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*Poetry: Sivasegaram, Thavachelvan, Varavara Rao*

# The Statue of the Dictator

## *S. Sivasegaram*

He ruled his country for long,  
Ruling a country is no easy task!  
So, he ruled the country  
at the mouth of a cannon.  
His rule lasted  
as long as he lived.

Although no one loved him  
while he ruled,  
there were those who worshipped him.  
His worshippers  
continued to rule the country  
in his name and in his way  
at the mouth of a cannon.

Statues of him  
erected town after town  
were wrecked town after town.  
As that was bad for his reputation  
they restored the statues one by one. But  
the statues got wrecked one by one.

Besides,  
the restored statues  
looked too dissimilar.  
As that was bad for his reputation  
and for the regime bearing his name  
they decided to cast all statues in bronze  
using a single mould  
and set up a committee to design his statue.

The Statue Committee debated for long  
and took some decisions.

*(Continued on inside back cover)*

## *Editorial*

Case was made for a common candidate in early 2004, based on the assumption that the executive presidency was at the root of all evil that the Rajapaksa regime represented. It was argued that a common candidate contesting on the basis of the single-issue of ridding the country of the executive presidential system will be panacea to all what ails Sri Lanka. The failure of the opposition to agree on a common candidate, for whatever reason, was a good thing since electing as president a common candidate without clear common goals and a common minimum programme to achieve them is a politically meaningless exercise. The inability of the opposition parties to reach common ground even on the future of a post-executive presidency Sri Lanka shows that there is little in common among the parties in the proposed alliance.

The UNP cunningly snatched the opportunity to take full advantage of the concept of a common candidate. Thus Maithripala Sirisena is not quite the common opposition candidate that he has been made out to be but a UNP proxy, who is presented as common candidate to avert certain risks in fielding the leader of the UNP as the presidential candidate. The votes that Sirisena is likely to gather are effectively the same as what a UNP candidate would.

More worryingly, the message of the manifesto of Maithripala Sirisena is the same in substance as that of Mahinda Rajapaksa. In fact, the presidential election is not contested on political issues but on whether the agony of the nine years long misrule of the Rajapaksa family should be prolonged. Consequently, and in keeping with the way electoral battles are fought in the country, the election campaign seems to be about which of the two candidates is worse.

There has been considerable bitterness towards the Rajapaksa regime within the SLFP, especially among party seniors and those in the tradition of Bandaranaike policies, with all its aberrations. Rajapaksa, in the course

of taking control of the SLFP, marginalized a significant section of the SLFP while befriending dissidents from the UNP and JVP as well as notorious former leaders of the LTTE. He also sought to firm up his position as ruler of the country by bringing the bulk of the budgetary allocation under the control of his family. His affinity for the rabidly Sinhala-Buddhist Bodhu Bala Sena not only frightened the Muslim partners of the UPFA regime but also irked leaders of the chauvinist JHU who felt that they were being upstaged by the BBS. The divide and rule approach of encouraging splits in the Hill Country Tamil parties eventually led to disaffection due to inter-party and inter-personal rivalries.

Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism was used to blackmail the instinctively pro-UNP leadership of the reactionary Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which for opportunistic reasons acted as an appendage of the LTTE since its founding in October 2001 until the fall of the LTTE in May 2009. Very early in the campaign, the Rajapaksa camp hinted at exploiting the vulnerability of the TNA — still seen by many Sinhalese as a separatist outfit with foreign influence — to interpret overt support for Sirisena as a deal between him and the TNA to divide the country. The TNA, fearing that its support for Sirisena could backfire, held its horses until after the Muslim parties deserted Rajapaksa. On the other hand, the Sirisena camp had nothing on offer for the TNA to encourage the Tamil people to support him. The weaker Tamil National People's Front, however, called for a boycott by the Tamils, which is unlikely to be heeded by the Tamil people who clearly expressed their instinctive hostility towards the Rajapaksa regime in the elections to the Northern Provincial Council in 2013 September. The post-Aluthgama violence mindset of the Muslims and general resentment about the government among Hill Country Tamils could favour Sirisena. But there is little that the minority nationalities can expect in return from a candidate relying on support from the JHU. In fact, the extent to which the conduct of political parties representing minority nationalities has been conditioned by chauvinist politics is a serious warning about the direction that national politics is heading.

The people should be prepared to face the prospect of the executive presidency being replaced by worse parliamentary tyranny. The democratic track record of the UNP was never impeccable and, more ominously, a government that relies on the support of the JHU and a former military chief whose top priority is not pluralist democracy but political vengeance cannot deliver on a democratic agenda. Deserters from the ranks of the government are not paragons of democratic virtue. Thus there are different scenarios for which the people need to be prepared.

- Disruption of the election or suppression of the election results followed by military rule
- Sirisena winning by a slim majority followed by the whipping up of communal tension leading to violence to punish the minorities
- Sirisena winning comfortably and continuing with the same domestic policies as Rajapaksa and a more pro-Western stance internationally
- Rajapaksa winning and further tightening his control over the state.

None of the above bodes well for democracy. It is therefore vital for the genuinely left, democratic and progressive forces to steer clear of either candidate and avoid appearing to collude with either by 'conditionally' supporting one or the other candidate. It was vital for these forces to assert their independence and use the occasion of the Presidential Election to warn people of the impending threats to democracy under either option before the country. An opportunity existed for the genuine left and progressive forces to field a common left-democratic candidate with a manifesto based on a common minimum programme. Some bad old political habits killed that project.

There is need to start afresh and remember that irrespectively of there being a regime change or otherwise, there are important immediate tasks ahead which include:

- The resolution of the national question based on the equality of nationalities
- Rehabilitation of war victims and war affected regions

- Ending politically motivated land grab and ethnic cleansing
- Restoration of all democratic institutions that have been subverted under the Executive Presidency
- Prevention of military involvement in civilian affairs
- Ensuring the rule of law and a role for the public in arresting crime
- Bringing the control of corruption into the public domain
- Restoration of the national economy and rejection of the open economic policy
- Restoration of social welfare, free education and health services
- Reduction of reliance of the economy on export of labour in order to free the country of its adverse economic and social impact
- Restoration of trade union rights and ensuring a fair minimum wage in all sectors and safe and healthy working conditions
- Acting to protect the environment from consumerism and callous industrial practices
- Arresting cultural degradation and decline of social values
- Defending the status of women as equals at home and in work places

The left, progressive and democratic forces should take the initiative to defend the independence of the country from foreign political, military and economic domination. The particular problem of foreign meddling on the pretext of addressing human rights concerns and war crimes can be averted only through uniting the people based on equality of all nationalities and all other identities.

The case that is made here is not to take up all issues collectively and simultaneously, but raise them in turn, if necessary, in the context of issues as they arise so that the political consciousness of the people is raised and the people are weaned away from the fallacy of bourgeois democracy towards a genuine democracy of the people.

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# A Common Left-Democratic Presidential Candidate

*[Proposal for a draft manifesto submitted by the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party for consideration by left parties at the consultation sessions for fielding a common Left-Democratic candidate at the forthcoming Presidential Election]*

## **Scope**

In the view of the NDMLP, although the national question is currently the main contradiction in Sri Lanka, the class contradiction remains the fundamental contradiction in all class society. The purpose of fielding a common left-democratic candidate at the forthcoming election is not to determine the outcome of what would effectively be a contest between the incumbent Mahindra Rajapaksa and his main opponent fielded by the UNP or a UNP alliance.

The genuine left should be well aware that, whatever the outcome of the election, there will be very little difference between the two main candidates on lifting the economy of the country, improving the living conditions of the people, restoring democratic, human and fundamental rights, and finding a just and lasting solution for the national question.

We know that despite all pledges by the leading candidates, the elected President will not reverse the downward slide along the path of growing corruption and enrichment of a corrupt political elite, growing crime with links to the state apparatus, denial of democratic freedoms, freedom of expression and the freedom of the media. Nothing will be done to restore

the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law. The abuse of law and law implementation will persist along with the large scale material and moral corruption of society. The country will continue to follow the disastrous economic route on which it was set by the open economic policy declared in 1978 and comply with the imperialist neo-colonial agenda of globalization and implement neo-liberal economic programme as dictated by the agencies of imperialism.

Thus the purpose of contesting the elections is clearly not to elect a left-democratic candidate or even to determine the outcome of the election. It cannot be for achieving a socialist goal or any significant part of a socialist programme. It cannot be for the overthrow of the ruling reactionary elite and their imperialist masters. It cannot be to resolve the national question in one stroke. It should not, as in the past, be for boosting the image and strength of any given political party.

The perceived democratic left alliance, despite differences in the perspectives of individuals and parties, shares goals of social justice at every level of society, genuine democracy (meaning people's democracy as opposed to bourgeois democracy), and people's government. Thus there is a strong case for a broad left or left-democratic front to launch revolutionary mass struggle based on a short or intermediate term minimum programme. But the immediate task concerns the forthcoming Presidential election and thus has a limited scope.

The task should be viewed in the context of the country facing economic ruin in the face of growing imperialist domination, rising threats to its independence and sovereignty caused by rivalry among US imperialism and regional powers for influence in Sri Lanka, the chauvinist fascist challenge to an already undermined democracy, and among others the dangers of renewed meddling in the affairs of the country by foreign powers on the pretext of addressing aspects of the national question such as war crimes and human rights violations and restoration and rehabilitation in the war affected regions.



The manifesto of the common left democratic candidate is best guided by recognizing the people as the driving force of history and their immense strength when correctly informed and politically mobilized. It could, if correctly designed and implemented, be the basis of a longer term alliance based on a minimum programme. Thus it should not be an opportunist document of a loose alliance of parochial groups to serve their respective private purposes. At the same time there should be caution against parochial approaches, and there is need to take into account the current reality in which the nationalities remain divided under the prevailing influence of forces of chauvinism and narrow nationalism, but without compromise on principles.

The manifesto should, thus, without compromise on essential principles, address the immediate challenges to the country and the people and aim to awaken the people to the reality and the need to address it in ways that will prevent further downward slide of the economy, democratic institutions, unity of the people and political and economic sovereignty towards ruin. It should thus be a minimum programme to firstly reach out to the people by addressing their main concerns, explaining to them the dangers faced by the country and the people and create a climate in which the masses could be mobilized in the near future to defend themselves and the country against the impending threats.

A word of caution is necessary about right wing elements and the media distorting the purpose of fielding a common left democratic candidate. These forces would have been happy to have a divided field of left candidates each gathering a handful of votes. A common programme will worry them, more because of its long term political implications than its impact on the outcome of the elections. Arguments to the effect that a vote for the left common candidate is a waste and that it will only help Mahinda Rajapaksa retain power are to be expected. The reality is that no supporter of the genuine left will defend the UNP. The candidature, will on the other hand give courage for supporters of the old left to break with

the UPFA in which their leaders have lost their left identity. It will also give an opportunity for people to register their protest meaningfully against the leading candidates who have nothing to offer by way of answers to the ills faced by the country. There is also the fallacy of projecting the UNP candidate as the “democratic” alternative to the present dictatorial regime. This either a calculated act of deception or selective amnesia about the seventeen year misrule by the UNP from 1977 to 1994.

It is based on these considerations that the NDMLP puts forward the following thoughts for adoption in the manifesto.

### **Pressing issues**

- The failure of the national economy, neoliberal economics and globalization
- Erosion of social welfare and undermining of free education and health services
- Growing reliance of economy on export of labour, its social and economic consequences including worsening increase in prices and declining living conditions
- Deterioration of the environment (through consumerism and callous industrial practices)
- Erosion and subversion of democratic institutions
- Executive presidency and its abuse
- Rising corruption, amassing of wealth and family rule
- Subversion of the rule of law, rising crime and the impotence of law
- Cultural degradation and decline of social values under globalization and the worsening status of women, especially of women working abroad and in the FTZ
- The national question in the face of chauvinist and narrow nationalist dominance
- Rehabilitation of war victims and war affected regions
- Land grab and ethnic cleansing
- The role of the military in civilian affairs

## **Urgent threats**

- Imperialist and Indian hegemonic bid for military and political domination
- War crimes as a means for imperialist meddling
- The fascist threat to democracy and foreign and military connections
- Foreign economic domination and growing development debt burden especially through China, Japan and India
- Subversion of secularism of the state

## **Bogus solutions and alternatives with a long term view**

### *Economy*

- Development economy as a scheme for making the economy burdened with debt for generations; over-reliance on export of labour and value added re-exports.
- There is need for a strategic move towards a self-reliant, self-sufficient, planned economy integrating agriculture, industry, manufacturing and trade to meet the basic needs of the people.

### *Democratic institutions*

- The abolition of the executive presidency without reinforcing democratic institutions at every level will only lead to further undermining of democracy. Empowerment of the people could be the basis for democratic governance as well as addressing the national question

### *Repressive laws*

- National security should not be a pretext for repressive legislation, and every piece of repressive legislation including anti-terrorism laws should be repealed.
- All unlawful detainees and political prisoners should be released unconditionally.

### *Facing the fascist threat*

- The state and the chauvinist political parties that had been in power have been reluctant to take on the chauvinist fascist threat. In fact they are at times supportive.
- A firm stand is necessary and requires the education and mobilization of the people.

*The national question*

- The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment or any amended version is not an end in itself. It can only be a starting point for devolution of power and meaningful power sharing at the level of provincial councils. The purpose should be to address the aspirations and genuine fears and grievances of the majority and minority nationalities (Tamils, Muslims & Hill Country Tamils) and other national minorities (Burghers, Malays, Attho and others).
- Respect for identity is important and forced changes in ethnic composition of any region by the state should be stopped. All malicious acquisition of land and property by the armed forces should be nullified. Voluntary and lawful settlement of individuals in any part of the country should not be hindered.
- Language rights of the people should be respected and implemented as laid down in law. The use of Sinhala and Tamil in public affairs should be encouraged.
- The question of war crimes and other violations should be investigated by a commission that enjoys the trust of all nationalities. The inquiry should cover all parties to the conflict. Major offenders at policy level should also be brought to book. Besides punishing serious offenders there should be fair compensation for all victims of such violations.
- The parties to the conflict are fully answerable for disappearances, deaths and disablement, and the government should take concrete steps to find those who have disappeared.
- The main purpose of inquiry should not be revenge but ensuring that such offences do not occur in the future.

### *Imperialist dominance and control*

- The main political parties do not have an anti-imperialist outlook. Understanding of imperialism and its modes of operation at local and national levels is important.
- Foreign policy should be free of foreign pressure and meddling and take the side of oppressed nations and people targeted by imperialism
- Foreign investment should be encouraged only where it is part of a national economic programme of benefit to the people. Development projects to serve infrastructural needs of foreign investors and vested interests should be terminated.

### *Environmental issues*

- Strict control of industrial pollution in contrast to the indifference of the ruling elite.
- Need for mass education and reversal of consumerist values and habits.

### *Secular values*

- The right of any individual to any religious faith of his/her choice should be defended.
- Secular values should be upheld in all activities of the state and in all public matters except where activities concern the interests of specific religious groups.

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*[Notes to the draft document:*

*This is not a comprehensive document but we hope that it covers most of the key aspects that need to be addressed in the Manifesto.*

*Details could be added to cover important day-to-day issues that concern the toiling masses, once the essential outline is agreed.]*

# Reconciliation after War: Thinking Beyond Solitudes

*Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda*

*[Text of commemoration address delivered at the meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2014 to mark 25<sup>th</sup> Death Anniversary of Comrade KA Subramaniam, founder General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, then Communist Party of Sri Lanka (Left)]*

Writing in the context of Canada's political and constitutional crisis, generated by the rise of secessionist nationalism in the French-speaking Quebec, Charles Taylor commented:

The "two solitudes" of Hugh MacLennan are still a fundamental reality in Canada; the ways that the two groups envisage their predicament, their problems, and their common country are so different that it is hard to find a common language. They are like two photographs of the same object taken from such different points of view that they cannot be superimposed (Taylor, 1993:24).

Charles Taylor is perhaps the leading academic political thinker and philosopher in Canada today. His essay, 'A Canadian Future', from which the above quote is taken, first appeared in 1970 in a volume entitled *The Pattern of Politics*. Taylor's reference to Hugh MacLennan is the latter's novel *The Two Solitudes*, published in 1945. The novel chronicles the impossibility of communication and solidarity between an English-speaking Canadian and a French-speaking Canadian during the early

decades of the last century. The novel is about the solitudes which deep attachment to ethnic identity nourishes.

Sri Lanka after the ending of its long drawn out civil war in May 2009 is no different from the Canada which Charles Taylor described in 1970. Even five years after the war ended, the two solitudes of the Sinhalese and Tamil appear to be a fundamental reality in the post-war Sri Lanka as well. The ways in which the leaders of the UPFA and the Tamil National Alliance, the main Tamil nationalist party, “envisage their predicament, their problems ... are so different that it is hard to find a common language” for them to have a meaningful and sensible political communication. Although they have been talking to each other, they have not been having a dialogue. They have been talking through public pronouncements that are designed to re-assert and re-iterate political positions that have once again become non-negotiable. Exactly like what happened in the past during peace negotiations, the two sides have been re-discovering, and re-inventing mutual differences, suspicions, apprehensions and even hostilities. Retreat to solitudes is the preferred path of politics. Reconciling is not.

Why has reconciliation become so difficult in post-war Sri Lanka? This presentation is an attempt to reflect on this question.

### **Phenomenology of Ethnic Solitudes**

Let us begin by trying to understand why post-war reconciliation is so difficult. Perhaps, one explanation is that in the Sri Lankan context, reconciliation presupposes new imaginations for shared politics among competing ethnic projects. Ethnic projects are by their very nature, mutually exclusivist, built on the ‘we’ and ‘the other’ dichotomy.

Ethnicity and democracy are the two most important political imaginations which modernity has brought to our society. Ethnicity provides each cultural community – Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim and a few others – a framework of thinking about itself as a political community, and as a political collectivity. Democracy has enabled each citizen to relate himself/herself to the state as a rights-bearing individual, and with

entitlement to be treated by the state with dignity and equality. These are no mean achievements of modernity. The two are sources of the political self of all Sri Lankan citizens. Through ethnicity, our citizens understand themselves first as belonging to cultural-political communities □ Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher etc. The larger nation-state identity – the Sri Lankanness – comes second and that persists despite the promise of democracy to facilitate a trans-ethnic political identity of citizens with equality. Ethnic imagination of group identity has over-powered the democratic imagination of nation-state identity for a range of good reasons. The individual and negative rights discourse of democracy has not provided a language of expression to articulate either group predicaments or visions of emancipation for collectivities. That has been the context in which Sinhalese, Tamil and later Muslim ethno-nationalist ideologies and mobilizations developed as the most powerful political dynamics in modern Sri Lanka. This becomes all the more alarming when we realize that it is ethno-nationalist ideologies, not democratic ideals, that propelled forward the three-decades of protracted civil war. Ethnicity's triumph has been the failure of our democracy. The challenge in the post-civil war Sri Lanka is to reverse this process, to bring democracy back in as a political force with a capacity to blunt the sectional, parochial and exclusivist promise of ethnicity and ethno-nationalisms.

However, dealing with ethnicity requires caution and care, because, like religion, ethnicity responds to phenomenology of suffering, fears and redemption. Secularism cannot deal with religion, because it denies the phenomenological justification for the very existence of religion. In a world of individual despair and disappointment, religion provides an imagination of solace and fulfilment, which a secularist might find it no more than mere illusion. Yet, religion defies the rationalism of the secularist, because it provides to the human soul what secularism even fails to recognize as existing – a specific way to understand and deal with this-worldly deprivations. The relationship between ethnicity and democracy is somewhat similar. A good liberal democrat may find it difficult to justify why parochial ethnic imagination has become so



attractive, when there is a better promise of universalist political emancipation in the form of individual freedom, rule of law and equality. In political theory, these two perspectives have also been framed in the debates of communitarianism vs. individualism, and cultural relativism vs. universalism. Without falling into the trap of seeing the political world through antagonistic binaries, one can still see why some form of dialogue between ethnicity and democracy is both necessary and possible.

Before exploring the possibility of such a dialogue, it is necessary to be aware of the limitations of the kind of exchange of ideas that ethnicity, or ethno-nationalisms, often promotes. If we take Sri Lanka's own experience of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms, we can see that these two dominant forms of group political imagination have not really facilitated a constructive political dialogue as such between themselves and across the communities they represent. This problem of impossibility of dialogue has been dramatically demonstrated during peace negotiations between representatives of the Sri Lankan government – both UNP and SLFP-led governments and the Tamil community, the Federal Party, the LTTE and now the TNA. Negotiations from the mid -1950's to 2012 meant to find a political common ground for the Sinhalese and Tamil communities, for the majority and minority communities, to live in the nation-state of Sri Lanka as equals, and all such negotiations led to the discovery of not a common ground, but differences, irreconcilables and hostilities.

By looking at the political history of Sri Lanka since independence, one can find many reasons to explain this failure. Scholarly literature on the escalation of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict is replete with useful explanations. One theme that stands out in the literature is the inherent incapacity of the two dominant ethno-nationalisms in Sri Lanka to understand each other, even though they speak the same language. This is one of the key paradoxes of modern ethno-nationalism. As political phenomena, ethno-nationalisms within nation states have many structural and existential similarities. They give expression to fears, anxieties, hopes and aspirations of each community. They invoke the past to explain the present and map out the futures in more or less similar ways. The way in which they invent

heroes and villains, invent and invoke historical memories, and appeal to certainties of historical change are amazingly similar. However, no two ethno-nationalisms within a nation-state can have a productive dialogue through the language of nationalism. The reason lies in the peculiarity of nationalism itself. For two nationalisms to enter into a constructive dialogue, they need to find a language outside nationalism. This is where democracy, the other legacy of modernity, comes to our assistance, and to the assistance of ethno-nationalisms to find a framework of solidarity and co-existence.

### **Nation-Building and Political Integration**

After the war ended, the centrality of nation-building and political integration has returned to the country's political agenda in a new context, but with the same old challenges, perhaps with greater intensity. Two questions are at the heart of the debate, although they are not explicitly articulated by our political elites or in the media. They are: (a) what kind of a nation do we want to build in Sri Lanka after three decades of civil war, and (b) what kind of a state we want to build in Sri Lanka?

Quite understandably, there are many perspectives from which answers to these questions are framed. In the political debate, there are two major perspectives in conflict, one shared by the UPFA government and the other articulated by the TNA. They are different in their key assumptions, and analysis and conclusions.

The government appears to think that economic development in the North and East is the key to post-war national integration and nation-building in Sri Lanka. This position is based on the assumption that the ethnic conflict was more a terrorist problem and a security challenge to the sovereignty of the state than a political problem arising out of political grievances and therefore calling for political-structural reform. Therefore, as the UPFA government's thinking appears to suggest, what is necessary is to strengthen the national security and defence capabilities to crush any future insurgency threats while integrating the north and east with the rest of the country through rapid infra-structure and economic development.

This combining of national security, strong state and economic integration makes the government's vision for post-war political and economic change paralleled with the developmental state experiment in some South-East Asian countries a few years ago, particularly Malaysia.

The TNA, on the other hand, gives primacy to the political root causes of the ethnic conflict. In its approach, the military defeat of the LTTE has not obliterated the Tamil community's political aspirations for power-sharing in an advanced form of devolution. In this analysis, ethnic conflict is a political problem that calls for a political solution. And a political solution presupposes reforming the state.

Now, these two approaches have certain differences and similarities. Differences emanate from ethno-political standpoints on which each approach based. The government's approach has a clearly Sinhalese nationalist and ethnic majoritarian framing of Sri Lanka's conflict and solutions it demands. It views the outcome of the war as restoration of state sovereignty, which was earlier threatened by a minority secessionist rebellion. It sees devolution as a potential threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state. Devolving power to a political entity that has had links with the LTTE, the TNA in the present case, is viewed by the government leaders as unacceptable, unwise and even dangerous. Why take steps that will negate the political gains of the military victory? This rhetorical question in a way summarizes the dilemma of what one may call the 'victor's peace.' This dilemma is further heightened by the fact that the war victory has enabled the UPFA government to claim the veto power over the terms and conditions of any political settlement with the Tamils. Thus, the post-war triumphalism that the government has been invoking is not only a state of mind; it is also an expression of a specific political logic, a new political equilibrium, germinated by the way in which the civil war ended in Sri Lanka.

Then, there is the peace of the 'vanquished,' which the TNA continues to articulate with little positive response from the government. The 'peace of the vanquished' demands devolution, equality and dignity to Tamils. In this perspective, political rights and the right to share state power takes

primacy over the material benefits of rapid economic development. It views devolution as the essential pre-condition for post-war state-building and national integration. However, the TNA does not have a bargaining strength to realize any of its political demands. Its strength emanates from its weakness, being the political representative of a vanquished minority. Yet, this is only a moral strength that does not have a material value in the way in which politics is taking shape in post-civil war Sri Lanka.

The similarity shared by these two contending approaches is more ironic and than real. It emanates from the ethnic foundations of the episteme of each. Both are ethno-nationalist projects, one majoritarian and the other minoritarian. The political language through which each expresses itself is not positively responded to by the other, for the simple reason that the two do not share the meanings of key words of each language. For example, devolution for the TNA is a minimum pre-condition for political unification whereas for the UPFA government, it is the stepping-stone to disintegration of the state. Self-determination for the TNA is the concept that frames the Tamil claims to political rights. For the UPFA government, self-determination is a demand for secession. For the TNA, political rights should take precedence over economic and infrastructure development. For the government, economic development is the best gift that the state can give to the Tamil people.

### **Irreconcilable Reconciliation?**

Inability of dialogue – this is one phrase which can describe the condition of stalemate into which talks between the UPFA government and the TNA have fallen. The political, ideological and cultural contexts that led to the deadlock in government-TNA talks are worth examining in order to understand why the inability of dialogue seems to persist between the two sides, to the great surprise of Sri Lanka watchers from outside. On this matter too, there can be many explanations. However, one troubling dimension of the way in which political debate in Sri Lanka has unfolded since May 2009 is the polarization of mindsets, or rather worldviews, in terms of victor and the vanquished.

The continuing debate between the Western governments and the UPFA government on reconciliation demonstrates in a dramatic fashion how this incommensurability of worldviews has constituted a major obstacle to Sri Lanka's post-war political recovery. The Western governments and the UN insist that Sri Lanka's post-war reconciliation should be based on two elements, (a) a political solution to the ethnic conflict, and (b) investigations into allegations of possible war crimes and related excesses during the last stages of the war. From the point of view of the advocates of this particular approach to reconciliation, both are necessary for post-war 'healing.' The UPFA government has been initially uncomfortable with this approach, and became hostile to it when the issue became a part of Western efforts to shape Sri Lanka's post-war political trajectories.

The Western concept of post-conflict reconciliation has both liberal and Christian-humanist moral roots, as particularly seen in the South African experience of its Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In both South Africa and Guatemala, the process of reconciliation was made possible by the fact that conflict ended in both instances through a mediated and negotiated peace agreement. These were instances where there were no victors or losers in a moral sense of the term. The end of the conflict and violence through a peace agreement was seen there as a moral triumph for the entire nation. Sri Lanka's situation, as seen by the UPFA government, is totally different. Reconciliation was thus seen there as celebration of the return of humanistic values after years of hatred, violence and war. Here, post-war reconciliation suggests a different moral economy as well. It is about forgetting the past and moving forward, not returning to the past, either for collective therapy or retribution.

The issue of reconciliation in Sri Lanka has then moved away from its normative and value framework. It is caught up in the unending antagonisms between the government and the TNA on the one hand and the government and the global powers on the other. As a moral practice, reconciliation is a voluntary exercise. If it is practiced reluctantly, or in response to the pressure from powerful outsiders, it cannot be

reconciliation and it requires some other word to convey what it is. This is Sri Lanka's dilemma of post-war ethnic reconciliation.

### **What to do with Ethnicity?**

It appears that ethnicity and ethno-nationalist politics has come to stay in Sri Lanka for quite some time. As the discussion so far in this essay suggests, it has not done much good to Sri Lanka's people, although ethnic politics has been useful to highlight group grievances and aspirations. Ethnicity-based identity politics has provided our citizens modes of political imagination, a language of political expression as well as lenses through which to look at other citizens and their groups, and evaluate who they are and what they do. Ethno-nationalist politics has also made all Sri Lankan citizens acutely political, raising their political consciousness to unprecedented levels. Citizens of all communities – Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Plantation Tamil, Burgher, and small such small ethnic communities as Malayali, Thelingu, Colombo Chetty and the Veddha Adivasis – are acutely aware of who they are politically and what their place is in the larger schemes of things in society. They have a good sense of who their friends and enemies are, and the sources of threat as well as solidarity. As many opinion surveys have demonstrated empirically, citizens of all these communities also have firm political opinions about their grievances, rights, and even what kind of a state structure they want to live in. All of these are not altogether good; nor are they altogether bad. The real task now is to harness these political energies of the ethnically conscious communities to achieve the shared and collective goal of democratic, pluralist and peaceful Sri Lanka.

What is it that can hold these communities together as members of the political association called Sri Lanka? The present government of Sri Lanka appears to think that economic prosperity, or expectations of prosperity, is the common thread that binds disparate ethnic communities together. Its election slogan of "An Auspicious Future" (*suba anagathayak*) encapsulated this thinking. Some ethnic communities are likely to be attracted to the prospects of a prosperous future, precisely because the

three decades of war and violence deprived them of benefits of economic well-being. However, the Tamil people appear to think differently. For them, men, and women, do not live by bread alone; they need collective dignity as well. Their conceptualization of an 'auspicious future' comes from the perspective of the vanquished, the defeated and the victim. In that conceptualization, dignity, equality and justice constitute powerful emotional expectations. Can the Sinhalese political leadership respond to the Tamils with a gesture of healing? This question is central to assessing Sri Lanka's prospects for post-war political unification, nation-building, state-building, peace and democracy, because Sri Lankan Tamils live not by roads, highways, bridges and harbours alone.

If we try to understand the logic of the government's position from its point of view, it is perfectly possible that the government wants to de-emphasize the ethnic identity dimension of what it may term as the 'Tamil issue.' That is not a bad thing, if it is paralleled with a similar de-emphasis of the Sinhalese nationalist agenda as well, which to a great extent informs the government's overall policy. What the government should ideally do is to construct an overarching political identity for all ethnic communities that recognizes and accommodates all ethnic identities, but privileges none. The state thus constructed can be a kind of post-national constellation of many political communities who are moral equals with an equal stake at the state.

Building a new political association within and beyond the nation-state can thus be seen as a post-national project in a specific sense. 'Post-national' is a formulation which Jurgen Habermas, a German political thinker, used in support of his notion of 'constitutional patriotism'. Habermas has been articulating an argument for a 'post-national' Europe, emphasizing that on the context of globalization and the influx of migrant populations, shared identity among citizens and residents can no longer be the old 'national identity' in the uni-cultural sense. Multiculturalism calls for a sense of belonging to the state which is other than cultural. Habermas's proposal for constitutional patriotism is based on the idea that political attachment ought to centre on the norms and values of a liberal

democratic constitution, rather than a national culture. Those are secular values too. They transcend cultural specificities. They offer to all a shared framework of civic allegiance to the state; a deeply political sense of belonging.

Has Sri Lanka reached a post-national phase in which cultural belonging can be replaced by political belonging alone? Obviously not. Sri Lanka's story is one of reinforcement and re-stabilization of the nation-state through internal warfare. However, it is also story that calls for broadening the notion of 'national belonging' that can be equally shared by the victor and the vanquished alike. This is where some form of post-national citizenship can offer a deep sense of political belonging to all – to the Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Upcountry Tamils and other small minorities who constitute a 'political' nation, rather than a 'cultural' nation. That sense of political belonging and political togetherness can best be understood as a set of political norms and values. Norms are ideals to be achieved by the polity for the common good of all. They provide the principles and commitments of the state, its institutions and personnel as well as the citizens and their elected representatives. Values are derived from norms and they constitute the yardsticks to evaluate actions of the state, its institutions and personnel as well as the citizens and their elected representatives. Norms and values are intertwined and they together enable political communities to forge unifying ideologies and define and redefine the unity project which Sri Lanka is now desperately in need of.

What are these norms and values? They are actually there in the Sri Lankan society, in the people's political consciousness, in the aspirations that people often invoke in moments of despair. They are peace, democracy, equality, justice and fairness. All of these are there in our political culture, notwithstanding the fact that they have been under attack, in retreat and are sometimes facing the risk of extinction. Nevertheless, they together constitute a powerful epistemic framework that animates people to thinking and action. People very often invoke them as a critique of the state, its institutions and practices. People employ them to critique, accept or reject the behaviour of their rulers and



representatives. They are deeply embedded in the collective political consciousness of all ethnic communities, whether Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim or any other. Bringing them back to the centre of the nation and state building projects in the present phase of political transition under post-civil war conditions as the guiding framework of norms and values is the task that requires a great deal of political energy. Because, this is a project that calls for a minimum value consensus among all communities, and something like a new political covenant among them.

Some civil society groups have recently called for a 'new social contract' for Sri Lanka. This metaphor of a new social contract suggests that Sri Lanka needs a new value framework that binds all citizens and communities, the state and its citizens, and the rulers and the ruled to a shared framework of political destiny as well. A new social contract requires a new process of political deliberation at every level of society. Deliberation requires a shared language of communication and dialogue. Ethno-nationalist ideologies do not have such a facility, because they do not promote solidarity across solitudes. A shared language of communication and dialogue for intercommunity solidarity has to emerge from outside the ethno-nationalist projects. Peace, democracy, intercommunity equality, non-adversarial justice, social justice and human welfare, and fairness to all together can constitute the ontology – a world-view – for shared political dialogue and imagination beyond solitudes. These are political values, and normative frameworks, that have deep roots in all our cultures and forms of social consciousness.

Let me conclude this presentation by saying the following: Sri Lanka has passed the hour of inter-community reconciliation. Excessive politicization of the project of reconciliation has only fostered new suspicions, new sense of bitterness and betrayal, and new politics of hatred. What the people can, and ought to, look for now is 'inter-community solidarity.'

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# Confronting Imperialism: Plea for a United Front Strategy

*Deshabakthan*

## **The Marxist Leninist United Front Strategy**

The United Front Strategy advocated by Marxist Leninists is about bringing people together on issues rather than ideology. The strategy although limited in purpose takes a long term view of issues. Thus it cannot be the desertion or dilution of ideology or the betrayal of the working class and all what Marxism stands for. Marxist Leninists enter into united fronts with well defined goals that address specific issues characteristic of specific situations.

Marxist Leninist parties have entered into alliances from positions of relative strength and from positions of relative weakness, not an act of desperation but as a bold move whose motivation transcends the purpose of strengthening the party. Genuine Marxist Leninists know that with goals clear, principles uncompromised and cooperation based on agreed principles, they will end up stronger and as the leading force in the course of struggle for a common cause.

A united front is contextual, conditional and changing, and there can be no general prescription about the goals or choice of allies. There are, nevertheless, fundamental principles and guidelines, which have emerged from positive as well as negative historical experiences, both direct and indirect, from the time the concept of United Front was initiated by Lenin a century ago to bring together the working class that was divided

between revolutionary and social democratic parties in order to achieve specific goals. The idea of uniting the many to isolate the few has since been developed in various forms including the position that communists should support anti-imperialist struggles even where the struggle is led by members of a reactionary class, provided that the struggle is objectively revolutionary in the sense that it delivers a blow to imperialism.

Lenin, addressing the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1919, prophetically declared that “The socialist revolution will not be solely, or chiefly, a struggle of the revolutionary proletarians in each country against their bourgeoisie— no, it will be a struggle of all imperialist-oppressed colonies and countries, of all dependent countries, against international imperialism”. [Collected Works, 4<sup>th</sup> English Edition, Moscow 1965, 30, pp. 151-162]

Lenin’s observation is especially pertinent after neo-colonialism shifted the burden of capitalist exploitation to the Third World with the once anti-imperialist national bourgeoisie as junior partner and proxy in exploiting the toiling masses and in suppressing any attempt to resist or revolt in their respective countries. The burden of the anti- imperialist struggle in mainly on the shoulders of the toiling masses of the Third World. That is not to dismiss the revolutionary potential of the working classes in advanced capitalist countries, but to argue the role of revolutionary struggles in the neo-colonies in deepening the crisis of capital.

Accordingly, the revolutionary strategy of the United Front, initially formulated to unite parties leading the working class, has been adapted to situations where broader alliances were formed as necessary to resist the common enemy of all toiling masses, even in contexts where the industrial working class was numerically weak. The strategy proved effective in situations ranging from the anti-fascist struggle in Europe to liberation struggles in China, Vietnam and other Third World countries.

The United Front Strategy has also helped the revolutionary left to break the isolation imposed on it by the reactionaries who to varying degrees had succeeded in dividing the oppressed masses based on narrow

distinctions, including ethnicity and other identity-based issues. Most importantly, the revolutionary left forged alliances to successfully isolate imperialism, the main oppressor, and its reactionary allies.

In any event, the case for anti-imperialist united fronts is strong in all contexts because the revolutionary forces do not currently constitute a majority in any developed capitalist country. Also, the emergence of the service industry as a dominant part of the capitalist economy has further weakened class consciousness. The need for united fronts has been recognized in advanced capitalist countries as evident from the mass support for initiatives such as the various “Social Forum” and “Occupy” movements. There is also much to learn from the failure of mass uprisings such as the ‘Arab Spring’. It will help to ask ourselves why all such mass mobilisation failed to produce the desired results.

The point is that the initiatives which triggered the imagination of the masses in favour of a political change were not organized as a political force with clear goals and direction, in other words, without correct leadership. I am convinced that it is the revolutionary leftists, the Marxist Leninists in particular, who have a sound theoretical understanding of imperialism today and the need for anti-imperialist mass struggle at various levels. It is thus necessary for Marxist Leninist parties and organization to play a leading, not necessarily dominant, role in planning the goals and strategies for such struggles. Without it, mass enthusiasm for struggle could be squandered by NGOs and bogus populist bodies, willingly acting in the interest of imperialism, to deflect the campaign from what should be its main thrust.

The United Front Strategy is not hazard-free and Marxist Leninists should be alert to potential dangers. The importance of maintaining the initiative and preserving the independence of the Communist Party within the United Front cannot, therefore, be over emphasised.

Mao Zedong, summing up the experience of the Second Revolutionary Civil War, urged the Communist Party to be firmly in the lead: “Only the proletariat and the Communist Party can lead the peasantry, the urban

petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie; can overcome the narrow-mindedness of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, the destructiveness of the unemployed masses and also (provided the Communist Party does not err in its policy) the vacillation and lack of thoroughness of the bourgeoisie— and can lead the revolution and the war on to the road to victory.” [Problems of Strategy Issues in China’s Revolutionary War, December 1936, Selected Works, Volume One]

With reference to the United Front against Japanese invasion, Mao Zedong defended the independence of all member parties: “To sustain a long war by long-term co-operation or, in other words, to subordinate the class struggle to the present national struggle against Japan— such is the fundamental principle of the united front. Subject to this principle, the independent character of the parties and classes and their independence and initiative within the united front should be preserved, and their essential rights should not be sacrificed to co-operation and unity, but on the contrary must be firmly upheld within certain limits. Only thus can co-operation be promoted, indeed only thus can there be any co-operation at all. Otherwise co-operation will turn into amalgamation and the united front will inevitably be sacrificed.” [The Question of Independence and Initiative within the United Front, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1938]

Serious errors occur when — as in the case of the parliamentary left in Sri Lanka — the leadership loses faith in the revolution, subordinates itself to the dominant partner of the alliance, and eventually uses the united front to shield its own weakness. The Sri Lankan parliamentary left is now an appendage of the once national bourgeois SLFP, whose leadership is drained of anti-imperialist content.

What is thus important is not whether the party is participating in a united front from a position of relative strength or weakness, but whether it is principled in its approach and firm in principles while being flexible in its dealings with partners based on mutual respect and adherence to the aims of the United Front.

## **The Imperialist Strategy**

We know that US imperialism has developed a variety of mechanisms to prolong imperialist control of the global economy. Imperialism plays different tricks at different levels to sustain its political and military domination and exploitation of countries and people of the Third World. Emphasis of national interest in imperialist countries is now more implicit than in the colonial era. But nationalism with a tinge of racism is explicitly summoned in the name of defending “the American way of life” etc. to address threats to the established social order.

Globally, imperialism implements its neo-colonial agenda by assigning to itself the role of defining and defending the international order. It has at its command mighty military machines in the form of national armed forces and the NATO, a powerful network of intelligence and subversion agencies, devices for economic pressure and control, and *de facto* control over the UN. As military intervention is a key aspect of imperialist control, pretexts are either imagined or manufactured as necessary to justify and sustain intervention by whipping up xenophobia and racism within the imperialist country through allusion to threats to national security and economic interests.

Besides attacking ‘hostile countries’ and ‘terrorists’ and subverting ‘less friendly’ countries in the name of defending democracy and human rights, imperialism also stifles internal opposition and resistance to aggression and meddling in foreign countries using a variety of tactics ranging from appealing to patriotic sentiments to brutal repression where necessary. The subservient media establishment collaborates with the imperialist state, at least for the duration of any act of aggression.

At regional level the US mostly uses proxies to wage war or to destabilise unfriendly countries. Israel has been particularly notorious in this respect. Colombia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, and Australia are among important client states that regularly serve US imperialist interests in their regions and even beyond. The US also exploits disputes among countries, based on historical issues including border disputes, to provoke conflict

and thereby weaken and destabilise 'less friendly' countries. The most recent example is regime change in Ukraine designed to punish Russia for its 'hostile' role in frustrating US-led attempts to subvert Syria. It will also be well to remember that most of the Islamic fundamentalist organizations (including ones which have spun out of control to confront US interests) are creations of the US aided by clients in the Middle East.

Imperialism uses issues of identity to divide anti-imperialist forces in any country that it wishes to subvert. Oppression of minority nationalities which came to the fore in the post-colonial era is exploited in more than one way. While oppressed nationalities are egged on to adopt narrow nationalistic — and even confrontational — stands, their chauvinist oppressors, repressive governments mainly, are encouraged to deny the national and fundamental rights of minorities. Imperialism has also shown ability to support both sides of a conflict at different times (as in Ethiopia in the 1970's) or simultaneously (as in Sri Lanka during the civil war which ended in 2009).

Religious chauvinism is another weapon that has recently been added to the armoury of imperialism. Promotion of internal conflicts and their escalation into war also offers imperialism benefits by way of sale of arms as well as peace brokering through which it buys influence on both sides to the conflict.

### **Towards an Anti-Imperialist Strategy**

Imperialist subversion at the national level deserves the most urgent attention of a Marxist Leninist party, since identity-based conflicts hinder the unity of the people who desperately need to overcome imperialism, fulfil urgent democratic tasks and achieve social justice. A powerful united front of the oppressed masses is thus a prerequisite for a Marxist Leninist party to establish itself as a (if not the) leading revolutionary force and thereby defeat of imperialism and its allies.

It is the equally the duty of Marxist Leninists to oppose imperialist aggression and subversion anywhere in the world and support every form

of opposition to imperialism. Such opposition is most effective when expressed through international organizations. Thus there is a strong case for international anti-imperialist solidarity organizations. But Marxist Leninists should be wary that their participation in such organizations does not become a substitute for mass political work at home and the building of a strong Marxist Leninist party. International Marxist Leninist solidarity organizations should be free of sectarianism and encourage tactical issue-based as well as strategic anti-imperialist united fronts in every country with the view to link them with each other at national, regional and international levels.

Superficially, sectarianism seems arrogant and over confident, but what underlies it is lack of self confidence. Marxist Leninists should be humble, willing to learn from others — especially the masses — and ready to admit error and correct it when recognized. Every political party arrives at its stand based on certain class or group interests and has the right to its views. There are differences in views of Marxist Leninists on various issues even when they agree on fundamentals. To be rigid and insist dogmatically that one's position is absolutely correct and all else is wrong is not a Marxist Leninist approach. Differences in views can be based on differences in experience, differences in emphasis or even differences in perception. Individual opinion should be seen in context, and it takes discussion and debate on an equal basis to resolve differences and reach common ground for united struggle.

We come across Marxist Leninists who are willing to discuss common strategy with reformists and bourgeois liberals but are reluctant to even discuss issues with Marxist Leninists from a different political party. Blind adherence to terminology and definitions can drive apart parties that are effectively prescribing the same line. Thus there is a need to be sufficiently flexible to hear other points of view, understand their bases, and discuss matters with an open mind rather than reject outright the position taken by another party. Emphasis should be on achieving common ground.



Dimitrov, in the context of building an anti-fascist front, answered the question “Is it possible to realize this unity of action of the proletariat in the individual countries and throughout the whole world?” as follows: “Yes, it is. And it is possible at this very moment. The Communist International puts no conditions for unity of action except one, and that an elementary condition acceptable for all workers, viz., that the unity of action be directed against fascism, against the offensive of capital, against the threat of war, against the class enemy. This is our condition”. [The United Front: The Struggle against Fascism and War, Georgi Dimitrov, Proletarian Publishers San Francisco, 1975, p.33. Article accessed as [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08\\_02.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm); and as <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/TUF35.html>]

Dimitrov adds in support of a contextual approach to the United Front: “It goes without saying that the practical realization of a united front will take various forms in various countries, depending upon the condition and character of the workers' organizations and their political level, upon the situation in the particular country, upon the changes in progress in the international labour movement, etc.” [Ibid p.38]

### **The Challenges of the United Front**

A united front is not an end in itself. It is designed to address immediate issues that need to be resolved in order to mobilize the people to achieve long term goals, on which partners of the alliance can vastly differ. A Marxist Leninist should have sufficient confidence in the Marxist Leninist goal and be clear about how the short term objectives addressed by the common programme will eventually tally with long term objectives.

Each partner enters the anti-imperialist united front in recognition of the threat posed by imperialism in both the short and the long term. Building a united front is about addressing shared concerns and making compromises on issues where there are significant differences, but without compromise on principled positions. There have been situations where some aspect of the political programme of a partner may be suspended

temporarily but with the option to reactivate it when conditions change. What matters is that everything about the United Front should be above board and conducted as agreed without any partner subverting the common programme or using the programme to implement a private agenda in an underhand manner. Where there is mutual trust the United Front could survive beyond the delivery of the declared goals to adopt a more advanced common programme. It can on the other hand be wrecked by the insincerity of one or several partners.

A positive example in Sri Lankan politics is the united front founded in 1966 to combat caste discrimination. The campaign won new allies for the Marxist Leninist Communist Party – predecessor of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party and the Ceylon Communist Party (Maoist) – which played a leading role, and enabled cooperation on a number of projects on the socio cultural front. That experience enabled the Party to survive the decades of repression in the North of Sri Lanka by the armed forces of the state as well as Tamil militants.

A negative example concerns the founding of the New Left Front (NLF) by three left parties and three left groups in 1999. The leader of the Navasamasamaja Party (NSSP) who entertained parliamentary ambitions sought to use the NLF to advance his career. Having secured a seat in the Western Provincial Council in the elections of 1999, based on strong backing from a key partners, mainly the NDMLP (then NDP), he yielded to temptation by the JVP which promised to make him Speaker of the Council with support from the UNP. Having lured him into their trap, the JVP dumped him soon after his breach of trust forced a split in the NLF.

What is important to note is that a broad-based alliance with all partners sincerely adhering to the agreed terms succeeded while a potentially closer left alliance failed because an important partner nursed a private agenda.

It is thus clear that the United Front Strategy to succeed demands basic integrity besides a well considered programme focusing on key issues and

ensuring maximum consensus through compromise and concessions, without forcing any participant to abandon a principled stand,.

Negative experiences in a united front could make participants reluctant to join such alliances on later occasions. But that is to fail to learn from the past. A written comprehensive agreement and mass publicity for it will be a deterrent to opportunists as they would then be challenged by the public.

There are those who are reluctant to enter into alliances because they fear that they are a small force and therefore could be dominated by numerically stronger partners. What needs to be remembered is that the strength of a Marxist Leninist Party rests primarily on sound theory and practice. If it is capable of standing by its principles, not afraid of criticism and ready to rectify mistakes through criticism and self-criticism, it can actually win over a majority and even persuade larger partners to accept its line.

There are inhibitions that Marxist Leninist parties suffer about the prospect of working together in a united front, although each party is, at least in theory, amenable to broad-based alliances. That brings one to the crucial question about friends and enemies. Before a party rejects another, accusing the latter of right opportunism, left adventurism or any such deviation, it should attempt to discuss political differences and resolve them if possible and, most importantly, explore common grounds for them to work together. No difference in ideology, revolutionary strategy or tactics can justify branding another Marxist Leninist party as an enemy. Resolution of such political differences by violent means is an anti-Marxist flaw that should be remedied. A party which is too stubborn to accommodate another with similar ideology is unlikely to be effective in a United Front which will have even greater diversity of views.

If a Marxist Leninist party fears that working with a particular rival in a common programme involves a risk, that risk is worth taking, even if such ventures fail more than once. Lack of dialogue hinders Marxist Leninist unity as well as the prospect of building a strong anti-imperialist mass

movement. A Marxist Leninist only grows stronger by taking calculated risks, making mistakes and demonstrating the humility to correct mistakes rather than by being “always right”.

There are differences among Marxist Leninist parties on questions relating to the feudal and colonial labels. One party may call a country feudal or semi-feudal while another may reject that view. Some parties like to use the term semi-colonial while others prefer neo-colonial to refer to certain Third World countries. While terminology needs precision and related disputes need to be resolved at some stage, what matters immediately is whether terminology should be an obstacle to unity for a common cause. If parties recognize aspects of feudalism that need to be eliminated there is a case for unity in struggle. Irrespectively of whether the mode of operation of imperialism is semi-colonial or neo-colonial, imperialism remains the main enemy and should be opposed. There can be no excuse to shy away from that. Working together to achieve short term targets and discussing matters in a fraternal spirit will help to resolve theoretical and ideological issues while advancing the revolutionary cause.

Some parties are particular about the use of the qualifier Maoist in their name. Some resent it and there are others who have an open mind on the matter. If it is possible for a Marxist Leninist or a Maoist or a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist to work with non-Marxists on issues of democratic and human rights, why should the label hinder their joining in a united front? It is a bitter truth that matters of ego and careerism have played a big role in factionalism and dogmatic politics. A good communist should be free of such emotional shackles.

### **Summing Up**

The case pleaded above may be summed up as follows:

- The United Front Strategy is about a programme to unite the majority against a small oppressive minority.
- While working in the United Front towards its short term goal, Marxist Leninists should also take a long term view of the struggle.

- The agenda of the United Front should be clearly defined to discourage any member organization implementing a secret agenda.
- Emphasis within the United Front should be on achieving maximum common ground within the broadest feasible alliance.
- Common goals inevitably demand compromise, but not at the expense of the principled stand of a party.
- Members of the United Front should be sincere in purpose, so that opportunism is avoided.
- A Marxist Leninist party should preserve its independence and maintain the initiative within the United Front.
- Equally a Marxist Leninist party should defend the independence of the partners of the alliance
- A Marxist Leninist party should always uphold class and class struggle.
- A Marxist Leninist party should always remember that its strength does not lie in numbers but in its principled stand and commitment to the revolutionary cause.
- Unity among Marxist Leninist parties and a strong anti-imperialist alliance at the national level is essential to effective anti-imperialist cooperation internationally.
- The principles on which solidarity is successfully built at national level could be used at international level regionally and globally.

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# Looking at Democracy through Lenses of Sri Lanka

*Asvaththaamaa*

## **Introduction**

I was provoked to write this piece by a recent comment in the social media on the politics of the country in the wake of the forthcoming presidential polls, which read "Even though Sri Lanka has not won medals in the Olympics, Sri Lankans can be relieved that it will be able to get some medals in the next Olympics in sports such as pole vaulting and hop step and jump which is known as triple jump". Although it was a sarcastic remark, it reminded me that Sri Lanka is known to be full-fledged democracy and a pioneer of parliamentary democracy in the Third World. Introduction of universal franchise in 1931 for all citizens over the age of 21 years, including women, was seen as a very progressive step towards democratization. Now, Sri Lankan parliamentary democracy is in tatters. One may wonder whether we have 'Democracy, Sri Lankan style'.

The way democracy has been defined and understood is based on the western liberal understanding of democracy. We could call it 'liberal democracy'. Although democracy in Sri Lanka is in peril, it is not unique to Sri Lanka; democracy is in crisis throughout the world, especially in the post-9/11 global setting. Sri Lanka is nevertheless unique in the way it redefines the concept of 'democracy'. This article seeks to understand Sri Lankan democracy in the light of the global crisis of democracy.

## **Democracy in crisis**

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, advanced capitalist democracies enjoyed historically unprecedented affluence, peace and security. Yet,

around this time, and especially since the 'war and terror doctrine' was put in place, people also became more sceptical about government, distrustful of politicians, and cynical about the workings of the democratic process. Thus contemporary democracies face a challenge not from enemies within or outside the nation but from democracy's own citizens, now sceptical about democratic institutions and disillusioned about the way the democratic process works. Admittedly, anxiety about the health of democracy is a regular feature of political science and political analysis. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, analysts were concerned about the endurance of democracy, especially when faced by non-democratic challenges.

Prominent academic studies of democracy in the present era, like those from leftist scholars such as Bobbio and Habermas, caution against the weaknesses of Western democracy, albeit from a perspective intertwined with a critique of capitalism. Discussions of popular orientations toward politics often intermix different aspects of citizen evaluations, such as feelings of political alienation, cynicism, or distrust. Sometimes evidence of public discontent is no more than disaffection with the incumbents of office, even though this may be considered a normal and healthy aspect of democracy. The theoretical distinctions between different levels of support and different objects of political support are often blurred (or even ignored) in the debate over public trust and confidence in democracy.

Political cynicism is increasing in democracies throughout the world. The Arab Spring, its aftermath especially, and other emerging uprisings around the world ranging from Africa to Latin America reflect people's disenchantment with Western democracy. What do these trends imply? In many ways, declining support for democratic politics seems to be in conflict with the performance of government. The end of the Cold War created a new euphoria about democracy and the democratic process among many politicians and political analysts. One can arguably claim that elected parliamentary democracy of some kind has become the dominant form of political system globally, with most nations functioning as democracies or striving to achieve this status.

Equally importantly, public opinion has a practical impact on politics. Even if some analysts would argue that people are wrong to distrust their government, the reality is that feelings of distrust exist in the minds of many citizens. If people distrust the government, then it is a reality that shapes individual behaviour and eventually the workings of the political process. More generally, if democracy relies on the participation of its citizens as a basis of legitimacy and to produce representative decisions, then decreasing involvement as a consequence of distrust can harm the democratic process.

Citizens becoming sceptical about political parties and failing to develop affectivity towards political parties can change the nature of electoral politics. An electorate that is not emotionally bound to political parties would display greater volatility in its voting choices and a greater tendency to respond to short-term electoral factors. Scepticism about the existing parties could also facilitate the emergence of new parties or the fragmentation of the existing parties. Moreover, failure of voting shifts and arrival of new parties to regenerate political support — as is expected in democratic theory — may stimulate a spiral of political distrust.

Also it is important to note that, citizens becoming more distrustful of politicians and the political process, may alter other relationships between the citizens and state. Democratic politics are based on the presumption that citizens willingly comply with the law. Increase in political distrust could lower voluntary compliance of the citizens and their acceptance of government regulations.

### **The Case of Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka is a long-standing democracy and among the few post-colonial countries where parliamentary democracy has lasted without disruption since independence in 1948. The making of the state itself had inherent weaknesses that need to be seen in the context of decolonization. Decolonization produced high hopes of development, democracy, and transcendence of ethnic rivalries. Aware of their multi-ethnicity, most



colonial liberation movements carefully steered away from ethnic definitions of the people, except to distinguish from the colonialists. Liberalism idealized a democracy representing the diverse economic, not ethnic, interest groups of society. A religion-centred sense of ethnicity was unlikely to dominate anti-colonial struggles. In Sri Lanka, there were no active independence movements; and power was transferred to a Sri Lankan elite group in the name of independence. Once the colonial power left, the class rhetoric no longer suited the dominant political interests or the economic realities. The new elites controlled the state, economy, and media and used their power to conceal the truth that they were now a ruling class. They were helped by the fact that in any relatively underdeveloped economy disparities between regions usually outweigh those between the classes, and by the tendency for ethnic groups to be regionally concentrated. It made the rulers concentrating on regulating ethnic rather than the class shares of the pie.

Even among post-colonial political parties that set out ethnically blind or multiethnic parties with a socialist or liberal, or even conservative, agenda, over time, many became regionally and/or ethnically bound. At the national level, and almost everywhere at the local/regional level, elections became ethnic censuses, with party votes strongly correlating with the ethnic composition of the population. Ethnicity started to trump class. Sri Lankan democracy suffered this phase in the 1950's and 1960's.

The introduction of the open economy and liberalization in 1977 drastically altered the role of the Sri Lankan state in the functioning of the democracy. Sri Lanka was moved towards a liberal democracy with the committed capitalist state giving precedence to market over people. Erosion of democratic institutions and politicization of state sector soon followed as part of the market liberalization agenda of the regime. This, in turn, opened the door for the patronage politics in the 1990's with patronage later becoming the only access to parliamentary politics.

These developments acquired new meaning in the post war politics of Sri Lanka. The threat to democracy is accelerating since the end of the war.

Even after the end of war, the armed forces increasingly dominate the daily life of people in the North-East; and the denial of democratic rights is worse than during conflict. Anyone serious about democratic and fundamental rights in Sri Lanka cannot view the blatant suppression of these rights in the North-East in isolation from the onslaught on the independence of the judiciary and the freedom of the media, and the surge in state condoned violence against critics and opponents of the regime.

Independence of the Judiciary is one of the pillars of functioning democracy. But it is, however, not an issue of mass political concern in Sri Lanka — reasons for which include the prevalent political apathy and, more significantly, a lack of faith of the vast majority in the legal process. Nevertheless, independence of judiciary, rule of law, fair elections and proper conduct of the affairs of the parliament and other elected bodies are important to the people in their struggle for democracy and social justice, not because these institutions are anywhere near perfect or adequately good to justify their retention in their current form but because the undemocratic breach of each is an obstacle to the struggle for social justice and genuine democracy. Those who have used state power and parliamentary majority to undermine bourgeois democratic institutions did not do so in the interest of people's democracy or public interest.

Parliamentary democracy and the 'pillars of democracy' have done little for the ordinary masses to deserve their wholehearted defence of these institutions. Yet it is the mobilisation of the people that can salvage the independence of these institutions from encroachment by a creeping fascist dictatorship. But the problem is with the nature of the commitment of the mainstream media, the legal profession and the parliamentary fraternity to the institutions of bourgeois democracy, rule of law, freedom of expression and fundamental rights. To defend the institutions, they count on forces — including foreign powers — that serve the interests of the elite whose class interests militate against the very institutions.

Defence of democratic institutions demands the defence and restoration of all democratic and fundamental rights that have been systematically

eroded. Thus the resolution of the national question is an integral part of the democratic struggle. Also, it is the oppressed people and nationalities who have the potential to achieve genuine democratic change. Paradoxically, in Sri Lanka's functioning democracy, democratic rights are being submerged in the name of 'democratic principles' with the rule of law and the courts subverted to suppress protests and trade union action.

Revisiting recent events in the post-war setting will help to map out the nature and character of the Sri Lankan democracy today. Military intervention and the brutal suppression as evident from the way the armed forces dealt with public protest in Weliveriya and the police dealt with peaceful protests by workers of the Free Trade Zone in Katunayake, add new dimensions to the working of Sri Lankan democracy. The point is that even after the systematic breach of democratic institutions, deterioration of rule of law and loss of credibility of the judiciary, there is pretence that Sri Lanka is a democracy, one where the political leadership knows to manoeuvre its agenda through the pretence of democracy.

### **Conclusion**

The current Sri Lankan situation is a test case of a third world democracy. The ruling elite have found a way to run the country by playing by the rules of democracy. The question remains on what shall be done. It is necessary to transform completely the old approaches of the people, to undertake new initiatives and to carry forward new forms of struggle in new directions. Trade union activities of workers and peasants, strikes, electoral political meetings, processions and demonstrations have only provoked harsh responses accompanied by violence, and yielded counterproductive results.

This leaves us to question whether Sri Lanka is a democracy or not. But if you have a democracy checklist Sri Lanka will be able to tick all the correct boxes. This is a challenge Sri Lanka poses for democracy. That is why Sri Lankan democracy is unique in its character.

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# The Environmental Crisis: “Renewable Energy” in Context of Consumerism

*Dr S. Sivasegaram*

Renewable energy, especially solar and wind energy, has become a major commercial venture. The term “renewable energy” — although misleading since energy can only degrade and cannot be renewed — refers to all manner of energy sources excluding conventional and nuclear fuels, but includes biomass. The current search for “renewable energy” was triggered by the “oil crisis” of 1973, meaning the steep rise in oil prices announced by the Organization of Oil Producing Countries (OPEC). While alternatives to fossil fuel have since been sought in earnest, the discovery of new oil resources in subsequent years dampened the enthusiasm. Interest was renewed by the rising cost of extraction of fossil fuels, especially oil, and to some extent the public yearning for “cleaner” energy.

Oil consumption continued to rise steadily but with a slower growth rate than before 1973. Search for new oil fields led to off-shore oil exploration — made affordable by the higher oil prices, which also made oil extraction from shale and oil sands and the recent environmentally hazardous practice of fracking economically feasible.

Coal, despite remaining environmental concerns, is still a dominant energy resource (World Energy Resources: A Summary, World Energy Council, 2013), and the International Energy Agency expects coal to replace oil as the world's leading energy source by 2017. [Source: <http://www.iea.org/newsroomandevents/pressreleases/2012/december/name,34441,en.html>). The overall share of coal would somewhat decline owing to the strengthening of other rival resources, especially natural gas and to a less extent renewable energy. Development of nuclear power has, however, slowed down in the face of public pressure based on potential hazards.

Alternatives to fossil fuel other than nuclear energy that have been explored include hydroelectricity, wind power, solar energy, geothermal energy, tidal energy, ocean wave energy, ocean thermal energy and biomass. Waste recycling for biogas generation and incineration grew as energy supplementing methods in the 1970's and 1980's.

As hydropower is a highly feasible option, investment in it is on the rise. China followed by Brazil is a clear leader in hydropower generation. Despite room for expansion, especially in the industrially less developed countries, hydropower has a ceiling which is far below the current global demand for energy. There are also environmental concerns including adverse implications for agriculture and fresh water fisheries, and therefore livelihood. There is also concern that anaerobic decomposition of vegetation in reservoirs leads to conversion of the carbon in the vegetation into methane after the reservoir is initially flooded. In reservoirs which undergo large seasonal fluctuation in water level the process will recur as plants growing on the banks of the reservoir during dry season submerge in the wet season. Estimates vary but, with methane 21 times potent than carbon dioxide in causing global warming, the green house effect of methane from certain reservoirs has been assessed to be several times more than that from the carbon dioxide emission from a thermal power plant of matching size (<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn7046-hydroelectric-powers-dirty-secret-revealed.html#.VJxLtsAGc>). Even if the risk is

overstated and could be ameliorated with appropriate measures, it is a matter that needs to be seriously addressed.

Windmills and water-wheels are the earliest known non-muscular mechanical energy sources. Interest in wind power resurged after the oil price rise of 1973. But its potential to meet human energy needs many times over is deceptive since it has practical limits including construction costs and environmental impact, and public resistance to wind power generation on a large scale is growing from an environmental perspective in industrially developed countries. Renewability of wind energy should take into account the energy cost of the wind turbine and the supporting structure which need to be debited from the energy earned by the turbine. This cost will have implications for carbon dioxide emissions and affect the cost of wind energy in the context of varying fuel prices.

Solar energy which was used initially as a source of heat subsequently found other applications including refrigeration. The main applications now are heating, thermal power and electric power generation. The “renewability” of solar energy, for electricity especially, has to be assessed in the context of large energy inputs for manufacturing photovoltaic cells. Solar photovoltaic panels are far more energy intensive than wind turbines. Only recently, the electric energy produced by a photovoltaic panel during its life surpassed the electric equivalent of the energy input for its manufacture (<http://news.stanford.edu/news/2013/april/pv-net-energy-040213.html>). The technology is advancing and the life and efficiency of photovoltaic panels will improve with time and the energy cost of manufacture would decrease. Yet, a substantial part of the “free energy” from the panels will be used to pay back the energy debt for manufacture, probably obtained by burning fossil fuel.

The above is not to deny a future for wind energy and photovoltaic cells in the future, but to warn of the need for caution in uncritically accepting claims about the benefits of renewable energy technology.

Biomass and waste recycling will contribute marginally to global needs, while considerations of cost, environment and availability will force tidal

energy, ocean wave energy, ocean thermal energy and geothermal energy, to contribute far less to the global need.

The benefit of biomass as an energy source is, however unclear. Biomass as a source of bio-petrol (food grains, sugar cane, sugar beet plant cellulose etc.) and bio-diesel (mainly oil seeds) is suspect in the context of the biomass being produced at the expense of food and animal fodder, either directly or indirectly through the use of cultivable land. There are also charges of destruction of forests for cultivation of bio-fuel crops.

A context in which biomass could be beneficial is when it comprises agricultural waste or an unusable agricultural by-product. Problems of cost of collection, processing and storage of bio-fuel among others do not make biomass a viable alternative to fossil fuel, although there could be special circumstances where there is benefit. It is true that biomass fuels economise on the use of fossil fuel. But to call them environmentally friendly is a fallacy as they emit as much carbon dioxide if not more than fossil fuels for the same amount of electrical energy produced.

The inclusion of bio mass in "renewable energy" is challenged by Almut Ernsting in "Abundant Clean Renewables? Think Again!" in the internet news journal "Truthout" [<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/27392-abundant-clean-renewables-think-again>]. The article evaluates the claims of contributions of major "renewable" energy contributions to the total demand in Germany as follows : "The picture looks even worse when one examines the mix of energy classed as renewable in Germany: Solar photovoltaic (PV) makes up 11.5 percent of renewables, wind, 16.8 percent. The bulk of it — 62 percent — comes from bio-energy, much of which is far from low carbon or sustainable. It includes bio-fuels, many of them made from imported soya and palm oil that are being expanded at the expense of tropical forests and peat lands and that destroy the livelihoods of small farmers, indigenous and other forest dependent peoples worldwide. It includes biogas made from 820,000 hectares of corn monocultures in Germany — a key driver for biodiversity loss in the country. And it includes wood pellets linked to forest degradation across

Central Europe. On closer examination, therefore, 24,000 wind turbines and 1.4 million solar panels have scarcely made a dent in Germany's fossil fuel burning and carbon emissions."

Europe appears to have taken renewable energy more seriously than the US, and Germany is the global leader in solar electric energy installation followed closely by China, and Japan trying to catch up since the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011. [Source: <http://oilprice.com/Alternative-Energy/Solar-Energy/Why-China-Is-Leading-The-World-In-Solar-Power.html>]. China and the US followed by Germany dominate global wind power generation.

The promise of renewable energy sources gives hope amid a desperate climate crisis. But we need to critically assess whether the growth in "renewable" energy has helped to reverse the damage to the climate. In fact, the additional energy from renewables seems to have, rather than avert the burning of a matching amount of fossil fuel in power plants, added that energy to drive global economic growth, thus promoting carbon dioxide emissions. This raises a fresh question: Can technology alone address the global energy crisis and related environmental issues?

Even those who view renewable energy as the ultimate answer to the energy crisis of the future would admit that neither solar nor wind energy is a reliably steady source of energy. Given the current levels of demand for energy, it is hard to imagine a world based on clean energy in the foreseeable future. The goal will be even more difficult to achieve if the current directions and rates of development are to be sustained.

Technology, to solve a problem, requires a scientific understanding of the relevant issues. The kind of solution that technology provides will depend on the way it is guided, in other words, the class or group interests that guide technology. The present approach to the energy and climate crises appears to be one of replacing one set of energy sources with another without examining what led to the crises. Without challenging the growth-based economic model pursued by capitalism it will not be



possible to arrest the soaring demand for energy which is part of the consumer culture that is essential to the survival of capitalism.

To address properly the energy crisis in terms of renewable energy, we need to define “renewability” more meaningfully and assess the renewability of an energy source on that basis.

As said earlier, solar and wind energy use substantial energy inputs of fossil fuel origin and are thus not entirely clean or free. Biomass is not a clean renewable as it only substitutes for fossil fuel. Some energy sources that seem renewable in the context of small scale power generation may be unsustainable on a large scale owing to their environmental impact which alters the basis on which the source had been developed. For example, ocean wave energy devices built on off-coast solid structures could alter the adjoining sea bed profile and ocean thermal energy devices could, over a prolonged period, affect the local ocean current pattern. Excessive heat extraction of from geothermal sources can be environmentally harmful.

The prevalent approach to clean and sustainable energy appears to be about increasing the available energy with no regard for its implications to energy consumption. This is a dangerous trend that should be corrected and, if it persists, no technology can salvage humanity from an environmental disaster. The alternative is to move towards a global economy that addresses the essential energy needs of humanity and emphasises energy economy.

The imperialist West in its quest for cheap labour shifted its manufacturing bases long ago to the Third World and along with it much of its industrial pollution and hazardous emissions, for the Third World countries to produce goods for imperialist profit. Much of the increase in energy consumption in the Third World countries is used for the manufacture of export goods. Thus much of what is seen as a growth in Third World energy consumption is really consumption by imperialist countries that pollutes the Third World environment — and eventually the global environment — for multinational companies to make profit.

It is relevant to note at this juncture that the African continent — whose mineral resources are being extracted at an ever increasing rate by the industrialized countries and their clients — has thus far been largely left out in the matter of developing “environmentally friendly” energy. Africa, as a whole, is far behind the rest of the world in the production of wind, solar and hydro electricity in relation to its potential for such alternatives. The situation is bound to change, and the signs are already there. With the fresh neo-colonial penetration of Africa with features of old colonial occupation, Africa could become the next target for a cheap labour market after South and South East Asia. Flow of foreign industrial investment would boost demand for energy and consumerism will advance apace.

Africa, like many other parts of the Third World, lacks the technical knowhow and the means to produce high tech solar and wind power devices, and will come under pressure to produce clean energy to keep the global environment safe for those who have already polluted it beyond control. Since clean and renewable energy technologies are highly saleable commodities, countries and businesses with the technological edge will take advantage of their knowhow to make further profit by selling renewable energy systems to enable Africa to meet requirements of clean energy that would be imposed on them.

The issue of clean energy will soon become an international political game in which the main culprits responsible for the global environmental crisis through the promotion of consumerism at home and abroad will make further profit by passing the burden of cleaning up the global environment to the Third World.

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## **The Not Really Common Common Candidate**

Although the opposition has been almost unanimous in its resentment of the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime there was little in common between the main players, namely the UNP and the JVP. Prospects for a common opposition candidate had all but evaporated soon after the Uva Provincial Council elections, with the JVP unwilling to risk its recovered voter base by becoming a formal partner in yet another alliance, this time dominated by the right-wing UNP and its allies. The UNP, despite the elation following the encouraging results in Uva, has been hesitant to gamble its political future at the Presidential Election by fielding its own candidate without assured support from parties other than its usual allies. What it desperately needed was an impression of a common candidate, desirably its own nominee, even without a common programme.

UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe was a more feasible common candidate than others whose names had floated around in the media from February 2014 including the Ven. Maduluwawe Sobitha Thero, former President Chandrika Kumaratunga and former Chief Justice Shirani Bandaranayake among others. Yet, fielding Wickramasinghe had its risks, including the prospect of undercutting by UNP rebels led by Sajith Premadasa who had returned to the fold only a few months ago and a media establishment which used him to target Wickramasinghe over the past few years. Wickramasinghe was also vulnerable to attacks by the ruling UPFA and its Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist allies for his “efforts to placate the LTTE”. The UNP therefore covertly explored options while giving the impression that Wickramasinghe will be its candidate.

Rajapaksa, since becoming President in 2005, systematically sidelined the old guard of the SLFP and sought to project his father DA Rajapaksa as a historic SLFP leader outshining SWRD Bandaranaike. Members of the Rajapaksa family and persons who crossed-over from the UNP, the JVP, and even the LTTE since 2009 were given prominence over loyal SLFP MPs. He also tightened his family's control over the national budget. This strategy consolidated his position within the SLFP and the government, but led to resentment among SLFP stalwarts.

Bodhu Bala Sena (BBS), the voice of the Sinhala Buddhist fanatical fringe, came to the fore in the post-war years and earned the favour of an influential member of the ruling clan. It conducted with impunity a string of acts of violence against Muslims and their places of worship in the South. The soft approach of the Rajapaksa regime towards the BBS goons was much to the unease of the Muslim leaders in the ruling coalition. It upset the leaders of the chauvinist JHU who felt sidelined. As a result, talks took place between the UNP and the JHU in June 2013, only four months after the announcement of 'Vipakshaye Virodhaya' – an alliance of opposition parties comprising the UNP, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), Democratic People's Front, Nava Samasamaja Party and five minor parties – "to fight against the Rajapaksa regime as well as the corruption within the government and to rebuild the national reconciliation". The prospect of the JHU leaving the ruling alliance was thus strong even before Rajapaksa chose to call for and contest the Presidential election.

Although speculation was rife that a sizeable number of government MPs will part company with Rajapaksa once the presidential election was called, the announcement by Maithripala Sirisena, Minister of Health and General Secretary of the SLFP, that he was contesting the presidential election surprised all but the handful who masterminded the coup, mainly Ranil Wickramasinghe and Chandrika Kumaratunga. Speculation in the news media about the prospect of Sirisena's candidature only a few weeks before the election was instantly quashed by Sirisena. Six MPs including a key figure, Minister Rajitha Senarathne, joined him rather than the much

larger number anticipated earlier. It is said that huge bribes prevented not only crossovers from the government but also purchased a few badly needed crossovers to the government.

However, Maithripala Sirisena is only a proxy for Wickramasinghe since, despite the likely SLFP support that he can garner from his own base in the North Central Province and from Bandaranaike loyalists who are bitter about the way Rajapaksa sidelined Bandaranaike's family, his main voter base is that of the UNP. The prominent display of the image of the UNP alongside that of Sirisena in campaign cut-outs is early assertion by the UNP of its authority. All the parties in the formal alliance for Sirisena as the "common opposition candidate" are parties which would have supported a UNP presidential candidate in any event. The SLFP votes that Sirisena can count on comprise those who were likely to desert Rajapaksa if he sought a third term as President.

"Common candidate" Sirisena is supported with reservations by the JVP, whose declared aim is to defeat Rajapaksa. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and the All Ceylon Muslim Congress switched loyalty two weeks before the election, fearing splits in their ranks under pressure from the Muslim community which bitterly resented Rajapaksa's affinity for the BBS. The TNA which signed the MoU of the UNP-led alliance of opposition parties 'Vipakshaye Virodhaya' in February 2013 endorsed Sirisena, just ten days before the election, although there was nothing in Sirisena's manifesto that would appeal to the Tamil electorate. Tainted by its earlier support for the LTTE, it was mindful of a Sinhala nationalist backlash against any candidate that it may support and of the general impression among Sinhalese that it entertains a separatist agenda, with backing from the Tamil diaspora and Western powers. Hill Country Tamil parties have been divided on the issue but a majority have deserted the UPFA and each of the leading parties suffered a split over the issue which will probably heal in time for a general election.

Although the programme of the common candidate is not merely "the single issue" of ridding the country of Rajapaksa family rule and thereby

the executive presidency as envisaged earlier in the year. The Sirisena manifesto addresses other issues as well — even going into fine detail on matters that could fetch a few votes — but, unwilling to lose the support of the JHU and unable to deviate from the economic policy put in place by the UNP, avoids central issues such as the future of the open economic policy which has ruined the economy, the unresolved national question, and many issues of democratic rights which have been trampled on by successive governments in the name of national security. There is no hint of how a Sirisena regime will resist IMF and World Bank pressure to further undermine public education, healthcare and social welfare.

Although the two leading candidates have presented their respective manifestos the main election issue is Rajapaksa himself. With war victory losing its shimmer, faults of the Rajapaksa regime such as corruption, family bandyism, rising crime, failing economy violation of democratic principles and abuse of the legal and judicial systems among others are coming to the fore, especially in the urban areas.

Out of desperation, the regime is increasingly resorting to malpractices that the country has become accustomed to, and on an unprecedented scale. The mainstream media, the police and the bureaucracy are under its control. The West, although desirous to see Rajapaksa off, is, unlike in 2009, circumspect in its activities. Amid this, the three parliamentary left parties have painted themselves into a corner by failing to distance themselves from the regime when they had the opportunity.

Sadly, the country, badly in need of a political change, is not presented with a comprehensive view of the real issues facing it and a long term strategy to address them. By failing to agree on a manifesto for a common left-democratic candidate, the left has made the task before it more difficult than it need be.

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## **Drivers of Dissent: Hong Kong's Occupy Movement**

### **Some Prehistory**

Observers on both the left and the right of the global political divide, irrespectively of ideological differences have wondered why the People's Republic of China which dared to liberate Tibet in 1951 left Hong Kong and Macau untouched until almost the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. All agree, however, that Taiwan was a tough proposition owing to the international implications of the UN recognizing — under pressure from the US — the Taiwan-based Guomintang government as the sole lawful government of China and the US militarily backing for the Guomintang regime.

Several European governments recognized People's Republic of China much before it secured its long overdue legitimate seat in the UN in 1971. In establishing diplomatic relations, the People's Republic took a firm stand that its recognition as the sole legitimate government of China was an essential precondition. Thus of the three Western powers with veto power in the UN, only France, led by Charles de Gaulle, established diplomatic relations in 1964, although Sweden established relations in 1950 followed by other Scandinavian countries.

China entered the Korean War in 1950 to defend North Korea against US-led aggression endorsed by the UN at a time when the Soviet Union was boycotting the UN in the first half of 1950. The US in response slapped an economic embargo on China which lasted until 1972. Its impact on China's economic development was compounded with devastating effect by Soviet withdrawal of experts from industrial projects in China in 1960 in response to the sharpening political differences with China that led

to the split in the global communist movement in 1964. [Sources: M. Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, New York, NY: Free Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1999; <http://www.chinaforall.info/engels.html>]. China's policy towards British occupied Hong Kong (with the island of Hong Kong ceded after the First Opium War to Britain in 1842 and the New Territories leased to Britain for 99 years in 1898) and towards Portuguese occupied Macau (lent to the Portuguese empire as a trading post in 1557 under Chinese sovereignty until self-administration in the 1840's, and ceded in 1887 to Portugal which made Macau an overseas Portuguese territory by treaty) was conditioned by the need to survive economic isolation. International implications of retaking Hong Kong from the British was perhaps a factor in the Chinese government's reluctance to assert its legitimate right, for China was already facing a severe economic embargo imposed by the US, and Soviet hostility after Khrushchev's ascent to power worsened matters.

China thus used Hong Kong as a front for foreign trade, especially with countries under strong US domination. Another consideration was the political burden of taking over a region with deeply entrenched colonial values, before socialism was consolidated in China. In any event, socialist China felt no urgency to recover a territory which the British could not hold on to forever, and British business interests in Hong Kong dictated that Britain would not overtly use Hong Kong for political sabotage.

The colonial rule was severe in Hong Kong whose population swelled following the civil war in China which ended with the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. The cheap immigrant labour was used in light industries and led to Hong Kong's economic revival. Cheap industrial labour under colonial repression also meant industrial disputes which were occasionally violent. Militancy rose in 1966 and was at its peak in 1967 with anti-colonial feelings running high among workers inspired by the Cultural Revolution in China. The colonial regime handled the protests with a heavy hand but also modestly increased wages, boosted the welfare system and built a massive housing scheme comprising cheap public



apartment complexes. The accompanying industrial growth was to help Hong Kong secure a place among the “Asian Tiger” economies in the 1980’s. More importantly, when China opened its economy in the 1980’s, Hong Kong benefitted from its historical links with the mainland and its proximity to Shenzhen, China’s first Special-Economic Zone.

The repressive colonial regime denied any form of democracy to the people of Hong Kong even after formal ratification by China in 1990 of the agreement of 1984 between the UK and China on the return of Hong Kong to China, which was by then firmly on the capitalist road. Britain used the pretext of the alleged Tiananmen massacre of 1989 to introduce democratic reforms in 1992 under the “liberal” Tory politician Chris Patten who was the last Governor of Hong Kong. This was classical British mischief: A people to whom Britain denied any form of democracy for 150 years were offered democracy modelled on the British system just five years before Hong Kong was restored to China in 1997. China reacted strongly to this high handed move made without consultation. The implied threat to British business interests led to the crash of the Hong Kong stock market and Britain yielded. A diluted democratic reform package was introduced in 1994 and elections were held for the new Legislative Council.

When Hong Kong was returned to China after 150 years of colonial rule, British passport holders of Hong Kong demanded their right to British nationality, but were refused. Such was British gratitude to loyal subjects of the Queen. Yet, besides the many influential British loyalists in post-colonial Hong Kong, there remains a sizeable western-oriented middle class which cherishes British colonial values.

The political and economic development of Hong Kong was in vast contrast with that of China, even after China’s drift towards capitalism since 1978. The policy of “one country two systems” was as a result of the Chinese regime knowing the implications for China of establishing a Western style democracy in Hong Kong and problems in imposing on Hong Kong the system of government in the rest of China. However, it was not feasible for Hong Kong to have a western style democracy of any

kind without China also moving in that direction. That has been at the root of the conflict between the “democracy campaigners” and supporters of the Chinese regime.

Mischief continued even after China gave up on socialism. The obscure cult Falun Gong which sneaked into the elite society of China by 1984 was firmly dealt with by the Chinese government from 1985 to prevent its spread across China. The Western media accused China of suppressing religious freedom, whereas Falun Gong — like the South Korea based Moonies — was a fraudulent practice with a megalomaniacal person at its centre. Anti-subversion legislation introduced in Hong Kong in 2002, designed to suppress the activities of Falun Gong was shelved indefinitely in the face of public protest in 2003. Such retreats were seen as weaknesses of the China-backed rulers of Hong Kong, who became very sensitive to pro-Western political undercurrents in the name democratic reform.

### **The Occupy Movement**

The Chinese regime, although wary of Western meddling in Hong Kong, agreed in 2007 to let the people of Hong Kong directly elect their leader by 2017 and their legislators by 2020. This made the “pro-democracy” camp in Hong Kong smug enough to demand an even earlier transition. China’s refusal led to the “Occupy Central” (strictly, Occupy Central with Love and Peace) protests of 2014. The protests, later dubbed the “Umbrella Movement”, however, lacked the anti-capitalism of the “Occupy Central” movement of October 2011 to September 2012— the longest but weaker in numbers of the Occupy campaigns that followed “Occupy Wall Street”.

The term “Occupy Central” as used in 2014 was a parody of the “Occupy” concept in ways reminiscent of how the term “Arab Spring” was used for the protests in Libya and Syria, which were manipulated by the West to achieve “regime change”. It will thus be useful to identify the dividing line in the stand-off between the Hong Kong Government and the “pro-democracy camp” and identify some of the key players.

Opinion in Hong Kong on the desirability of protests was divided along lines of class and age. According to poll conducted at the end of 2013, more than 70% of respondents with family income less than US\$10,000 and more than 80% of those over 70 years were opposed to protests. Support was strongest among students and those earning more than US\$100,000. Although a majority opposed protests owing to fear of violence and economic loss, support for the call for universal suffrage was overwhelming. [Source: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/01/hong-kong-democracy-prote\\_n\\_5748192.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/01/hong-kong-democracy-prote_n_5748192.html)]

It is not surprising that the US and UK governments, which ignored brutal suppression of recent mass protests in the Philippines, Italy and Mexico, expressed explicit support for the protests and formally objected to the Chinese government about the use of tear gas by the police in Hong Kong. Although China sees the role of the West as an attempt at a “Colour Revolution”, the West is far from securing a regime change in China. “Occupy Central” to the US and UK is a battering ram to have a knock at the Chinese economy by weakening China’s grip on Honk Kong, which is a leading global financial centre and financial gateway to China.

A more insidious role than that played overtly by the governments of US and UK is played covertly by the vast array of Hong Kong registered NGOs funded by US State Department agencies, especially the National Endowment for Democracy and its subsidiaries. Tony Cartalucci in his exposé of the Umbrella Movement in New Eastern Outlook of 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014 reported: “Identifying the leaders, following the money, and examining Western coverage of these events reveal with certainty that yet again, Washington and Wall Street are busy at work to make China’s island of Hong Kong as difficult to govern for Beijing as possible.” He also exposed connections to the key leaders of the “Occupy Central”.

The protests weakened through November, and failed by December, although the US sponsors and the Western media are trying keep it alive. The US failed in its aim to provoke China into mishandling the protests the way it happened in 1989 in Tiananmen, when Western state and media

propaganda successfully distorted the events to create the impression of a “massacre”, which did not really occur.

However, Hong Kong has serious problems of social justice as does China. Hong Kong is a very unequal society with 20% living below the poverty line and facing problems of housing because of the high prices. The youth have every reason to be angry about poor living conditions and an uncertain future. Mass protests in Hong Kong have several features in common with protests elsewhere, and could organize themselves into movements for social justice as in the case of Greece and Spain. They could otherwise be manipulated by the far right to implement its reactionary agenda as in Venezuela, Ukraine, Thailand and Syria.

There are other sinister aspects to the movement which, although not dominant, cannot be lightly dismissed. Some organizations like the “Civic Passion” affiliated to the “People Power” party are right-wing and anti-immigrant (especially from the mainland). The danger is that with the “democratic alliance” losing steam and the genuine grievances of the people not addressed by those in power in Hong Kong and in China, the far-right would be well placed to attract the increasingly militant youth frustrated with the let down by their “democratic” leaders.

Many of the Hong Kong protesters genuinely wanted democracy and social justice. But the protests themselves had at very outset been hijacked from them by manipulative proxies of local capitalist oligarchs and foreign vested interests. This is not unique to Hong Kong and has repeatedly occurred in protests with a strong spontaneous component.

### **The Attitude of the Left**

Internationally, the stands taken by some sections of the left simply echo their earlier erroneous stands on Syria, Ukraine and Venezuela. They respond favourably to the validity of the demands and what seems to be mass support, but ignoring the driving forces behind the campaigns.

In some cases old anger about the betrayal of socialism by the Soviet Union and China lingers to blind them to the reality of imperialism in

operation. Idealist perceptions of democracy of some prevent them from taking a long term view of matters. They seem to be missing out on the lessons of the colour revolutions to imagine that the genuinely progressive forces in protest movements will rise to the top after the ruling reactionary elite is defeated. Such hopes in Syria were shattered when the US, Saudi and Qatar backed Islamic fundamentalists and fanatics got the better of the progressive elements.

To defend Saddam Hussain in Iraq, Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and Bashar al-Assad in Syria against US-led manoeuvres to oust them is not to approve of their conduct of affairs in their respective countries, but to know why imperialism is targeting them and to be alert to the likely medium term consequences of their overthrow. To defend the regimes in North Korea, Cuba and Venezuela against US imperialist targeting is not necessarily because one considers them to be truly socialist.

Thus the demand of the people of Hong Kong for more democracy and the right to directly elect the chief executive deserves to be defended. But to isolate these bourgeois democratic demands from demands for social justice and to let capitalist oligarchs use populist methods to set the pace and path of democratization is dangerous and should be averted. US imperialist funding for any mass protest movement either directly or through agency of NGOs should be unreservedly opposed.

The people of Hong Kong and mainland China should stand together to defend their democratic rights and their right to social justice and to fight to restore socialism in the whole of China.

[Sources: <http://journal-neo.org/2014/10/01/hong-kong-s-occupy-central-is-us-backed-sedition/>; <http://conspiracyanalyst.org/tag/hong-kong/>; [www.ultra-com.org/project/black-versus-yellow/](http://www.ultra-com.org/project/black-versus-yellow/), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/hong-kong-pro-democracy-protesters-reject-will-of-the-people/5416983>]

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## *NDMLP Diary*

### **Address by Comrade SK Senthivel at the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party's Public Political Seminar on the Presidential Election**

*21 December 2014*

The public political seminar of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party organized by the Northern Regional Committee of the Party was held in the afternoon of 21<sup>st</sup> December 2014 at the Kavignar Murukaiyan Auditorium of the Dhesiya Kalai Ilakkiyapp Peravai, 62 KKS Road, Kokkuvil, Jaffna.

The seminar was chaired by Comrade K Selvam Kathirgamanathan, Northern Regional Secretary of the Party and was addressed by Comrades SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the Party, Comrade K Thanikasalam, Editor, Thayakam (literary journal of the Dhesiya Kalai Ilakkiyapp Peravai), Comrade S Thevarajah, Politburo member of the Party, and T Prakash of the New Democratic Youth Front. The following is the text of the address by Comrades Senthivel.

The forthcoming presidential election will bring no relief or salvation to the vast majority of the toiling masses or the ethnically oppressed nationalities. Two factions of the comprador capitalist classes who enjoy the backing and patronage of foreign forces are competing in this election to capture state power. Neither the continuation of the family dictatorship of Mahinda Rajapaksa nor the election of Maithripala Sirisena as President will solve the basic problems faced by the country and the challenges faced by the people. At the same time, it will be politically unwise in

today's context to boycott or reject this election. Hence the Party suggests that the people should think deeply of the consequences in a long term perspective and vote independently.

When JR Jayawardane took advantage of his five sixths majority to implement the constitution and the executive presidency which have been in effect from 1978, we along with other left and democratic forces strongly opposed it. We warned of its potential dangers. But, thirty-six years on, we see the country and the people choking in the stranglehold of executive power, unable to free themselves of its dictatorial grip.

It is under these conditions that the Rajapaksa brothers, having got the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution in place, are seeking to prolong the personal family dictatorship. It is for that purpose that they are holding the presidential election prematurely and throwing around several billion rupees in order to deceive the people and continue in power. Where did this money come from? For what is it being spent? What is the benefit from it for the people? It is important for the people to think about these matters because Mahinda Rajapaksa is unwilling to talk about the fundamental economic problems faced by the country and the people or about the national question which remains the main problem of the country or about a minimum acceptable solution to the national question.

Instead, he and his camp are carrying out a vicious chauvinist campaign among the Sinhalese that terrorism and the LTTE are about to return, that Rajapaksa will not allow the country to be divided, and that he alone is the suitable leader to protect the motherland. At the same time, they shamelessly visit the North-East to speak aloud about development. They are wearing a variety of masks to win the votes of the Tamils and Muslims by easy means. Hence it is important that the entire people and the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people especially should think deeply about whether they should allow the fascist dictatorship of the family rule.

At the same time, it is important to think deeply with a long term view of what Maithripala Sirisena who has been fielded as common candidate in the name of a joint opposition front will achieve. None of those who set him up as the common candidate are new to politics. The UNP which

introduced the constitution with the executive presidential system, gave away the economy of the country to foreigners, and subjected the country to a 17 year rule of darkness, Chandrika Kumaratunga who ruled for eleven years under that constitution, and the former Army Commander who conducted a 30-year war against the Tamil people and presided over the catastrophe called the final victory will not bring about fundamental changes in the country. The declaration that they will replace executive power with power to the parliament is only to achieve collective ruling class dictatorship in place of personal dictatorship.

It is sheer fantasy to think that all the problems of the country will be solved and that the people will live in a paradise of prosperity and peace when power is transferred to parliament. The election manifesto of Maithripala Sirisena, "A New Country in 100 Days" lists eleven key items. It speaks importantly about parliamentary power in place of executive power, appointing Ranil Wickramasinghe as Prime Minister and establishing good governance through introducing a new constitution. But not the tiniest bit is said about getting rid of the neoliberal economy under neo-colonialism, which has been the cause of the ruin faced by the country and carrying forward in its place a planned national economy. The deterioration of the daily livelihood of the people as a result of the policies and practice of liberalization, privatization and globalization is not spoken about either.

There is not one word about a solution to the national question in the programme of Maithripala for "A New Country in 100 Days" which was the cause of the 30 years long war in the country and the loss of life of up to 300,000 people in the North-East. The New Country policy of Maithripala preserves secretive silence — which implies Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism — about the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamils who comprise around 24 percent of the population and the problems faced by them. The oppressed nationalities need to think about these matters.

Rajapaksa remains a big oppressive monster who has made his and savoured all resources and power during his two terms spanning nine years. Another kind of monster called Maithripala is placed before us to defeat him and prevent him from returning to power once again. Foreign hegemonic powers, multi-national companies, mega business



establishments and investment banks are lined up behind both oppressive monsters.

Under these conditions, while there is a case for defeating the family rule of the Rajapaksa brothers, there can be no doubt that it will not be long before the Maithripala-Ranil alliance will oppress the people. Hence, a powerful left progressive front should have come forward to represent the toiling masses and the oppressed nationalities and point to an alternative political path, transcending the two chauvinist comprador capitalist groups. It should be pointed out that the failure to achieve it — despite the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party being at the forefront to emphasize and to take the initiative towards it — is a weakness of the left, democratic and progressive forces.

### ***NDMLP Statement to the Media***

*11<sup>th</sup> December 2014*

### **Statement on the Presidential Election**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party made the following statement on the forthcoming Presidential Election on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party.

The forthcoming Presidential Election scheduled for the 8<sup>th</sup> of January is a premature election that has been forced on the people. The election which is scheduled to gobble up one billion five hundred thousand rupees of tax revenue from the people is conducted to enable Mahinda Rajapaksa to capture power as Executive President for a third time and prolong the dictatorship of his family. This election will not lead to a solution to the economic crises comprising the basic problem faced by the people or to the national question which persists as the main problem. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party wishes to point to the truth that it will as usual be yet another contest between rivals among the ruling chauvinist comprador capitalist classes of the country to capture state power by deceiving the people using the electoral process. In the meantime the Party appeals to the people to think and act towards the creation and

implementation of alternative political thoughts in the economic, political and social spheres of the country.

During the past thirty-six years of executive presidential rule, the economy of the country developed under liberalization, privatization and globalization. Local comprador capitalists and foreign multi-national companies benefited through them. The rich have become even richer while the living standards of the working people have deteriorated. Foreign imperialist multi-national companies and mega business establishments have been exploiting and plundering the labour of the people and the resources of the country. Everyone who wielded executive power has supported and assisted these developments. Along these lines, the Rajapaksa brothers have collaborated with Indian, Chinese and Japanese capital and other foreign banks to wreck the economy in the name of development as well as undertaken corruption, irregularities, and denial of democratic and human rights in militarist and fascist manner. One cannot forget that, over a period exceeding three decades, the very same ruling classes transformed the national question into war and been at the forefront of killing three hundred and fifty thousand people in the North-East. They have subjected not only the Tamil nationality but also the Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities to chauvinist oppression.

Even in the forthcoming Presidential Election, neither the Sri Lanka Freedom Party candidate Mahinda Rajapaksa nor the Common Candidate of the allied opposition is ready to put forward any proposal concerning the national question or a political solution to it. Thereby, they affirm that they are on the side of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. Under the conditions, the Party, in the context of the election, points out the need for the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people to think deeply and act along a path of alternative political awakening that could firmly resist comprador capitalism, chauvinism and imperialism.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary

## *Related NDMLP Correspondence*

Comrade Pubudu Jagoda  
Frontline Socialist Party, Colombo

Dear Comrade,

The Frontline Socialist Party and other left parties came together to field a common left candidate in the forthcoming Presidential Election as a left alternative. A media conference was held in Colombo on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2014 in that connection. While the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party welcomes this initiative, we wish to inform you with much regret that the Party is not in a position to participate in the above leftist common programme for a left alternative or to campaign for it among the people. We hereby wish to inform the FSP and the other left parties concerned, in a spirit of friendship, the Party's reasons and the Party's position on the subject.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party worked closely with the FSP and other parties in preparing the common programme for the above left alternative, and had participated in debates and discussions. At the time, we agreed with the common consensus to field a common candidate and put forward a left programme for the purpose. We were hopeful that we could take such a left common programme among the people to educate and awaken them. All of us agreed that faith in the left could thereby be built among the people. Based on that, all of us accepted that the programme should be structured to accommodate the three important matters of the economic situation, the state of democracy and the national question in the country. Based on that, the NDMLP, like other parties, put forward its proposals.

The NDMLP in its proposals had, in a spirit of understanding, made concessions, as much as it could, based on the policy and position concerning the Party's ideology and practice. The NDMLP, in the process of developing a common programme, did not seek to impose its position on imperialism, the stage of the revolution, the new democratic

programme, nationalities and the national question, and the application of the principle of the right to self determination and other matters. The NDMLP, based on the tactic of the united front, attempted to the very end to bring about compromise and understanding. The purpose was to achieve a common programme acceptable to the entire people.

However, the current proposal for the common programme for a left alternative is a programme that does not even accommodate the minimum requirements spelt out by the NDMLP. In particular, the programme fails to take account of the national question remaining the main question facing the country. Instead, the common programme through a scattering of phrases shows a tendency to view the problems faced by the Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils as superficial issues. The proposed common programme does not thereby include even the minimalist proposals of devolution of power and power sharing as a political solution to the national question which is still simmering in the current political context. One cannot adopt an honest left position on the national question by merely denouncing racism and religious extremism.

Hence we wish to communicate to you with regret the inability of the NDMLP to endorse the above common candidature and the associated common programme for a left alternative. We wish to let you know that the NDMLP cannot carry the above common programme to regions in which the Party is working on a broad basis.

While the Central Committee communicates its above decisions to you in a spirit of friendship, it also wishes to inform you that the Party remains eager and interested in designing and delivering in the future a clear and far sighted left common programme based on Marxism Leninism.

Thanking you,

Yours fraternally,

S.K. Senthivel, General Secretary

V. Mahendran, National Organizer

New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party

## From the archives of the NDMLP (then NDP)

### *NDP Statement to the Media*

8.12.2009

## **Call for a Common Candidate**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Party issued the following statement pointing out the need for the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil political parties and the left parties to field a common candidate at the forthcoming parliamentary election.

In the present context, the correct choice for the parties of the minority nationalities and the parties of the left will be to put forward a common candidate of unity based on a common programme addressing in the form of clear demands the issues confronting the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities. The New Democratic Party emphasises that the time has not passed for efforts to that end and for decisions to be arrived at.

Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil political parties had met in Zurich recently for a two-day conference. Why couldn't they put forward a common candidate based on their unity? Putting forward such a candidate could prevent the leading candidate from securing 50% of the votes cast, thereby create a constitutional crisis, and force the existing executive presidential system face a dilemma. Besides, that could provide the opportunity to emphasise the problems faced by the minority nationalities and to put forward demands.

Hence, talks should be initiated to put forward a common candidate representing the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil political parties and the left parties. The time has not passed for that to be achieved. Parties deciding on which of the two main candidates is to be supported or individuals declaring themselves as candidates amounts to political deficiency and politics of selfishness. Hence the

New-Democratic Party pleads with the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil political parties and the left parties to arrive at a consensus on a common candidate.

S K Senthivel  
General Secretary, New-Democratic Party

## **NDMLP News**

### **ICOR admits NDMLP as Full Member**

Comrade Sanjay Singhvi, Coordinator, Asian Coordination Committee of the International Coordination of Revolutionary Parties and Organizations (ICOR) informed the General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party that following the sanctioning process examining the credentials of the NDMLP and the relevant consultations, the ICOR has admitted New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party of Sri Lanka as a full member of ICOR.

It should be noted that a delegation of the Party attended the Second International Conference of ICOR between 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014 in Germany as an observer. Comrade SK Senthivel General Secretary of the NDMLP who led the Party delegation was invited to apply for membership at the closing session of the Conference.

### **Comrade KA Subramaniam Remembered**

The Comrade KA Subramaniam Commemoration Committee organized a public event in the evening of 29<sup>th</sup> November 2014 to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> Death Anniversary of Comrade KA Subramaniam (Comrade Maniam), founder General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, then Communist Party of Sri Lanka (Left), at the Auditorium of the Colombo Tamil Sangam in Wellawatte.

Comrade S Thevarajah delivered the welcoming address of the meeting which was followed by the address from the chair by Dr S Sivasegaram. Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda delivered the Commemoration Lecture titled

“Irreconcilability of Reconciliation. Reconciliation after War: Thinking beyond Solitudes”. Summary translations were provided in Sinhala by S Sivagurunathan and in Tamil by Dr S Sivasegaram.

The book “Memories of Comrade Maniam” in Tamil by Comrade S K Senthivel was launched after the Commemoration Lecture. Comrade Siva Rajendran reviewed the book presenting the political life of Comrade Maniam based on thirty years of togetherness of the author with him.

The first copy was issued to Mrs Valliammai Subramaniam, wife of Comrade Maniam, who briefly addressed the audience about the integrity of Comrade Subramaniam in both private and political life. The author, SK Senthivel in his address of acknowledgment highlighted key events in the life of Comrade Maniam.

### **Remembering Comrade C Navaratnam**

The Tenth Death Anniversary of Comrade C Navaratnam, a leading comrade of the New Democratic Party (initially the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (Left) and now New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party) organized by the Comrade Navaratnam Commemoration Committee was held in the Kalaimahal Community Centre Auditorium, Thirunelveli, Jaffna on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

### **Campaign for Housing & Land Rights of Hill Country Tamils**

The recently founded Hill-Country Mass Organization for Social Justice (HMOS) formally launched a mass campaign for Land and Housing Rights in various parts of the Hill Country. In the context of the campaign, Comrade V Mahendran, National Organizer of the NDMLP issued on behalf of the Hill Country Regional Committee of the Party a pamphlet calling upon the people to unite and advance in the campaign demanding for each family 20 perches of land (5 are = 500 square metres), individual housing with right of ownership and a housing scheme structured as a village. The leaflet challenged the people to reject deception by the leadership in the Hill Country and take the initiative in their hands to fight for their rights.

The leaflet also said that the Hill Country Tamils with nearly 200 years of historical tradition and permanent residence in this country have been subjected to continued exploitation and oppression. Successive chauvinist capitalist rulers of the country have rejected their rights as a working class and their national aspirations. The saga of suppression of democratic rights and basic rights to livelihood including the right to housing, health and education persists. The trade union leadership which led the Hill Country Tamils in the since the independence of the country, owing to its short sighted political actions and advancing of self interest, has served to position the Hill Country Tamils as a group that pleads for concessions. Privatization of the plantations added to the burden of exploitation of labour and domination over their lives. Thus the state, the trade unions and private companies have been conspiratorial partners in exploiting the labour of plantation workers and dominating them. Amid these conditions, occasional natural disasters in the highlands repeatedly rob them of their lives and belongings. The tragedy of the land slide in Meeriabedde, Koslanda bears tearful testimony to this. Geoscientists have consistently insisted that antiquated and unsafe line rooms and environmentally destructive human activity are to blame for such tragedies. Against this background and as an echo of the Meeriabedde tragedy, the demand for land and housing rights has come to the fore as a minimum demand of the Hill Country Tamil people. Hence the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party which has consistently made demands for the recognition of the Hill Country Tamils as a nationality and for the granting of land and housing rights calls for a mass campaign demanding land and housing rights for the Hill Country Tamils.

### **Relief for Earth slip Victims and Mass Awareness**

Founding members of Hill-Country Mass Organization for Social Justice have for some time actively carried out relief work for victims of natural disaster. The HMOS while mobilizing support and relief for the landside victims of Meeriabedde, Koslanda, also carried out an awareness campaign about the causes of such tragedies, their prevention, and the politics of natural disasters. The campaign work in progress in several districts of the Hill Country enjoys wide support among the people.



# Can you sell the flame?

*S Thavachelvan*

You are able to sell  
the wind in which the bird spreads its wings;  
flowers, leaves and many plants too,

You sell  
ponds in which the fish frolic,  
trees that scoop the sun, and  
the grasslands that the cattle graze.

You know not that the hills that surround  
are the heads of our ancestors and  
the rivers are more ancient than their blood.

All what you sell are yours, but  
they are mine too, and  
they are ours, the people's.

You sell everything!  
Can you ever sell the  
hurricane that they generate?  
Can you sell the  
boundless tidal wave that surges forth?

Can you sell  
the flames that they spread?  
Can you?

# The Poet is no Lion, but a Stream

*Varavara Rao*

The poet is by no means a lion  
But a stream  
It is in the nature of a river  
Not only to leap from peaks but  
Also to flow steadily in plains,  
Circumventing the hurdles  
Stopping at dams  
And if time favours,  
Breaking them down and move on  
In branches and in canals

Some people can only see  
A flow in the river  
And a motion in her gait  
But they can't see  
The nature of her mind  
And the explosion in silence  
Those who mistake the sirens for truth  
Never can realize  
That there is the heat of the sun  
In the protoplasm,  
That there is the murmuring song of water

In hundreds of thousands of  
Megawatts of electricity  
That the fish which swims against the current  
Moves about only in water.

*(Continued from inside front cover)*

As he was a little short and fat  
it was resolved to make the statue slightly slimmer and taller.  
As his face was a little ugly  
it was resolved to slightly sharpen his nose,  
slightly straighten his lips  
slightly enlarge his eyes and  
chisel a slight stern smile on his face.  
The decision to clothe him in military attire  
and place a beret on his head  
was, however, not that of the Statue Committee.

It was resolved to engrave his qualifications  
on the pedestal of his statue.  
So, although a school dropout,  
he was awarded various degrees and titles.  
He was likewise awarded a military title too.

In the end, his name posed a little problem  
as the people know him only as the rhinoceros.  
Besides, the name that his parents gave him  
was rather unimpressive.  
So they slightly refined his name as well

The tasks of casting the statue,  
erecting the statue,  
caring for the statue and  
protecting the statue  
were assigned to reliable contractors.

But not all the citizens of the country are reliable!  
So— one day  
everything turned topsy turvy.  
Every statue was dislodged and  
taken to the foundry.  
His memorial building was demolished too.

But the dictator laughed—  
“What they demolished were not my statues”  
he gloated, rotting in the pit of his unidentified grave.

*The Truth*  
*Varavara Rao*

*The truth that worker's sweat*  
*will never utter,*  
*The truth that his empty stomach*  
*will never utter,*  
*The truth that his tears*  
*will never utter*  
*The truth that his toiling fists*  
*will never utter –*  
*Can a drop of ink from a poet's pen*  
*Ever express it?*

[Pendyala Varavara Rao (b. 3.11.1940): communist activist, renowned poet, journalist, literary critic and public speaker from Telangana, India]

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