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The Politics of Identity Politics

***The Issue of Nationality in the
Sri Lankan National Question***

Halal: Only a Pretext

***Poetry: Ken Saro-Wiva, TV Reshzankan,
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Dis Nigerian Sef

Ken Saro-Wiva (1941-1995)

Oder people dey speak one language
Your own come pass two hundred:
Sanu, ekaro, deeyira, tank you, doo
kakifo, nonsense, you no go fit take one!
Nigeria, you too like borrow borrow
You borrow money, cloth you dey borrow
You borrow motor, you borrow aeroplane
You borrow chop, you borrow drink
Sotey you borrow anoder man language
Begin confuse am with your confusion
Anytin you borrow you go confuse am to nonsense
Idiot debtor, wetin you go do
When de owners go come take dem tings?

[Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa writer, television producer and environmental activist, belonged to the Ogoni ethnic minority in Nigeria whose homeland, targeted for oil drilling since the 1950s, suffered extreme environmental damage from dumping of petroleum waste. Saro-Wiwa led a nonviolent campaign against the environmental degradation caused by the multinational petroleum industry and the Nigerian government for its reluctance to enforce environmental regulations. He was arrested at the peak of his campaign, hastily tried by a special military tribunal, and hanged in 1995. His execution provoked international outrage which led to Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth for over three years.]

Given above is an exact from a long poem "Dis Nigeria Sef" from "Songs in Time of War" by Ken Saro-Wiwa.]

From the Editor's Desk

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness....” opens the ‘Tale of Two Cities’, the well known novel by Charles Dickens, referring to life in England and France during the run-up to the French Revolution. It is neither the best of times nor the age of wisdom in Sri Lanka. The arrogant foolishness of those in power suggests that the worst is yet to come. Equally worrying is the impotence of the parliamentary opposition.

We were once told that LTTE terrorism was the challenge facing the country. When the LTTE was militarily annihilated we were told that terrorism has been defeated and that development is the challenge. Four years on, the anniversary of the military victory is celebrated with great fanfare while the wounds of war remain unhealed. No Sri Lankan Tamil in his senses sees secession as a feasible proposition, and there is no sign of armed activity on the Tamil nationalist front. On the contrary, the Tamil National Alliance, which claims to represent the majority of Tamils, is so mollified that it even avoids uttering the phrase ‘self determination’. Yet the government still uses every opportunity, from victory celebrations to UN Human Rights Council resolutions critical of its record in dealing with charges of war crimes and human rights violations, to keep alive the secessionist and terrorist ‘threat’.

The creation and sustenance of a siege mentality among the Sinhalese helps the government to divert attention from the real issues that face the country and the people. Pandering to chauvinist sentiments, the UNP and the JVP compromised themselves on the national question and the conduct of the war, and have since rejected the possibility of war crimes and human rights violations. Their only concern is that the government is still using the military victory to make political capital at their expense.

The government, meanwhile, under coercive guidance from the IMF and the World Bank, follows policies of open economy, privatization, liberalization, curtailing of public spending and state subsidies for education, health, agriculture and social welfare. The resulting burdens on the people have led to strong protests in the past two years by workers, peasants, students and academics against aspects of government policy that affect them. Anger building on several fronts reached new heights with the recent hike in electricity prices which badly hurts domestic consumers while leaving the big consumers virtually unaffected. Yet the opposition is unable to spur mass frustration and anger into political action.

While the violation of democratic rights and attacks on the media in the South gather rising concern, conditions in the North-East are deteriorating rapidly. Violent attacks on university students, newspapers and journalists, politicians and offices of political parties are now nearly matters of routine. There have been reports of sexual violence against women by the police and security forces. But the rape and perverse sexual cruelty that a seven year old school girl in Nedunkeni (Vavuniya District) was subjected to in May brought out hundreds of people in angry protest against deliberate police inaction. What is worrying is that while such crimes seem to occur with the connivance of the state there is a conspiracy of muted media response in the South.

Muslims and Islam are increasingly targets of neo-fascist Sinhala Buddhist organisations that have come to the fore in the South since the end of the war so that the fascist threat is now more than a possibility. Targeting minorities is standard practice of fascists all over and religion has fared prominently in their arsenal. The English and Sinhala news media are downplaying the gravity of the situation either to avert the fury of the neo-fascists or because they secretly endorse the anti-Muslim agenda, at least in part. Such mistakes were made eight decades ago in Europe and the price paid was heavy.

It is at this juncture that the absence of a strong revolutionary left organisation is dearly felt. Only a genuine left can mobilise and lead the people against threats to democracy. The old left comprising the revisionist Communist Party, and the LSSP and its successors has since the 1960s ended up as appendages of the UNP or the SLFP. The degeneration of the old left was the direct result of its taking the parliamentary road in their pursuit of power. Careerism and craving for posts and portfolios has politically destroyed even the remaining major factions of the LSSP and drawn them close to the SLFP and the UNP.

It is now for the unorganised genuine left, especially among the Sinhalese, and genuine leftists —who for some reason stayed with the old left and other opportunist left parties— to join hands with genuine left parties to build the left as a mighty political force. A broad based, anti-imperialist and anti-chauvinist front that will unite the left, progressive and democratic forces on a common programme that combines struggles for democracy, human and fundamental rights and for economic salvation with a solution to the national question based on the recognition of the right to self determination will necessarily be an integral part of the programme to building up the left.

The Politics of Identity Politics

S. Sivasegaram

1. Identity in Politics

Politics has always been identity-based. Every kind of identity that is operative in society manifests itself to differing degrees in politics, directly or indirectly. Whenever social inequality, exploitation and oppression occur in the name of an identity, conflict and hostile politics will naturally exist in terms of such identity. However, certain identities and contradictions relating to them dominate politics.

Any form of identity and identification can gain importance in given contexts. Besides, the arrival and development of identities are determined by the social interests related to the identities concerned. Of social identities, the only one that is fundamental, permanent and unavoidable concerns gender. Although some fringe identities relating to gender can be significant to differing degrees depending on their status within a society and the nature of the society itself, we know that the male-female difference is fundamental to the continued existence of humanity. Oppression and exploitation of women has been in existence for very long in known history. It was only after the advent of Marxism that the historical source of that contradiction was correctly identified. It was even later that calls for women's rights arose in strength at various levels. Yet, during the past half century, interests besides social justice have played a role in highlighting its importance. While it deserves examination in depth, it is not within the scope of this article to probe it in depth.

The existence of a society depends on social production. Thus, it is the mode of production and productive relations that are bases that decide the nature of a society. Besides, the impact of productive systems and productive relations on the social structure in the course of their development survives long after the productive systems and productive relations have themselves changed. Together, all of them make human identities multi-faceted and complex combinations of differing features.

If we consider the caste identity of the Indian sub-continent along with the more readily recognized identities such as race, language, religion and culture, we will find that none of them is eternal. Some identities merge to form a common identity. Some divide to become distinct identities. Some are superseded by other existing or altogether new identities. Yet, we have witnessed a tendency to assign each identity a historical strand or a common ideological basis or some imaginary feature and, thereby, attribute to it an unchanging and eternal character.

A part of the above tendency has to do with the survival of a society or a social group. How a society or a part of it identifies itself is an important issue concerning its existence. Identity becomes all the more important when survival is under threat. Likewise, a dominant group within a community could make a tool of the identity of the community to further its interests and to exercise dominance over the society. The sharpening of identity-based contradictions within a community and between communities to become conflicts and wars is largely based on the needs and purposes that drive identification.

Calm reflection will reveal that, in the absence of hegemony, exploitation and oppression, there is no need for hostility in the relation between communities. Generally, severe hostility between communities is rare. Many historical animosities have been forgotten. But we also see historical animosities being reinvented through revival, exaggeration and distortion of hostilities of the past. Hindutva in India and Sinhala Buddhist ideology in Sri Lanka provide modern day evidence of this tendency.

Question arises as to whose interests are served by such identities. Although each identity is projected as a representation of an entire community, it does not represent a common interest of the community. Instead, it highlights the interests of a minority. However, certain interests are presented in a way that a considerable section of the rest of the community is induced to believe that such interests coincide with their own. Many are fed with the illusion that the projected identity is essential to their survival and protection. On occasion, notions of grandeur about the community are invented and the need to preserve it is emphasized.

To understand the foregoing in simple terms, let us look at the case of racism. White racism with its roots in slave trade in North America remains strong in the US even after the election of an American Black as President. Although the regime that made cruel racist oppression the norm in South Africa was brought to an end through mass struggle, racism persists. Parochial thinking assumes different forms in different circumstances. It

should not be forgotten that German fascism did not target Jews alone and that racism was at the core of its ideology. Racism also played an important role in the advancement of colonialism. Although colonialism later gave way to neo-colonialism, racism continued to function in the name of national interest.

Whole communities have been annihilated in the continents of North and South America through activities of identity politics of different forms including race and nation. Cultural identities of communities have been impaired and their economic bases wrecked, leading to the ruin of the communities. In southern Africa, communities have been reduced to slavery. What happened in Australia was even worse.

Asian history has little to be proud of in that respect. The emergence of every empire with claim to historic glory has been accompanied by all manner of ruin for tribal and minority communities. We should be aware at least to a small extent of how that trend intensified with the growth of capitalism and met with resistance and struggle.

Those who know of class and class struggle would readily identify the interests associated with the politics of subjecting identity to social conflict. Yet, there is no harm in reminding ourselves of it. A dominant social group that exercises control over a community, through presenting its interests as those of the whole community or that of a section of it (generally the majority) and, in the name of advancing those interests, justifies its oppression and aggression of other communities. Although this tendency assumes different forms in different contexts, we can discern a common pattern.

Contradictions concerning production and productive relations in a society (in fact, matters that determine the existence in the society) are assigned secondary significance or are proscribed from public discussion. Relegation of class and class struggle in such manner is not accidental.

2. Identity and the politics of domination

In the colonial era, a power or a hegemonic group that exercised dominance over a community showed itself as a force of direct dominance. That situation is not there anymore. Neo-colonialism does not identify itself explicitly. As far as possible, it avoids portraying itself as a force of domination and exploitation. The dominant class or classes in a society too avoid identifying themselves in such manner.

Oppressors and exploiters do not locate themselves in direct confrontation against the oppressed majority. In the colonial era, the colonial regime, besides its alliance with the local dominant classes, established a buffer

middle class. The colonial regime ensured that this class alienated itself from the oppressed majority. In other situations, it created a middle class by granting concessions to a national ethnic group or a selected section of that ethnic group. Already existing social hierarchies were made use of in this case. A community brought in from another colony too has served as a middle class, as in the case of East Africa.

An exploitative and oppressive minority could use military might and suppression to protect itself. When that is not possible, it strengthens itself by resorting to identity politics. It conceals its exploiting class identity within the identity of a majority community. Besides, in order that its class identity is not exposed, it identifies one or several of minority identities as threats against the majority and an age-old enemy. Thus it is able to deflect attention from the class contradiction which could comprise the principal contradiction.

At the same time, we also see a tendency of this oppressive minority to divide social groups that cannot be identified with it. Ethnic, religious and linguistic differences with a long history serve this purpose. When such distinctions in identity coincide with hierarchical differences relating to productive relations or ownership of property and wealth, they easily become obstacles to the unity of social groups.

An examination of the use of such approach by modern day Indian Brahminism will reveal to some extent the united front tactics of the ruling elite classes. Initially, the upper castes were mobilised under a Hindu Identity, first under the leadership of the Brahmin elite and then as partners. Then the Dalits were drawn into the Hindu identity—in a way that ensured that they did not forfeit their lowly caste identity or realise their low status—in order that they did not enter into an alliance with the Muslims. This politics of inclusion served to define Christians and Muslims as enemies and target them. Significantly, during the anti-Muslim violence of 2002 in Gujarat, even the tribal people were drawn into the Hindu fanatical Hindutva agenda. What is important to note is that the enthusiastic effort to draw the Dalits into the Hindu identity is carried out with no intention of eradicating casteism or untouchability.

In Sri Lanka, Sinhala chauvinism, from the outset, had Sinhala Buddhism as its basis. Sections of the elite who, for purpose of self advancement, converted to Protestant Christianity readily reverted to Buddhism for political gain. There was also a time when caste identity preceded Sinhala Buddhist identity. In elitist politics, under conditions without universal franchise, caste was an important factor among the dominant classes. As the dominance of the Govigama caste elite associated with feudal land ownership waned, there was compromise between the feudal and the emergent capitalist classes. Although

religious identity was underplayed for a while when emphasis was on language, today it is Sinhala Buddhist hegemony that is predominant. Yet relations between the Hindu, Muslim, and Christian big capitalists and Buddhist big capitalists have remained fairly smooth.

Identity politics is on the one hand about emphasizing and prioritizing various identities that emerge in the course of development of a society and on the other about seeking common identity from time to time.

While the Sinhala national identity strengthened itself, with differences on the question of emphasising Buddhist identity, the Tamil national identity emerged based on the interests of an elitist minority from the Jaffna Saivaite (Hindu) Vellala caste that was at its head. In the absence of a challenge to the emphasis of those interests, that minority, rather than emphasise and cultivate a broader Tamil identity, continued to project Saivaite Vellala dominance. Thus, it was only with the founding of the Ilankaith Thamizarasuk Katchi (Federal Party) in 1948, that the identity of a Tamil-speaking people was put forward. However, since it lacked the social thinking or socio-politically driven a historical development, besides its failure to unite the Tamil-speaking people, it paved the way for confrontations that were avoidable. What we need to see here is that it is the short term interests of a dominant class that guided social identity. The failure of the Tamil elite to identify the Tamils as an oppressed minority is important in this context. Although caste and regional differences play a role in politics among the Sinhalese, a major reason why they did not dominate politics is that, unlike among the Tamils, there has been no elite group of a given caste or regional identity that exercised dominance in all walks of life.

The ruling elite cannot rely on establishing a majoritarian identity base on ethnicity and religion. Identity in the form of country or nation too is put to use. It is useful to have a common enemy of the country. Besides supposed threats from China and Pakistan, the Indian ruling elite can also portray neighbouring countries including Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka as threats to the security of India. If one needs to know how such things are used to serve certain class interests, one only needs to observe how strongly Indian patriotic sentiments are marked by anti-China and anti-Pakistan fervour —alongside hostility towards Malayalis, Kannadigas and Telugus— in Tamilnadu, where North Indians were once seen as the enemy. The class interests that these attitudes represent deserve to be noted. It can be easily seen that the purpose is to divert attention from class exploitation, since those who encourage them also welcome closeness towards US imperialism.

3. Identity and liberation politics

The question arises as to how the ruled classes should respond when the ruling class puts to use an ethnic, religious or linguistic identity of its choice to safeguard its interests and to conceal its identity as an oppressive exploiting class.

It is possible to unite an exploited and oppressed people on the basis on which they are exploited and oppressed. But that does not always occur. Nor does it come about easily. The exploiters use contradictions among the oppressed. They are able to emphasise differences in identity and introduce differences afresh in ways that deepen fissures. Thus oppressed communities need to evolve tactics of identity politics that can that can effectively counter the identity politics used by the oppressor.

In struggles against colonialism and imperialism, especially when left ideology guided the struggle, the united front strategy succeeded by bringing together a variety of identities against what was identified as common enemy.

It is only when we recognize which among contradictions between identities are friendly and which are hostile that we will be able to isolate the enemy and unite the oppressed people. Hence the alternative politics of identity should be one that simultaneously acknowledges different identities and emphasises common features.

Let us consider two recent instances where parochial interpretations of identity have led to defeat and destruction. The first is the Tamil nationalist politics of Sri Lanka. Initially, it put forward an unclear Tamil identity to advance the interests of elite of the Jaffna Peninsula. Then it adopted the identity of 'Tamil speaking people'. Later the identities of Tamil Eelam and Tamil nation gathered momentum. But at no stage did its activities cross the border of Tamils of the North and East. At the same time it refused to accept the individuality of the Muslim and Hill Country Tamil communities and their evolution into nationalities. Today it is struggling against regionalism. The current tragic plight of Tamil nationalism goes to illustrate that is not only unnecessary but can also be harmful to conceal social identities and deny internal contradictions in order to build a common basis.

The second example concerns the politics of Dalitism, which has miserably failed to unite people oppressed on the basis of caste. Also, it only helped the formation of political parties in the name of every caste among the oppressed people and not the formation of a common fighting front against caste oppression. In addition, Dalit politics of today also shows a trend of using Dalits as vote banks for the new elite that has emerged from among them to

further its class interests. In the past decade, parliamentary electoral politics has enabled class compromise with the Hindutva elite. Although social awareness of the Dalits has developed in the course of continuous struggle, Dalitism has functioned in a way that obstructs the direction of that awareness towards smashing the caste and class based exploitative social structure.

What in these instances prevents a common identity from preserving its commonness? We will find the answer when we take into account the neglect of class identity in a planned manner. Not only was class identity ignored, it has also been argued by Dalitists of Tamilnadu with the help of postmodernist logic that upholding class identity will negate Dalit identity as well as wreck Dalit unity.

Be it Tamil national politics or Dalit politics, each has only weakened and not strengthened itself by rejecting all common identities and any identity external to its defined identity. At the same time, there is a tendency to give primacy to class identity and reject the importance of other identities. Here, I do not have in mind the opportunist left but tendencies to reject in the name of Marxist purity the importance of contradictions other than the class contradiction. The working class cannot be united through such approaches, and all talk about uniting all oppressed people under the leadership of the working class will be plain fantasy.

In class society, class identity is fundamental. Although the nature and form of classes have changed in the course of social development, the chasm between those who work and those who exploit work has only deepened and not ceased to be. Thus, no struggle can succeed by neglecting that contradiction.

Under given conditions, ethnic, linguistic, religious and other identity-based contradictions can come to the fore. Issues based on caste and region may demand urgent action. Steps against gender-based hierarchy could become important. If in a given context a specific contradiction becomes more important than rest and other contradictions cannot be dealt with without addressing it, then need arises to treat that contradiction as the immediate or main contradiction.

Marxist Leninists, while upholding class contradiction as fundamental, have carried forward or supported national liberation struggles, anti-racist struggles, liberation struggles of nationalities, and struggles against casteism in many countries. The voice of Marxist Leninists against male chauvinism has always been loud and clear.

What makes it possible? Why do nationalists, Dalitists and bourgeois feminists refuse to take note of any form of oppression other than those belonging to a particular category? Why do they acknowledge only certain kinds of oppression? It is here that the roles of an identity based world outlook and postmodernist rejection of generalisation become clear.

Identity politics based on nationality, religion and caste, and bourgeois feminism have demonstrated that viewing contradictions based on a single identity is not in the interest of all members of the identity group concerned. We should not forget that those who emphasise identities individually or collectively may have in mind something that transcends those identities. That is, in reality class interests take precedence over other interests. Such class interests have often been the interests of oppressing classes.

If working class politics would only give primacy to workers' interests and ignore all forms of social oppression other than class oppression, it could degenerate in the same way as trade unionist politics. Marxism gives prominence to the working class because only the working class can liberate the entire humanity. In the course of its development, Marxism supported anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. Marxists not only participated in them but also led and played an active role in the struggles. National liberation movements with left tendencies too have sought ways of eliminating other forms of social oppression.

We have seen that, when identity politics does not have a clear political basis, it leads to failure and to the strengthening of the dominant classes. On the other hand, when it has a clear political basis, it could go beyond the given identity to contribute to social liberation and social justice.

When identity politics restricts itself to a particular social identity, it isolates itself. When it examines the fundamental reason why members of its identity group suffer oppression and exploitation its approach changes to link its struggles with other struggles for social justice.

What is significant about Marxism Leninism is that it has most impressively demonstrated its historic ability to free identity politics from the fetters of identity and link it with other struggles for justice.

(Approximate translation of Tamil article in Asai, France, 2011.)

The Issue of Nationality in the Sri Lankan National Question

Aswaththamaa

In post-war Sri Lanka, while many search for solutions to the Sri Lankan national question, the notion of minority nationalities itself is being challenged by some claiming that there are no nationalities in Sri Lanka but only national citizens. It has been widely accepted that Sri Lanka comprises several nationalities. Negating the existence of several nationalities in Sri Lanka by coining the phrase "national citizens" is fundamentally flawed and intentionally misleading. The purpose of this article is to explain the basis of the concept of nationality, affirm the existence of nationalities in Sri Lanka, and assert that the recognition of the nationalities is the first and essential step towards finding a solution to the Sri Lankan national question.

Whether one believes that nationalism begets the idea of nation or that nations develop nationalist thought, one cannot discuss nationalism without an idea of what one means by a nation. Yet, even nationalist literature shows differing approaches to defining a nation. Nationality has been called upon to be all things to all people: civil rights, political participation, social welfare, identity and recognition, the common good and the consciousness of community. Formally, nationality is defined as the legal bond between a person and a state. As early as 1913, J.V. Stalin defined nation as a historically evolved, stable community of people, based upon the common possession of four principal attributes, namely a common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common psychological make-up manifesting itself in common specific features of national culture. This definition has been widely accepted as a minimum condition to fulfil the status for nationhood. It allows conceptualizing nationality. Those who refuse to accept the existence of nationalities in Sri Lanka are implicitly denying the rights of the minorities and refuse to admit that there is majoritarian domination and that the minorities are suppressed. Referring to the people in Sri Lanka as 'national citizens' is a means to dodge the national question and issues of minority rights, and deny the right to self determination.

The nation state is a product of capitalism and there is nothing fundamental or natural about national identity. Yet, national identity exists and so does nationalism. A nation state may define its people and communities in any of several possible ways, but the core elements of nationality usually include a combination of historically rooted identities such as religion, race, or ethnicity. Typically, an implicit or explicit ethnic or religious identity lies at the core of the definition and influences the state's treatment of its citizens. Thus, the modern state's building of the national citizens is done with purpose (Berberoglu 1999). The nation-state aims to tear individuals from their "traditional" (or "primordial") communal ties, while the conception of the nation still refers to a "traditional" identity, which at the end brings everyone within one identity, namely the majoritarian identity. Thus, reference to the entire people of Sri Lanka as national citizens and thereby rejecting nationalities can only be part of a totalitarian agenda.

Otto Bauer (2000) in 1907 argued that the dominant theme running through the radical upheaval in the traditional state system in the nineteenth century was the principle of nationality: each nation should form a state, and each state should encompass one nation alone. The struggles for the unity of Germany and of Italy, the freeing of Greece, Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria from Turkish domination, the struggle of the Irish for home rule and eventually freedom and of the Poles to re-establish the Polish state, and the liberation of South American states from Spanish and Portuguese rule were all struggles for the realization of the principle of nationality.

The concept of citizenship is an aspect of the modern state's project of harnessing the loyalties of individuals at the expense of their pre-national local communities. While citizenship implies unification of a people around a state and a degree of socio-political equalisation by the creation of universal rights, it also coincides with the building of a "nation" (Carr 1945; Marshall 1964). Citizenship thus entails the creation of a "national community" and a nationalist ideology of political sovereignty, and comprises two distinct aspects. Firstly, it defines a politically constructed identity which specifically identifies members and non-members of the national community. Secondly, it formally endows the members of the community with a set of rights as well as a burden of obligations. This is true regardless of the nature of the nation-state. As much as a democratic nation-state of any description limits political participation (wholly or partly) to its citizens, an authoritarian nation-state while denying or restricting political rights confines social benefits to its citizens. State sovereignty is thus exercised in the name of the national community, based on nationalist ideology.

Nationalism requires the coincidence of nation and state. Nation states often propagate the myth that such coincidence is feasible if not existent. Where divergence cannot be concealed, "national minorities" are identified. This situation raises issues of sovereignty including to whom it belongs. The challenge of nationalism is to accommodate divergent elements within a supposedly homogeneous population exercising sovereignty, while addressing the issues of whether minorities could be full members of the community, their rights within the community in an absolute sense and in relation to the rights of the majority, to which real sovereignty is assumed to belong. Such questions cannot be answered by glibly referring to the whole population as 'national citizens' and thereby ignoring the existence of nationalities.

This new fangled notion of national citizens is conceptually underpinned by the concept of "imagined communities" by Benedict Anderson (1983) but without understanding him correctly. To Anderson, "The nation is ... imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of his fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion". What made such imagining possible was a particular technological and economic development, what he called "print capitalism", and the production in vernacular languages of, among other things, newspapers that could be read across a considerable expanse of space. The establishment of these languages was fundamental to establishing "national consciousness" and the literature produced in these languages provided many of his illustrations of how national communities were imagined. The point to remember is that Anderson freshly explained nationalism, without denying the existence of nationalities. Another important point in Anderson's thesis is that nations are not horizontal communities and nationalisms have internal cleavages that differentiate between full and part (or strong and weak) citizens. The latter groups are marked as not fully belonging to the nation (Gutierrez 1999). However, there is a weakness in Anderson's analysis in that it narrates the story of economic and political elites and fails to incorporate the agency of subaltern populations in the formation of national communities (Thurner 1995 and Mallon 1992).

Anderson's argument that nations are imagined political communities has done much to debunk the misplaced concreteness in nationalist common sense and scholarly literature. He does not, however, go far enough to identify the strategies through which "the imagined" becomes "second nature" or a "structure of feeling" embodied in material practice and lived experience. For example, symbolised space and place are integral to Mexican nationalist discourses (Mallon 1992); the nation is rendered real through a "vast iconic structuring of 'public' social space" that "transforms what was once the terrain

of local and regional autonomies into a homogenized and nationalized domain, where an objectified official history makes the presence of the state palpable in everyday life". Hegemonic strategies sustain the idea of the state through concretizing the imagined community of the nation by articulating spatial, bodily and temporal matrices through daily routine, rituals, and state policies.

Gramsci's definition of the state in 1926 (see Gramsci 1957) deals with the role of the state in a narrow sense where it is equated with government, functions by command and coercion; and in an expanded sense where it is defined as "hegemony protected by the armour of coercion" and equated with political society and civil society. Both formulations locate civil society as the source of hegemony. Thus, the power of the state "rests not so much on the consent of its subjects but with the state's regulative and coercive forms and agencies, which define and create certain kinds of subjects and identities while denying" others through everyday routines and rituals of ruling.

Gramsci's notion of hegemony identifies the role of the state in the hegemonic processes. It should be added that hegemony was a highly material and political concept in Gramsci's usage than it has been made subsequently and that hegemony was for Gramsci not a final monolithic ideological formation but a problematic, contested political process of domination and struggle. Owing to this fragility, hegemony is constantly renewed, recreated, defended and modified according to the shifts in the relations of social forces.

The 'Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia', signed by Stalin as People's Commissar of National Affairs and by Lenin as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, was published in 1917 proclaiming the following principles of the Soviet Government with regard to the nationalities of Russia: 1. The equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia. 2. The right of the peoples of Russia to freedom of self-determination, including the right to secede and form independent states. 3. Abolition of all national and national-religious privileges and restrictions whatsoever. 4. Freedom of development for the national minorities and ethnographic groups inhabiting the territory of Russia. (See Lenin and Stalin, 1934). These principles are also embodied in the Constitution of the USSR.

Rosa Luxemburg was critical of the Bolshevik policy on the national question, placing the idea of the international unity of the working class in opposition to the principle of national self-determination, especially in the context of the Polish nation, but also to include other nations oppressed by Tsarist Russia. She argued that the recognition of the right to national

independence would strengthen petty-bourgeois-nationalist tendencies, weaken the revolution, and lead to the disintegration of revolutionary Russia. But what happened was more as Lenin and Stalin had predicted. On the basis of voluntary decision, clearly recognizing their common interests with the great Russian Socialist Republic, the Ukrainians, Byelo-Russians, Georgians and other peoples of the Caucasus, dozens of different nations, proclaimed their adherence to the Union of Socialist Republics, a model of a free union of free nations (Smith 1999).

To correctly understand Lenin's and Stalin's position on the national question, one has also to take into account another aspect of the Marxist approach to national movements based on the principle of proletarian internationalism. As each concrete national question should be regarded from the point of view of the general progress of human society, it would be wrong to demand that Marxists must support every national movement and apply the principle of national self-determination as a dogma in each case. The right to self-determination can neither be applied blindly to nor imposed on a nationality or an ethnic group. A nationality claims its right to self-determination or to secede only when it feels that its identity or its very existence is under threat. Intervention by a Marxist party should be aimed at removing the threat, and that is best achieved by endorsing the right to self-determination. The opportunist left sees the demand for secession as the issue rather than as a response to the threat faced by the nationality.

What is needed today is ensuring the right of all the nationalities in Sri Lanka to self-determination. Sections of the Tamil diaspora and Tamil media propagate the view that the right to self-determination is merely the right to secession. Tamil narrow nationalists as well as Sinhala chauvinists intentionally mislead the masses on the question of right to self-determination. The right to self-determination is much more than the right to secession, as it also means the right of different nations and nationalities to remain within a political union by choice, and is thus the best possible safeguard against secession.

Self-determination is based on the recognition of nationalities, and of the existence of nationalities means the rejection of the right to self-determination. A Tamil nationalist fallacy prevails that Tamil nationalism represents the entire Tamil speaking people, including the Muslims and the Hill Country Tamils. Hence, Tamil nationalists are reluctant to recognise the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils as distinct nationalities and at times to recognize even their distinct characteristics. Thus they are oblivious to the need to address the national question of the Muslims and the Hill Country Tamils based on the principle of self-determination. On the other hand, the hegemonic and

chauvinistic approach of Sinhala nationalism denies to all minority nationalities their right to self-determination. In this context, calling the entire people 'national citizens' and thereby denying the existence of nationalities in Sri Lanka is a devious trick to deny the minorities in Sri Lanka their rights while playing along with majoritarian agenda driven by Sinhala chauvinism.

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

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Halal: Only a Pretext

A note on the rise of Sinhala Buddhist intolerance in Sri Lanka

Mohan

Religious intolerance is growing in Sri Lanka, but it is seldom recognized that its rise has more to do with class interests than with religion. Proselytizing by Christian missionaries under colonial rule led to some public resentment, finding expression in Buddhist and Saivaite (Hindu) revivalism from around mid-19th Century. The champions of revivalism, however, represented certain elite class interests as did their Christian rivals. People of different religions nevertheless lived in relative harmony and it should be noted that hostility between the Hinayana and Mahayana sects of Buddhism was marked by conflicts more bitter than with any other religion, at least until the 20th Century. Even the earlier conflicts between rival Buddhist sects were mostly driven by rivalry among the clergy and their clients for royal patronage.

Buddhism as a political force in response to missionary activity was tailored to suits the needs of an emergent Sinhala Buddhist capitalist class. The Catholic community, economically and educationally weaker than the Protestant community but far outnumbering the latter, got cautious. Having suffered severe religious persecution under Dutch colonial rule, it remained under the control of the Catholic Church, a bastion of anti-left thinking, guided by the Vatican. (Developments since 1956 and the changing international situation, however, forced the Sri Lankan Catholic establishment to retreat from its open hostility to the left). The Catholic community, following a skirmish with Buddhists late in the 19th Century, adapted itself to a predominantly Sinhala Buddhist environment. A large section of the Catholics along the western coast were persuaded by the Church to replace Tamil, traditionally their domestic language, with Sinhala. While the community got deeply divided on linguistic lines from the 1970s, following the escalation of the national question, Catholics on either side of the language divide got on well with other religious communities, although religion has played a significant role in electoral politics, particularly among the Sinhala Catholics.

The bulk of the Protestant elite converted to Christianity under British rule for personal gain so that leading members of the community could switch back with ease to Buddhism for political advantage. The Protestant community has a large middle class component and the upper middle classes have wielded considerable influence in the affairs of the country.

The use of school education as a means of conversion to Christianity triggered competition in the field of education. Buddhist and Hindu schools sprang up across the country, but addressing the needs mostly of urban populations. All schools, except a handful of private schools, received state assistance to provide free education since early mid 20th Century. The missionary-run schools continued to take political advantage of their position as providers of education and indulged in discriminatory practices as well. This led to the state takeover of all assisted schools. The government acted fairly in letting schools of any religious denomination to go private if they chose to, and, in cases of government take-over, schools were allowed to preserve their respective religious identities, without abuse of that privilege. The government stood firm in the resultant confrontation with missionary establishments, the Catholic Church mainly. The next major conflict with any Christian establishment came many years later in the wake of religious conversion by Evangelist Christian organisations, and several Churches in the Colombo District have been attacked by Buddhist extremists in the past few years.

Until the 1970s, neither the elite nor the middle classes of the Muslim community, with a sizeable section of urban-based traders and a large rural population of cultivators and fisher folk, invested in education on scales comparable with that of their Tamil or Sinhalese counterparts who competed in the fields of education and white collar employment. Domination of retail trade by Muslim and Indian merchants was resented by the Sinhala merchant community and this rivalry was pivotal in triggering the island-wide anti-Muslim violence in 1915, the first island-wide communal conflict in known history. Sinhala Buddhist resentment was deepened by the Sinhala Buddhist elitist view that the Colonial regime was harder on the Sinhalese than on the Muslims, although the latter were the victims of the conflict.

The Muslims were predominantly Tamil speaking but, demographic and political factors determined that they asserted an identity distinct from the Tamils of the North-East and the Hill Country. Those who lived among Sinhalese, although conversant in Sinhala, retained Tamil as their 'mother tongue'. In recent times, educational needs and job opportunities have tempted a small but significant section of the Muslims in the South to opt for education in the Sinhala medium and even use Sinhala as their 'home language'. However, social integration with the Sinhalese remains a harder

proposition than was once possible with the Tamils, partly because Sinhala Buddhist nationalism sees the Muslim as the 'other.' This alienation has grown stronger recently, with the emergence of Sinhala Buddhism as a political force and petit bourgeois rivalries acting as a driving force in whipping up of communal sentiments.

Muslim traders used opportunities that came their way like, for example, the gem trade in the 1970s. The accumulation of oil wealth in the Middle East since the mid-1970s led to employment opportunities for Sri Lankans. Although members of all communities found work in the Middle East, by proportion, more Muslims benefitted. Muslim traders also took advantage of growing trade opportunities resulting from growing consumerism.

The emergence of Islamic fundamentalism as a global political force involved two opposing aspects. One was genuine resentment of the Muslim ruling classes who failed to address the grievances of the ordinary masses or to stand up to the imperialist powers who treated Muslims as a whole with contempt. The other, seemingly driven by religious zeal, has been manipulated by the Arab ruling classes (especially Saudi Arabia) to serve the interests of imperialism. Muslims in the south have been uneasy with Sinhala Buddhist attitudes. Attacks on Muslims, although not regular, compelled Muslims to assert their religious identity with greater force. The attitude of Tamil nationalists, especially Tamil militants, towards Muslims also added to the feeling of isolation. Islamic fundamentalists took advantage of this sense of insecurity to make inroads into the Muslim community. A false sense of pride about Arab greatness with Saudi wealth at its centre has been encouraged among the emergent educated middle classes. However, the main effect of such fundamentalism has been to divide the Muslim community by rejecting secular values and attacking, often violently, Muslim sects labelled as "heretics". Sunni-Shia differences have been emphasised to the point that Muslim pride in the Iranian revolution for standing up to US imperialism has begun to wane. Muslims who endorse secular values and are critical of the corrupt Saudi regime and other oil sheiks of the Arabian Peninsula come under threat from Islamist activists who want to impose conservative values on the whole community. But none of these had anything to do with Sinhala-Muslim relations.

Sinhala Buddhism down played its anti-Muslim politics during the early part of the war against the LTTE. In fact, the UNP government went out of its way to encourage Muslims in the East to turn against the Tamils. Neutralising the Muslims was then important to the Sinhala chauvinist agenda. With the LTTE antagonising the Muslims in 1990 by driving them out of the North, the more vehement anti-Muslim elements among the Sinhala Buddhists felt no need to

accommodate the Muslims, and since early this century, Muslim businesses have been under systematic attacks, and claim is made to land held by the Muslims with the help of the state and its armed forces. Another factor that has added to anti-Muslim sentiment in recent times is the growing number of instances of cruelty suffered by Sri Lankan housemaids in Arab countries, although the victims include Muslim women.

The Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) is not a spontaneous outgrowth of Sinhala Buddhism. It is a militant extension the Sihala Urumaya which adopted a Buddhist label to become the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) with a shamelessly chauvinist Sinhala Buddhist agenda, and reportedly enjoys patronage and protection at the highest levels of the state. Its membership is predominantly middle class, and the BBS has strong appeal among Sinhala Buddhist extremists at home and abroad. The BBS is a neo-fascist outfit and it is to Sinhala Buddhism what the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is to Hindutva in India, except that in India the RSS preceded its political arm, the Bharatiya Janatha Party and is better organized than the BBS.

The BBS and allied groups such as the Sinhala Ravaya use sophisticated methods to spread their message of hate. Using press conferences, the internet and electronic media, the BBS organised a mass rally early this year attended by 15,000 in Maharagama (in the outskirts of Colombo). The rhetoric is that the Sinhala Buddhists, though a majority, are a threatened social group that has to combat its enemies to protect its rights, values and identity. The Sinhala Buddhist militants have persistently vilified the Muslim dress code, harassed persons in Muslim dress, put up anti-Muslim posters and distributed anti-Muslim handbills in public places, and hurled public insults at Muslim beliefs. Since the vicious attack on a mosque in Mawanella in 2001 in the hill country, mosques have again been attacked in the past few years. The number of notified anti-Muslim incidents rose from 21 in January to 54 in March, and most of them were in the urban areas of Colombo, Kandy and Kurunegala which, more than the rural areas, are the breeding grounds for Sinhala Buddhist fascism. The government has neither denounced these activities nor acted to end to them.

The All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU), the apex body of Islamic Theologians, played into the hands of the fascist BBS, on the lookout for opportunities to portray Muslims the way German fascism portrayed the Jews, by issuing Halal certificates for a fee to wholesale and retail traders in meat. The supermarkets and meat exporters to the Middle East needed the 'Halal' (meaning proper) label to flog their meat and meat products to the fast growing Muslim market. Several practicing and devout Muslims have challenged the validity of the methods used for certifying and, on ethical

grounds, opposed the practice of Halal certification. The BBS, however, argued that the Halal label constituted a process of forcing Halal meat on non-Muslims. While this was far from the truth, the ACJU rather than holding firm and explaining the meaning and implications of Halal, beat a retreat, and agreed to withdraw the Halal label on meat sold locally. The move, which has hurt the credibility of the ACJU among Muslims, was seen as a victory for the Sinhala Buddhist hardliners.

This success gave greater impetus to the BBS and its allies to go on the offensive against Muslim businesses. In the evening of 28th March, a mob which had gathered in the Sunetradevi Pirivana Temple in Pepiliyana (10 km from Colombo) stoned the heavy vehicle yard of the Muslim owned business, *Emerald Trading*, stoning all vehicles and equipment in the yard and setting the office on fire, causing damage exceeding Rs 10 million. Now very aggressive, the mob, led by monks and grown to several hundred, shouting anti-Muslim slogans, turned to the warehouse and the outlet of the Muslim-owned Fashion Bug (a leading garments chain store). The mob assaulted employees of the Fashion Bug, injured a journalist, harassed media personnel, and caused extensive damages to the building, merchandise and vehicles. The BBC and the AFP reported that the police stood by as Buddhist monks attacked the Muslim-owned shop. No arrests were made on the spot. Clearly, the attack was premeditated.

Following the unexpected publicity to the event by the electronic media, on 29th March, several suspects, including monks seen on video footage, voluntarily surrendered to the police. But the BBS denied involvement and urged the government to take action against the offenders. Yet, when the suspects were produced in court, Fashion Bug pleaded with the court for the release of the suspects and declared that it will not pursue the matter any further. The police and the magistrate were only too glad to accept the position of Fashion Bug, although what was at stake was a serious question of law and order. A helpless Minister of Justice, Rauf Hakeem, a Muslim, admitted to the BBC that in his view the owner of Fashion Bug was forced to settle the matter and that the rule of law had been challenged.

The lessons are clear: the Muslim business community has been successfully intimidated by the forces of Sinhala Buddhist fascism and the Muslim political leadership including cabinet ministers has little say in matters concerning chauvinist violence against Muslims. The police by their conduct have signalled to the Muslims that it may prove socially irresponsible to complain against extremist anti-Muslim mobs. While much of this is reminiscent of pre-war years in Nazi Germany, there was more to come.

A sizeable section of the Buddhist population in Colombo has had enough of the perversion of Buddhist values by the BBS and decided to protest against it on 12th April 2013 and turned up for a peaceful candle light vigil. As they prepared to light the candles, the police, based on some trumped up claim that the gathering was to promote a change to the national anthem arrested a few of the protesters, only to release them subsequently. But clearly, the police was completely on the side of the BBS and dispersed the protest to 'avoid trouble' although it was the BBS crowd that was misbehaving. The police and one of the private pro-government TV channels gave credence to the BBS version, despite total lack of evidence. Thankfully, other sections of the private media were more balanced in their presentation, although the state media went to the extent of suggesting that the protests were NGO-funded.

Whether similar protests will recur with significant frequency and strength in the face of BBS intimidation protected by a biased police force remains a question. But the demonstration was in itself a good sign that people now dare to stand up for peace, democracy and justice. It is still a long way from mobilizing a larger section of the population and transforming protests into a mass movement for freedom and democracy. It is not easy to convince a majority which is still dazed by the thought that the country is being defended by its government against a Western world that is persecuting it for the wrong reasons and that forces like the BBS, despite all their flaws, are effectively fighting the enemy within such as the Muslims, Tamil separatists, westernized Sinhalese, the NGOs and other 'unpatriotic' sections of the population.

The Muslim masses will soon realize that no Islamic state, notably Saudi Arabia and its allies, will come to their rescue and that Muslim leaders and businessmen will, for their own survival, make deals with the BBS and other fascist elements. The world has seen Jewish businessmen and politicians behave in this manner during the rise of the Nazis in Germany.

As much as the Jews were not the ultimate target of the Nazis, the Muslims are not the ultimate target of the BBS and its likes. Diversions of the kind generated by the BBS suit the government as they deflect attention from the real issues facing the Sinhala masses. Eventually, the paths of the BBS and the government or a dominant section of it would converge towards compromise with imperialism and destruction of democracy in the country.

NDMLP Diary

May Day Rallies of the Party

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party held three very well attended and enthusiastic May Day Rallies in Jaffna, Hatton and Vavuniya.

Jaffna: The Jaffna May Day event started with a bicycle procession from Chunnakam Market to the venue of the Rally in Jaffna. The Rally, chaired by Comrade K Selvam Kathirgamanathan, was addressed by Comrades SK Senthivel and K Thanikasalam on behalf of the Party, by trade union delegates Comrades A Seevaratnam, R Thavarajah and K Panchalingam, peasants' organisation delegate Comrade P Murugesu, mass organisational delegate Comrade TV Krishnasamy, Comrade T Sri Prakash of the Youth Front and Comrade S. Seelan of the Regional Arts Group.

Hatton: The Hatton May Day Rally was chaired by Comrade V Mahendran and was addressed by Comrades S. Panneerselvam, ARC John, Fernando S. Krishnananth and Marx Prabakar among others.

Vavuniya: The Vavuniya May Day Rally, chaired by Comrade N Pradeepan, was addressed by Comrades S Thevarajah, M Mauran and S Thanujan, and Comrades Raman Chitran, K Mahendran, Ruban, N Thevakrishnan and N Kannan representing the five participating trade unions, and by Comrade T Saraswathy of the Women's Mass Organisation.

All three rallies concluded with cultural programmes comprising revolutionary songs and performances.

NDMLP Statement to the Media

25th April 2013

May Day Call by the Party to the Working Class and the Oppressed People

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary and Comrade V Mahendran, National Organizer of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following rallying call for May Day on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party in preparation for its Revolutionary May Day processions and rallies in Jaffna, Hatton and Vavuniya.

The Mahinda Rajapaksa government which is continuing to increase the prices of food items and other essential goods is readying to impose large price increases on electricity consumption and public transport. By heaping unbearable burdens on the people the government is delivering hard blows on the bellies of the entire people of the country. At the same time, it is denying a political solution for the national question, the main problem facing the country, and through chauvinist military repression in the North-East is continuing to oppress and suppress the Tamil people. Under such conditions, on this May Day, the international day of the workers of the world, the Party calls on all workers and other toiling masses and the oppressed Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people to mobilize and come forward to express their denunciation of the anti-people policies of the Mahinda Chinthana government.

The economic policy adopted by the family rule of the Rajapaksa brothers is that of a neoliberal consumer economy under the aegis of imperialist globalisation. This consumer economy that has substituted for a production economy is ruining the country and the people. The IMF and the World Bank advise and guide an economy that exploits and plunders the resources and people of the country. As a result, workers in the state, private and plantation sectors are denied wage rises. A measly wage rise was granted to the plantation workers of the Hill Country through an act of deception called the "Collective Agreement". The UPFA government led by the President is likewise adopting a hostile and repressive stand towards all workers and toiling masses including peasants and fisher folk. At the same time, with perverse chauvinism, it refuses to find a solution to the national question, the main problem facing the country.

The government is also implementing direct and indirect oppression of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities. Especially in the North-East it is continuing to implement blatantly chauvinistic military repression. Land grab, encroachment of land, planned colonization, setting up of military camps and expansion of occupied territory are carried out for no good reason. Under these conditions, the entire oppressed working masses and the oppressed Tamil people have no way but to mobilise along the path of mass struggle. Hence, the Party calls upon them to mobilise on this May Day, the international day of the workers of the world.

The May Day meeting of the Party in Jaffna starting at 4.00 p.m. in the campus of the Graduate Studies College on Stanley Road will be chaired by Comrade K Selvam Kathirgamanathan. Comrade SK Senthivel will deliver the key May Day address. Comrade K Thanikasalam, member of the Politburo of the Party and representatives of trade unions and other mass organisations

will also address the Rally. A bicycle procession starting in Chunnakam at 2.00 p.m. will proceed along KKS Road to the venue of the meeting in Jaffna. The May Day rally in Hatton will be chaired by Comrade V Mahendran, National Organiser of the Party. The meeting will be addressed by representatives of the Party and trade unions. In Vavuniya, five trade union organisations led by Comrade N Pradeepan, Vavuniya District secretary of the Party will join hands for the May Day procession and rally. Comrade S Thevarajah, member of the Politburo of the Party, will deliver the key address. The procession will commence opposite the Vavuniya Tamil Vidyalayam at 9.30 a.m. and proceed along major roads to the Town Hall, the venue of the rally.

SK Senthivel, General Secretary
V Mahendran, National Organiser

NDMLP Statement to the Media

9th April 2013

The 'Collective Agreement' is a Treacherous Sham

Comrade V Mahendran, National Organiser of the NDMLP issued the following statement on the recent "Collective Agreement".

Another act of betrayal of the Hill Country plantation workers has been staged through the hasty signing of the Collective Agreement which determines the livelihood of the plantation workers. This time, an agreement has been made cunningly for a daily basic wage of Rs 460/- and a total wage of Rs 620/-. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party fully rejects this agreement which fails to compensate the economic burdens on the plantation workers and shows no regard for the views or expectations of the plantation workers. Besides, the Party strongly condemns the Collective Agreement and the betrayal that have been imposed on the plantation workers without any concern for or far sight about their livelihood.

In the agreement of 2011, the basic wage was increased by Rs 105/-, i.e. an increase of 38%. That was made possible by the continuous struggles of the workers and pressure from various quarters at the time. It should be borne in mind that this time the wage has been increased by Rs 70/-, which is only an 18% increase. In these two years the economic crisis of the country has reached a rather complex state. The prices of essential goods have risen drastically. Under the conditions, the above wage increase is mere eyewash. Usually Collective Agreement negotiations take place in several rounds and in the interim various struggles and debates occur in an organized manner or

spontaneously; and they exert pressure on the negotiators. But, this time, the Collective Agreement has been hastily completed in two rounds, in secrecy, without giving room for appeals by workers or the views of the public. This agreement is a blatant betrayal by the leadership of the plantation trade unions and mere eyewash in the interests of the plantation companies. It also demonstrates the hegemonic attitude and high handedness of the trade unions that signed the agreement as well as exposes their lack of interest in the workers.

Although the Collective Agreement specifies the total wage as comprising the basic wage, attendance incentive and payment for surplus tea plucking, in practice this sum is not received in full by all workers. Besides, a full day's wage can be earned only by workers who work on 17 days, i.e. 75%, of the 25 days on which work is offered. According to the new agreement, the monthly earning will be Rs 11,780/- (620x19). But statistics show that a family of six needs Rs 47,000/- for monthly living expenses. Based on that, the wage of the plantation worker is less than a quarter of the needed income.

In the past, every company conspired to reduce the total wage payment and cunningly avoided offering work on not less than 20 days. Also other matters stipulated in the Collective Agreement are not implemented in full by the plantation companies. The number of work days offered and the required minimum weight of leaves to be plucked vary from company to company. The practices regarding profit based bonuses, leave day bonus etc. that existed at the time the plantations were under state control are still being followed. It is a painful truth that neither party to the agreement has shown any interest in implementing practically feasible actions or plans.

The history of the Collective Agreement has been that the workers are mortgaged to the Employers' Federation every two years in the name of the agreement. Although the trade unions that are not signatories to the Collective Agreement got together to take some anticipatory steps, it should be pointed out that the steps were reduced to mere statements without leading to constructive action or concrete struggles for the rights of the workers concerning their well being, including a fair wage increase.

This treachery will prevail until the workers strengthen themselves as a force to secure their rights through struggle and do not rally behind the visibly treacherous trade union leaderships that persistently cheat them. Hence, the Party calls upon the plantation workers to transcend trade union and political differences and come forward to oppose this deceitful agreement. The Party also appeals to them to reject the leaderships that have all along been making political livelihood by cheating the people and to mobilize to strengthen the

mass political line to win their national aspirations, fundamental rights, employment rights and other such rights including a fair wage rise.

V Mahendran
National Organiser

NDMLP Statement to the Media

6th April 2013

Denouncing Fascist Attacks on Political Freedom

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement regarding the spate of attacks against the public, following the recent attacks on the office of the Tamil National Alliance and then on the office of the Uthayan newspaper.

The hands of chauvinistic fascism are behind the continuing violent attacks in the North. That is being repeatedly proven by the harsh acts of violence against media personnel and media offices, university students, people's struggles and political parties. Recently, the office of the Tamil National Alliance in Kilinochchi and the office of the Uthayan newspaper have been the targets of fierce attacks by thugs.

The freedom of expression of the people and the democratic rights of political parties have been blatantly denied through such acts. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly condemns these acts. The people should, instead of observing silence, mobilise to demand justice. Political parties should come together and carry out campaigns of opposition based on common demands. Otherwise, oppression will only grow.

It is four years since the end of the war. To this day, democracy, normal life and political solution continue to be denied. Under these conditions, the state machinery is functioning in a way that oppresses the media, political parties and alternative political views. The people are thereby threatened directly and indirectly. The black smoke of oppression that it is dangerous to discuss politics is being spread from the government side. It is as an expression of this phenomenon that the newspapers from the north, Uthayan, Thinakkural and Valampuri, were subjected to a series of attacks. The attacks on the students of the University of Jaffna and their arrests were carried out to intimidate and silence them. Now the Kilinochchi office of the Tamil National Alliance has been attacked and the Kilinochchi regional office of the Uthayan newspaper has been smashed. Other political parties too are subjected to severe surveillance and intimidation. The ongoing serial attacks and repression demonstrate that the North will not be getting any democracy, human rights,

normal life or political freedom and instead chauvinistic fascism is spreading out its fierce fangs.

The position of the party is that the correct response to these trends is with the entire oppressed people.

S.K. Sentinel
General Secretary

NDMLP Statement to the Media

7th March 2013

Tribute to Hugo Chavez

New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party Salutes Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and his Stand and Struggle against US Imperialism

Yesterday, Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez succumbed to the cancer that harassed him for two years. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party of Sri Lanka sorrowfully mourns his death, and remembers his historic contribution to anti-imperialism in Latin America and the Caribbean, which can be second only to that of Fidel Castro. The Bolivarian Revolution initiated by him changed for better the life of the poor majority in Venezuela and the Bolivarian spirit of anti-imperialist cooperation and defence of the resources of countries against imperialist plunder, inspired several South American countries.

Following his election as President in 1999, he used his position to make fundamental changes to Venezuela's political structure, including a new constitution assuring the rights of marginalized groups, a highly democratic system of public referenda with mass participation on major public issues, and participatory democratic councils. He pursued in word and deed his vision of Socialism in the 21st Century and, in the process, with popular support overcame military coups, strikes and recall referendums instigated by the US-backed right. By nationalising several key industries, especially oil, he enhanced the government's financial resources, much of which he invested in the previously neglected health care and education, and thereby achieved a significant reduction in poverty. Most importantly, Chavez symbolised Latin American resistance to US imperialism, and was a focal point for Latin American solidarity against US domination. He considerably succeeded in bringing together Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and other countries of the region to isolate the US on long-standing Latin American issues such as the US policy towards Cuba and the more recent coup in the Honduras. Also, his principled stand in defending people and countries outside the region, especially Palestine, Lebanon, Iran, Libya and Syria, against the cynical and systematic subversion by US imperialism and its allies was a source of strength for anti-imperialist struggles. Thus his loss will

be deeply felt far beyond Venezuela, and Latin America and the Caribbean and, to the vast section of humanity struggling for its rights, the name of Chavez will forever be associated with hope and resistance.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party of Sri Lanka is at one with vast majority of toiling masses of Venezuela in sharing their deep sorrow for their beloved leader and their avowed determination to struggling to achieve the goals of Chavez defined in his vision of a Bolivarian revolution.

May the spirit of social justice and struggle symbolised by Chavez advance ever stronger wherever mankind seeks liberation!

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP Statement to the Media

23^d February 2013

On Responses to the Channel-4 News Story

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued on behalf of the Politburo of the Party the following statement on the recent release by the British TV channel, Channel-4 of photographs relating to the killing of Prabakaran's son Balachandran.

No lies or distortions can cover up the wicked deeds of the military action by the defence forces of Sri Lanka in the name of "humanitarian war" during the final stages of the war in 2009. Information and evidence about them have already been released by international democratic and human rights organisations. As a continuation of such information, the TV channel, Channel-4 had recently release photographs relating to the killing of the 12-years old son of Prabakaran. The killing of a child of tender age as an act of revenge has shocked every parent who saw the photographs. Although the photographs have been released belatedly, they have brought out the cruelties of the war and the violation of the rules of combat. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly condemns these acts.

Many thousands of Tamils were killed in the coastal areas of Mullaitheevu in the final days of the cruel war waged by the Mahinda Chinthana government. Those killed included the old, the sickly, women, children, youth and infants. Prabakaran's twelve year old son Balachandran was one such victim. This wicked act was an inhumane and immoral act of murder carried out as an act of perverted vengeance. It is in breach of national laws and to accepted international norms for the conduct of war. This event makes us wonder how many more tender buds like Balachandran would, in the final stages of the war, have been prey to the guns of this regime, which claimed

vociferously at home and abroad that it was acting against the recruitment of children as soldiers and to protect the rights of children. Thus the government should solely accept responsibility and answer related charges. But government spokespersons and the Defence Secretary flatly deny everything. It will be in vain to expect that the UN, its Human Rights Council, the US, the West and India will provide justice for the human rights breaches in the final stages of the war or for the murder of the child, Balachandran. These very countries were responsible for the murder of children of tender age like Balachandran. Thus, the only way to win justice for the murders is to make the Sinhalese people, who have been distracted by the government, to think politically and question the government. It is our duty to inform the Sinhalese people that the same fate could befall the Sinhalese youth tomorrow.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP Statement to the Media
8th February 2013

Denouncing the Attack on Newspaper Distributor

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued on behalf of the Politburo the following statement on the brutal attack on a newspaper distribution officer two days ago.

A distribution officer of the Yazl Thinakkural daily published in Jaffna was attacked early in the morning, the day before yesterday, by three masked thugs, who also set afire the bundle of newspapers that he was transporting as well as the motorcycle that he was riding. The officer who was badly injured in the attack is undergoing treatment in the Jaffna General Hospital. This brutal attack was planned, and the Politburo of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly condemns this attack.

Thugs continue with attacks on journalists, newspaper distributors and newspaper offices as well as arson in a planned way. None of those responsible for the attacks have been brought before the law. It is against this background that the attack of day before yesterday has occurred. This attack is a harsh blow against the free functioning of newspapers and freedom of expression. The attack and the act of arson have clearly demonstrated that there is no room for democracy, freedom and normal life in Jaffna.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

Sri Lankan Events

Opposing electricity price hike

The announcement in April of a sharp increase in the price of electric energy in ways hurting domestic consumers provoked public consternation, and the government seemed to retreat a little to mitigate the blow on very low level consumers but still hurting middle class homes while sparing big consumers. The government has been burdening working people by increasing the prices of food, fuel and other essentials, while keeping wages low. The opposition, rather than explain the reasons for the price hike and mobilise the affected people to struggle against the oppressive regime, seems to be only interested in electoral political mileage.

Death of a child

In February, Channel-4 released images relating to the killing of Prabakaran's son Balachandran. Killing of a child as an act of revenge shocked every parent who saw the images and rekindled deep sorrow among Tamils by reminding them of the events of the final stages of the war. While the motive of Channel-4 in releasing the images weeks before the UN Human Rights Council vote on Sri Lanka is political, the callous response of the Sri Lankan government is shameful. The government has made it a habit to deny wrong doing in the face of evidence of war crimes or human rights violations and claim that the evidence is fabricated. Equally disgracefully, the mainstream Sinhala and English news media and the main political parties too ignore the evidence or join the chorus denouncing foreign conspiracy against Sri Lanka.

Military land grab and mass protests

Expansion of territory under direct control of the armed forces based in the Jaffna Peninsula has since the 1990s denied the people of Valikamam North access to their lands, among the most fertile in the peninsula. Those displaced by army occupation have since protested in various ways demanding the return of their lands. But the protests have thus far fallen on deaf ears. The government in a move to legitimise and make permanent this unlawful and unjust seizure of land announced the taking over for military purposes 6400 acres (2560 hectares) in 24 Grama Sevaka Divisions and affecting 60,000 people. On 29th April, thousands of people mobilised near the occupied territory in a protest organised by the Valikamam North Displaced People's Organisation. Attempts by the police to thwart the protest were foiled and the protesters delivered their objections to the Tellipalai Divisional Secretariat. The success of the protest has inspired the masses and resistance is growing to

the cynical move by the government that will further aggravate national oppression and jeopardise a solution to the national question.

Rape of a child

A seven-year old school girl was abducted and raped on 14th May in the village of Senaippilavu, Nedunkeni (Vavuniya District). The people of the region launched a massive protest to challenge police inaction. The protest organized by the Mass Organization for Social Justice, affiliated to the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, had the support of other left parties and Tamil nationalist parties in the District. The police pledged prompt action following the protest, and an arrest was made based on a statement by an eye witness to the abduction. The main achievement of the struggle is its impressing upon the people the value of mass mobilization and struggle.

Arrest and release of Muslim leader

Asad Sally, former Deputy Mayor of Colombo and outspoken critic of the neo-fascist Bodu Bala Sena, was arrested by the CID under the Prevention of Terrorism Act on 2nd May on charges of “stoking the fire of ethnic and religious strife and harming national unity”, based on an interview with a Chennai-based Tamil magazine dated 24th April, which gave it a sensational heading “Muslims will also take up arms”. Although Sally acted promptly to correct the mistake, he was arrested and his detention continued for two weeks until protests from various quarters including the government’s Muslim partners secured his release. The arrest was an act of political victimization and is worrying since anti-Muslim Sinhala Buddhist fanatics get away with their hate campaigns and criminal acts while secular politicians are persecuted.

Pre-empting Provincial Council Elections?

The government, which has already burned its fingers in the parliamentary and local council elections held in the North in the wake of the Presidential election, is reluctant to hold elections for the Northern Provincial Council, although two successive elections have been held for the Eastern Provincial Council since 2009. The government which under external pressure agreed to hold the elections in September is trying to pad up the electoral register with voters who are likely to support government party candidates. Partners of the government are meanwhile making mischief by demanding that the Council be stripped of power over land and police before elections are held, while some demand scrapping the 13th Amendment and with it the Provincial Councils.

World Events

ASIA

Korea: Imperialist Troublemaking

Relations between the US and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, (North Korea) are at an all time low since the end sixty years ago of the War imposed on the Korea by US imperialism. The Western media are busy propagating the impression that North Korea is to blame for the tensions, and recent North Korean responses are taken in isolation from the events that led to those strong statements.

Fidel Castro writing under the heading "The Duty to Avoid a War in Korea" on 4th April 2013 observed that the present crisis in the Korean peninsula "is about one of the most serious dangers of nuclear war since the October Crisis around Cuba in 1962, 50 years ago". He drew attention to the Korean War unleashed in 1950, barely five years after two atomic bombs were exploded over the defenceless cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The war cost millions of lives, including a million Chinese soldiers who fought alongside North Korean soldiers. The Soviet Union led by Stalin provided military, logistical and economic support to defend North Korea. Although the war ended with the US frustrated in its aim to overrun Korea, the US has been able to keep Korea divided for more than six decades. Castro, while appealing to North Korea for restraint in preventing the escalation of the conflict into war, warned that, in the event of a destructive war which will affect a vast section of humanity, Obama would be buried in a deluge of images which would present him as the most sinister character in the history of the US and urged that the duty of avoiding war is also his and that of the people of the US.

Historical background: The Armistice Agreement reached at the end of the Korean War in 1953 led to the partition of Korea but not on a permanent basis. Its purpose was to set the stage for lasting peace. But the Agreement has been observed more in the breach than in good faith by the US. Repeated requests by North Korea to the US to enter into a peace agreement, have been turned down by the US. The Agreement required the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the Korean peninsula, and all foreign forces except the US forces left; and the US is still stationed in South Korea as an army of occupation with the South Korean forces kept under US command. While the Agreement prohibited "the introduction into Korea of reinforcing combat

aircraft, armoured vehicles, weapons and ammunition...”, the US brazenly violated the agreement by introducing nuclear weapons into South Korea in 1958; and it is in the same spirit that the US has been acting in its war games-related deployment of massive amounts of US military.

North Korea always strove for the reunification of the motherland and, whenever South Korea had a relatively progressive regime, the South Korean government cooperated to bring closer the Korean people divided by war. But efforts to reunite Korea have been systematically undermined by the US which has used every reactionary ruler to escalate tension between North and South. The US knows well that the reunification of Korea will make US military presence in the region redundant.

North Korea has for decades suffered an imperialist siege designed to reduce it to a state of deprivation so that it will eventually surrender. But North Korea not only withstood the siege but flourished until the fall of the Soviet Union, and even afterwards, despite US-led economic sanctions including a trade blockade and financial isolation leading to a strained economy, North Korea has remained defiant. No country, not even Cuba, has been menaced by such wide-ranging sanctions for so long. Besides sanctions, military harassment and the US nuclear threat forced North Korea, for survival, to develop its defences including ballistic missiles and nuclear devices.

Under US pressure, the UN Security Council has in the past two decades adopted several resolutions to deny North Korea its right of self-defence. Meanwhile, the US and its client state in South Korea, where US troops are still stationed, have for decades kept up a campaign of unrelenting military harassment in the form of regular war games. The image projected by Western imperialism and its mass media is that the sanctions are aimed to correct North Korea’s “waywardness” and that the war games are mere deterrents against North Korean belligerence.

The current crisis: To understand the present crisis, it is important to remember that it was deliberately brought about by the US. In the past six months the US acted highly provocatively towards North Korea. In October 2012, the US granted the Republic of Korea (South Korea) an exemption under the Missile Control Technology Regime allowing South Korea to extend the range of its ballistic missiles to cover the entire North Korea. This was followed by sweeping changes in the military alliance between the US and South Korea. A plan termed “tailored deterrence,” was drawn up calling for joint US-South Korean military operations to counter with disproportionate force any North Korean “provocation”, and included pre-emptive strikes against possible North Korean missile attacks.

When North Korea launched an earth observation satellite on 12th December 2012, the US falsely claimed that the flight was a disguised ballistic missile test in violation of UN resolutions forbidding North Korea from testing ballistic missiles. The North Korean position that the projectile was only to place a satellite into orbit has since been vindicated by several international experts. Yet the US deliberately misrepresented the nature of the launch to further its own political end of isolating North Korea, and in January it bullied the UN Security Council into passing a resolution criticising North Korea and imposing new sanctions.

When the Security Council singled out North Korea for punishment by denying it the right to launch a satellite, North Korea responded by exposing the hypocrisy of the US in rushing resolution through the Security Council, which has not passed a single resolution denouncing any other of the thousands of nuclear tests and satellite launches, mostly by the US. It rebutted the aggressive US policy by conducting its third nuclear test on 12th February 2013. The following day, South Korea declared that it had deployed cruise missiles capable of striking anywhere in North Korea and intends to accelerate the deployment of ballistic missiles of similar range.

The latest US-South Korea war games, Foal Eagle, began on 1st March to last two-months. The war games, conducted as practice in mobilizing US troops and military hardware from abroad for rapid deployment in the Korean peninsula, this year involved besides US and South Korean forces, British, Canadian, and Australian forces as well. The nominally “defensive” war games are designed to force North Korea onto a permanent war footing and keep its military on high alert, an exhausting and expensive exercise for a weak economy.

Meantime, the Security Council debated further sanctions on North Korea. Although China prevented the US from securing authorization of military enforcement of the sanctions, the Security Council resolution of 7th March fulfilled many of the aims of the US by requiring all nations to inspect North Korean craft suspected of carrying forbidden cargo and placing restrictions on North Korean banking operations. Even as the Security Council debated the sanctions, the EU went ahead with its own set of punitive fiscal measures. The US added its own sanctions, prohibiting transactions between the Foreign Trade Bank (North Korea’s main foreign exchange bank) and US individuals and businesses, and freezing its assets held under US jurisdiction.

South Korea adopted policies increasing the danger of war, and the US and South Korea signed a counter-provocation plan, in which the US will militarily support the South Korean forces in attacks on North Korean targets.

On 11th March, in a powerful demonstration designed to intimidate North Korea, the two allies began their annual Key Resolve military exercise, this time overlapping with the Foal Eagle exercise that began on 1st March. The two exercises together involve the demonstration of the nuclear-capable B-52 bombers, the nuclear-powered US submarine USS Cheyenne, equipped with Tomahawk missiles, and the powerful radar-evading B-2 stealth bombers. A mock drill implementing a plan of the US to enter North Korea and capture key locations was also part of the Key Resolve exercises. The show of force was further escalated by the US making a public display of F-22 stealth fighter planes sent to South Korea. The US has also approved the sale of 200 bunker buster bombs to target North Korean underground facilities.

After the US provoked the North Korean in so many ways, manoeuvred the UN Security Council to slap still more sanctions and began its latest round of war games, North Korea responded with hard hitting proclamations, severing of its military hotline with South Korea, declaration of intent to restart the Yongbyon nuclear reactor, and the temporarily closure of the Kaesong Industrial Complex where there is cooperation with South Korea.

The conduct of North Korea is portrayed as reckless by the US media which accuse it of stoking tensions with South Korea, whereas it was the US that had stoked tensions with North Korea. The North Korean response has to be seen in the context of the unwillingness of the Obama regime to negotiate with North Korea and its plans to economically and militarily subvert North Korea. Also, despite claims of trying to ease tensions, the US has been escalating tensions by pushing Japan and Australia to sanction Korea's Foreign Trade Bank and applying pressure on the EU to do the same and blackmailing China to do the same under threat that the US will increase its military presence in Asia.

North Korea has long known that its only protection against US aggression is its possession of a nuclear weapon and a capable delivery vehicle. The US has placed just two options before North Korea: meekly submit to punishment by the US and its allies or stand up to the US risking further punishment.

The US will use the climate of confrontation as an excuse to deploy anti-missile systems and hold military drills in the region. As long as South Korea does not take the initiative to de-escalate the crisis, the US will aggravate the crisis at the risk of plunging East Asia into war. The present reactionary regime in South Korea is unlikely to take the lead, and the only hope is that the South Korean people would act to bring about a change.

Russia and China need to respond to US provocations more strongly, because the prize that the US eyes is not just North Korea but domination

over the entire East Asian region and curtailing the growing global influence of China.

Bangladesh

Killing for Profit

The collapse of the eight-storey building on 24th April 2013 that killed over 1100 people, predominantly women, took place when Bangladesh had barely recovered from the shock of the fire of 24th November in the seven storey building of the Tazreen Fashions plant in the outskirts of Dhaka that killed 112 people, the worst industrial accident in Bangladesh until 24th April,.

To refer to such events as accidents would be to deny that their cause was callous neglect driven by greed. That the collapsed building was unsafely built, that serious cracks were observed in the structure the day before its collapse, that the workers were forced to enter the building despite their concerns, and other news stories since the disaster have identified some of the culprits but not the main culprits.

Public anger led to days of mass protests and clashes, controlled by the police using tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets. The fury of the people was at those directly responsible for the collapse of the building and those who forced the workers into their death trap. Arresting the factory managers and the owners of the businesses and of the building is no consolation to the families of the victims; and anger continues to grow over the working conditions of the country's 3.6 million garment workers.

The Capital Development Authority accused the owner of the building and the local municipality of erecting the building without due authorisation. It is also said that the building was erected on weak foundations on the site of a pond filled in with sand and earth. The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association has, in the interest of business, demanded of the garment factory owners to produce safe building designs by July this year. But these very bodies are answerable for letting this and other factories to operate under highly unsafe conditions. Thus they too are guilty as are successive governments. But the real guilt lies elsewhere.

Several leading European and North American retailers are customers of these factories. The Western media, with very few exceptions, have glibly talked of the likely impact of fresh Western concerns about worker safety and low wages on the country's garment export trade worth around US\$ 20 billion and comprising nearly 80% of the country's export income.

The media, like the political establishment, know well that the multinational brand-names cared only about ensuring competitively low costs and not the condition of the workers. It happened when the use of child labour and sweat shops of the kind that existed three centuries ago in England were exposed over a decade ago. The companies pretended ignorance until evidence surfaced of their foreknowledge. Even in the aftermath of the garment factory fire last December, brand name companies denied connections with the factory, until evidence was published. The cynicism of the exploiting classes knows no limits, and it is only when their 'image' among customers at home is at risk they rush to cover up by offering modest compensation, to avoid answerability.

Pressure for increased productivity and delivery on time invariably mean worsening of working conditions for the labour force, mostly women, often deprived of normal trade union rights prescribed by law. Let alone unionization of labour, any attempt by the exploited workers to organize themselves and demand better wages meet with retaliation by the investors who will apply pressure on the government to maintain "industrial order" and threaten to move to another country, equally desperate for jobs, even at cruelly low wages. The government of Bangladesh, unwilling to risk massive job losses, persuaded the striking workers in other factories to return to work. But the jobs created by the garment industry only stand in the way of the development of a national economy, and the garment industry keeps the country eternally bonded to multinational companies thriving on cheap labour.

Third World countries that host such industries because they offer large scale employment and export income are eventually trapped by rivalry among themselves to produce goods at the lowest possible cost and the threat by the investor to transfer the industry to a rival. Unregulated globalization combines advanced technology and production methods with primitive modes of capitalist exploitation as at the time of the industrial revolution to obtain cheap labour from a submissive work force under threat of starvation. Unlike then, today's sweat shops are far out of sight of the consumers, who seldom realize the unhealthy and unsafe working conditions and dismal wages, until a major disaster shocks the world. Even then, globalised capital shifts the blame on the government of the exploited people. This pattern of exploitation will exist until the world is rid of imperialist exploitation and plunder.

Deflecting the Shahbagh Movement

The first verdict in the long awaited International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) — constituted forty-two years after the end of the war of independence of

Bangladesh in 1971— disappointed the families of the victims and the general public. The trial itself is of a few local collaborators although the chief culprits were the 195 Pakistani army officers initially identified as the principal war criminals, and the government of Bangladesh has never demanded their return to Bangladesh for trial. The Awami League government under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman forgave all arrested Pakistani army personnel, including the 195 identified offenders, and returned them to Pakistan as a gesture of goodwill, with India serving as mediator. There is also a less spoken aspect of war crimes in Bangladesh in 1971 that concerns the slaughter of left political activists by the Awami League helped by the Indian armed forces.

The protest by a handful of young men and women who gathered on Shahbagh in Dhaka on February 5, 2013 against the sentencing of Kader Mollah, a 1971 war criminal, to life imprisonment and to demand capital punishment for him and eight others under trial rapidly swept the country. Although electronic networking helped, the reason for the spread was more than the people's desire to punish the war criminals, although the people of Bangladesh never forgot the Pakistani atrocities of 1971 and have always sought justice against those who perpetrated horrendous crimes against them.

The independence movement and the war raised the expectations of the people but, after independence, the government led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman abandoned all that the people stood for. Thus there was suspicion that the mild verdict was due to a deal between the ruling Awami League and Jamaat-e-Islami, the party which opposed the independence struggle and collaborated with Pakistan; and the Shahbagh movement which targeted the Jamaat-e-Islami also directed its frustration at the government. As the movement gathered momentum, the government showed support, but sought to restrict the demands to death penalty for the war criminals and a ban on Jamaat-e-Islami.

The Jamaat hit back with the claim that the Shahbagh movement was anti-Islamic so as to make Islam the central issue, and resorted to violent protests, and following the ICT verdict of death sentence for Delwar Hossain Sayedee, a Jamaat-e-Islami leader and war criminal on 27th February, the Jamaat responded with large-scale vandalism throughout the country. Over sixty people, mostly Jamaat activists, some civilians and a few policemen, were killed and many more injured as a result of armed police action on 28th February. At this stage, the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), the main opposition party, threw its weight with its Jamaat-e-Islami.

The Jamaat and its Islamic fundamentalist allies have to some degree succeeded in diverting the attention from the core issue of the Shahbag

protest and the underlying grievances of the people who rallied behind it. The BNP-Jamaat alliance also resorted to communal violence and attacks on Hindu temples; and the motive goes beyond discrediting the protests to protecting the culprits, who have strong links with the two organizations. The government, partly to appease the opposition, arrested three bloggers on charges of defaming Islam on the Internet, charges which the supporters of the accused firmly deny, but nevertheless refused to bow to fundamentalist pressure to introduce “blasphemy legislation”.

[Sources: news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-02/06/c_132155578.htm;
revolutionaryfrontlines.wordpress.com/2013/04/08/bangladesh-on-the-shahbagh-movement-against-war-criminals-of-1971/]

India

The Authoritarian Turn

The Sanhati Collective warned in an article dated 13th February 2013 (<http://sanhati.com/articles/6136/>) that India could be heading towards a period of undeclared emergency. It was pointed out that the ruling Congress Party, intimidated by popular anger against its neo-liberal policies and all pervasive corruption, and a likely electoral debacle is lurching to the right to adopt the communal and parochial agenda of the BJP. It drew attention to the brutal assault and abuse of students and teachers of a college of the Delhi University protesting the visit of Narendra Modi on 6th February and to the quiet execution on 9th February of Mohammad Afzal Guru, a Kashmiri Muslim sentenced to death for his alleged role in the attack on the parliament in 2001, based on no evidence but a confession extracted by police torture, and whose appeal to the Supreme Court was rejected despite the documentation in great detail of the gross injustice of the indictment by civil rights activists, progressive lawyers and academic-activists.

The article, critical of mainstream political parties for their implicit or explicit endorsement of the hanging, also pointed out that when various organizations, activists and Kashmiri students from Delhi converged at Jantar Mantar on 9th February to protest against the hanging, they were attacked by Bajrang Dal goons in the full view of the police who did not act to stop the atrocities but attacked the protesters and detained many of them at police stations. The article places the incident in the context of draconian government measures in Kashmir including firing on protestors by security forces, clamping of curfews, truncation of internet connections, and arbitrary detentions.

Attention is also drawn to high handed action by the Odisha government. Dandapani Mohanty, a former mediator between the CPI(Maoist) and the Odisha government, was kidnapped by Odisha plainclothes police on 8th February and then charged with 15 criminal cases. The state government, suppressive of peoples' voices in Odisha, on 3rd February, unleashed brutal police action on the villagers resisting the POSCO project in coastal Jagatsinhpur district. The police were still occupying Gobindapur village and terrorizing the villagers even as Abhay Sahu, leader of the resistance to POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti was on an indefinite hunger strike.

The article also points out that the Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal issued on 6th February a directive that permission from the police headquarters is necessary to book a public hall for a political meeting. During the past year, open meetings in public spaces have effectively been banned for want of permission from the police headquarters; and now sites of protest meetings during the Left Front regime are available only for meetings of the ruling party or its allies, to the exclusion of dissenting organizations. The new directive will extend the ban to public halls too, so that small dissenting organizations will be prevented from holding even an indoor meeting.

The article warns of the ominous implications of the impending clampdown on democratic dissent in the backdrop of imposition of neo-liberal policies, price rise, evictions and land-grabbing, and the strengthening of right wing forces. It warns that democracy is in grave peril in India unless the draconian moves are resisted by all popular forces acting in unity.

Student Protests in Tamilnadu

Tamilnadu has always been sensitive to the Sri Lankan national question. But thus far, opportunist parliamentary political parties used the mass anger since the time of the anti-Tamil violence of July 1983 to the killings preceding the final defeat of the LTTE in May 2009 to their advantage.

The release of a set of photographs of the young son of the deceased LTTE leader by Channel 4, suggesting killing by his captors, triggered a wave of protests in February 2013. The students who initiated the protests and the organization as a whole were not only critical of the Sri Lankan and Indian governments, but also of the leading political parties, especially the DMK, AIADMK and the Congress, for their opportunism. That seems to be the most meaningful outcome of the campaign. While several of the demands are impractical and show a lack of understanding of the complexities of the Sri Lankan national question, the campaign is a more genuine reflection of the

feelings of the people of Tamilnadu than those of the Tamil nationalist political parties of Tamilnadu in the past. Continuing the campaign based on emotive sentiments without a good understanding of the issues could, however, let reactionary forces hijack the campaign. It is the duty of the genuine left to prevent such a turn and develop the students into an effective force in support of the Tamils and other oppressed nationalities to secure their national rights.

Meantime, parochial elements, known for their hostility towards other nationalities in India as well, have in recent months launched attacks on innocent Sinhalese visitors to Tamilnadu. The vast majority of the people of Tamilnadu, who resent such acts, seem helpless in the context of opportunist political leaders failing to take a firm stand. Such mischief should be opposed unconditionally by all left, progressive and democratic forces.

Resistance to Nuclear Power Persists

The People's Movement against Nuclear Energy (PMANE) through its relentless struggle, has had an impact on the people living in the vicinity of the Kalpaakkam nuclear power station who have added their voice to the protests. What is remarkable about the struggle is that, while it has not denied any political organization the right support the just struggle initiated by the people of Idinthakarai and Koodankulam in 2011, it has ensured that the struggle is not hijacked by opportunist political parties. It is also commendable that despite the dismissal by the Supreme Court in early May of a public suit seeking to halt power generation in the plant, the PMANE has reasserted its determination to continue its resistance to the nuclear power plant.

The Maruti Suzuki Struggle

The Maruti Suzuki Workers Union, currently on an indefinite dharna in Kaithal, Haryana since 24 March 2013 issued a statement on the occasion of May Day 2013 calling upon all workers and fair minded people to join them in large numbers on 8th May in Kaithal for a program and rally to take the struggle forward. The appeal called for the strengthening of the Unity of the Workers of Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal and the toiling masses of Haryana and to pledge on the occasion of May Day to challenge the attack of the capitalists and the Government which serves their interests.

The statement, in the true spirit of class struggle, is a clear expression of the realization of the workers of the renewed importance of May Day and its glorious history by being tempered in the hearth of the struggle against exploitation and repression by the ruthless employers and the government. It

is also a declaration of the defiant determination of the workers to fight to the very end until they win their rights. (The full text of the statement can be seen in sanhati.com/articles/6670/).

Farmers Protest in Delhi

On 18th March, thousands of farmers from 15 states gathered in protest at Jantar Mantar, Delhi demanding the Prime Minister's intervention to reverse the grave Indian agrarian crisis. The protesters included farmers from the Indian Coordination Committee of Farmers' Movements, the Bhartiya Kisan Union and the Karnataka Farmers Movement and other organizations, and were joined by the National Alliance of People's Movements. They drew attention to issues of land acquisition, falling incomes, new legal structures threatening livelihood and food sovereignty, and exploitation by new farm technology. Their key demands were:

- End to land acquisition, and affirmation of land rights

- Assured income for farmers through Farmers' Income Guarantee Act and Farmers' Income Commission

- Immediate steps to stop farmers' suicides

- Annulment of new legal structures threatening farm livelihood, and food sovereignty

- Promotion of ecologically sustainable agro-technologies (acceptance of agro-ecology and rejection of genetically modified engineered crops and agro-chemicals)

- Ban on projects that exploit water and divert it from farming to infrastructural, recreational and thermal power projects

- Upholding seed sovereignty of Indian communities

[Source: www.downtoearth.org.in/content/agrarian-crisis-farmers-15-states-protest-delhi-jantar-mantar]

Nepal

The Continuing Stalemate

The Hindu on 30th April noted that Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda), who in response to India blocking the ascent of his party to power, declared not long ago that "You can either be a revolutionary force with a coercive apparatus or a civilian party abiding by the discipline of multiparty democracy. Make a choice", has fully reversed his

position to declare that his party had made a choice in favour of 'democracy' and 'progressive nationalism.'

Dahal announced that the UCPN(M), through a national congress in the southern town of Hetauda in February, made three fundamental changes to its ideology, namely accepting peaceful transition and peaceful multiparty democratic politics; focusing on economic prosperity and development; and rejecting narrow nationalism and feudal nationalism to adopt progressive nationalism (basically a reference to earlier stand against Indian expansionist domination of Nepal).

He added that where the UCPN(M) differed with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) was on the "dogmatic and sectarian" view of the erstwhile "extremist colleagues" who continue to criticise Indian expansionism. The differences seem to run deeper than that and concern many national issues that were core issues of the ten year People's War (1996-2006).

To drive home his bourgeois democratic credentials, he made virtue out of political defeat to claim that his party gave up its ruling mandate to form a government led by the Chief Justice, Khil Raj Regmi, to hold elections in a free, fair, and acceptable manner, whereas it was under pressure from parliamentary political rivals that Baburam Bhattarai stepped down as Prime Minister.

A thirty three party alliance, with the CPN(M) as the strongest political party in the alliance, was formed to oppose elections to the Constitutional Assembly under the government headed by Chief Justice Regmi. Their demands include delineation of electoral constituencies according to the latest census; allocation of seats for marginalised groups, namely women, Dalits, Madhesis, indigenous groups and Muslims, to ensure proportional representation in the CA to write Nepal's constitution. A ten-day protest programme was launched by the alliance that culminated in a national shut-down on 7th April. Amid protests, the elections have been deferred to November. The CPN(M), declared it will obstruct government's voter registration unless the demands are met.

Indian Weapons for the Nepal Army

After a two-day joint-consultative group meeting between Nepal and India on 11th April, the Indian government agreed to provide Nepal with lethal and non-lethal military logistics. The four major Nepali political parties had agreed in March to allow the Army to purchase military hardware following consensus on

the status of former Maoist combatants now receiving army training as part of an integration programme, including a decision to assign the combatants one post of Colonel and two Lieutenant Colonels. On 12th April, the Government of Nepal authorised its army to procure necessary military hardware including weapons. Against whom the weapons will be used is not hard to guess.

[Sources: *thehimalayantimes.com*; *nepalnews.com*]

AFRICA

Re-colonisation in Earnest

In 2002, using the 9/11 attack of 2001 as pretext, the US established its first permanent military base in Africa in Djibouti, a former French colony, in east Africa and separated from the Arabian Peninsula by a narrow stretch of the Red Sea. The United States African Command (AFRICOM) was created in 2007 under the Bush Administration as a Military Command centre to cover the entire Africa. Although the US announced that AFRICOM would provide a new centralized US command presence in the African continent, AFRICOM with its headquarters in Germany had no base in Africa.

The US was desperate for a permanent footprint in Africa to assert US interests in a continent where the Soviet Union was its key rival and now China. During the civil war created and armed by the West to overthrow Gadhafi, it was expected that Libya could become the first foothold of AFRICOM in Africa. The Libyan regime change did not work out as intended, but created conditions for increased military intervention by the West. Libya was used to arm the rebels of Mali to create conditions under which the French had an excuse to intervene militarily in western Africa for a second time in recent years. The need to protect the French forces is now the pretext for AFRICOM to establish itself on African soil.

The New York Times on 23rd February reported that President Obama, opening a new front in the drone wars against Al Qaeda and its affiliates, announced that about 100 US troops had been sent to Niger to help set up a new base from which unarmed Predator drones would conduct surveillance in the region. The new drone base of the US Africa Command is now based in the capital, Niamey. Niger, one of the poorest countries in the world, signed a status-of-forces agreement last month with the US, clearing the way for greater US military involvement in Niger.

The late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, in statements preceding his untimely death showed greater far sight in recognizing US intentions in West Asia and Africa than the leaders of China and Russia, the ultimate targets of US military expansion. While denouncing recent Western interventions in Africa, Chavez strongly urged countries of the South American and African continents to unite into a “true pole of power”.

The Real Agenda (real-agenda.com/2013/01/30/22156/) in its comment of 30th January 2013 titled “U.S. Military increases involvement in African conflict” pointed out that the US media said that the US is negotiating with Burkina Faso on the southern border of Mali for an agreement similar to that with Niger, and that the permanent presence of drones could be extended even to Algeria.

[For an informed comment on the AFRICOM and its mission see www.globalresearch.ca/america-invades-africa-the-resource-war-and-the-invasion-of-mali/5315477. Also see www.globalresearch.ca/civil-war-in-the-congo-template-for-neo-colonialism/5314178 for a discussion of foreign meddling by proxy in the Republic of Congo.]

Tunisia

Responding to a Political Assassination

Opposition leader Chokri Belaid, a lawyer and vocal critic of the ruling Ennahda party, was slain by a gunman on 8th February, evidently at the instigation of extremists trying to set up an Islamic dictatorship. The murder triggered demonstrations in the capital, Tunis, and the central mining region of Gafsa. The General Union of Tunisian Workers, Tunisia's most powerful trade union, called for a strike to coincide with the funeral of Belaid. Only three days prior to Belaid's killing, his name featured on the information portal Kapitalis which posted a hit list of prominent secular politicians and journalists circulating on Islamist Facebook pages. Kapitalis also warned of growing violence by Islamist enforcers close to the ruling Ennahda Party. Public anger forced Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali to announce a new administration of non-political technocrats, but only to be ruled out by the Ennahda Party's parliamentary leader.

The Tunisian uprising like its Egyptian counterpart has failed to establish democracy. One repressive regime has been replaced by another. But in both countries public anger is growing, and it will take working class led uprising to bring about meaningful change.

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

Venezuela

Bolivarism after Chavez

Venezuela led by Chavez achieved things that were unimaginable a little more than a decade ago. The courageous anti-imperialist initiative of Chavez had a major impact on the politics of Latin America and the growing isolation of US imperialism. Yet the re-election of Maduro, the chosen successor to Chavez, by a slim majority in the presidential election in April 2013 brings to the fore some of the failures and challenges of the Bolivarian process. There are important lessons for the left, including some that should have been learned from the Chilean experience of four decades ago. Over enthusiasm for the Bolivarian Revolution blinded many to the reality of imperialism as a potent force in the region and to the scale of the influence of local reaction in Venezuelan society. The closely contested election should have woken into reality the advocates of the Bolivarian model as “Socialism of the 21st Century” and as the path for revolutionary change, implicitly rejecting the need for armed revolutionary mass struggle.

Meantime, the dogmatic pessimism of a variety of harsh critics —based on Chavez not following the path that they would charter for the revolution (in Venezuela or for the region and the whole world)— has so far helped only the reactionaries. Marxist Leninists who have, however, been constructive in their criticism drawing attention to the unique conditions in Venezuela that made several positive social changes possible and pointed to drawbacks, including an over reliance on the charisma and personality of Chavez have a serious responsibility at this moment. Rejection of the parliamentary road to socialism cannot mean ignoring issues of electoral politics that concern the retention of power by progressive and anti-imperialist forces in the face of impending imperialist threat and a still robust reactionary opposition.

Given the constraints of the bourgeois parliamentary framework within which the politics of Venezuela and the rest of South America function, any move towards public ownership of the means of production and public services or control of the people over their working environment has to ensure the support of the majority. Every move to free the economy of foreign control has so far been portrayed as anti-democratic by the reactionaries. The private sector media is still strong, and has often demonstrated its capability for mischief. Response by the state to such mischief through legislation is readily labelled as authoritarian, and US imperialism does not miss any chance to

intervene to destabilize the government, if necessary, by plunging the country into civil war. US imperialism has in its armoury several new weapons to effect regime change that are more sophisticated than the crude ones that it used until only three decades ago.

The narrow victory margin has been explained in terms of a sizeable section of the electorate being swayed by irritation about shortage of goods, the high crime rate, and insincere pledges of higher wages and better social welfare by Capriles, known for his loyalty to imperialism. The shortage of goods was partly the making of a politically motivated business sector and the opposition had a role in sustaining crime. That a sizeable section of the electorate is still vulnerable to false promises indicates that the level of political consciousness has to rise further to advance the Bolivarian project.

Large swings in electoral support occur in times of economic crises. People give vent to their frustration by changing governments, as they have done recently in Europe, knowing well that the change will not improve matters. The question is whether the Bolivarian revolution can run such a risk. A change of government at this stage has grave implications not only for the toiling masses of Venezuela but also for anti-imperialism in Latin America and the world.

The challenges needing to be addressed include an economy bound to global capital, a strong private sector with ties to foreign capital, and the hold of the reactionaries over much of the media. The parliamentary system is vulnerable to abuse, and the discontent of a people who are not adequately politicized to see issues from a long term perspective is easily manipulated by the reactionaries.

Chavez saw the need to politicize the masses, and much has been done to democratize social institutions, and political consciousness, knowledge and discussion, and social awareness as a whole are more advanced in Venezuela than in all but a few countries in the region. The vast majority appreciate what the Bolivarian process has achieved for them in education, health and social welfare, and for the country's political and economic stature and stability. Yet public awareness of what made all of that possible and public will to build on the achievements are what matter.

While it is doubtful that Venezuela can advance to socialism within the framework of the existing multi-party parliamentary system, what has been achieved in uplifting the vast majority of toiling masses and in resisting imperialist political and economic domination of South America cannot be lightly dismissed.

Given the inherent limitations of the bourgeois state and the capitalist system, the contradiction between the mass base and the organizational structures of mass political power will remain a major challenge. The initiatives for self-management and self-government aimed to replace the bourgeois state institutions with communally based institutions have led to the expansion of work in state institutions. This has further bureaucratized them and helped them to expand and control the social processes.

While the Bolivarian process aims to institute a socio-political and economic system unlike the existing one, the entrenched bourgeois interests will not passively accept the erosion of their hold on state power. The emergent new middle class—the child of the welfare society created by social reforms— with expectations from the state but indifferent towards the envisaged egalitarian society will encourage the reactionaries emboldened by the narrowness of the victory of President Maduro.

The PSV and its Bolivarian programme are not fully equipped to deal with the challenges. Thus the task of genuine revolutionaries is to persuade the PSV and the government to adopt stands that will strengthen the national economy and consolidate people's power and control over national resources including the media, both state and private owned. It is easy to let things slip and offer explanations or to play the vindicated prophet of doom.

The genuine left should learn from the negative experiences of democratic social change from Guyana in 1957, Chile in 1971 and elsewhere, where the ability of reaction to strike back was grossly underestimated. While it should learn from the blunders of the opportunist left that unconditionally aligned itself with centre-left governments it should also learn from errors of the ultra-left that has isolated itself from the masses through its parochialism. The PSV at this juncture needs and deserves the unqualified support of all left, progressive and anti-imperialist forces in carrying out the Bolivarian agenda. Pushing the Bolivarian process forward and defending the achievements of the process requires political work among the progressive sections of the PSV. The push for social change has to come from the masses, and there is no substitute for mass revolutionary political work that unites the majority against an oppressive minority.

Ecuador

Correa wins third presidential term

Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa was re-elected to a third term in office with a 30% lead over his nearest rival among six right wing opponents.

Following the death of Hugo Chavez, Correa's resounding victory could locate him as Latin America's most effective critic of US imperialism. Correa, whose social and economic programmes have made him a popular leader, reaffirmed his goal to further reduce poverty, which the UN says dropped from 37% to 32% since his election to office in 2007.

Correa despite his rejection of neo-liberal economics could only curtail the role of big business and media groups but not nationalize the country's oil resources as the country relies on foreign investment to boost oil production and to start to tap its gold and copper reserves. Foreign direct investment since Correa took office in 2007 has on average been less than \$1 bn a year, much less than that of its neighbours Peru and Colombia. While the West is pleased at the prospect of Ecuador opening further to foreign direct investment, it is not pleased with Ecuador negotiating with China a \$12.5 bn funding for its Pacifico refinery, that could save up to \$5 bn a year in fuel imports.

EUROPE

May Day Protests against Austerity

May Day 2013 in Europe once again reaffirmed the anger of the working class of Europe about the austerity measures that have been imposed on their countries by the EU. Several May Day rallies across Europe have been massive protest rallies against austerity measures which implied wage cuts or wage freezes and redundancies as well as reduction in social welfare spending. Despite mounting public anger, governments are under increasing pressure to add economic burdens on the people, who are paying the penalty for the follies of finance capital.

Protests were strongest in Greece as people poured into Athens to show their anger at austerity measures that have sent the country's economy into a tailspin. In neighbouring Turkey, the people were reminded of what the state machinery is in essence when the riot police wielded tear-gas and water cannons at demonstrators trying to get to the popular-tourist destination of Taksim Square in Istanbul for May Day demonstrations. Istanbul suffered an effective citywide shut down owing to restriction on traffic and suspension of public transportation to the square.

Rising with Radiance from the Ashes of Society

T.V. Reshzankan

Something is afire there! Someone burning something!
The pall of black smoke touches the sky, and covers us up.
While the singeing odour covers the countryside
the fragrance of jasmine is stuffed through the nostrils.
Why should we consider them, come
let us attend to any other matter that we may do.

Even if we are what burns and what is burnt, why bother in vain—
our time is precious.
Let us know after finishing burning and after the burning is finished
for us to watch in amusement the ashes of the corpses.

We will only utter words of concern, and —if needed—
shed a few crocodile tears.

Ask not for any more from us,
for we cannot offer or do anything—
you know that we have been made to be this way.

In how many fires are we incinerated each day—
we keep no account of anything, and
we are not allowed to keep account.
We speak not of nor will we ever speak of
the scars of fire burns or of the burnt ash
or of those who placed the fire amid us.
We do not wish to know of their being among us.

Day in day out you will see us in joyful company
with no concern for the form of the fire or
the cruel deeds of its flames.

We have millennium old fables and newly made ones too.
We will live unto our last day singing their praise—
but never antagonize anyone or
anything by asking questions at every turn.

Compromise that submits us to everything is our watchword.

So many flares of fire in our land, varied in form, vividly beautiful.
Those who lit them
were they very wise or very mighty or very holy?

We created their wisdom.
We were food for their might
We paid for their holiness.
We became the cause of it all.

So many flares of fire in our land, amid us....

A gorgeous fire named caste....
It burnt a thousand, but many thousands burned in it.

They came among us who lived in joyful harmony—
ash on their body, a thread across and
made a smoke of bogus charm.
They made and spoke many a tale of our origins as
from the arm, the leg, the head and the chest.
They built pedestals for us and burned us beautifully on them.
We burned to ashes dreaming that this was paradise.

The great fire called class....
It burnt a thousand, but many thousands burned in it.
They told us
—who lived by ourselves and toiled by ourselves—
of kinds of work, and
owned work through wages and kept us at work all the time.
While we were roasted in work
they warmed themselves in the heat
And we burned to ashes beneath the machines.

The enormous fire of religion....
It burnt a thousand, but many thousands burned in it.
Soaked in the fear within us, fire burned as a flame.
The fire burned us and served us up
as pieces small and large to all and sundry.
They made big battles and books on them

and narrated big new tales
in which our hands and hearts burned daily to ashes.

Nationalism, the fire of falsehood
you will see has seeped into the land.
They keep lighting that fire—
as a totality of all aspects of existence and
afresh in varied forms.
They make us a mix of some kind and incinerate us.
Not knowing a thing, we burned in it our selves to ashes.

A sparking fire called race started a fire within all colours and
incinerated all leaderships in it, became the fire for rights,
falsified all thought, crippled all questions, and
in the end
endlessly burned everyone to ashes.

The fire of desire called power—
a wicked fire unbowed for years on end
this cruel fire defiantly it destroys all.
It can flare in all directions in the name of one view or another,
sit on the hand of anyone that desires, slip off, fall aground and
join all hands to set ablaze the one who started the fire.
It will burn us in full and digest us.

So many flares of fire in our land, amid us....

We are your slaves, so cremate us completely.
Coat and cover your dreams with our ashes.
Compose your epics over our ashes.
Stand on our ashes and howl aloud.
Yet bear in mind one thing:
do not stand alone in our lands without company.

Some of us would be lying unburnt in the fire that you lit
un-burnable by you and still alive amid the ashes
Un-bearing of the heat of the fire and un-subdued
They will rise bright from the ashes—
to burn you and bury underfoot.
Beware.

Martyr

Zuheir Abu Shayeb

They found him
luminous, green, in the field.
When they raise his hands
the grasses under them had turned to hearts.
It is said:
wheat stalks bloomed beneath his sleeves.
It is said:
the birds carried his blood
to his beloved cousins.
He shall return
Blossoming with volcanoes,
and fill again his mother's breasts.
When they found him green as light
they shrouded him with rose buds,
they spread out the sky to lay him on
and made the sun his pillow.

Zuheir Abu Shayeb, born in the village of Deir Ghusun in 1958, is a teacher, graphic designer and art critic, and is regarded highly among Arab poets

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