders were high handed acts that met with public protest and an indefinite strike by the undergraduates, which led to eventual compromise on the release of the detainees. But the arrest itself, detaining those arrested at the Welikanda army camp, and the initial declaration by the army commander that they will be released only after their 'rehabilitation' are in themselves worrying as they are naked threats against even the mildest sign of protest by the students or any section of the community. The virtual silence of the Colombo-based English and Sinhala media on the circumstances of the attack on the students and their arrests casts doubt on the credibility of the media concern for the 'independence of the judiciary' and about the corrupt and autocratic tendencies of the government.

Anyone serious about democratic and fundamental rights in the country cannot see the blatant suppression of these rights in the North-East in isolation from the onslaught on the independence of the judiciary and the surge in state condoned acts of violence against critics and opponents of the regime. As significantly, the national media, amid unfettered acts of state repression undermining hard won freedoms of the people, remains hostile to trade union action and demands 'disciplined obedience', from the workers, especially in the state sector. It should be noted that the dominant sections of the media have been selective in their criticism of attacks on the freedom of the media, often ignoring incidents aimed at the Tamil media.

Seemingly surprisingly, the media were free of threats during their long campaign against the impeachment of Chief Justice Shirani Bandaranaike. That bit of tolerance was not because the government had suddenly changed its undemocratic ways but because it knew well that the independence of the judiciary was not an issue of mass political concern— reasons for which include the prevalent political apathy and, more significantly, a lack of faith of the vast majority in the legal process.

Yet, independence of judiciary, rule of law, fair elections and proper conduct of the affairs of the parliament and other elected bodies are important to the people in their struggle for democracy and social justice, not because these institutions are perfect or even good enough to justify their retention in their current form but

because the undemocratic breach of each of them is an obstacle to the struggle for social justice and genuine democracy. Those who have used state power and parliamentary majority to undermine bourgeois democratic institutions have not done so in the interest of people's democracy or public interest. Every breach of democratic principles like the prolonging of the term of parliament by the SLFP-LSSP-CP coalition—in the pretext of its new constitution in 1972—legitimised worse things under the UNP regime that followed, including the avoidance of a general election by conducting a referendum. Serious tampering with the judiciary under the executive presidency in 1978 has been taken to a higher level now to serve the interests of an increasingly dictatorial clique of family and friends.

The legal profession, the media establishment and sections of the elite, who cry 'foul' when their interests are threatened by another section of the elite, have consistently failed the people of the country when the interests of the people were sold out to imperialism through the open economic policy. They never saw the injustice of the brutal repression of workers' strikes under different regimes or of the cruel slaughter of the JVP youth in 1971 and 1988-89; and to this day they have not shown the slightest interest in the people who have gone missing during the final stages of the war and after. The main worry of the media establishment seems to be that the country could suffer increased isolation by the imperialist West.

The media, the judiciary and parliamentary democracy have done little for the ordinary masses to deserve their wholehearted defence of these institutions. Yet it will be the mobilisation of the people that can salvage the independence of these institutions from encroachment by a creeping fascist dictatorship.

Sections of the media, the legal profession and the parliamentary fraternity have genuine faith in the institutions of bourgeois democracy, rule of law, freedom of expression and fundamental rights. But to defend them, they count on forces—including foreign powers—that serve the interests of the elite whose class interests militate against the very institutions.

Defence of democratic institutions demands the defence and restoration of all democratic and fundamental rights that are being systematically eroded. Thus the resolution of the national question is an integral part of the democratic struggle. Since it is the oppressed masses comprising the workers, peasants, fisher folk and other toiling masses and the oppressed nationalities who have the potential to achieve genuine democratic change, it is the collective responsibility of the left, progressive and democratic forces to educate them of the implications of the erosion of democratic institutions and mobilise them in the struggle for democracy and social justice.

Draft Proposals for a Common Programme

[The following is the text of a set of draft proposals put forward on 18th December 2012 by the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party for a Common Programme to resolve the National Question.]

1. The Sinhala Buddhist comprador bourgeoisie are the ruling faction in Sri Lanka today. Beginning some time before 'independence' they have exercised power and dominance in Sri Lankan politics. A constitution that suits their likes and dislikes has continued to persist. All toiling masses and nationalities are being subject to oppression under that constitution. Conservative religious and cultural ideologies are being used as ideological instruments for the continuation and survival of such oppression. The oppressors link Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism with historical glory to maintain their ruling class stand. It is thus that the forces of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism have carried forward their political, social and cultural projects.
2. At a time when Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist oppression is at its peak in Sri Lanka, it is the ruling class elements that represent it and the imperialist and hegemonic forces that are allied to them who constitute the main enemy of the Tamil nationality and other oppressed nationalities.
3. Only autonomy based on the right to self determination can be the way for the liberation and survival of the Tamil nationality and other oppressed nationalities. The basis for autonomy is the establishment of full autonomy in the traditional homeland of the Tamils in a merged North-East. Autonomous units should be established in this autonomous region for the Muslims who have been living there for many generations. Likewise, autonomous

units should be established for the Hill Country Tamils, who have a 200-year history in this country, in regions where they live in large concentrations.

4. Securing such autonomy cannot be easy. Thus it is only by uniting all possible forces which can be united against the common enemy that the rights of the Tamil nationality and other oppressed nationalities could be secured and sustained through autonomy.
5. The sources of national oppression and the meaning of self determination should thus be explained clearly to people subject to national oppression, and the people should thereby be subject to political awakening and politicisation. It is thus that a broad mass of people who will participate in politics could be mobilised.
6. At the same time, the struggle should take into account the feelings and demands of members of the Tamil nationality who are subject to the effects casteism, gender oppression, class differences, regionalism and religious sectarianism. In particular, any liberation struggle should take into account that those who have been depressed by caste and subject to oppression and cruelty under casteism and untouchability constitute a third of the Tamil nationality. Likewise, women constitute half the population and problems faced by them should be taken into consideration. It is only thus that Tamil national liberation can be the liberation of all Tamil people.
7. The Tamil people in their struggle for autonomy need to confront a powerful chauvinistic ruling class, which also oppress the broad toiling masses of Sinhalese on a class basis. The just causes of the Tamil people should be explained to the oppressed Sinhalese people and their support and solidarity won thereby. It will thus be possible to secure support for the just struggle of the Tamil people as well as weaken chauvinism.
8. Tamil mainly is the mother tongue of Muslims, who have traditionally coexisted with the Tamils in many regions, but have a distinct identity based on religion and culture. Hence, a pledge and assurance should be made to the Muslims that they will have the right to internal autonomous structures in regions where they

live in large concentrations. It will thereby be possible to unite them in the struggle of the Tamil people.

9. Not only will it be in vain but also wrong to hope that imperialist and regional hegemonic forces will help or guide us in the struggle to secure autonomy, for they are only concerned about their economic, political and military interests. That was why the Tamil people failed to get anything from them. Instead they suffered bloodshed, loss of life and loss of property. We should not forget these experiences and their lessons. Our fundamental strength and faith should be based on the people.
10. We cannot in any way take a route based on conservative thinking to carry forward the struggle for autonomy. We should gather the experiences and lessons of the politics of compromise, parliamentary political bargaining, politics of passive resistance and armed struggle of the past, and explain politically to the people the glory of democracy, independence and freedom. It is essential to identify through honest political analysis the reasons for the failures of the political leaderships of the past. Through it, we should carry forward alternative politics for the political awakening of the people and their mobilisation along the mass line. It is essential that the alternative politics should be a progressive alternative to conservative Tamil nationalism. It is through the creation of such an environment that the Tamil people, especially the youth, who remain in a state of frustration, disgust and fear could be guided to progress with confidence through an alternative political leadership.

Marxism is not a lifeless dogma, not a completed, ready-made, immutable doctrine, but a living guide to action.

(VI Lenin in “*Certain Features of the Historical Development of Marxism*”, 1910)

Stages of Revolution and The New Democratic Revolution

Mohan

The case for stages of revolution

Marxists cannot have an ultimate goal other than a socialist world, which will eventually be a communist world. There is a clear distinction, both in content and in approach, between what Marxists consider socialism and what social democrats and other reformists call socialism. The socialist society that Marxists envisage would emerge from capitalist social formations or could also emerge from semi-feudal semi-capitalist social formations and other weaker capitalist formations which resulted from the imposition of colonial capitalism on pre-feudal societies.

The distinction between socialism and communism, which is its eventual form, relates mainly to the recognition that the state will undergo a long period of withering until communism arrives. Socialism is seen as the period in which there is a need for a state under the dictatorship of the proletariat, which guides the transition to communism. The need for this prolonged period of transformation also derives from the fact that capitalist transformation and industrial development of societies has, invariably, been uneven owing to the very nature of capitalism. It is in this context that questions arose about stages in the path to socialism or stages of the revolution and the accompanying question of socialism in one country.

Many idealists, 'left extremists' and Trotskyites have rejected the concepts of stages of revolution and socialism in one country. Trotskyites, through rejecting the possibility of building socialism in one country, take the stand that socialism cannot be built without a world revolution. This position results from an unrealistic view of the capitalist world order as well as an insatiable desire to prove that Trotsky was always right against both Lenin and Stalin— and of course an obsessive hatred towards Stalin.

Historical experience since the October Revolution is that, since capitalist development has been uneven across the world, the path towards socialism will necessarily vary according to the level of capitalist development and the prevailing global situation. Also, practice has shown that no rigid models exist for the people of any country to follow in making revolution or building socialism.

Revolutions have failed and socialist governments have collapsed, not because the notion of building socialism in one country is inherently flawed but because of failures in dealing with contradictions within the socialist society and the failure to appreciate the ways in which classes and class struggle could persist even after the overthrow of capitalism. Our task is to learn from past mistakes and advance towards socialism.

To make revolution in any country, it would help if there is a well coordinated international left or even an anti-imperialist movement with a broad but clear agenda. It would also help if there is a progressive camp comprising committed anti-imperialist or, more desirably, left governments. Such things do not, however, come about of their own. They come about only through relentless struggle on an international scale.

Despite the reality that the world was dominated by capitalism in the form of imperialism and that a world revolution was not yet in sight, revolutions occurred in Russia, and later in other countries including China, and undertook the task of implementing the socialist mode of production under the leadership of the proletariat. While it is true that perfection of the task depended very much on what happened elsewhere in the world, there was no doubt about the direction in which the economy moved. Countries where socialism was to be established, other than East Germany, which was part of the war ravaged Germany, were not capitalist powers with an advanced industry. Revolutions in Tsarist Russia (later to become the Soviet Union) and China, respectively, inherited a backward capitalist economy with strong remnants of feudalism and a semi-feudal economy that was for long dominated by capitalist powers.

Attempts to modernise the economy in the Soviet Union and introduce socialist relations of production in the agricultural sector faced setbacks and the socialist strategy had to be reworked as a “New Economic Policy” under the leadership of Lenin. Without that adaptation the revolution would hardly have survived.

The stages of revolution

What Marxist Leninists mean by stages of the revolution is essentially the phasing of the tasks of the revolution in the whole of a country or parts of it

according to the nature of the forces and relations of production. An assessment of the ground situation is necessary before steps are taken to transform the economy from one that is not a fully developed industrial capitalist economy.

In all cases, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat requires the establishment of a People's Democracy and, where a country has enjoyed some degree of bourgeois democracy, transition to a People's Democracy could be straight forward. Where bourgeois democracy is absent or severely flawed, as in the case of most former colonies, some aspects of democratic government that remain unfulfilled need to be addressed before establishing People's Democracy. The bourgeois democratic character of a number of the tasks that remain to be fulfilled does not mean that the revolution has to be bourgeois democratic; and the mission of a proletarian party is not to enthrone bourgeois rule in the name of bourgeois democracy.

New Democracy

The concept of New Democracy was introduced in China to deal with the dilemma of transition to People's Democracy in a country with a backward industry and prevailing feudal relations. New Democracy, unlike People's Democracy which is implemented fully under working class leadership, relies on an alliance of progressive or potentially progressive class forces. What is important, however, is the leadership of the working class and guidance by working class ideology. It is thus a proletarian strategy to achieve the essential bourgeois democratic changes and from there advance to People's Democracy.

In China, the alliance of classes comprised the workers; poor, landless and middle peasantry; the petit bourgeoisie; and the national bourgeoisie. The intention was clearly to isolate imperialism and its close allies, namely, the warlords, the bureaucrats, the comprador bourgeoisie, and big landlords. Democratic change was also a dividing line between the two groups. However, if democratic change were to be confined to bourgeois democratic goals, the revolution cannot progress towards its aims of people's democracy and socialist economy. Thus New Democracy is only a transitional stage and not an ultimate goal. Yet, without it the revolution cannot unite the many against the few oppressors; and reluctance to transcend it will mean surrender to the bourgeoisie whose opposition to imperialism is only conditional.

The case for a New Democratic Revolution exists in almost the entire Third World for a variety of reasons. What make it necessary are conditions where bourgeois democratic tasks remain unfulfilled or where the form of bourgeois

democracy that exists is under constant threat from imperialism. A strong reason for the non-fulfilment of the bourgeois democratic tasks is that, in former colonies in Asia and Africa, bourgeois democracy was not established through a bourgeois democratic revolution but imposed by the colonial powers to suit their purposes. Parliamentary democracy failed to reach out to the masses except by way of their role as vote banks susceptible to manipulation in an electoral process designed to retain the elite in power.

Even where a revolutionary or independence struggles led to some form of electoral democracy, as in several Latin American countries nearly a century ago, political and industrial backwardness allowed the systematic subversion of democracy by collusion between the land owning elite and imperialist powers. The reliance of the economies on mining and farming on a large scale favoured the retention of relations of production more characteristic of feudalism, or even slavery, than capitalism.

The dominance of feudal ideology (even without feudal property relations), national oppression by a dominant nationality (often with imperialist backing), and a distorted economy (alongside significant industrialisation) conditioned by imperialism have impeded democratic change so that the revolution needs to go through a transitional stage before advancing to People's Democracy.

It will be dogmatic to seek a uniform code or a standard model for New Democracy. The tasks of the New Democratic Revolution will vary with context as would the period of transition to People's Democracy. Differences in approach will be necessary not only be between countries but also between communities of a country, as shown by the slower transition to collective ownership in Tibet than in the rest of China. Thus, it could become necessary to phase out the tasks of the New Democratic Revolution within a given community or region of a country, depending on its readiness for transition.

It could be said in summary that New Democracy comprises the consolidation of the victory of the revolution of an anti-imperialist alliance led by the proletariat and preparation for transition to the fulfilment of socialist goals under a People's Democracy through democratisation of society and overcoming all remnants of feudal ideology.

A Critique of the FLSP Programme

1. Introduction

Those who broke away from the JVP and founded the “Frontline Socialist Party” (FLSP) have published their political programme as a lengthy 44-page document.

There is reason for some expectation among Tamil nationalists as well as leftists about this document. There is more reason for some or many of the expectations to be unfulfilled since the FLSP is a child conceived in the womb of the JVP and those who were partners in the course of development of the chauvinist politics of the JVP are today the leaders of the FLSP, who did not protest when parliamentary opportunism isolated the JVP from its support base among the oppressed rural population and drove it close to the urban middle and lower middle classes. Most importantly, they have declared several times that they are the ones who loyally follow the path of Rohana Wijeweera, whose policies are responsible for thrusting the JVP towards destruction and driving tens of thousands of youth to slaughter.

Thus, while one cannot expect from the FLSP a significant deviation from the policies of the JVP, one may, however, console one’s self by explaining the emphasis on Wijeweera’s policies in terms of FLSP’s need for the cult of Wijeweera. But the question arises here about the fundamental differences between the FLSP and the JVP. If it is merely a tactical difference, what is the guarantee that the FLSP will not repeat the earlier tactical errors of the JVP?

All political parties err. But correcting each error individually, without understanding the reason for its occurrence will not prevent the recurrence of such errors.

Even after the same kind of serious error had recurred, the JVP did not analyse the fundamental reason for the mistake and subject itself to a process of self-criticism. It never apologised to the people for the offences it committed against them. Even after witnessing the degeneration of the old left parties which took the parliamentary road, the JVP opted for the same route, only to degrade and waken itself. The question remains as to whether the FLSP is willing to undertake an in-depth analysis of the reasons for such occurrences.

A Tamil identity which has been imposed on the FSLP could tempt some to look at it from a Tamil nationalist angle and some others from a chauvinist angle. Such interpretations, undoubtedly, are based on class interests. We know that the founding of a party with the word Socialist in its name, after a long time in the history of Sri Lanka a party, has irritated reactionaries. It is thus necessary for the FSLP to develop itself as a party free of all forms of narrow racial outlooks. It is in view of this need that the Programme of the FLSP is critiqued here.

2. Understanding history

Although the first part of the Programme concerns the development of the capitalist system in Sri Lanka, it re-records old history written from a Sinhala Buddhist perspective, with a surfeit of Arya Sinhala illusions. Besides, the term "Asiatic (?) mode of production" has been consistently used in order to avoid the phrase 'feudal society'. An important difference between European feudalism and Asian feudalism is that in the latter land was not privately owned. However, besides class relations based on relations of production, the state had control over the labour of the community and the use of land. The royalty, the nobility, ministers, local officials and the like existed. Besides there was a system of the state granting land to temples and individuals. There is historical evidence that division of labour was based on caste and the upper crust of the higher castes dominated over the whole society. Such a society cannot by any means be a non-feudal society.

Differences between feudal societies can be compared with those between capitalist societies and that between early capitalism with independent capitalist structures; and comparison is possible with capital-labour relations in early capitalist societies with independent capitalist structures and relations between the exploiters and the exploited in societies where capital and state unite as a powerful structure constituting state capitalism. Under monopoly capitalism, especially under the dominance of finance capital, direct exploitation of labour as under old capitalism and the corresponding capital-labour class relations do not exist.

Thus one can see that Marx's concept of "Asiatic mode of production" has been over simplified to create the illusion that what preceded capitalism in India and Sri Lanka was not feudalism. Besides, we know that a variety of smaller states can emerge when powerful states decline. There had been principalities and chieftaincies during the Kandyan Kingdom and before it. Besides, there have been private property and wealthy individuals. However, what has been done in much of the text is to preserve an illusory image of "Asiatic mode of production" in Sri Lanka without explaining what it was like.

Capitalism in Sri Lanka, if one excludes the service and industrial sectors related to the plantations, did not develop as one concerning modern industrial

production. Thus capitalism in Sri Lanka emerged as commercial capitalism and comprador capitalism. The wealth so accumulated created big land owners. Besides them, under colonial rule, collaborators with the rulers were awarded large extents of land by the state.

As the relations of capitalist production in Sri Lanka did not correspond to that in a fully fledged capitalist system, with the exception of a small section of the urban working class, the workers had not fully broken with feudal ideology. As a result, the Sri Lankan society still possesses features of feudal ideology such as casteism and obsolete traditions.

The “Asiatic mode of production” was not uniform across Asia and has changed with time. Failing to recognise this and to use the term in a way that gives the impression that it was a commendable mode of production will only serve to miss the class relations, class contradictions and dominant ideology of a feudal society.

3. Colonialism and neo-colonialism

The text suggests that imperialism intentionally created neo-colonialism in the colonial era. On the contrary, neo-colonialism came about as colonial rule came to an end. The old colonialists did not let go of their colonies until the very last colonies succumbed to struggle. It was only after almost all of Asia and most of Africa freed themselves through struggle that the colonists voluntarily granted freedom to the remaining few colonies.

The coincidence of the emergence of neo-colonialism as a phenomenon and the emergence of the US, which was not a major colonial power, as a global power is worth noting. The emergence of a strong socialist camp opposed to old colonialism and imperialism following the end of World War II, and especially the liberation of China, and the need of US imperialism to expand its global market created the conditions favouring the emergence of neo-colonialism. Why British imperialism was unable to exercise direct control in its former colonies and why France was able to wield influence in its former colonies for longer than Britain are important issues to consider. We should be clear that neo-colonialism is a product of force of circumstances and not something that capitalism created in anticipation of what it foresaw as the future of its colonies. But imperialist globalisation, on other hand, is a programme that has been planned with some far sight.

The phrase “state-monopolist capitalist system” is used in the text to refer to the Sri Lankan economy of 1948-78. It is true that there was state monopoly in a few sectors of the economy and it is also true that some called it “socialism”. But the Sri Lankan economy has been dominated by national, comprador and foreign capitalists. Like in Sri Lanka, there have been several nationalised industries in many European countries. They could be referred to as state monopolies. But the term “state-monopolist capitalist system” will

apply only when almost the entire economy is in the control of the state and the state acts as an instrument of the capitalist class.

There is reason to believe that some of the above confusions could have been the result of naïvely borrowing certain Trotskyite phrases.

In all, the Programme fails to show any sign of understanding how imperialism has drawn Sri Lanka its scheme of globalisation.

4. Socialist Revolution

The Programme of the FLSP also discusses the socialist revolution and the tasks of the socialist revolution. It is said that the purpose of the socialist revolution is to complete the unfulfilled revolutionary tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution. The document does not, however, say when the bourgeois democratic revolution took place or which of its revolutionary tasks have been fulfilled.

If Sri Lanka is a neo-colony, should not the next task of the revolution be to oppose neo-colonialism and the creation of a society freed from neo-colonialism. To talk of freeing the country from neo-colonialism and establishing a socialist state will be none other than to return to the confused Trotskyite thinking of the LSSP.

Against this background, the tasks of the socialist revolution put forward in the Programme seem highly idealistic.

5. Revolutionary Policy Declarations

While the revolutionary policies declared are generally the same as what many leftists have put forward many a time, a view as to how an economy could be established which could deliver them is not evident anywhere. While considerable room has been allocated to the national question, the Tamil people are not acknowledged as a nationality anywhere. Between 1978 and the early 1980s Wijeweera endorsed the right of the Tamil people to self determination. The same Wijeweera adopted a blatantly chauvinist line in 1988. It remains for the FLSP to decide whether it too is to follow Wijeweera's line.

The problems faced by the plantation workers are not just the already resolved "citizenship" issue and social, economic, political and cultural issues. They do not have the right to land and housing and even to a postal address. To ensure these rights for them, regions where they rightfully belong should be lawfully acknowledged.

It is thus important that the Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils, like the Sinhalese, have the status of nationalities. Following from there is the question of the right to self determination.

Even if the FLSP avoids discussing the right to self determination for fear that it implies secession, it is unfortunate that it is reluctant even to take a firm stand on the right of the nationalities to autonomy and devolution of power.

The Programme is disappointing in many ways. The long lists of tasks that go on like election pledges do not address the question of how those tasks could be fulfilled.

“Who is an enemy and who is a friend?” is the fundamental question in any revolution. Clarity about the complexities of the path to achieve the ultimate goal is as important as firmness about the goal itself.

Whoever an oppressed people are, a revolution cannot unite the people without offering solutions or alternatives concerning their immediate fears. It is clarity about this matter that has throughout history distinguished Marxist Leninists from Trotskyites and petit bourgeois extremists.

The FLSP should give sincere and careful thought to basic and simple problems right in front of them and arrive at sound conclusions. For the break with the JVP to be also a break with chauvinism and opportunism, the FLSP should dare to debate in public matters such as the national question and the stages of the revolution and arrive at sound conclusions.

Change in leadership should emerge from basic policies and principles, and not merely pointing to mistakes and substituting individuals. Otherwise, opportunities will persist to obstruct an environment in which genuine Marxist Leninist ideas reach the people of Sri Lanka and grow and develop, especially among the Sinhala youth.

It should be accepted that errors have occurred on several fronts in carrying forward properly the Marxist Leninist trend that developed in Sri Lanka in the 1960s. Most important among those was the petit bourgeois revolutionary stand of the JVP. The FLSP should subject itself to deep criticism and self criticism about the fact that the extremist and opportunist line of the JVP has led to erroneous impressions about the Sri Lankan revolution and to deviations with no sense of direction, especially among the Sinhala youth.

(Approximate translation of a report released in Colombo on 16th June 2012 by the Ideological and Political Study Group of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party.)

State-Civil Society Dynamics during War and Peace in Sri Lanka and Nepal

Aswaththamaa

Introduction

The strategic importance of South Asia to globalisation led to long term commitment of international donors to the region, once a backwater for development aid. Nepal, one of the poorest countries, and Sri Lanka, torn by civil war for three decades, offered opportunity for donors and aid practitioners, in and around conflict. Both served as test cases to try out fresh theories on civil society and state-civil society relations; their weak economies and the fragility of the state let donor-driven civil society programmes to supersede the state in several sectors.

It can be dangerous to superficially apply Western notions of civil society to South Asia, especially to countries in crisis. In the West, civil society is seen as distinct from the state and political spheres, as it makes political demands upon the state and political players, without running for office. In Sri Lanka and Nepal, civil society organisations tend to be part of either the state or political parties. With the state as the central, and often repressive, actor in the associational sphere of the citizens, state-civil society relations change with political climate.

In both countries, during war as well peace, the civil society was instrumental in reflecting, educating and informing the public. A fair share of the outcome of the respective peace processes could be attributed to civil society. In Nepal it helped to abolish the monarchy; in Sri Lanka it contributed to the failure of the peace process by not acting to take the peace dividend to the grassroots. Also when states are weak, actors adapt to changes in power relations; and uncivil and xenophobic groups tend to grow stronger (Belloni 2008), limiting the potential of civil society to improve cross-ethnic understanding. Meanwhile, conflict, economic decline, social stress, ubiquitous violence, and partition of civil society along ethnic fissures force groups to develop into uncivil actors. In both countries, NGOs and civil society platforms are dominated by the very elitist groups that have long dominated the affairs of the country. Lack of internal democracy, transparency and

accountability characterise most NGOs, especially in Nepal, and serve private rather than public interest. Reliance of civil society groups on kinship as well as tribal, religious and traditional power structures (Pouligny 2005:498) led to their failure at grassroots level.

This article draws on extensive interviews with personnel from humanitarian agencies in Sri Lanka and Nepal during the past five years to analyse the dynamics of state-civil society relations during periods of conflict, peace activity, and failure of peace efforts.

The Case of Sri Lanka

Prior to 1990, Sri Lankan civil society organs comprised community development organisations and issue-based social movements. The former served to fill the gaps left by the state in meeting the basic social needs of the people. The latter comprised social movements that acted as a counterweight to the state, e.g. the 'Mothers Front' in the Tamil dominated North comprising mothers of victims of abduction and killing by the forces as well as rival armed Tamil militants. When many Sinhalese youth went missing in the South during the JVP insurrection of 1988-89, their mothers formed a social movement to protest political violence. Early democratisation of the movements, which forced upper class politicians into an alliance with rural lower middle class, gave way to political patronage (Stokke 1998), which eventually became the cornerstone of institutionalizing civil society. It conditioned public attitude to one of awaiting help instead of developing awareness to demand their needs from the authorities concerned. Thus political patronage substituted for a demanding civil society.

From 1991, with a civil war along clearly ethnic lines, the impact of globalisation grew stronger. Donors, mainly from the West, attributed the conflict to under-development and boosted developmental aid. Development-related NGOs entered Sri Lanka, with Western educated elite initiating and managing most. State-civil society relations were warm as the NGOs bore the burden of developmental work and were given a free hand in carrying out their work. The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) even referred to the NGOs as civil society. Religious social organisations proliferated (Saravanamuttu 1998); and traditional village societies that are still important in social organisation around issues of common concern became dependent on state resources or foreign aid or have been replaced by ones with external funding.

The change of government in 2001 and the Ceasefire Agreement of 2002 made fresh openings for NGOs. The LTTE and the GoSL allowed NGOs unfettered access to LTTE held areas. The peace process was claimed to be based on the notion of "Peace through Development", and foreign funding

entering the country to secure lasting peace led to the mushrooming of 'peace building' and 'peace advocacy' NGOs. Western donors preferred them to community-based NGOs, in anticipation of peace-building at grassroots. 'Peace' became the password for international funding, and NGOs rushed to do 'peace work'. Most of the NGO personnel interviewed admitted that they had to please the bureaucracy of donor agencies, and added a 'peace component' to their programmes to ensure funding. The influx of funding invariably led to careerism in civil society organisations, widening the gulf between mainly Colombo-based paid staff and volunteers elsewhere. As a result, the NGOs were further alienated from the people, whose needs and aspirations they no more understood. 'Peace' NGOs, despite good relations with the state, not only failed to mobilise support for peace but also contributed to the collapse of the peace process, as the people did not receive or see the prospect of a 'peace dividend'. As donors demanded to know the number of people each 'peace' NGO was working with, the NGOs began to pay people to attend meetings, seminars, gatherings and rallies. The net result was the wrecking of the ability of people to mobilise for the common good. Then on, mass mobilisation became donor-driven and NGO-based, with adverse implications for the civil society movement. When it spoke up for human rights and media freedom following the formal declaration of war in 2008, the state branded every act of protest as a 'Western conspiracy'.

The peace process, already tottering by 2004, was followed by undeclared war with a change of government in 2005. The GoSL and the LTTE considered the Tamils in LTTE held areas as Sri Lankan citizens and agreed that it was the responsibility of the state to serve them. To the GoSL it was assertion of its authority over the population, and to the LTTE it was easing of its economic burden. Thus NGOs worked in LTTE held areas with the blessings of the state. When hostilities resumed in 2006, the GoSL imposed travel and other restrictions and asserted control over the delivery of essential goods and services to LTTE held areas. The GoSL also restricted its supply of dry rations to war affected people and justified keeping supplies at the minimum possible level, in terms of fear that supplies could fall into the hands of the LTTE. This and GoSL travel restrictions on NGOs strained the relations between the state and NGO-led civil society, leading to further regulation of NGO activity as well as added restrictions.

A parliamentary select committee was appointed to study NGO-related issues; and NGOs like the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies suspected of acting against the interests of the GoSL in its pursuit of war were expelled, and visa restrictions were introduced for expatriate NGO staff. The NGOs were compelled to work with the GoSL and often according to its agenda.

Donors were in effect reduced to providing funds only to NGOs which acted according to government needs. Thus, during the period of fully fledged war, some NGOs played along with the GoSL to serve its needs while others sought to be a counterweight to the state. The relationship deteriorated after the GoSL, following its taking full control over the East, started its offensive in the North. To the dismay of NGOs, the GoSL ordered all NGOs but the ICRC to leave LTTE held areas. Some NGOs negotiated unsuccessfully with the GoSL regarding the decision, while UN agencies moved out of LTTE held areas without protest, apparently for fear that the UN could be ordered out of Sri Lanka.

This hard-line of the GoSL persists even after the end of the war, and two trends were seen to exist among donors. Firstly, donors interested in funding humanitarian crises were preparing to fund the crisis accompanying the huge influx of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the LTTE held to government held areas. Secondly donors were losing interest in the East with attention shifting to the North and its IDPs. Livelihood activities in the East began to be neglected, with many NGOs ceasing operations and moving towards the North: UN agencies in the East were severely downsized. Some NGO spokespersons claimed that this was a counter measure by civil society reminding the GoSL of its responsibility to look after its citizens.

There was a humanitarian crisis in early 2009 when the IDP influx began. Donors preferred to work with the UN agencies in view of its capacity and reliability. Many NGOs had shifted their bases to the north in anticipation of working with IDPs. As the IDPs arrived in government controlled areas, it was assumed that UN agencies and NGOs were ready to deal with the situation. But the situation proved to be chaotic in the IDP camps, where even the minimum international standards were not observed, amid lack of coordination and competition for donor funding. The GoSL, besides, imposed restrictions on NGOs working with the IDPs. Rivalry persuaded some NGOs to give in to GoSL demands, undermining civil society potential to bargain with the state, and forcing the NGOs to act according to the wishes of the GoSL. The donors too were answerable for the poor standards in the camps.

The Case of Nepal

Three kinds of civil society exist in Nepal. Firstly, donor-supported NGOs work on service, globalisation, liberalisation, and privatisation. It is largely populated by a conglomerate of urban elites calling themselves civil society leaders. They have no interest in addressing societal issues or peripheral activities, and tend to treat citizens as consumers, ignoring the basic tenets of civil society. The second kind is backed by political elites and political parties and

involves interests groups, including trade unions built on political lineage (Bhatta 2007). They serve political interests as well as self interest. The third comprises people mobilised as social movements.

Several associational forms of civil-society and donor-driven poverty alleviation NGOs have been active in Nepal. Rather than remain as autonomous social spaces, many became part of political society —political parties, electoral politics, special interest groups and the state— and, thereby, failed in their civic roles. They played a negligible role in civic renewal and opening up the political choice of individuals. This state of stagnation ended with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), Maoists from here on, launching its “People’s War” in 1996. After ten-years of armed insurgency the Maoists emerged as a powerful political force as strong as, if not overshadowing, Nepal’s established parties. The Maoists stressed the role of beneficiary communities in direct delivery of services, and sought to minimise the role of the mostly Kathmandu-based intermediaries such as international agencies, INGOs and private contractors.

The first successful mass campaign (*Jana Andolan 1*) in 1990 helped to democratise Nepal. The campaign for democracy gained momentum in 2006 as the Maoists announced the end of their “People’s War”. To some the campaign for democracy was a way to get even with the dictatorial monarch Gyanendra, widely reviled for a host of real and imagined offences. To some others, it was a means to persuade the Maoists to end their decade-long insurgency. For many —perhaps the majority— the call for a democratically elected government was instinctively appealing because it seemed the way to a more inclusive and equitable society (Miklian 2008).

Gyanendra’s assumption of absolute power in 2005 denied political space to all —including political parties and civil society— but a section of the Kathmandu elite who were close associates of the king. The Maoist campaign created the political space for the civil society to work for democracy by enabling an alliance of major political parties’— the Seven Party Alliance (SPA). For want of an alternative, the political parties, notorious for their bickering among themselves while bargaining for power with the monarch, formed an alliance to restore democracy. The agreement between the SPA and the Maoists came about because the SPA realised that Gyanendra was doomed and that an agreement with the Maoists was the best option before them. The NGO-led civil society too, for its own survival, joined hands.

When the Maoists formed the government in May 2008 after considerable delay since elections to the Constituent Assembly, another successful people’s movement (*Jana Andolan 2*) was launched by the deprived sections

from all communities of Nepal demanding implementation of changes pledged in the agreement between the Maoists and the SPA. This unprecedented show of defiance by the oppressed majority was the result of political education in the course of the Maoist insurrection. The conventional, NGO-dominated Nepali civil society was dismayed at it. A senior activist lamented "This is a very bad precedent.... If people are going mobilise themselves to demand for their rights for each and everything ... by street blockades and so on, it will be hard for the state machinery to function, these actions can destabilise the state. This should be stopped." These words sum up the fear of NGO-led civil society for its future.

The Kathmandu-based donor-driven civil society felt desperate in the face of these developments and sought to join the people's movement groups to work for a common goal. Donors too were pleased by such initiatives. One NGO took all indigenous women's movements on board to create an umbrella organisation for indigenous woman rights, with typical donor driven agendas and bureaucratic procedures in place. But there was no room for protests or demonstrations. A project coordinator of this NGO argued: "These indigenous women should be educated first on women rights then they should be taught how to do peaceful protests and especially advocacy". Several new NGOs were formed with baggage different only in phrasing. English-speaking elite females hijacked the leadership from the 'uneducated', 'uncouth' women leaders living hundreds of miles off Kathmandu. The rights based people's movements built from the bottom gave way to more than ten NGOs for indigenous women's rights. Rivalry for funding manifested in the use of irregular means to boost membership. Other issue based NGOs were no different; and all NGOs remained Kathmandu based. Mass-based civil society activists with a role in *Jana Andolan 2* returned to work in their villages, unhaunted by donor aid or NGOs.

While Maoists were in power, the civil society elite acted as a counterweight to the government. Relations between state and civil society were strained, since the civil society elite despised Maoists being in power. The elitist civil society acted to undermine the legitimacy of the Maoists, especially since the Maoist-led government, to the distaste of the NGOs, demanded accountability and transparency. The donors too rejected the need for government regulation.

When the Maoists resigned from government, the elitist civil society responded that 'the blockage for the development of Nepal has been removed'. But the change of government failed to change anything; the NGOs in Kathmandu continue to produce narrative reports on glossy paper. In reality, Kathmandu remains unchanged, while Nepal had changed for the better.

Grass roots based people's activity returned and people once again started to demand their rights.

Conclusions

State-civil society relations in Sri Lanka and Nepal have much in common despite important differences. In both countries the civil society is elitist, and international donors play a visible role in defining it. NGOs have developed into a lucrative employment industry in itself so that state-civil society relationship seems to be governed by individual and institutional self interest than by issues of public interest. Social movements coming from below as issue-based people mobilisation have been enticed by NGO funding. In Sri Lanka, NGOs have almost totally hijacked issue-based mobilisation while in Nepal hijacking by NGOs is confined to Kathmandu. Relations between the state and civil society elite are smooth and constructive only when they have common interests. Conflict of interest has always manifested as open hostility. Since most civil society organisations are donor-driven, rivalry has been mostly counterproductive. The politicisation of civil society at grass roots level in Nepal is a healthy sign that distinguishes it from Sri Lanka, where grass roots politicisation is severely eroded.

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(Article written in 2011)

Impeachment of the Chief Justice

NDMLP Statement to the Media

9th January 2013

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on the high-handed manner in which the government is seeking to impeach the Chief Justice.

The aim of the Rajapaksa regime is to use its two-thirds majority in Parliament and the executive powers of the President to seize all powers in its hands to implement a dictatorship of the family. It is on that basis that democracy, human rights and the right of the people to their daily lives are being trampled underfoot. The Divi Neguma Bill and the impeachment motion against the Chief Justice are expressions of these. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly condemns the anti-people actions of the President and the UPFA government, including the high handed breaches of democratic and human rights. At the same time, the Party expresses its support to just struggles for democracy, human rights and the problems of the people and participates in them.

The economy of the country is trundling towards an abyss. As a result, the prices of essential foods and consumer items are increasing by the day. The resultant rise in cost of living has become an unbearable burden that hurts them. At the same time, chauvinist oppression is advanced at the expense of finding a solution to the national question. While chauvinism is being whipped up in the South, the government, in order to deflect the attention of the people from the real issues, is raising the LTTE bogie by claiming that the LTTE has returned to the North-East. In the circumstances, what the Rajapaksa families need are more laws to reinforce a dictatorship.

They have been persevering to bring an impeachment motion in parliament against the Chief Justice because they cannot tolerate the Supreme Court and the Chief Justice obstructing the introduction of laws to that effect. Through such conduct the dictatorial regime of the Rajapaksa family stands exposed at home and abroad. Under these conditions, there is a need for the people to mobilise and arise for democracy and human rights. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party gives its fullest support to the campaign initiatives for democracy by the judiciary, the legal profession and the pro-people parties who have rallied in support of them.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

Protests by University Students in Jaffna

NDMLP Statement to the Media

20th December 2012

Comrade S.K. Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party made the following observation regarding protests by the students of the University of Jaffna.

The decision of the students of all faculties of the University of Jaffna to boycott classes until the release of the students who have been arrested by the Terrorist Investigation Department of the police and detained in the Welikanda Rehabilitation Centre is correct. Support for that decision from the university community is also a welcome measure, and the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party welcomes the decision of the students of the University of Jaffna, who face a multitude of difficulties.

He added that the ulterior motive of the government is to create and prolong a tense situation in the North-East and prevent the establishment of democracy and normal life there. Besides, it needs a new 'Tiger tale' to divert the expressions of protest, discontent and criticism against the government by the people in the South. It is in that context that attacks were launched on the past 27th and 28th on male and female students of the University of Jaffna and students have been arrested and detained at the Welikanda Rehabilitation Centre reportedly for rehabilitation. To detain students outside the realm of law, justice and fair play and demand that the remaining students should return for studies can only be to demand that the students should bow to oppression and accept it. Not only are students in the North-East but also those in the South are speaking up in support of the students of the University of Jaffna. Hence, the view of the Party is that the unconditional release of the students will be the only way to restore harmony in the University of Jaffna.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

Attack on Jaffna University Students

NDMLP Statement to the Media

30th November 2012

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party regarding attacks by the Army and the Police on undergraduates of the University of Jaffna.

The despotic attack on two successive days by members of the Army and the Police targeting undergraduates of the University of Jaffna deserve to be strongly

denounced. These attacks are not merely on students but comprise a cruel attack designed to intimidate and suppress the entire Tamil people. It exposes the prolonging of the military oppression of the Tamil people. Hence the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly condemns the brutal attacks on the undergraduates of the University of Jaffna on the 27th and 28th of this month. It also supports the students' putting forward just demands such as safety for the students, learning in a free environment and the withdrawal of the defence forces from the neighbourhood of the university.

Defence forces had forcefully entered and launched attacks in an uncivilised fashion in the hostels of male and female students. On the following day, all students had conducted an awareness campaign protesting the incident. That peacefully conducted campaign was democratic. Students have been attacked to prevent the protest campaign from taking place. The Jaffna District MP Saravanabavan who arrived on the scene while the attack was in progress was verbally abused and his vehicle has been smashed. The editor of the daily "Uthayan", Premananth was targeted and attacked. All of these make clear the chauvinistic oppressive stand of the government and the defence forces towards the Tamil people.

Hence the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, besides expressing support for awareness campaigns in Jaffna denouncing the above attacks on the students, will also participate in the campaigns.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

Remembering the October Revolution and the October Uprising

Media report of the Northern Regional Branch

30th October 2012

On 28th October 2012, Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party addressed a public forum chaired by Comrade S Thevarajah, Attorney at Law, in Jaffna, under the title "the 1917 October Revolution and the 1966 October Uprising". The following is an extract of his address.

The 1917 October Revolution which broke out and triumphed under the leadership of the revolutionary genius VI Lenin not only against the cruel exploitation and autocratic oppression of the workers, peasants and other toiling masses by the Russian state but also against chauvinist oppression in Russia, which was also a prison of the nationalities. Its echoes are still reverberating throughout the world. It is for that reason that the people of various countries who

are struggling against all forms of oppression are taking the revolutionary path of struggle of the glorious October Revolution. It was by traversing that path that the uprising of 21st October 1966 opposing caste based untouchability became a revolutionary struggle. It was the struggles of the time that defeated the untouchability nurtured and defended by Tamil conservatism to create a historical turning point.

The socialist revolution of 1917 in Russia succeeded under the leadership of the Russian Communist Party on the basis of class struggle to wipe out the autocracy of the Tsar and establish socialism on that soil. The struggle led by the Revolutionary Communist Party of Sri Lanka, based on the path of the same class struggle, confronted caste-based untouchability and overcame the cruelty of untouchability in the soil of the North hardened by conservatism. Through that it secured and established equality, social justice and democracy among the Tamil people. The experiences of the above two events of revolution and uprising in the last century deserve to be viewed in depth in the current Sri Lankan context and it is important to think and act on their basis.

Today, totally anti-people trends are being developed in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres of our country. The comprador bourgeois chauvinist despotic regime does not only decide on every issue but also seen to be ruling in the manner of a fascist dictatorship. Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism in Sri Lanka bears witness to the historical experience that nationalism could lead to fascism. Such chauvinism is going hand in hand with the agenda of imperialist globalisation. If the budget for the coming year is to be put forward in collaboration with the World Bank, IMF and the Asian Development Bank, there is little need to explain where the country is being dragged to. Thus, the economic burdens and oppression heaped on the Sinhala working people in the South are covered up by chauvinistic language while practices are being adopted against the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamils.

The truth is that the regime has been able to oppress the Tamil people and deflect the attention of the Sinhalese and retain in its hands the power of family rule but not take the country and the people towards prosperity. That is exactly what the US imperialist and Indian regional hegemonic forces desire. They are accordingly carrying out their manoeuvres in Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils cannot break the mighty chains that bind them without understanding these truths. It is in this context that there is a historical need to draw lessons from the historical experiences of the October Revolution 96 years ago and the October 21st Uprising 46 years ago.

Excerpts of the opening address from the chair by Comrade S Thevarajah are given below.

We, the Sri Lankans, remain deeply suppressed by comprador capitalism, chauvinistic oppression and imperialist globalisation. Chauvinistic oppression in

particular is unprecedentedly assertive in its oppression of nationalities. Tamil nationalism has failed to confront it and overcome it in the last century as well as in this century. Neither peaceful campaigns nor subsequent armed struggles have achieved anything. A most unfortunate situation persists in which no Tamil nationalist leadership is willing to review or re-examine the past to identify reasons for the failure. In such a situation, the lessons of the October Revolution and of the October 21st Uprising are essential to the oppressed Tamil nationality and other nationalities.

The reason for the inability of Tamil nationalism to confront chauvinist oppression at the correct level is its being rooted in Tamil conservatism. Without freeing itself from that bond, Tamil nationalist leaders can only offer verbal leadership but not help to win liberation in any way. The 1966 October Uprising showed the direction to struggle, not just to the people oppressed by caste. It was because the oppressed stood shoulder to shoulder with the fair minded among the so-called upper caste and the democratic, progressive and left forces in launching mass struggles that the struggles of that time succeeded. Tamil nationalists not only refuse to learn the truth of this historical experience but also proceed to conceal them from history. The reason for it is the conservative ideology that has well set into them.

Any struggle which is not ready to challenge a Tamil nationalism unwilling to do away with inequality based on class, caste and gender or cannot transcend such Tamil nationalism cannot win liberation for the Tamil nationality. Also, it is only through developing just policies and methods which can reach out to the toiling Sinhala masses, rather than feed Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism, that the Tamil people could advance towards liberation. Today's need is to bypass the leadership of Tamil political dominance and initiate a fourth stage struggle led by the toiling Tamil masses. That could only comprise mass struggles mobilising the broad masses. There is no other way before the Tamil people.

The meeting concluded with an open discussion where many useful views were put forward by the members of the audience.

Northern Regional Committee
New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party

Mass Awareness Campaign Warning of the Threat of the Koodankulam Reactor

NDMLP Statement to the Media

11th November 2012

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the statement to the media on the importance of the mass awareness

campaign warning of the dangers of the Koodankulam nuclear reactor to be conducted on 17th November 2012 at 11.00 a.m. opposite the Central Bus Stand, Jaffna.

Not only the people of Tamilnadu but also the people of Sri Lanka, especially those in the northern region, face dangers from the Koodankulam nuclear power plant. Hence the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party calls upon all political parties, public organisations and socially conscious individuals to participate in the awareness campaign about this threat.

The Koodankulam nuclear power plant has been installed along the coast of Southern Tamilnadu and in proximity to the Northern and Western parts of Sri Lanka. Radiation from it is dangerous, and in the event of an accident in the nuclear reactor, there is likely to be heavy loss of life. The radiation, besides destruction of life, is also capable of polluting the soil, sea and air to cause grave illnesses and poses dangers for generations to come. It is because of that, the fisher folk and villagers of Koodankulam and Idinthakarai in Tamilnadu have been struggling against the Koodankulam nuclear power plant for the past fifteen months. Their struggle is just and we express our support to them.

Hence, the Party calls upon all democratic, progressive and left oriented people and political parties that defend the interests of the people to rally to this awareness campaign to express protest on behalf of our people.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

Oppose Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant

NDMLP Press Release

7th November 2012

The Koodankulam nuclear power plant that has been installed along the coast of Southern Tamilnadu and in proximity to Sri Lanka and due to be put into operation involves grave risks of loss of lives and serious illnesses for the people of Tamilnadu as well as to the people of Sri Lanka, especially along the northern and western coasts. Radiation from the nuclear reactor and from nuclear waste carries threats of destruction to the daily lives of the people and serious damage to the soil, sea, air and the environment. Besides, many thousands of people would perish in the event of an accident in the nuclear reactor. A recent example of that possibility was the nuclear disaster in Japan. The Chernobyl disaster in the Soviet Union in the 1980s was another instance. Hence, people are mobilising, with the Koodankulam and Idinthakarai regions on the south coast of Tamilnadu as focus, against the initiation of operation of the Koodankulam nuclear power plant and are conducting a continuous campaign of people's power. The campaign will reach its

450th day tomorrow. The fisher folk and villagers have joined hands to carry forward with determination immense mass campaigns on the sea coast and on land. The sweep and momentum of these struggles are echoing in the southern districts of Tamilnadu and in the state capital, Chennai.

The Central Committee of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party of Sri Lanka expresses its fullest support for and militant solidarity with the mass struggles by the people against the Koodankulam nuclear power plant. At the same time it strongly denounces the continuing brutal attacks on the people by the police under instigation by the central and state governments acting in collaboration. Anthony John, a fisherman was killed by savage police shooting during the struggle. Sahayam Francis, another fisherman, died of shock when the Indian Coastal Guards flew the plane at a very low altitude. Yet the people have not abandoned their resolve to struggle.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party expresses its solidarity with the movement for struggle, led by SP Uthayakumar, which is carrying out the above struggles of mass upsurge and with the Marxist Leninist movements and other democratic and progressive forces who are supportive of the movement.

The Indian ruling classes and their foreign imperialist allies are setting up nuclear power plants merely to rake in huge profits. The inherent dangers and disasters of nuclear power are concealed from the people in the pretext of generating more electric power.

These dangers are being brought to light and exposed to the outside world by the continuing struggles of the people of Koodankulam and Idinthakarai. Sri Lanka is in proximity to the Koodankulam nuclear power plant. An accident there will subject not just the people of Tamilnadu but also the people of Sri Lanka, especially in the northern and western coastal and adjoining regions, to loss of life and other ill effects.

But neither the President of Sri Lanka nor the government of Sri Lanka seem to pay much attention to these dangers. They humbly accept the conciliatory fallacies dished out by the Central Government of India and remain calm. Champika Ranawaka, Minister of Electrical Power, reputed for his chauvinistic venom, is muted in his comments on Koodankulam. Likewise, the Tamil nationalist leaders are preserving silence on the dangers of this nuclear reactor or about the mass struggles against it by the people of Tamilnadu. This demonstrates their greater loyalty towards their Indian masters rather than the interests of the Tamil people. Under the conditions, it is important that the people of Sri Lanka, especially the Tamil people, awaken to the potential dangers of the Koodankulam nuclear power plant and launch mass struggles against it.

S.K. Sentinel
General Secretary

Denounce the Detention of Student Leader

NDMLP Statement to the Media

24th September 2012

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary, New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued on behalf of the Politburo of the Party the following statement denouncing the detention of Sanjeewa Bandara, Coordinator of the Inter-University Student Federation.

The detention of Sanjeewa Bandara, Coordinator of the Inter-University Student Union, is an attempt to intimidate university students and subdue their just demands and struggles. The fascist tendency of the government which has unleashed such police repression has to be understood by the entire university student community, the educational community and the public. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly denounces the detention of Sanjeewa Bandara and urges his immediate release.

The Mahinda Chinthana government is causing crises and placing obstacles to the field of education in the country. It is also acting in a variety of planned ways to bury free education and establish full-scale private education. In particular university education and its future are in the balance. It is under these conditions that the Inter-University Student Federation has been pushed to launch struggles to defend their educational rights and that of future generations. Likewise the Federation of University Teachers Associations have been on strike for the past two and a half months demanding an allocation of 6% of the GDP for education, a fair wage increase and political and military interference in the educational sector. Instead of fulfilling these just demands the Mahinda Chinthana Government is attempting to subdue them through threats.

Hence the Party joins other democratic, progressive and left forces to support the just struggles of the university students and academics; and, besides opposing every form of oppression by the government, it expresses its support for and solidarity with the protest processions of the Federation of University Teachers Associations and the Inter-University Student Federation starting from Galle and Kandy, respectively, towards Colombo.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

Sri Lankan Events

Fighting to Save the Plantations

The recently founded Peoples' Forum for the Protection of Plantations held a seminar on 27th November 2012 in Matale on the protection of the plantation sector from wanton destruction and redistribution of plantation land. Attention was drawn to the exclusion of the plantation sector from state administration throughout its long history in the island, and to the current Pradeshiya Sabha Act, which restricts Pradeshiya Sabha administration to rural areas alone, and thereby excludes residents of plantations from being served from public funds.

Attention was drawn to the lack of environmental safety for residents of plantations in several parts of the Matale District. It was demanded that the 37,000 hectares of land identified as barren be used to house people from the locality or other affected regions and that their settlement be legitimised by issuing them with deeds of ownership of their residences. The seminar drew attention to the granting of two acres of land in the Mousakelle Estate belonging to Elkaduwa Plantations Ltd some years ago to build houses for villagers affected by landslides and asked why the affected plantation population cannot be treated similarly. Forced eviction of the plantation population in the Districts of Ratnapura, Kegalle and Kalutara was also criticised, and concern expressed that the government's turning a blind eye to such incidents fuels hostility between communities and marks a failure to protect the people.

It was resolved that steps should be taken, transcending party and trade union loyalties, to raise the issues at higher levels, to urge Hill Country Tamil parliamentarians to take up these matters in Parliament and to appeal to the trade unions to join hands with the Forum for the just demands of the people.

In a statement issued in December in the context of natural disasters, the Forum commended the Disaster Management Ministry, the District Secretaries and many individuals for their good work in affected regions, and appealed for the re-housing of victims of landslides who are now in relief camps in locations whose stability is assured. The statement which criticised the hostile attitude of some arrogant officials towards the refugees also emphasised that its concern for the victims of natural disaster transcends regional and ethnic considerations and is about the tragic conditions faced by a deprived people.

A Trade Union for the Hill Country People

A new trade union, Makkal Thozilaalar Sangam (People's Workers' Union) has been founded in October 2012 to address the need for an alternative trade union movement for the Hill Country. The PWU initiated its activities by setting up an

office in Kahawatte in the Ratnapura District, and has been registered as a trade union under trade union regulations and recognised by the Department of Labour. A membership drive took off in December with a leaflet campaign to inform the workers of the aims and activities of the union. The need for mass political work among the people and the role of a trade union in such work has been discussed and it is encouraging that youth wanting an alternative political path have joined hands with workers in the region. Plans are afoot to extend the activities to other regions.

Ruling Party as Prosecution, Jury & Judge

The impeachment of Chief Justice Shirani Bandaranaike was uncouthly handled by the government, which made no secret of its intentions. Shirani Bandaranaike was not given a fair hearing before the Parliament Select Committee and was abused by government members of the PSC so that she and her team of lawyers walked out in protest. Opposition members of the PSC too withdrew from the proceedings in view of the biased conduct of the inquiry. When the majority report of the PSC was tabled in Parliament, the revisionist CP and the Trotskyite LSSP sought to salvage the remnants of their credibility by criticising the manner in which the inquiry was conducted but, fearing the wrath of the regime, abstained rather than vote against the move. The Trotskyite DLF, which justified the impeachment, however, chose to abstain. The reality is that all allies of the ruling clique are knowingly ruining themselves politically by being party to the entrenchment of an autocratic rule.

Militant Buddhism on the March

Charges of cheating at examinations were made in the context of an unusually large number of Muslim students qualifying for admission to the Law College. The allegation that the entrance examination paper was leaked to selected students with the help of the Ministry of Justice, headed by Rauf Hakeem, was denied and it was pointed out that the Law College is managed by an independent board and that the Department of Examinations conducts the examination. While the possibility of leakage cannot be ruled out, the claim of a Muslim conspiracy is part of an anti-Muslim agenda.

On 7th January 2013 a protest was held opposite the Fort Railway Station, and a group led by militant monks of the “Bodu Bala Sena” marched to the Law College shouting racist slogans and stormed into the Law College premises, breaching security barriers. The police failed to control the violence while BBS thugs assaulted individuals including students. The Principal of the Law College yielded and granted a meeting with representatives of the protestors.

The issue of admissions has since been resolved by the Law College which lowered the qualifying mark and thereby increased the number qualifying from 313

to 551. But the underlying issue of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism targeting Muslims remains, and the Muslim leaders have failed to give leadership against the rising number of attacks on mosques and Muslim businesses.

Meanwhile, the poisoning of the minds of the Sinhala middle classes is gathering force. Nineteen websites, besides vicious Facebook and SMS campaigns, have been identified as spreading anti-Muslim ideas in the country. It is also believed that some of the extremist Sinhala nationalist groups enjoy unofficial state patronage at the highest levels.

Rule by Intimidation

Recently, students were attacked by the armed forces in the University of Jaffna without provocation. Following the attack, student leaders were detained under draconian legislation which was introduced in the pretext of fighting terrorism. Wherever possible, the name of the LTTE is invoked to justify repression so that people would hesitate to participate in protests against any injustice for fear of being labelled as LTTE supporters and dealt with harshly. Such cynicism arises from the failure of the government as well as its loyalists in the North and East to win the confidence of the Tamils. But people cannot be terrorised forever and time will come when mass anger will overcome fear, and the might of the people will be unstoppable.

Muslim Leaders and Saudi Injustice

Saudi Arabia is a source of employment for many female domestic workers from Sri Lanka as well as of unimaginable cruelty to the workers. A death sentence was handed down to young Rizana Nafeek following conviction for killing a baby in 2005. Rizana, who was seventeen at the time, was denied a fair hearing and her government too failed her.

Genuine Muslims who criticised the Saudi abuse of Islamic law have been abused and threatened by Saudi-funded Muslim fundamentalists. Even more disgracefully, no Muslim political leader in Sri Lanka has dared to criticise the dictatorial Saudi regime, which is the closest US ally after Israel in the Middle East. Some leaders have acted as brokers for the Saudi regime to pay blood money to Rizana's family. But Rizana's mother, a poor woman from the East of Sri Lanka, gave the country's Muslim leaders a lesson in self esteem by refusing any gift from the killers of her daughter or from their proxies.

World Events

GLOBAL ISSUES

Imperialist Agenda and the Muslim World

(Political comment on protests against the movie “Innocence of the Muslims”)

Western Attitudes: The “Arab Spring” has been successfully hijacked from those who fought against corrupt dictatorial rulers to secure genuine democracy. The US and the EU have been aided in their counter revolutionary coup by Turkey, the absolutist monarchies of the Gulf region and a variety of Islamic terrorists. The US has secured a strong foothold in Egypt and is engaged in a proxy war in Syria conducted by its Muslim allies. Most importantly, it is contemplating war against Iran.

Muslim discontent with the US stretches from Pakistan to North Africa. The insensitivity of the West to Muslim sentiments manifested itself all too well in the movie “*Innocence of the Muslims*” —produced in the US last year— desecrating Prophet Muhammad, and the inadequate response of the West to the sense of offence in the Muslim world. The movie which led to strong protests by Muslims in Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Nigeria, Mali, Mauritania, Kenya, Yemen, Kuwait, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, the US, Britain, France, Belgium and other countries was one of many deliberate acts designed to offend Muslims, starting with the desecration of the Qur’an at the Guantanamo Bay naval base of the US in 2005, and includes the notorious Danish anti-Muslim cartoons of 2006, Pope Benedict’s false assertions in the same year about the Qur’an and Muhammad, for which he later apologized, and the more recent French anti-Islamic cartoons. Yet the West, especially the US, dominates affairs of the state in all Muslim countries other than Iran, Syria and, to some extent, Lebanon.

Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Iran have already experienced aggression or explicit threats against them by the US. The response to the movie has been strong in these countries. However, the reasons why in Iran and Syria the state was in unison with mass protests against the movie and why in Iraq and Afghanistan the state, while objecting to the movie, carefully avoided criticism of the US are not hard to understand in the context of the relationship of the respective governments with the US. Protests were strong in Lebanon and in

Palestine with participation by all sects of Muslims, although in separate protests in Lebanon. Interestingly in Syria, while hundreds staged a sit-in as a symbolic protest before the now closed US embassy in Damascus, opponents of the regime, including Muslim fundamentalists, were concerned that protests would distract public attention away from their agenda of toppling the regime.

There were mass protests in Jordan with the Islamist Salafists playing a prominent role and in Bahrain where the Shiite majority protested strongly. In both cases the governments avoided blaming the US for the offence. Responses were rather muted in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states; and the Saudi regime, while condemning the movie, denounced the protests as counterproductive.

Events in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen where the US has secured new allies in state power are significant in the context of changes taking place in the Arab World, and are commented on in some detail.

Egypt: The US has always desired tested subservient clients in power in every country, especially in Latin America and the Middle East, and has done its best to protect loyal dictators, as in Iran in 1979. It tried hard to prop up the Mubarak dictatorship in Egypt in 2011 while millions protested and thousands got killed, wounded or tortured by the murderous armed forces and the police. When Mubarak eventually departed, the US turned to his Generals, and when the military proved a non-starter in the face of massive pro-democracy rallies, the US brokered a power sharing deal between the military and the neo-liberal elite of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Muslim enthusiasts for President Mohamed Morsi seldom note his advocacy of aggressive 'free market' capitalism and his desire to retain Egypt as a key US client in the Arab world. While some of his moves would seem anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist, a closer look will reveal that they are designed to avoid antagonising the US.

Morsi's presence at the Teheran summit of the Non-Aligned Movement was seen by many as a snub to the US. He was there to retain his credibility in the Third World, but, more seriously, he breached the NAM code of conduct by calling for the overthrow of a member state, namely Syria; and to the joy of the US and Israel expressed support for the Western-backed mercenaries in Syria. His protests against Israeli violations in Gaza have not been followed by firm steps to defend the Palestinians, and trade routes between Gaza and Sinai remain closed as they were under Mubarak

His plans to privatise public enterprises, reduce budget deficit by removal of subsidies, further open the economy to foreign capital and end industrial strike action confirm that his vision for Egypt is its continuation as a pliable US client.

The plans were instantly rewarded with offers of loans, debt relief and grants to the tune of \$20 billion by the West and its rich Arab allies.

Morsi, while adhering to a neo-liberal economic strategy and neo-colonial foreign policy, needs some anti-imperialist Islamist posturing to retain his impoverished Muslim vote bank. Fearful of the resurgence of the pro-democratic and nationalist fervour which got rid of Mubarak, he uses his pious Muslim posture to deflect discontent with his neo-liberal economic policies. His denunciation of the US movie ridiculing Muhammad and turning a blind eye to the subsequent attack on the US Embassy in Cairo did anger the US. But the US did not take its disapproval very far, since it knows that tolerating Morsi's letting off steam at the US Embassy is a small price for the bigger reward of burying for good the pro-democratic and nationalist aspirations of the masses. If at all, the movie has been a lifeline to Morsi and the Brotherhood— with whom bitterness has been growing among the public for abandoning pledges of welfare, full employment, economic prosperity and a patriotic foreign policy.

Although mass protests about the anti-Islam movie started in Egypt, the main Islamist parties, namely the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists, while strongly condemning the movie, denounced the violent protests, stressing Egypt's obligation to protect foreign missions and diplomats. They did not call for public protests about the offensive French cartoons which appeared even before the fury about the movie subsided. While the Salafist party refrained from commenting on the cartoons, the Brotherhood condemned them and demanded that the French government should take action against the cartoonist. In the end, on the pretext of defending the stability of an 'Islamist regime', these ardent Islamist parties are ready to play ball with imperialist powers.

Tunisia: Two years ago, Tunisia seemed ripe for democratic change and a state free of US-EU dominance. However, after the uprising enabled the 'moderate' Islamic Ennahda Party to be elected to power, the government led by Moncef Marzouki was easily tempted through pledges of economic support by the US and the EU to abandon democratic change. The US and EU have heavily subsidized the new regime which, with its 'free-market' policies, has abandoned the issues that led to the uprising, namely mass unemployment, concentration of wealth in the hands of an elite, and a foreign policy subservient to the US and EU. The double game of the regime and the ruling party was exposed by their denouncing of the US-made anti-Islam film while crushing public protest for fear that it could ignite a strong upsurge against the regime's betrayal of the original democratic agenda. However, Tunisia's Salafists, unlike Egypt's, played a strong role in the violent protests.

Libya: The war waged by the US on Libya with the support of European allies and Gulf Arab client states wrecked Libya's economy and decimated its national

integrity. The US and EU had in desperation let all manner of foreign and domestic fundamentalist terrorist groups to take control of vast regions of Libya. With Gadhafi out of the way, they installed in power a jumble of Libyan expatriate clients with no popular base or local institutional support. While the subsequent chaos pushed many towards family, clan and religious bodies for mere survival, the mixed bag of Islamic fundamentalists, clans, tribalists, criminal gangs and local warlords, armed and assisted by the US and EU to overthrow Gadhafi, destroyed the very foundations of state and civil administration. Infiltration of the police, military and administration by rival factions seeking a share in the oil revenues has further added to lawlessness. The recent assault on the US consulate was one besides many ongoing attacks against property and state authority that hardly receive mention in the global media.

The US-EU allies hoped to replace the fundamentalist forces that brought about the 'regime change' with neo-liberal administrators who would run Libya as their client state that will give a free rein to their oil companies to plunder Libya's fuel resources. But that hope has not materialised. The proxies of the West have alienated all sections of Libyan society: mainly the millions of beneficiaries of the stable and prosperous secular regime of Gadhafi; the mass of armed Muslim fanatics who are angry that their sacrifices for achieving a fundamentalist state have been wasted; and the warlords and mercenaries who jealously defend their territorial and other acquisitions. The fact that the vast majority looked on with apathy, if not approval, as the armed gangs bombed the US Consulate on the pretext of protest over the anti-Islam film is a measure of the degree of accumulated grievances following foreign intervention.

The insensitive US-EU alliance, however, draws on sections of the Islamist mercenaries who fought the Gadhafi regime to create chaos in Syria, and lives in the hope that Libya will soon return to 'normalcy'.

Yemen: For 33 years, the US armed and financially backed Ali Abdullah Saleh's brutal dictatorship in Yemen. The pro-democracy movement which reached its peak in 2011 was blocked by the US-Saudi intervention which led to the killing, wounding or incarceration of thousands. The seizure of the US Embassy in September 2012 over the movie had stronger underlying reasons including mass discontent with the three decades of US-Yemen alliance and the bogus democratic transition after Saleh was given safe passage out of Yemen. As in Egypt and Tunisia, his removal helped to keep intact Yemen's state apparatus, which is the mainstay of US and Saudi power in the region. In all the so-called democratic transitions in the region, the West has used servile Muslim politicians to marry religious extremism with pro-imperialist neo-liberalism. During the anti-movie rallies, demonstrators protested against the inclusion of Saleh's ministers and affiliates in the post-Saleh cabinet, demanded that Saleh and his allies be put on trial, and denounced US interference in Yemeni affairs.

Events in two other Muslim countries in north east Africa, namely Somalia and Sudan deserve comment in view of US efforts to destabilise them.

Somalia: The two-decade long direct military intervention by the US in Somalia has, since its failed marine occupation, shifted to financing military surrogates comprising Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. The Islamist Al-Shabaab has retreated from urban centres in the face of the combined assault by the surrogate armies. The US-sponsored war pitting radical Islamists against Western backed surrogates and the 'moderate' Muslim regime is far from over. It has merely displaced a majority of Somalia's population and made Somalia a divided, destroyed and destitute country. In January 2013, the US, in its bid to regain its hold on Somalia, recognised a Somali government for the first time in over two decades. But resentment of the US runs deep, as reflected in the strong protests against the anti-Muslim movie in the capital Mogadishu, under the control of the US-backed provisional government

Sudan: In North Africa, Sudan perhaps has the longest record of distrust of the West. A US-led conspiracy led to the recent secession of South Sudan —despite the South already enjoying substantial autonomy— and severely reduced Sudan's oil revenue. Sudan, an important target in the anti-Muslim agenda of the US, has been hit by Israeli and US bombing raids for over a decade. Although the movie met with massive protests including violent attacks on US and European embassies, the protests had their roots in the impoverishment of Sudan following secession; and the movie has only ignited the deep frustration against a regime with a fading anti-imperialist credibility.

South and South East Asia: Protests occurred in all countries with large Muslim populations. Pakistan witnessed massive demonstrations across the country, and the protests had much to do with the ever growing resentment against the decade-long US violation of Pakistan's sovereignty, including US drone bombings which killed scores of tribal villagers. Mass protests were strong on both sides of occupied Kashmir as well as in many parts of India. Protests also rocked Bangladesh, where the people are still furious over the killing of hundreds of garment workers in a recent fire in a garment factory, for which US brand names including Walmart are to blame for ignoring safety requirements.

While mass fury prevailed over most of the Muslim World, protests were rather muted in Malaysia and Indonesia, despite a record of Muslim militancy. A feasible reason for the mildness of the protests is that US meddling in their military and political affairs has not been as blatant as in the Arab World.

US Imperialism and Muslim Rulers: US imperialism has learned little from its mistakes. Faced with a strong militant backlash to its aggressive conduct in the

Muslim World, the US is increasingly counting on heavy handed suppression of protests by its Muslim client states. But such repression has only aggravated public anger.

The US response to the pro-democracy movements of 2011 which threatened its client rulers in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain was essentially negative. Yet it could subvert the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen by substituting old rulers with new ones who, despite their anti-West posturing, turned out to be willing collaborators. In the case of Bahrain the US allowed its ally Saudi Arabia to brutally suppress the uprising, on the pretext that the Shia majority was being instigated by Iran against a Sunni sheik.

The US and its allies created situations in Libya and Syria that would enable intervention to overthrow rulers who, although not hostile, were not entirely pliable. The prize target of the US, however, is the Islamic regime in Iran, and the US and its Gulf allies are promoting a Sunni-Shia rift to justify intervention in Sunni majority Syria ruled by a repressive, yet secular, regime led by a Shia Muslim. What the US failed to learn is that, while its encouragement of the Sunni-Shia contradiction and its promotion of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq had short-term benefits for the forces of occupation, in the long run they contributed to making Iraq ungovernable by the US or its puppets, as well as aggravated the Kurdish national question in Turkey.

What is clear in the Muslim World, especially the Arab countries, is that the anti-Muslim agenda of the US has the blessings of Saudi Arabia, its most ardent Arab ally, and that moderate Islamists are potential allies of imperialism. Recent developments have confirmed that the Islamic establishment is fundamentally anti-left and that its differences with imperialism are conditional and lose significance when it comes to protecting the interests of the ruling capitalist classes.

The conduct of all imperialism is guided by economic interests, but it is risky to oversimplify it. Imperialist military wars have often sacrificed economic benefit to secure regional or global domination and to ward off what the imperialist power perceives as a threat to its system of exploitation and domination. US imperialism invested far more than can be justified in economic terms in its war in Vietnam and efforts to subdue Cuba. While oil remains central to US calculations in the Middle East, not every act of subversion, aggression or invasion has been driven solely by the desire to secure control of oil. We should remember that Saddam Hussein, Gadhafi and Bashar al-Assad were not implacable enemies of imperialism and their natural resources were not denied to imperialist plunder.

The conduct of US imperialism has to be viewed partly in terms of a military imperialist power losing its way. Imperialist militarism has a logic of its own which snares the imperialist power. The reliance of US imperialism on Israel as its regional policeman of the Middle East has cost it dearly, both economically and politically. The losses have been grave in the past decade.

It has not learned from the outcome of its aggressive conduct in Latin America. The harm it has caused to the Muslim world stretching from Pakistan to Libya is far more wanton than that in Latin America. The Arab democratic struggle —the so-called Arab Spring— has been subverted, although only temporarily. But the political awareness that it has instilled among the Muslims of the region will remain.

The future: A major challenge facing the Muslim World is, undeniably, the defence of 'Muslim dignity'. The case for the defence of Muslim dignity cannot be the case for a dictatorship in the name of Islam and Islamic laws. On the contrary, defence of Muslim dignity demands democracy and dignity for all irrespective of religion and religious sect. What we have seen thus far is that neither the moderate Islamists nor the extremists have successfully taken up the challenge when placed in the saddle of state power.

It should also be stressed that secular democracy is no answer if it means compromise with imperialism. What is needed is a secular democratic approach with a genuine anti-imperialist content to deliver the goods for the Muslims. That brings in the question of class and the need for the toiling masses to take the initiative under the leadership of the working class not only to defend Muslim dignity but also put an end to all forms of oppression that have thus far hurt Muslim dignity.

ASIA

China: Straining Relations with the US

In 2012, the US announced a "to return to Asia", namely broadening its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region apparently in response to China's increasing military activity in disputed waters in the seas adjoining China. The US plans for escalation represents a three-fold increase in US military presence, with large increases in the number of US naval personnel and vessels stationed in Australia, Singapore and the Philippines.

Yuri Tavrovsky, a Russian expert in Eastern affairs noted that China is actively developing its navy as it was feeling surrounded by US forces on all sides, and the US making no secret of its plans to counter the growing Chinese influence in the region. He also noted that China, while is not getting aggressive, is conscious of its growing military might. Another Russian expert, Evgeny Kanaev foresees further aggravation of US-China relations and notes China's unwillingness to develop its navy to satisfy the US which sees China as a rival and obstacle to its desire to be the dominant force in the Asia-Pacific region and maintain control over all the transport routes in the region. [Sources: english.ruvr.ru/2013_01_15/US-

China-compete-for-the-role-of-king-of-sea/; www.globalresearch.ca/the-chinese-are-starting-to-feel-surrounded-by-us-forces-from-all-sides-expert/5319159]

The aforesaid developments affirm that China's purpose in developing harbour facilities in the Indian Ocean —notoriously referred to as “the String of Pearls” designed to encircle India by those seeking to push India into the arms of the US— is to counter encirclement by the US and has little to do with India.

The history of US-China relationship was never on equal terms until China asserted itself following its liberation in 1949 led by the Communist Party of China. By the late 1980s, the pretext of “communist threat” under which the US justified its hostility towards China ceased to be valid. But mutual distrust and dislike prevail despite, or rather due to, the dependence of the US on China for its economic stability and the dependence of China on the US and European markets to sustain its high economic growth rate.

US-China hostility runs the risk of armed conflict and prospects are strong for a proxy war in the form of territorial conflicts between China and its neighbours. The heavy military presence of the US in the region could then mean more than containing China's rising influence in the region.

India

The Delhi gang rape: the real issues

The 23-year-old female student who was gang raped on 16th December and died 13 days after was yet another sad victim of prevailing semi-feudal attitudes towards women. Government attempts initially to suppress protests using police violence and later to defuse public anger by sending the victim to a hospital in Singapore misfired. The news of her death in Singapore heightened mass sorrow and fury; and the disgracefully insensitive government, which received the remains of the victim under high security and held her funeral out of public reach, announced financial compensation for the victim's family and a job for a member of the family. The fact that it took mass protests to secure a full inquiry reflects the attitude of the state towards female victims of sexual violence.

Comments on the rape and about the female protesters and women in general, by leading politicians of the government and the right-wing opposition, senior police officers and some members of the judiciary reaffirmed the endurance of misogynist feudal attitudes among the ruling classes and the keepers of the law. The mainstream media did its best to keep dormant the fact that the two previous incidents of gang rape that provoked mass anger on a comparable scale were custodial rapes by the Police (in 1979) and the Army (in 2004).

It is true that mass agitations have galvanised the Indian public in the long battle to end violence against women. But one cannot ignore the reality that successive

governments have systematically separated such issues from the bigger picture and thereby reduced them to isolated incidents paved over by investigative reports and token legislative changes. The issue at stake goes far beyond securing legal provisions to ensure justice for rape victims and concerns the defeat of feudal patriarchal ideology and the forces that sustain it.

[For more insightful comments see <http://sanhati.com/excerpted/5952/>]

Selling out retail trade to foreign interests

In December 2012, the Indian Government pushed through Parliament legislation on Foreign Direct Investment in retail trade the same way it pushed through the nuclear deal with the US five years ago, where too the parliamentary debate reflected majority opinion against the proposed legislation but the vote was driven by opportunism. The outcome, once again, is a charade reflecting a concocted majority put together by shady deals.

The Government claim that FDI in retail will benefit farmers and consumers has proven to be false globally, since multinational corporations in the retail sector have never given a better deal to either the producer or consumer. The argument that FDI in retail trade will usher in technology to prevent wastage was also false since the imposition of arbitrary size, colour and texture standards has generally resulted in the rejection of much of the food procured.

While Parliament debated the legislation, inquiries continued in the US into allegations of bribery by the retail giant Walmart in several countries including Mexico, India, China and Brazil. On 10th December the Washington Post revealed that Walmart had spent around \$25 million for lobbying in India to gain entry into the Indian market, and has been lobbying US lawmakers since 2008 to facilitate its entry into the Indian market.

The Indian Government has bulldozed through Parliament the FDI in retail under US pressure when retail giants are facing protests in the US for underpaying employees and harming small traders. The bullying tactics used by Walmart in the US to silence employees who waged industrial action since November 2012 has rallied support for the employees from other Walmart employees in the US and nine other countries. The Walmart experience in the US is a warning to the people of India about the implications of FDI in retail for employees and small businesses.

Although the Government still faces a judicial inquiry on allegations relating to Walmart's lobbying in India, the burden is on the shoulders of the people of India to fight to the bitter end the suicidal policy of FDI in retail that threatens the livelihood and interests of millions.

[Sources: makingchangeatwalmart.org/2012/12/14/workers-in-10-countries-call-for-an-end-to-the-silencing-of-workers-at-walmart/, www.thehindu.com/; www.cpiml.org]

Combating Maoists and civil rights violations

The Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners issued on 30th December a statement on the arrest by the police of seven people from a lodge in Mavelikkara in Kerala on 29th December 2012, alleging that they were Maoists. (www.countercurrents.org/crpp301212.htm). The statement condemned the arrests of civil libertarians and others by dubbing them as Maoists, and demanded immediate release. It also pointed out that such arrests were part of the process of criminalising dissent and denying the right to assemble.

Those arrested have been remanded in police custody and framed under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. Even before they could approach a lawyer, the police had planted stories in the local print and electronic media that the detainees had admitted to belonging to Maoist organisations. Mr Gopal, a former scientist in the atomic research centre Mumbai and Kalpakkam and a well known civil liberties activist in the Committee for the Protection of Civil Liberties as well as the People's Union for Civil Liberties in Tamilnadu is among those arrested, casting doubt on the story of the police. The media and the police have yet to name the banned organizations.

The state has been systematically terrorising the Indian public about Maoist and Muslim fundamentalist threats to justify its acts of stifling public resistance to its acts of repression and denial of democracy. United opposition by all revolutionary, left and democratic forces of India is essential to halt the repressive Indian state now in the service of US imperialism in its tracks before it further erodes democracy.

Kudankulam nuclear plant can be stopped

The Supreme Court bench hearing an appeal by social activist G Sundararajan against the Madras High Court's ruling refusing restraint against the Kudankulam nuclear power plant, said on 27th September that the safety of plant and the people living in its vicinity is its prime concern and issued notices to the Centre and Tamilnadu Pollution Control Board on a plea challenging the environmental clearance given to the project. The Supreme Court, which earlier refused to stay loading of the fuel in the plant but agreed to examine the risk associated with the project, also stated that it can stop commissioning of the power plant if it finds that the mandatory safety requirements are not in place. The Supreme Court reserved orders in 2012 on the Kudankulam case and a ruling is expected in January 2013.

The Kudankulam struggle is more than an issue of safety and livelihood of local villagers and fisher folk. It has serious implications for environmental safety in the region and is a part of the question of nuclear safety that concerns not just India

but the whole world. The anti-nuclear struggle should go on until the final decommissioning of all nuclear power plants in India.

[Sources: economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/16576138.cms?prtpage=1;
www.thehindu.com/news/national/supreme-court-verdict-on-kudankulam-this-month/article4262888.ece]

Maruti-Suzuki workers' struggle

The Maruti Suzuki Workers Union in a statement (sanhati.com/event/5915/) about its day-long protest demonstration in Jantar Mantar, Delhi on 19th December 2012 declared its commitment to carry forward its legitimate demands for an unbiased judicial inquiry into the violent incident of 18th July 2012 in the Maruti Suzuki Plant and the release of 149 Maruti Suzuki workers languishing in the Central Jail of Gurgaon. Its demands also include the reinstatement of the 546 regular workers and over 1800 contract workers dismissed on 18th July 2012 and the right to form unions in the auto belt industrial region including Gurgaon, Manesar, Dharuhera, Bawal, Faridabad, Noida and Ghaziabad.

The protesting workers allege that an all-out war has been waged against them by the management with the connivance of the Haryana Government because they asserted their right to form workers' union and questioned the illegal practice of contract worker system.

The just struggle of the Maruti workers has the support of the working class in all parts of India and is certainly there to stay until final victory over the arrogant company and its accomplice in power in Haryana.

CPI(M) pays the price for opportunism

Led by G Gangadaran, former president of the left-leaning Tamil Nadu Government Employees Association, dissenting members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) from 28 of the 32 districts of Tamilnadu left the CPI(M) in the first week of November 2012, to float the Marxist Party. The charges levelled at the CPI(M) leadership by the dissenting members mainly concerned its opportunist politics, and the founder members of the Marxist Party said that it was formed to make audible the voice of the working class. Although the party had no immediate plans to contest elections, it is likely to participate in elections in alliance with "parties whose policies and programmes are not antagonistic" to its own, and not as a minor partner in any alliance.

The CPI(M) leadership brushed aside the split as a case of a disgruntled comrade walking out to float a forum, although more than 56,000 CPM cadres had refused to renew their party cards in the past three years indicating that the split is a sign of growing disillusion with the CPI(M).

The call by 2013 CPM-Punjab, the Left Collective (Delhi), Left Coordination Committee (Kerala), Marxist Party (Tamilnadu), Marxvadi Vichar Manch (Maharashtra) and the Students Federation of India (JNU, Delhi) —all of whom split from the CPI(M) in recent times— on 13th January for the unity of progressive, democratic and left forces is a warning to the CPI(M) leadership that it faces isolation unless it acts fast to rectify its faults.

Nepal: Maoists at Crossroads

CPN-M Convention

The newly founded Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) held its General Convention on 9-13 January 2013, in Kathmandu. Its choice of name and calling the Convention as its seventh is in effect a declaration that it is the moral and legitimate successor to the CPN-M —later to be renamed the UCPN(M)— which led the 10-year long struggle that culminated in the ending of Nepal's monarchy. The Convention announced a 51-member Central Committee, a 5-member standing committee and a 13-member Politburo, with Mohan Baidhya as Chairman, Ram Bahadur Thapa as General Secretary, CP Gajurel as Vice-chairman, and Dev Gurung and Netra Bikram Chand as Secretaries.

The following is a summary of the assessment of the international and national situations presented to the Convention:

International situation

Indian expansionism is the main exploiter of Nepal while US imperialism is rising in South Asia.

The main obstruction and threat to revolution is US imperialism.

Rightist revisionism is main threat to world revolution.

The US and imperialist countries are weak and depend on financial capital.

A front should be formed against imperialist and expansionist forces.

Brotherhood should be developed among parties that follow Marxism, Leninism and Maoism.

National Situation

Nepal is neo-colonial country whose national sovereignty is in great danger.

The principal enemies are stooges, bureaucrats and feudal classes directed and mobilized by Indian expansionism.

It is necessary to form a people's constitution through struggle.

It is necessary to form a front and working alliance among leftist, nationalist, federalist and democratic forces.

The semi-proletariat in Nepal is rapidly expanding.

Objective conditions for revolution are evolving in Nepal but subjective reality is weak.

The nature of Nepal's revolution is a prolonged struggle.

People's communes should be reorganised.

A New Democratic Republican Nepal should be established through a new democratic revolution.

The Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist UCPN (M) has announced its General Convention in February 2012 and repeated its public appeal to the CPN-M for reuniting, which seems to have been ignored by the CPN-M, amid widening differences between the two parties.

The Economic & Political Weekly remarked in its editorial of 12th January 2013 (www.epw.in/ejournal/show/1/_/2929), written in the context of the two rival conventions, noted that the UCPN(M) has drifted from its strategy of protracted "people's war" to give up armed struggle, dissolve its people's governments and people's courts, disband the People's Liberation Army and integrate combatants in the Nepal Army, and now commit itself to returning of land confiscated as part of its radical land reform. It also questioned if 'New Democracy' is attainable through being elected to power in a multi-party, bourgeois democratic republic, and wondered whether the UCPN(M) will find newer ways in its general convention of February to take the constitutional process forward. The editorial also observed that the CPN-M has far greater challenges to surmount since military victory in a protracted people's war will be hard to secure in a post-September 2001 world and setting up stable base areas and holding power in district headquarters will be very difficult tasks. It also warned of possible Indian military intervention with US support, and it wondered how the CPN-M will it distinguish itself from UCPN(M) which it has dubbed "revisionist", if it decides against returning to people's war in view of these challenges. It, however, noted that the CPN-M has already formed the "People's Volunteers" which has militantly engaged in a few factory seizures and is resuscitating revolutionary art and culture.

[Other sources: www.bannedthought.net/Nepal/CPN-Maoist/index.htm;
www.signalfire.org/?p=22831]

AFRICA

Mali: Re-colonization in Classical Style

France, the former slave power of Western Africa, launched a military attack on 11th January. Its warplanes bombed urban centres across northern Mali and French troops in armoured columns followed with a northward ground offensive, beginning in the southern border of the North Mali. France, with significant

corporate interests in Mali, is spearheading the war with plans to expel Tuareg and Islamist fighters from Mali to pursue its agenda of “the total re-conquest of the country” and thereby stabilize the corrupt regime in control of the South, led by a military junta. The invasion has received unqualified support from the US, Canada and the EU. Plans are afoot to involve troops from eight regional countries, to provide a fig leaf of African legitimacy.

The imperialist powers see in the French assault the prospect of a lasting neo-colonial escalation of military intervention throughout Western Africa. The broader implications of the escalating war are clear from the following utterance of a former Pentagon counter-terrorism official cited in an article in the New York Times of 17th January: “To dismantle their [Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’s] network, the United States and its allies will need a well-thought-out regional strategy”. The US and France, as noted by the NYT, had been courting Algeria for months to get its help in Mali; and obliging the Algerian regime, all too keen to prove its loyalty to imperialism, has become a key player in the unfolding war. Its long border with northern Mali is essential to the invading forces for the “pacification” of northern Mali. Thus the war in Mali is not only about Mali, but about deals among the imperialists to reshape Western Africa. Although France took the initiative in unleashing war, the US, as in Libya, will not remain on the sidelines to let France monopolise the show, and will use the pretext of hunting down the Al Qaeda to assert itself. Thus the imperialist campaign to re-colonize Africa will be even bloodier and more oppressive than the original colonization of Africa.

It is true that Islamic fundamentalists have ruled northern Mali with an iron hand since taking over in 2012, but the reasons for the intervention lie in the determination of the imperial powers to keep the human and natural resources of poor regions of the world as preserves for capitalist profits, and west Africa is rich in resources including gold, oil and uranium.

A national question in play

The 1.2 million strong Tuareg people with their historic homeland spreading across much of Niger and northern Mali and parts of Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Algeria and Libya are one of several minority nationalities in West Africa struggling for national self-determination. In 1990 they won some degree of autonomy from the elected government of Mali, and in 2007 the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad won greater political and territorial concessions for the Tuareg. The pledges were, however, frequently reneged, leading to conflicts. A peace deal brokered by Libya brought peace in 2009.

Violence against the Tuaregs by the state pushed matters to a head in 2011. However, the defeat of the Mali’s army by the NMLA and its declaration of an independent state on 6th April 2012 were surprising. It is here that the Russian commentator Alexander Mezayev sheds fresh light on some key issues (www.strategic-culture.org/news/2013/01/14/military-intervention-mali-special-

operation-recolonize-africa.html). He sees the military operation in Mali as an example of special activities designed to re-colonize Africa, and argues that the appearance of terrorist groups in the north of Mali was part of a well orchestrated plan to prepare public opinion for an imperative of military intervention. Mezayev claims evidence of French involvement in the delivery of Libyan weapons to the NMLA in north Mali after Gadhafi's overthrow and that once the NMLA realized its being used, it opted to negotiate with the government of Mali. That was when it was attacked by the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamists of Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA), the real perpetrators of the provocation.

Mezayev also sees no good reason for the coup in March 2012 —only days before the Presidential election— that toppled President Amadou Toumani Toure who was not a candidate for the next term, except that President Toure and the favourites to win the election opposed Western military intervention; and notes that the idea of foreign intervention received fresh impetus after the coup.

He draws attention to the Islamist capture of northern Mali leading to a massive refugee problem and to the destruction of Muslim shrines in Sahara's ancient historical centres and argues that the aim was to "shock" the international community and impress upon it the urgency of military intervention. He also questions the logic and timing, as well as the true motive of the Al Qaeda offensive in the South, which seemed designed to provoke urgent foreign invasion; and notes that the French started the UN sanctioned military operation even before the physical arrival of African troops.

Militarization of Mali and West Africa

US armed forces have been training the Mali military for years, and in 2005, the US established the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership comprising Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. US aims in Africa centre on securing hegemony over the entire continent, a conflict in which its chief rival is now China, which surpassed the US as Africa's largest trading partner in 2009. Unable to compete economically with China, the US is turning to militarism to secure its advantage.

The US already has numerous military operations in Africa and has funded and trained troops for the African Union Mission in Somalia. Its forces play a central role in patrolling the waters off the Horn of Africa. On Christmas Day, 2012 the Associated Press reported that the Obama administration had decided to send some 3,500 US troops in early 2013 to as many as 35 of Africa's 54 countries, claiming it as part of an intensifying US effort to train countries to battle "extremists" and to give the US a ready and trained force to dispatch to Africa if crises emerge that require US intervention.

War Atrocities and the shame of the French left leadership

Only days into the French attack, evidence is mounting of significant civilian and military casualties, and the International Red Cross and Amnesty International has expressed grave concern. According to the UNHCR the attacks have displaced nearly 230,000 Malians besides 144,500 Malians who are already refugees in neighbouring countries.

Ominously echoing US imperialist excuses for atrocities against civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan and Palestine, French military commanders complain of difficulty in distinguishing fighters when bombing from non-combatant populations and that air strikes were being hampered because militants were using civilian populations as shields.

The military attack in Mali, interestingly, was ordered by the 'Socialist' President of France. His decision has been condemned by groups on the political left in France. But the leadership of the Left Front including the 'Communist Party' have shamelessly defended the intervention.

[Main source of data: globalresearch.ca]

[Also see a highly relevant article by John Pilger on the imperialist project in Africa: www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/world-affairs/2013/01/modern-times-are-upside-down-invasion-not-news-licence-lie-tak?quicktabs_most_read=0]

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

Venezuela: US and Opposition Playing Dirty

The convincing victory of Hugo Chavez in the presidential elections in October 2012 followed by further success for the Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSV) in 20 of the 23 governorship elections in December has made the opposition in Venezuela and its masters in the US rather desperate. They had used every trick in the book to dissuade the voters from re-electing Chavez and failed miserably. Now the opposition and the global media are demanding fresh elections in Venezuela on the grounds that Chavez has not taken his oath as President before the National Assembly within 90 days of election.

The CIA coordinated strategy to destabilise Venezuela comprises inciting internal conflict and fanning feelings of insecurity among the public. Attempts have been made to cause panic over an allegedly imminent food shortage and an impending financial crisis. Planned hoarding of essential food items have been brought to light, and smuggled weapons and ammunition have been found. For example, in the state of Zulia, bordering Colombia, members of the National Guard intercepted a shipment of 30,000 rounds of ammunition of various calibres. The

opposition, the US establishment and the CIA also dearly wish Chavez's death so that they have a chance to create chaos in Venezuela.

Already suspicion is whipped up that Chavez is in his deathbed and the government is not being truthful about it. Also incidents of violence are created and then exaggerated nationally and internationally to give an impression of growing lawlessness. Accordingly, the number of US correspondents in Venezuela has expanded dramatically and most of them are operating in carefully chosen areas. Meantime, Colombian paramilitaries linked with the CIA continue to penetrate the country; and there has been an increase in crimes involving firearms.

Rumour mills are working overtime to establish that a struggle is unfolding between factions in the Chavistas camp. Stories are published in the print and electronic media, and embedded in social networks. The destructive potential of these systematic attacks cannot be ignored and the opposition has descended to the level of using fake micro blogging on Twitter to pretend to be members of the families of Chavez and other leaders

Yet a few too many things stand in the way of the opposition's plans to destabilise the government. Most importantly, the cheap and petty conduct of the opposition has only increased public support and sympathy for Chavez. Also the PSV, following its resounding victory in the election of governors in December, is firmly behind Chavez.

Against this background, a campaign that failure of Chavez to swear-in within 90 days of his election will lead to a constitutional crisis was vigorously spread by the global media. But the campaign was deflated by the ruling of Venezuela's Supreme Tribunal of Justice on 9th January that President Chavez's new term in office starts on that day and that postponement of the swearing-in ceremony is constitutionally permitted. The Supreme Court also ruled that there was no vacuum of power or a constitutional requirement for someone to temporarily replace Hugo Chavez as President. The key points of the ruling are:

- *The Swearing-in can be postponed*
- *An Inauguration is not required for President Chavez to begin his Term*
- *The Chavez Administration continues to function*
- *The President has Congressional Permission to be abroad*
- *The President is not "Temporarily Absent" from office which is a Venezuelan legal/constitutional term which does not apply here*
- *The Supreme Court's decision is binding*

[For an English language version of Venezuela's 1999 Constitution see: www.venezuelanalysis.com/constitution].

Marxist attitudes towards the Bolivarian revolution ranges from its endorsement as the model for the 21st Century to its rejection as failing to achieve full ownership of the means of production with the proletariat leading socialist transformation. Idealisation of the changes as 21st Century socialism fails to take into account the fact that the huge oil resources made social welfare possible on the scale it has been achieved in Venezuela and thereby sustain the popularity of Chavez and the PSV. The defeated opposition had the support of 44% of the population and that means much more political work remains to be done. On the other hand to demand that Venezuela should rush into social or state ownership is to call for political suicide since imperialism is still strong and the elite class awaits an opportunity to invite foreign intervention. The strategy has to be one of ridding the economy of imperialist control and influence, and there are tasks remaining to be fulfilled. Politicising the masses and preparing the proletariat does not happen overnight. Whether the PSV can deliver on that remains to be seen as socialism and capitalism cannot coexist under one roof for long.

But what is important is to recognise that Venezuela led by Chavez is a bastion of Anti-imperialism in South America and deserves the support of all democratic, progressive and left forces internationally in the context of US imperialism and local reaction seeking to subvert the popular government.

While idealising the process in Venezuela as a model could be a sign of political immaturity and deserves criticism, to adopt positions that will weaken the government of Venezuela nationally and internationally will in effect be to support imperialism.

[The readers are recommended to read: www.globalresearch.ca/bolivarianism-in-venezuela/5317946; www.strategic-culture.org/news/2013/01/15/us-intelligence-agencies-preparing-for-developing-crisis-venezuela.html]

EUROPE

State Contempt for the Will of the People

On 14th November 2012 protests against austerity programmes were held in 23 countries in Europe with general strikes accompanying massive demonstrations in Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, and Malta. Countries with strong protest demonstrations included Germany, France, Brussels, Britain, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. The protests to a large part but not entirely represent a spontaneous reaction of the people against the systematic undermining of the welfare state. But it is also true that successive governments have carried on with their policies of austerity and "structural reform" to undermine the role of the state in sustaining social services.

It is clear that the capitalist welfare state in Europe has been a failure, mainly since the greed of the few and the needs of the many are never compatible. 'Moderate' or 'centre-left' reformist governments have been able to mediate between the two to secure social welfare, but only when working class militancy was at its peak. Such mediation failed with the weakening of the left movement whose leadership in Europe fell into the hands of a reformist left comprising social democrats and revisionists in Marxist garb and the resurgence of the right.

The collapse of the Soviet Union further strengthened the reactionary right which was already attracted to neo-liberal economic policies. Neo-liberalism too failed to address fundamental economic issues and the crisis has continued to deepen. But capitalism, especially Finance Capital, seeks to retain profits by passing on the burdens to the working classes.

The reformist left has either not learned the lessons of the past half century or is, in the name of safeguarding national interests and 'democratic' institutions refusing to risk conflict with the bourgeoisie. Its programmes are still about managing capitalism more effectively than how the right has. That pattern keeps recurring in country after country, and the response of a frustrated public has been to throw out of power any government that has not lived up to its expectations. Thus left or centre-left alliances and right or centre-right alliances have been taking turns to unsuccessfully manage the capitalist state in Europe.

Objectively, conditions are ripe for the overthrow of the capitalist state in many European countries, but the subjective requirements remain unfulfilled. If the left fails to come up with a credible alternative that can take the capitalist bull by the horns, it will be fascism that will ride on the anger of the masses to take state power and deliver the goods for the bourgeoisie. The electoral gains of the neo-fascist Golden Dawn in Greece alongside the rise of the 'alternative left' SYRIZA is too significant to be ignored. Another matter that deserves attention is that in most European countries the economic crisis has, as in the past, encouraged the far right, often the neo-fascists, and other racist elements to wage attack on immigrants and oppressed ethnic groups such as gypsies.

The left has to evolve a fresh strategy, not just to replace the ruling right or centre-right as the dominant parliamentary party but to give voice to the aspirations of the people. While there is a need to combat opportunism of every shade, there is also the need to combat the resurgence of ultra right and fascist tendencies. Cooperation with other progressive and democratic forces will not be a surrender of revolutionary principles if it is built as a strategic partnership that will politicize the people and revolutionize politics.

The Software Worker

Lyrics in Tamil by M Mayuran

A worker who maketh software – she
sells her brains for a wage daily
A worker who maketh software – he
sells his brains for a wage daily

Highly learned and blessed with
fortune to draw six figure wages

Lap-top hanging on shoulder – a
white microphone in the ear canal
hooked to the latest cell telephone – a
touch screen tablet ready at hand

Compelled to buy new electronics
whenever gadgets do reach market

Knows not the heat of scorching sun – for
cool air blows through the office AC
Knows not the poverty in his land – the
work place simply shimmers and shines

When word comes from high up about lay-offs
it sweats amid cold to count days left

Feet are rooted in native soil – but
the mind is seated well in the West
Life goes on on a daily wage – but
the mindset is that of a capitalist

Walks on ground while thought's sky high
Life goes on in unsure myths

Workers in tea plantations – they
have unions to demand justice
Garment factory workers too – have
in unity demanded all their rights

Like dogs do plead software toilers
stretched out at HR manager's feet

You too toil as an employee – this
truth you learn and come together
Think who steals and soaks up all – your
hard toil deprived of leisure

Do come forth and smash and change
the system that plunders you and me

A worker who maketh software – now
a comrade of the toiling folk
A worker who maketh software – now
if mind is made up, a militant too

Come forth let us join in fight
to make a new world, new justice

Kingdom of Words

Gloria Gabuardi

I want a kingdom of words
a river of words
to wash away human misery
and plant roots in my soul
so that it might be an Argonaut,
a Quixotic lady in fantastic seas
a valiant dreamer of liberty.
A kingdom of words
to rearrange the movement of birds in branches
to feel the colour of a star
the aroma of wind
the spirituality of men's passion.

A kingdom of words to help me know
human being, seas and stars
to join my soul and my body
and please my flesh.

I want a kingdom of words for my soul
as much as I want a vast country for my heart
a free country like we've all imagined.
A kingdom of words to seduce me
and roll out from my tongue
like a string of pearls
at dusk in my country,

A kingdom of words or a river of words
overflowing, carrying everything it finds in its path
a will-o'-the-wisp in my mouth
a passion devouring my dreams.

To burn my lips
and grant me the keys of the imagination
the islands of colours and spices
Amboina, Banda, Ternate and Tidore
with their trunks and tragedies and adventures
in the sea of lamentations of Vespuccio and Magellan
To have it come to a halt before me
all I need is the light of your eyes
the trembling at the threshold of dreams,
splashing on the white page.

Translation: Indran Amirthanayagan

Courtesy: Prometro, Latinoamerican Poetry Magazine, 84-85. July 2008.

On to the Promised Land

Gloria Gabuardi*

**And we walked for days on end
crossed whole mountains,
rivers, canefields, bridges
by boat and helicopter,
until we arrived
ragged and hungry;
they brought me a child
so he wouldn't die on them,
for we were the Liberation Front
and we came to stay.
We brought with us hope
clasped in a strong raised fist,
and with them returned to march
on to our future.**

**A poet and militant working for the Association of Sandinista Cultural workers, Nicaragua. (Written around 1984, Courtesy: Lovers and Comrades, The Women's Press, London, 1989)*

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