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Song Lyrics: Malvina Reynolds, Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan

Little Boxes

Malvina Reynolds

*Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky tacky,
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same.
There's a green one and a pink one
And a blue one and a yellow one,
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.*

*And the people in the houses
All went to the university,
Where they were put in boxes
And they came out all the same,
And there's doctors and lawyers,
And business executives,
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.*

*And they all play on the golf course
And drink their martinis dry,
And they all have pretty children
And the children go to school,
And the children go to summer camp
And then to the university,
Where they are put in boxes
And they come out all the same.*

*And the boys go into business
And marry and raise a family
In boxes made of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.
There's a green one and a pink one
And a blue one and a yellow one,
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.*

(This politically satirical song composed in 1962 was made famous by Pete Seeger in 1963)

Editorial

The people elected Maithripala Sirisena not because they were impressed with his election manifesto and “100 Day Work Programme”. They wanted to be rid of the corrupt, dictatorial Rajapaksa regime. All the abuse of state resources, bribes, threats and chauvinist falsehoods proved inadequate to get him re-elected. At first he blamed the minorities for his defeat. That was not accurate as he received at most 55% of the Sinhalese vote. Then he accused the CIA and RAW of conspiring to topple him. He was probably right, but their roles could not have been decisive. He was defeated by his own deeds. That does not deny the people the right to expect the Sirisena-Wickramasinghe regime to honour its pledges.

The government out of need for a two-thirds majority to deliver on some pledges has accommodated a large number of defectors from the SLFP, and in the process breached by a wide margin its pledge that the cabinet will be restricted to 30. The prospect of abolishing the executive presidency has receded amid differences about stripping the President of all power. The “national government” that emerged through horse trading has adverse implications for its ability to deliver on its promises. The questionable integrity of some of the SLFP defectors will mean that action against corruption will be restricted and highly selective. Thus whenever and in whatever form the 19th Amendment is passed in Parliament the general election is unlikely to give the country a stable government.

The current bickering among parties and parliamentarians is about electoral arithmetic. The JVP, the biggest likely loser if the existing system of district wise elections with proportional representation is replaced by a first past the post system based on individual electorates, desires early elections since electoral reforms will be hard to implement at short notice. The JHU, another likely loser, wants reforms before the election as it is keen to weaken the JVP and the Muslim and Hill Country Tamil parties, which too will lose heavily with their leaders poorly placed for political bargaining. The UNP seeks to take advantage of the disarray in the SLFP,

while the warring factions of the SLFP need time for recovery and likely candidates seem to think that the reformed system would offer them a better prospect of winning a seat.

Three desperate UPFA partners (DLF, MEP, National Freedom Front) and Udaya Gammanpila (formerly JHU) have successfully persuaded a section of the SLFP that there is no future for the SLFP without Mahinda Rajapaksa to lead them. This has deepened divisions inside the SLFP, and it is unlikely that the SLFP MPs who have been hastily bribed with ministerial posts will join the camp awaiting the advent of Rajapaksa. Confusion among the UPFA allies has been compounded by the demand that former minister Nimal Siripala de Silva steps down as Leader of the Opposition since many SLFP MPs have joined the government. The CP and LSSP are marking time until the muddied waters of the UPFA clear.

The JVP and the TNA, despite disenchantment with the government are holding on to their palaces in the National Executive Council of the Sirisena-Wickramasinghe government. The TNA is in a quandary since it was let down by the “International Community” on the matter of the UNHRC resolution on Sri Lanka, and has little to tempt the Tamil people with at the general election. The resultant desperation was the cause of the hastily formulated resolution on genocide in the Northern Provincial Council, which has strained relations between the UNP leadership and a section of the TNA. The thought of a reformed electoral system has added to the chaos and to throat cutting among TNA rivals for nomination.

Thus the country faces an uncertain future after the elections. However, US imperialism and Indian hegemony will exert more influence on the policies of the government, especially towards all enemies and rivals of the US and India, excluding China for historical reasons.

Economic burdens on the people will rise and the national question will remain unresolved as it suits both sides of the Sinhala political divide as well as Tamil nationalists to keep it alive. It is therefore time that the working people and the oppressed nationalities started to work on political options outside what parliamentary politics has to offer.

International Women's Day

(Excerpts)

Alexandra Kollontai

A Militant Celebration

Women's Day or Working Women's Day is a day of international solidarity, and a day for reviewing the strength and organization of proletarian women.

But this is not a special day for women alone. The 8th of March is a historic and memorable day for the workers and peasants, for all the Russian workers and for the workers of the whole world. In 1917, on this day, the great February revolution broke out.^[1] It was the working women of Petersburg who began this revolution; it was they who first decided to raise the banner of opposition to the Tsar and his associates. And so, working women's day is a double celebration for us.

But if this is a general holiday for all the proletariat, why do we call it "Women's Day"? Why then do we hold special celebrations and meetings aimed above all at the women workers and the peasant women? Doesn't this jeopardize the unity and solidarity of the working class? To answer these questions, we have to look back and see how Women's Day came about and for what purpose it was organized.

How and why was Women's Day Organised?

Not very long ago, in fact about ten years ago, the question of women's equality, and the question of whether women could take part in

government alongside men was being hotly debated. The working class in all capitalist countries struggled for the rights of working women: the bourgeoisie did not want to accept these rights. It was not in the interest of the bourgeoisie to strengthen the vote of the working class in parliament; and in every country they hindered the passing of laws that gave the right to working women.

Socialists in North America insisted upon their demands for the vote with particular persistence. On the 28th of February, 1909, the women socialists of the USA. organized huge demonstrations and meetings all over the country demanding political rights for working women. This was the first "Woman's Day". The initiative on organizing a woman's day thus belongs to the working women of America.

In 1910, at the Second International Conference of Working Women, Clara Zetkin^[2] brought forward the question of organizing an International Working Women's Day. The conference decided that every year, in every country, they should celebrate on the same day a "Women's Day" under the slogan "The vote for women will unite our strength in the struggle for socialism".

During these years, the question of making parliament more democratic, i.e., of widening the franchise and extending the vote to women, was a vital issue. Even before the First World War, the workers had the right to vote in all bourgeois countries except Russia.^[3] Only women, along with the insane, remained without these rights. Yet, at the same time, the harsh reality of capitalism demanded the participation of women in the country's economy. Every year there was an increase in the number of women who had to work in the factories and workshops, or as servants and charwomen. Women worked alongside men and the wealth of the country was created by their hands. But women remained without the vote.

But in the last years before the war the rise in prices forced even the most peaceful housewife to take an interest in questions of politics and to protest loudly against the bourgeoisie's economy of plunder.

“Housewives uprisings” became increasingly frequent, flaring up at different times in Austria, England, France and Germany.

The working women understood that it wasn't enough to break up the stalls at the market or threaten the odd merchant: They understood that such action doesn't bring down the cost of living. You have to change the politics of the government. And to achieve this, the working class has to see that the franchise is widened.

It was decided to have a Woman's Day in every country as a form of struggle in getting working women to vote. This day was to be a day of international solidarity in the fight for common objectives and a day for reviewing the organized strength of working women under the banner of socialism.

The First International Women's Day

The decision taken at the Second International Congress of Socialist Women was not left on paper. It was decided to hold the first International Women's Day on the 19th of March, 1911.

This date was not chosen at random. Our German comrades picked the day because of its historic importance for the German proletariat. On the 19th of March in the year of 1848 revolution, the Prussian king recognized for the first time the strength of the armed people and gave way before the threat of a proletarian uprising. Among the many promises he made, which he later failed to keep, was the introduction of votes for women.

After January 11, efforts were made in Germany and Austria to prepare for Women's Day. They made known the plans for a demonstration both by word of mouth and in the press. During the week before Women's Day two journals appeared: *The Vote for Women in Germany* and *Women's Day in Austria*. The various articles devoted to Women's Day — “Women and Parliament,” “The Working Women and Municipal Affairs,” “What Has the Housewife got to do with Politics?” etc. — analyzed thoroughly the question of the equality of women in the government and in society. All the articles emphasized the same point: that it was absolutely

necessary to make parliament more democratic by extending the franchise to women.

The first International Women's Day took place in 1911. Its success exceeded all expectation. Germany and Austria on Working Women's Day was one seething, trembling sea of women. Meetings were organized everywhere – in the small towns and even in the villages halls were packed so full that they had to ask male workers to give up their places for the women.

This was certainly the first show of militancy by the working woman. Men stayed at home with their children for a change, and their wives, the captive housewives, went to meetings. During the largest street demonstrations, in which 30,000 were taking part, the police decided to remove the demonstrators' banners: the women workers made a stand. In the scuffle that followed, bloodshed was averted only with the help of the socialist deputies in Parliament.

In 1913 International Women's Day was transferred to the 8th of March. This day has remained the working Women's day of militancy.

Is Women's Day Necessary?

Women's Day in America and Europe had amazing results. It's true that not a single bourgeois parliament thought of making concessions to the workers or of responding to the women's demands. For at that time, the bourgeoisie was not threatened by a socialist revolution.

But Women's Day did achieve something. It turned out above all to be an excellent method of agitation among the less political of our proletarian sisters. They could not help but turn their attention to the meetings, demonstrations, posters, pamphlets and newspapers that were devoted to Women's Day. Even the politically backward working woman thought to herself: "This is our day, the festival for working women," and she hurried to the meetings and demonstrations. After each Working Women's Day, more women joined the socialist parties and the trade unions grew. Organizations improved and political consciousness developed.

Women's Day served yet another function; it strengthened the international solidarity of the workers. The parties in different countries usually exchange speakers for this occasion: German comrades go to England, English comrades go to Holland, etc. The international cohesion of the working class has become strong and firm and this means that the fighting strength of the proletariat as a whole has grown.

These are the results of working women's day of militancy. The day of working women's militancy helps increase the consciousness and organization of proletarian women. And this means that its contribution is essential to the success of those fighting for a better future for the working class.

Notes

1. Tsarist Russia still used the old "Julian" calendar of the Middle Ages, which was 13 days behind the "Gregorian" calendar used in most of the rest of the world. Thus March 8 was "February 23" in the old calendar. This is why the revolution of March 1917 is called "the February revolution" and that of November 1917 "the October revolution."
2. Clara Zetkin was a leader of the German socialist movement and the main leader of the international working women's movement. Kollontai was a delegate to the international conference representing the St. Petersburg textile workers.
3. This is not accurate. The vast majority of unskilled workers in England, France and Germany could not vote. A smaller percentage of working class men in the United States could not vote – in particular immigrant men. In the South of the US black men were often prevented from voting. The middle class suffrage movements in all the European countries did not fight to give votes to either working class women or men.

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(Source: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1920/womens-day.htm>)

Self Determination Revisited

Imayavaramban

[Given below is the revised text of the article "On Self-Determination" by the author which appeared in the first issue of New Democracy in July 1999. The text has been edited for style and revised to accommodate national and international developments since the article was first published, but retaining the core thesis.]

1. Understanding Self Determination

The National Question Today

The national question has in one way or another become a major political issue and cause of conflict in several countries of the Third World. Satisfactory resolution of this question is important not only to political stability and economic development but also to matters of democratic and human rights in the Third World. Sri Lankans need not look too far for evidence.

The nature of the national question has changed considerably since the days of colonial rule. The class nature of nationalism, however, remains unchanged in substance and nationalism still preserves its two faces, one progressive and liberating and the other reactionary, narrow and oppressive. But the progressive mode of nationalism which once linked hands with the politics of egalitarianism to unite the people under colonial oppression in their struggle for liberation has gradually yielded to chauvinism and national oppression. The transformation was not sudden, and the Third World, especially within the non-aligned movement, played an important part in opposing super-power and

imperialist domination of the world. The inability of the ruling classes in the Third world countries to stand up to imperialism led to the weakening of the national leadership in most of these countries and to the effective collapse of the non-aligned movement as a body to defend Third World interests. By the 1980's the national bourgeoisie had willingly surrendered to imperialism with which they now actively collaborate to carry forward the grand imperialist programme of globalization.

The failure of the leadership of most of the Third World countries in defending political and economic independence was not surprising, since it represented the native exploiting classes and was unwilling to transform the existing social system. Some regimes were reformist to the extent that reforms helped to keep off revolution. (In subsequent years, several of the reforms were reversed by right-wing governments with the blessings of the imperialist West, posing as guardians of democracy and human rights.) Political independence in the colonies increased the social and political awareness of the masses. This meant that the poorer sections of the population wanted a fairer share of the wealth, and the working class posed a challenge. In the former British colonies especially, the ruling classes found it expedient to use contradictions among the people to divide them, a lesson that they learnt from their successful colonial masters.

Race, religion, language, caste, tribe and every conceivable difference was exploited in politics, electoral and otherwise. This helped to deflect, at least temporarily, the attention of the masses from the more pressing problems but hurt the economy, undermined political stability and made the ruling classes increasingly dependent on the imperialists for their survival. In Sri Lanka, the national question had its sources in rivalry between sections of the elite and business communities. It was advantageous in electoral politics to stir up chauvinist and narrow nationalist sentiments. JR Jayawardane, the leader of the UNP, used the steam roller parliamentary majority of the UNP to introduce a new constitution in 1978, and exercised the executive power that he granted himself under the constitution to suppress trade unions and other democratic institutions in order to implement unhindered its "open

economic policy" and systematically transform the national question into war.

Poverty and indebtedness worsened in the Third World and imperialism through its agencies, especially the World Bank and the IMF, has been able to dictate economic and social policy to the poorer countries. It has also been able to subvert any government that fails to toe the line, create conflict and cause civil war. Overall, in many ways, the situation now is worse for the people of the Third World than it was under colonialism. Under colonialism the people clearly recognized the enemy, whereas under neo-colonialism the enemy is invisible. Incapable of finding a way out of the mess, the ruling elite classes are, for their own survival, betraying the interests of their countries and the people.

Addressing the National Question

It takes much courage and foresight to face the reality of the national crisis in the Third World countries and seek just and lasting solutions. The exploiting classes have time and again shown their reluctance, if not inability, to solve the national question, unite the people and lead the country out of the political and economic mess. Governments that represent the exploiting classes have sought to benefit from national oppression and from dividing the people in every possible way except those that threaten the existence of the social system that preserves the interests of the upper classes. Thus, valid solutions can come only from the forces of progress and social justice, as they can recognize the need of uniting the oppressed masses nationally and internationally to overcome imperialist domination.

The international left, however, suffered a severe setback since the ascent of modern revisionism led by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union after Khrushchev took control of the Party and the state. The lure of parliamentary politics had been too strong for a sizeable section of communist leaders in advanced capitalist countries and some had substituted parliamentary elections for revolutionary politics well before Khrushchev compromised with US imperialism. The decay worsened after the split in the international communist movement. In Sri Lanka, it meant that the parliamentary left, which once took a principled stand on the rights of the minority nationalities, abandoned in course of time its

principles to become a docile junior partner of the Sinhala nationalist SLFP by the 1980's. Thus it is only the genuine left that can be counted on to come up with solutions.

Defining a Nation

It will be useful at this stage to discuss the concept of nationhood and self determination. There is a tendency among some, unfortunately including a number of 'leftists', to cling too strongly to definitions. The importance and value of definitions is undeniable in understanding things. Definitions are, however, more helpful when used in an explanatory sense than in a restrictive sense. The definition of a nation gives one an idea of what a nation could be but is not adequate to legislate whether a particular group of people could constitute a nation. Definitions help one to develop guidelines in addressing a political question but when applied rigidly and dogmatically they can lead to disastrous consequences.

Nations seldom wait for definitions to validate their existence. While common factors such as race, language, tribe and culture can bring a people together as a nation, a nation remains, above all, a product of history. Thus we have nations that cut across racial, linguistic, cultural and tribal barriers, and we also have situations where despite sharing the necessary common features people are divided among different nations.

Causes of Calls for Secession

When dealing with the question of the right of a nation to secede, we come across the question of feasibility but more often the question of the right of a people to nationhood. The ability of a nation to survive is more important than the award of license to nationhood by some definition. Size is important both territorially and demographically, but not critical. What is most important in the making of a nation is the ability of the socio-political system to unite a people and give them a sense of belonging. Cuba has united black and white people more successfully than any other country, while the mighty USA, despite its economic and military muscle and its reputation as the great melting pot, is still racially divided. What united India and gave Indians the feeling of 'Indian nationalism' at one time has ceased to be, and India is today a jumble of nations and a prison house for some nations and nationalities. The rigid approach of Nehru

towards the demands of the Sikhs for a state of their own within the Union of India relied on the argument that states cannot be formed based on religious identity. It not only hardened attitudes but also strengthened Sikh nationalism and militancy. Significantly, the Tamil nationalists of Sri Lanka suffer emotional problems not too different from that of the Punjabi Hindu majority at the time, and still find it difficult to accept the reality the Muslims consider themselves to be distinct from the Tamils. The reasons for such assertion by the Muslims are mostly historical and date back to early 20th Century. Muslims spoke of their eligibility to autonomy around the mid 1950s but it was only in the 1980s that they asserted themselves as a distinct nationality. While religion by itself does not comprise distinct national identity, political circumstances could create conditions that favour the emergence of a distinct national identity based on religious identity as in the case of the Muslims of Yugoslavia.

What threatens the unity of India is the concentration of power at the centre combined with the rise of Hindi-Hindu chauvinism and sustained upper caste domination of society.

Call for Secession Sri Lanka

Nations emerge as a consequence of socio-political awareness and often as a result of oppression. This is particularly true of the emergence of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka. The 'Tamil nation' in Sri Lanka that the Tamil nationalists refer to is neither a successor to the Jaffna Kingdom of five centuries ago nor composed of all the Tamil speaking people living in the island. What transformed awareness of Tamil identity into Tamil nationalism was a sequence of events since before independence. Yet it took more than the Citizenship Act of 1948, the Official Language Act of 1956, the continuous planned colonization of the North and the East, the notorious standardization of 1971, and anti-Tamil violence on several occasions. The vote for the TULF in 1977 was no more an endorsement of the demand for a separate state than was the vote for the Federal Party in 1956 an endorsement of the call for a federal state. It was the tragic turn of events since 1977, especially the genocidal attack on the Tamils in July 1983 and the negative attitude of the state towards the Tamils, which effectively denied the Tamil people the right to live in peace even on the soil that

constituted their traditional homeland that pushed the Tamil nationality into a struggle for national liberation.

Denial of the identity of the Tamil people as a nation (or a nationality) and thus a right to self determination has come mainly from Sinhala chauvinists who have argued that Sri Lanka can have only one national identity, namely Sinhala (desirably Sinhala Buddhist). The denial of the existence of a Tamil homeland in the north and the east of the country is historical mischief, while arguments questioning the feasibility of the Tamil nation-state have often fringed on dishonesty. Whether a separate Tamil state is desirable is an issue distinct from its feasibility. There are many who, rightly, believe that a united Sri Lanka is in the best interest of the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. But such unity cannot be imposed on the minority nationalities, especially in the wake of the events of the past few decades. Preservation of the integrity of Sri Lanka as a united country is conditional upon dispelling the fears of the minority nationalities about the prospects of their being treated as equals by the majority. The Tamil people of the north and east of Sri Lanka have, asserted their nationhood, and to deny it is to reject reality.

Besides, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils have in the past three or four decades increasingly asserted their identity as nationalities distinct from the Tamils. As the term "nation" appears to suggest the call for secession, and since neither the Sinhalese nor the Tamils in the island have historically been a nation in the modern sense and the assertion of "Tamil nationhood" is a result of political developments in the last quarter of the 20th Century, it may be more sensible to refer to both Sinhalese and Tamils as well as the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils as nationalities without prejudice to their eligibility for self determination.

A united Sri Lanka can only be a union of nations (or nationalities) and a stable union needs to be voluntary and hence incorporate the right to secession. Self determination does precisely this, and the credit for introducing the concept of self determination in its true sense should go to Lenin (*VI Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, first published April-June 1914, Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1972, Moscow, 20, pp. 393-454*) who was firm that it implied the right to secession. The purpose was, however, not to encourage secession but to ensure that the Soviet

Union was a voluntary union of nations based on equality and mutual trust. The right to secession asserted that the union was voluntary and thereby weakened the urge for secession, unless there was a threat to the survival of the people as a nation.

Understanding Self Determination

Self determination means the right to secede but not necessarily the act of secession. It is like the right to divorce, which does not mean that every marriage should be dissolved. Without the right to divorce, marriage is like a prison and the denial of that right does not guarantee the survival of marriage in reality. The right to part company makes a relationship more equal and stable than one without that right. The right to secession makes the members of a union of nations feel more secure and enables them to explore the best possible way in which they could coexist within the union as equal partners.

Both oppressor and oppressed can, for different purposes, stubbornly insist that the right to self determination means secession and achieve a shared objective, namely escalation of conflict. For instance, several Tamil nationalists of Sri Lanka have insisted that self determination simply means secession. That view is echoed by hard-line Sinhala nationalists, to whom any form of devolution of power implies secession. Some Tamil nationalists accused the LTTE of betrayal when it expressed willingness to negotiate a settlement within the framework of a united Sri Lanka when the LTTE and the UNP government agreed in their third meeting held in Oslo in December 2003 that the parties will explore the possibility of resolving the national question under a federal form of government with "internal self determination". Their mischief was matched by their Sinhala chauvinist counterparts. Lack of trust between the LTTE and the government, each working on its agenda of strengthening its hold in areas under its control and building up for future conflict, combined with chauvinist opposition to federation supported by sections of the media in the south of Sri Lanka, ensured that no settlement based even on some form of devolution of power was possible.

In the Sri Lankan context, it is the duty of the progressives among the Sinhalese to explain the full implications of self determination to the Sinhala masses so that they are not misled by the chauvinists. The people

have the right to know that self determination means more than the right to secession. It should be explained to them that it also means, most importantly, the right of nationalities to seek solutions to the national question within the framework of a united country. Whether the answer is a federal state, regional autonomy or self-government of some form within a unitary state is a matter for discussion and decision. It is essential to emphasize that the stability of the solution will be enhanced by the maximising devolution of power so as to strengthen democracy.

If the progressives fail to explain the meaning of self determination as a matter of free choice of the nationalities and the only means to a lasting, stable and just solution to the national question, they will only be helping to destroy the prospects of a united Sri Lanka. It will be worse than any mistake of the parliamentary left between 1956 and 1977, when the learned men and women of the left kept quiet while Sinhala nationalists in the UNP and the SLFP chose to interpret the demand for a federal state a secessionist demand. The parliamentary left had got fully addicted to parliamentary seats and posts in government by the mid 1960's so that it got fully sapped of revolutionary content. Its opportunism benefited the SLFP in electoral terms and more significantly the UNP in terms of its anti-working class agenda. Following its electoral humiliation in 1977, when it contested parliamentary elections without an electoral pact with the SLFP, it lost all will to be an independent left force. The parliamentary left learned neither the lessons of the seventeen years of UNP rule of 1977-1994 nor the lessons of its disastrous alliance with the SLFP in 1994-2015, especially under Rajapaksa. They need to salvage their left credibility and avert total political irrelevance, and rectifying their errors on the national question could be a good starting point.

2. Expanding the Scope of Self Determination

Nations and Self Determination

Self determination is widely known as the right of a nation to choose its mode of existence as a socio-political entity. It implies the right of the nation to statehood and, where applicable, secession. It also enables

nations to come together or stay together on a voluntary basis within the framework of a multi-national state.

Restricting self determination to nations means implicit denial of its underlying principle to groups of people who are not defined or recognized as nations. Partly as a result, popular movements struggling to protect the identity of an ethnic group and preserve its existence as a distinct social group feel compelled to assert that they are nations rather than an ethnic minority within the structure of a nation state.

The question of ethnicity is widely discussed today, and ethnicity has become part of the imperialist agenda of 'Identity Politics' promoted by it mainly through the agency of NGOs. Caste politics too has been promoted in India to the extent that caste identity is at times placed on par with nationality, while class identity and class struggle are rejected as inimical to the interests of identity groups. This is contrary to the principled Marxist Leninist stand of respecting and even defending the identity of any community against oppression while encouraging unity among various communities in their struggle against their common oppressor.

There are those who argue that ethnic groups should be allowed, if not actively encouraged, to preserve their identity as a distinct social group for as long as they wish. There are others who consider such preservation of a distinct identity to be harmful to national unity and advocate the integration of minority ethnic groups into the mainstream if not their assimilation by the majority. Interestingly, there are right- as well as left-wing arguments in support of each of these opposed views. Whatever one's intentions, one should be aware of the reason why a group of people opt to assert their ethnic or any other social identity, and it is unfair to deny an ethnic group the right to preserve its identity in the same way that a majority or minority nationality does.

Ethnic minorities are often treated as lesser social groups with limited right to identity as distinct social groups. This perhaps is the result of approaching the rights of groups of people to preserve their identity from the point of view of a nation state and right to nationhood. The concept of the nation state originated in Europe alongside capitalism. The national question of today is more complex and concerns more than the co-existence of nations. Most importantly, the principle that underlies

the right of a nation to choose its mode of existence as a distinct entity cannot be allowed only to people who can somehow be identified as a nation and denied to ethnic groups which, despite their strong ethnic identity, do not constitute a nation.

Hazards of Limiting Self Determination to Nations

Nations are not products of definitions but of historical processes. There can at times be little that is rational or sensible about what made a particular group of people a nation; and national awareness of a people, individually and collectively, is historical and contextual. Ethnic or national consciousness has not been the driving force behind a people to assert nationhood and create a nation state of their own. Historical or circumstantial national oppression has often been instrumental in the emergence of new nation states in recent years.

Oppression by an exploiting class with a nationalist ideology provokes resistance and struggle by the oppressed to defend themselves and preserve their existence as a socio-political entity in their own right. Under such conditions, no ethnic group waits for the grant of right to secession, and the denial of that right will only strengthen the resolve to secede. Here, limiting self determination to nations becomes more or less redundant. The real value of self determination is in its ability to bind nations together into a voluntary union of equal partners with a right to separate when the union ceases to be a happy relationship.

Limiting self determination to groups of people who can be considered to constitute a nation has harmful implications for the interests of many ethnic groups, in some instances with populations exceeding those of existing nations. The rights of native American races and tribes who have been reduced to refugees on their own soil continue to erode in North America as badly as they do in some of the lesser democracies of South America, especially Brazil. The aboriginal people of Australia have been rendered homeless on their own soil. The carving up of Africa by the colonial rulers has complicated the national question in the continent and adversely affected the way of life of nomadic people who have never known national boundaries. The Gypsies and Jews of Europe have been at the receiving end of nationalism for centuries. The problems of the tribal people of India, once highlighted during the Naxalbari uprising and the

decade that followed, have returned to haunt Indian politics in more than one way.

Most of the oppressed groups listed above do not constitute nations, as it is not feasible to found a nation state comprising any of them. Should that mean that they have no right to self determination? If self determination is understood as the right to secession, that right cannot be exercised by them. If that is the sole criterion for their disqualification, it amounts to perverting the spirit of self determination. Self determination applied to nations includes the right to secession because that represents the highest level at which a nation exercises its right to choose its mode of existence. Where that option is unavailable, a people should have an alternative, subject to the socio-political and geographic constraints that rule out secession.

It is the denial of self determination to the tribal people of India that prompted the hill tribes of north-eastern India to demand the carving out of a Jharkhand for them. The tribal people cannot constitute a nation in a strict sense of the word because they comprise several tribes with different languages and different cultural traditions, and without a common socio-political heritage. But one cannot miss similarities between the factors that prompted the demand for an Islamic state on the sub-continent early last century and those relating to tribal homelands now. The viability of a tribal homeland is an issue separate from the issues underlying the demand, which cannot be wished away. While secession is not a feasible option, the case for the highest degree of autonomy for each tribal community is strong. Nevertheless, there is need to consider tribal rivalries, with features similar to rivalries among nationalities and are susceptible to exploitation by the state, the capitalist classes as well as imperialism. The danger of one tribe seeking hegemony over numerically or economically weaker tribes within an autonomous tribal region will exist under capitalism. There are positive lessons on the correct handling of such contradictions in the experiences of Bolivia, Ecuador and Mexico.

Some ultra-leftists wish the disintegration of the union of India and prescribe secession, even where the nationality concerned is not interested. There are, on the other hand, Indian nationalists, unfortunately including several Marxists, who are oblivious to the reality that India is a multi-

national, multi-ethnic state that is unable to meet the aspirations of its minority nations or nationalities, tribes and other ethnic minorities in the face of surging Hindi-Hindu chauvinism and capitalist greed. India is the world's most complex mix of nationalities and ethnic minorities. Carving up the sub-continent into a multitude of nation states cannot be a good solution. But however desirable the stability and unity of India may be, they will be unattainable unless the national question is addressed based on the equality of national, tribal and other ethnic communities as well as allowing secession especially where there has been a historical claim to separate existence.

Nationalism in Oppression and Liberation

We need to return to the dual nature of nationalism as a force of liberation as well as one of oppression. Significantly, even nations struggling self determination resolutely deny that right to minorities within their territory. This has been true of Sinhala chauvinism from early this century and equally true of Tamil nationalism from its embryonic stages. Tamil nationalism represented Jaffna Vellaala upper class interests until recently, and the Tamil nationalist tradition denied the distinct identity of the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils by calling them "Tamil speaking people" – a concept that arose in the face of the disenfranchisement of the Hill Country Tamils in 1948 by a chauvinist government. The Federal Party which put forward the idea failed to address the grievances and aspirations of all three major groups that constitute the Tamil speaking people and emphasized only issues relevant to the middle class Tamils to end up as the party of the Tamils. The tragedy is that, in order to strengthen its case for federalism, it continued to insist that the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils were part of the Tamil speaking nation or nationality. This position has been upheld by nearly all Tamil nationalists to this day. The predominantly Jaffna-centred Tamil nationalist politics ensured that the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils distanced themselves from the Tamil nationalist leadership.

In Sri Lanka, discussion of the national question has, locally and internationally, been mostly confined to the Sinhala and Tamil nationalities. Occasionally the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils fare in the discussions. However, the leaders of all four nationalities have by and

large ignored the aboriginal people of the Island, the Attho (also known as the Vedda, meaning hunters) with their own language, customs and culture, who have lost much of their territory to agricultural development and colonization in the Eastern and Uva Provinces. Besides, the gypsy community and the "Rodiya" people have been traditional outcasts in the Sinhala south. Such indifference towards the grievances of other national minorities reflects a form of chauvinism.

No minority nationality has the right to subject a smaller minority to hegemony or to demand that it surrenders its identity to a larger identity. Thus the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party was early to recognize the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils as distinct nationalities as well as call for the national rights of the Attho.

Tribal populations of India have little say in matters affecting their life and livelihood and are not beneficiaries of projects undertaken at the expense of their traditional grazing, farming and hunting lands. Some see the projects as development and some others as a process of bringing these people into the modern era. To many liberals and even sections of the left "economic development" is an end in itself with no consideration for social consequences. As a result they play into the hands of imperialism by allowing imperialism define "economic development" and allow such development to occur at the expense of oppressed minority communities. Most environmental activists and several feminist groups in India, quite correctly, oppose such development. In fairness to the 'Naxalite' movement of the late '60s and early '70s, it should be noted here that they stood by the tribal people in their struggles against urban, capitalist greed. But, little has been achieved so far in relation to the right of ethnic populations to choose the path and pace of their transformation into a modern society, if they ever want to become one. Thus the Third World needs to redefine development and democracy in its own context and in the interests of all sections of the masses.

The tribal population of India is being deprived of control over its traditional lands partly as a consequence of development as advocated by the elite of India and partly as a result of capitalist greed. Such crimes against tribal and aboriginal people India and elsewhere have intensified under imperialist globalization. Development projects and large scale

mining threaten livelihood as well the right to homes. The election of the BJP to power in 2014 in India has aggravated the crisis of the tribal people, and attacks on the tribal people are likely to further intensify under the pretext of fighting “Maoist terror”.

The plight of the tribal population in many Asian and Latin American countries is hardly different from that of the tribal minorities of India. There is greater awareness of these issues today but not enough to bring about change. Political change in Latin America in the past two decades or so has made native populations conscious of their rights and politically assertive. But such awareness unless guided by progressive ideology can be abused by imperialism to subvert the gains of mass struggle. In other words, empowerment of a nationality or an ethnic group needs to be accompanied by anti-imperialist political awareness.

Imperialism and Self Determination

Issues of human and democratic rights matter to imperialism only as far as they can be used to bully states that challenge its domination of the world. Thus oppressed people can depend on themselves alone for their emancipation and it is important that issues of class, race, national liberation, women’s struggle for equality, and environment are interlinked and unity forged on the widest possible scale among victims of imperialist exploitation and plunder. Extension of the principle of self determination in a way that it applies to ethnic groups that are not recognized as nations is an important step towards achieving that unity. This idea needs further development in view of the concept of “internal self determination” adopted by the UN (*Equality of ethnic identity Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, General Recommendation 21, The right to self-determination (Forty-eighth session, 1996), U.N. Doc. A/51/18, annex VIII at 125 (1996), reprinted in Compilation of General Comments and General Recommendations Adopted by Human Rights Treaty Bodies, U.N. Doc. HRI\GEN\1\Rev.6 at 209 (2003). Para.4.*) The idea of “internal self determination” is a ploy by UN member states to deny the right to secession from a member country to a people with a claim to nationhood. In reality imperialism has facilitated secession in several instances by actively encouraging secessionist forces and militarily intervening in the name of defending human rights, now under the “Responsibility to

Protect" (R2P) which has UN acceptance. Thus imperialism is able to play self determination both ways, allowing some states to practice national oppression unhindered and enabling secession to punish or humiliate 'hostile' states.

Advocates of centralized state power and large and powerful states resent the idea of devolution. Their notions of economic integration of the world, like their ideas about science, technology and development are flawed. Mankind cannot be united based on the negation of the identity of any people and rejection of different forms of human knowledge, even with only a limited amount of "scientific truth". Such views of knowledge are characteristic of the arrogant and patronizing missionaries of the colonial era. Thus the current urge to unify all human knowledge and skills under one umbrella is based on imperialist design to rob the Third World of its right to its traditional achievements, especially through the privatization of knowledge in the public domain as intellectual property.

The struggle of the oppressed people of the Third World is inseparable from the demand for devolution and self determination in that it is struggle for global democracy in the ultimate sense. The practicality and feasibility of the extension of the principle of self determination are called into question mainly by the advocates of global integration as one happy family under imperialism.

Towards a Positive Approach

There are, however, two important instances in recent history where ethnic minorities with very small populations have been encouraged to preserve their identity and take control, although in a somewhat limited way, of their affairs. China with a population of 600 million — now well exceeding a billion — recognized over fifty national minorities with some of population of the order of 100,000 or less. There are individual autonomous regions or units for each of the larger ethnic groups. Elsewhere the interests of several ethnic groups are served by a single autonomous unit.

What is more impressive is the case of the relatively small Central American state of Nicaragua. The revolutionary government of the Sandinista alliance, after consulting the people during 1984-86 on

constitutional reform, adopted the constitution of 1987 which declared Nicaragua as a multi-ethnic nation and enabled the setting up of autonomous regions on the Atlantic Coast which was home to six ethnic minorities, the largest numbering 120,000 and the smallest a mere 800.

The Autonomy Law ensured that no ethnic group exercised hegemony over another, and Nicaragua became the first country of the entire continent to declare itself to be a multi-ethnic nation. Had not US Imperialism undermined the stability of Nicaragua and forced the overthrow of the Sandinista government in 1991, the Nicaragua experience would have been a great inspiration for the ethnic minorities of Latin America and an example for many countries of Asia, including Sri Lanka.

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The above two instances suggest how the principle of self determination can be extended to ethnic minorities that do not constitute nations. While they do not define how the principle can be applied, they demonstrate its feasibility. The term self determination has not been used in either country, but the degree of autonomy goes close to the exercise of self determination in the fullest by ethnic groups which cannot secede. What is important is that the right of an ethnic group to autonomy and devolution of power mean greater democratization and therefore a fuller exercise of the right of the ethnic group to make decisions relating to its existence as a distinct group.

Self determination cannot exist in isolation from the international situation; and imperialism, while encouraging secession and civil war in some national questions, turns a blind eye to national oppression in its own backyard and in countries controlled by its stooges. A close study of inconsistent US policy on the national question and its encouraging, if not provoking, ethnic conflict in certain 'unfriendly' countries will show that the US and its allies have cynically manipulated national sentiment to imperialist advantage. It is therefore hard to separate the national question from the struggle against imperialism. The left has to take the initiative in defending the rights of oppressed nationalities and minorities so that imperialism does not gain a foothold in any country on the pretext of defending the rights of oppressed minorities.

The case for unity and closer collaboration between the peoples of the Third World is strong. Such unity is not possible with national oppression, and the expansion of the scope of self determination to cover ethnic minorities will reinforce democracy, enable devolution of power and strengthen the struggle of the Third World for political and economic freedom from imperialist exploitation and domination.

Presidential Polls and the Geneva Syndrome

Asvaththamaa

Introduction

The results of the recently concluded Presidential elections and the voting pattern of the Tamils in North, the resolution on “Genocide against Tamils” adopted by the Northern Provincial Council and the reactions to it prompted me to write this comment. Sri Lanka now has a new Executive President and a new government, so that the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) could be persuaded by the new government to defer by six months the presentation of a report on Sri Lanka's alleged human rights violations during its civil war to allow more time to conclude its internal probe. This poses the country, especially the Tamils, a simple question: What is next?

The new climate reasserts the need for a fresh perspective of the Sri Lankan national question and an appreciation of the respective roles of narrow nationalism and majoritarian chauvinism. The national question continues to project itself as the main contradiction and needs to be seen as a problem affecting all the nationalities of the country. Further, embedded in each of the sections representing the different aspects of the problem is reactionary ideology based on conservative outlook. Among ideas put forward purportedly on behalf of the Sinhala and Tamil nationalities, are claims to an ancient history, conservation, purity, hierarchy, fear for the future, distrust, and mutual rejection.

The social order of Sri Lanka emerged from a semi-colonial semi-feudal social order to enter a neo-colonial social order. Thus there is no question of denying or concealing the reality that the fundamental contradiction in Sri Lanka is a class contradiction. However, the national contradiction, accompanied by related struggles, has overshadowed the fundamental contradiction to emerge as the main contradiction. The national contradiction comprises mainly oppression by the Sinhala Buddhist ruling classes and the struggle for liberation by the Tamil nationality, but it also concerns oppression of other minority nationalities and contradictions among all nationalities. Although there has always been the prospect of resolving amicably the ethnic contradictions that evolved into the current national question, the ruling chauvinistic capitalist classes have remained unwilling to find a just solution and merely asserted their class interests. Such attitude applies equally to the Tamil elite. Events since the formation of the new government are best understood when viewed in this light.

Nationalism in Sri Lanka spread rapidly across all nationalities to condition their outlooks. Danger exists that racial and religious identity in the hands of vicious nationalism could overwhelm the reality that the ethnic groups are people of this country who are mostly working people exploited and oppressed by the ruling classes. Consequently, the ordinary Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people could be driven to act like mutual enemies. Nationalism has contributed very much to the deterioration of the situation. This article examines the current reality in the context of the change of government and the plea of the Tamils to the 'international community' for justice.

Elections as Democratic Practice

The people of Sri Lanka have since independence voted in elections to parliament, provincial councils and local bodies as well as to elect their President. It is doubtful that the reportedly free and fair elections and the elected ruling class elite have thus far helped to solve any key issue. Without resolving the underlying issues, the people are condemned to go through cycles of elections, while problems, crises and the accompanying

sorrow and misery linger on. The situation calls into question the democratic credentials of the electoral process in a country which has enjoyed elected government since independence and is one of the first in the Third World to practice universal suffrage.

Elections are perceived as the lifeblood of democracy— generating public debate, shaping the policy agenda, selecting representatives, determining the composition of parliaments, and influencing the distribution of power in government. Regular opportunity to change elected representatives via the ballot box is seen as an essential pre-condition to democracy. However, in reality, legislative power has been usurped, media muzzled, government's legitimacy undermined by corruption, and public trust eroded by scandal.

The recently concluded Presidential elections in Sri Lanka enabled a regime change through ballot, which many see as the ultimate democratic achievement, as citizens changed the government through voting in elections. But this is an over simplification. The problem with elections which take place every few years in many parts of the world comprises exorbitantly expensive election campaigns and the powerful role played by the media, often with doubtful democratic credentials, ensuring that the elections are not level playing field. The conduct of the elections and of the campaigns have been increasingly lacking in democracy.

Outcomes of elections are often hailed with the slogan 'the people have spoken'. Such images of the most fundamental process of selecting members of a government in a modern democracy is necessary fiction, without which there would be little faith in the government that is subsequently installed. It is fictional, firstly because in contemporary democracies election alone has never been sufficient to give political legitimacy to the elected government. Political legitimacy of an elected government rests on the acceptance of other conditions that prevent the election result from being challenged. Political instability could ensue in case of challenge. Secondly, voter turnout, except under special circumstances, has on the whole been on the decline. Governing bodies are

increasingly elected by a minority of the electorate. The low turnout also reflects scepticism among citizens about the electoral process for a variety of reasons, including the fact that election to public office has become a contest of the rich and powerful, an elite game, since contesting elections has become a very expensive undertaking. The low turnout also raises questions about the degree and quality of representation of those elected and the government thus constituted.

In Sri Lanka, the electoral process seeks to separate the political sphere and its activities from the larger socio-cultural environment in which elections take place. It seeks to domesticate the election process by suppressing all the unwieldy untidiness of electioneering activities as 'irrationalities'. Ultimately, elections are defined by a set of 'universalistic' practices carried out in similar, orderly manner, with the entire process driven by the arrival of an outcome by the aggregation of individual votes.

In countries like Sri Lanka elections are conducted and campaigns run as a way of popular culture. As a result, non-political personalities — actors, beauty queens, singers, and artists — get elected for office. Targeting popular culture has been the electioneering practice in Sri Lanka since the early 2000s and has significantly altered the parliamentary political landscape. To engage the masses, electioneering activities draw on sentiments which are shaped by the local 'popular culture'. Popular culture exists prior to elections so that electioneering activities necessarily draw resonance from it to be successful in pulling in and persuading the crowds. This occurred in the Presidential elections as well. Populism took a nationalistic turn, and Mahinda Rajapaksa portrayed himself as a champion of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, which further encouraged the minorities to vote for his opponent. That was why after losing Mahinda Rajapaksa declared that he lost because of the minorities but really won the election since he received the majority of the Sinhala votes.

What awaits the minorities after voting in President Maithripala Sirisena? It is a dichotomy for all the minorities, which once again points to the elections failing as democratic practice. The minorities have not

gained anything by voting in the new government. They lack the necessary bargaining power in electoral terms. The government is unlikely to offer anything to the national minorities that would displease the chauvinists on whom it has become increasingly dependent. Besides, keeping the national question simmering is to its advantage. Even though Tamil nationalists believe that India will intervene on behalf of the Tamils, the reality is that Indian pressure on the Sri Lankan government is limited, as India has no interest in finding a just and lasting solution to the Sri Lankan question, since a solution which offers the necessary degree of political devolution could have adverse implications for India's policy towards its own national question. Besides, India's economic interests in Sri Lanka, let alone other hegemonic ambitions, far outweigh its desire to push for peace and political stability to Sri Lanka at the risk of political alienation.

In the Presidential elections, the Jaffna District showed a low voter turnout than the national average. The Tamils of the North have on earlier occasions effectively boycotted three successive elections— but not enthusiastically. Some saw it as a negative feature suggesting political apathy. But that was only characteristic of the post war, post presidential poll mood of the time. A vastly different behaviour was seen in the long delayed elections to the Northern Provincial Council in 2013 when the electorate overwhelmingly voted in the Tamil National Alliance in an expression of anger against the Rajapaksa regime.

Non-participation in elections is a strong political statement. In 2010, it was stronger than their response to the Tamil nationalist plea to vote to strengthen the Tamil polity. The people lacked credible options, and an expression of that feeling was not a sign of apathy but conscious rejection of the options before them. A political vacuum waits to be filled among the minority nationalities, especially the Tamils. There is no Tamil nationalist alternative to fill that space, as each existing parliamentary option has been tested and proven to be not just a failure but a cynical

breach of the trust placed in it by the people. That vacuum will exist until the emergence of a viable alternative that is acceptable to the people.

The Genocide Resolution: What about the IPKF?

In February 2015, the Northern Provincial Council adopted a resolution titled 'Sri Lanka's Genocide against Tamils'. The Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran in his presentation of the resolution said: "We the Tamils appeal to the international community to give justice to us by recognizing the Sri Lankan government's genocide against the Tamils". He further said "This is the right time to bring in the resolution". The unanimously adopted resolution targeted the upcoming UNHRC sessions in March. But the Government succeeded in getting the presentation of the report on Sri Lanka deferred to September. The deferral was recommended by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who argued that there was a possibility that new information will become available for the report. The US delegation to the UNHRC welcomed the deferral and expressed hope that new information will present a "more complete picture of what occurred". The deferral was supported by the delegations of the UK and EU as well. This has been a big disappointment for those who banked their hopes on the publication of the report. The point that they miss is that the actions of the UNHRC have little to do with justice for the Tamil people or for that matter any people. They comprise a 'carrot and stick' ploy of the "International Community" to keep Sri Lanka in line. With the new government willing to cooperate fully with the international community, it is now a show of carrots for Sri Lanka in Geneva in place of the sticks in the past two years under President Rajapaksa.

The reasons spelt out by the Chief Minister Wigneswaran for tabling the resolution are weak, and the timing of it is questionable. If it was timed for Geneva, it has misfired and lost its purpose. More significantly, it has made clear that the International Community did not care for what the Tamil spokespersons say. It has its needs and priorities and the Tamils let themselves to be used as readily discardable pawns on the geopolitical chessboard. The Tamils should understand this reality.

The NPC has more urgent issues to concentrate on. It has not passed a resolution expressing concern about waste oil contamination of water in the Jaffna peninsula. It has not adopted a single resolution critical of the attacks of the Tamil fishers by Indian poachers in Sri Lankan territorial waters. Having failed to address such pressing issues, the NPC appeals for justice to the International Community. The resolution argues in detail the claim of genocide against the Tamils. While it details the killings of the Tamil people since 1956, it carefully sidesteps atrocities committed by the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) in the North and East in 1987-89. Omission of IPKF in the resolution is neither accidental nor a mistake, but calculated. It is no secret that the Tamil National Alliance and other Tamil political leaders are averse to antagonizing the Indian establishment.

Interestingly, the resolution was drafted in English and adopted without even a Tamil translation for the members of the NPC, whose official language is Tamil. The Chief Minister explained that he did not have sufficient time to translate the resolution. Thus the haste in adopting the resolution, casts further doubts about the real intentions.

The Role of the International Community

The irony of the resolution is that it seeks justice from the International Community for atrocities committed by the Sri Lankan state especially during the last stages of war. It was the member states of the International Community who provided the Sri Lankan government with weapons, firepower and technical expertise as well as provided satellite images and intelligence during the government's onslaught since late 2008. The members of the International Community are thus party to the atrocities and are answerable for what happened during the last stages of war, as they were aware in advance of what was unfolding in the Vanni in the final stages of the war in April-May 2009.

Thus the resolution calls for justice from co-conspirators, who are as punishable and responsible as the Sri Lankan government for what happened. But the hollowness of Tamil nationalistic politics drove the

Tamil leaders towards blind faith in the international community despite repeated betrayals. The International Community's concern about human rights violations, threat to the media, the state of lawlessness, including killings and abductions, and other issues in Sri Lanka have thus far been mere formalities and has never been translated into action. The regime change has opened new windows and opportunities for the International Community to achieve their hegemonic ambitions in Sri Lanka. The plight of the Tamils does not enter the calculations.

Conclusions

Although the build up to Geneva has been deflated by the deferral of the report on Sri Lanka, the Geneva syndrome remains and dominates political columns and articles in the Tamil newspapers which renew faith in the UN and the International Community. The ineffectiveness of the UN in dealing with mass atrocities globally has drawn fire from all ends of the political spectrum. Noam Chomsky points to the weakness of the UN on different grounds, arguing that the US has systematically used its power and position in the institution not only to block action against mass killings but also to block even condemnations of such killings when the US regards them as contrary to its interests or aimed at its allies or friends.

The international forces that dominate the UN have incarcerated their "impartiality" and "integrity" within the confines of their imperialist hegemonic interests. There is no mechanism in place to control human rights violations and anti-democratic acts of nation states when mass political activity to oppose them is weak or absent. As a result, voluntary organisations and political parties tend to rely on imperialist and hegemonic pressures. This is the tragedy that has befallen the Tamil people.

Denouncing Genocide

Dr S Sivasegaram

In February 2015 the Northern Provincial Council (NPC) passed a resolution accusing successive governments of Sri Lanka of systematic genocide against the Tamils and requesting the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Investigation on Sri Lanka to investigate the claim of genocide and recommend appropriate investigations and prosecutions by the International Criminal Court. The resolution goes far beyond the earlier appeal during the Rajapaksa regime for a UN inquiry into war crimes and human rights violations against the Tamils during the war between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE. The timing and circumstances of the resolution have led to responses ranging from enthusiastic welcome through cautious comments either supportive or critical of the resolution to angry denouncement from various quarters.

It is not certain how pleased the Tamil people as a whole are about the resolution but the Tamil news media is generally approving of it while Sinhala nationalists of all shades have not hidden their irritation. Understandably, the resolution offends the sentiments of the average Sinhalese and makes a considerable section of the Tamils uneasy at a time when hopes, however false they may be, have been raised that national reconciliation could be within reach. Thus the purpose of this comment is not to add to the acrimony provoked by the resolution but to understand the motives of the authors, the expectations of enthusiasts and the concerns of the critics as well as explore the possible consequences.

To be frank, hypocrisy has been the hallmark of the Sinhalese and Tamil elite as well as of the “International Community” in their addressing of the Sri Lankan national question. Any observer of Sri Lankan history over the past century will accept that charges of violation of democratic, human and fundamental rights and war crimes and even of genocide committed against the Tamils have justification. But that is not the whole story. The Sinhala nationalist defence that the LTTE was the bigger offender is no excuse for the crimes committed. At the same time, the charges by the Tamil nationalists show an equal lack of morality as they do not display the slightest interest in talking of the crimes of the LTTE, which severely affected the Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims, and of crimes against Tamils and Muslims by some of its rival organizations, especially during the period of IPKF presence.

The Charges

The NPC in its resolution appears to have gone out of its way to establish that Tamils have been subjected to genocide on all but one of the five criteria laid down by the UN Genocide Convention of 1948:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The first two are supported by recorded incidents of anti-Tamil violence since 1956 when anti-Tamil riots took place in Gal Oya, triggered by rumours of anti-Sinhalese crimes by Tamils elsewhere. The anti-Tamil riots of 1958, 1977, and 1983 were well orchestrated island wide events. The one of 1983 was most severe and attracted international attention, thanks to the presence of foreign visitors with cameras in hand. Other acts of Sinhalese civilian violence against Tamils have occurred on several occasions on various pretexts, with the police and the armed forces either passively allowing or actively encouraging the violence. But one has to

note that these were not attacks by even a significant section of the Sinhalese. The Sinhalese were as helpless before the mobs as the Tamils of Jaffna were before the armed militants when the LTTE ordered the Muslims out of the Northern Province at short notice in 1995.

Despite the mass of evidence of wanton killing of civilians, the authors of the report seem to resort to half truths about certain events. While one cannot in any way condone the anti-Tamil violence one should also note that the authors of the resolution exaggerate when they say that "In May 1958.... The Prime Minister spread false rumours about Tamil-initiated atrocities to incite violence against Tamils in the Sinhalese dominated areas". Prime Minister Bandaranaike was wrong to pin the blame on the Tamils by claiming on 26th May that the riots started with the death of the Mayor of Nuwara Eliya D.A. Seneviratne the previous day, whereas the riots had started on the 22nd. But to accuse the man of spreading rumours is unacceptable.

Significantly, the resolution glosses over key events that aided the whipping up of anti-Tamil feelings. The campaign by the supporters of the Federal Party earlier in the year to delete the Sinhala letter for "sri" on number plates of vehicles as protest against its introduction in place of Roman letters was interpreted as an insult to their language by Sinhala extremists. Also, regrettably, there were a few instances of violent Tamil retaliation against Sinhalese residents in parts of the North and East, in response to the anti-Tamil riots, although no killings were reported.

The claim that the Sri Lanka police unleashed a brutal attack on a passive gathering of Tamils during the International Tamil Research Conference in 1974 led to the wanton death of nine Tamils is also somewhat distorted. It suppresses information relating to the cause for police presence and conceals the truth that the deaths were not at the hands of the police. Such disrespect for truth will inevitably have adverse implications for the credibility of even the valid aspects of the resolution.

A piece of evidence given under the third criterion is: "Following the passage of the Sinhala Only Act, thousands of Tamil civil servants

resigned due to a lack of fluency in Sinhala, and by 1970, the civil service was almost entirely Sinhalese". This is a weak story, as it was the Tamil leadership that persuaded schools in the North to discontinue teaching Sinhala as part of the curriculum as well as called upon Tamil government servants not to learn Sinhala, although the level of proficiency required of them was moderate. Notably, Sinhala is much akin to Tamil and is not difficult to learn for even a moderately literate Tamil. However, several important Tamil leaders who persuaded the Tamil people not to learn Sinhala let their children qualify in Sinhala to secure high positions. There was, nevertheless, considerable discrimination against Tamils in employment, which worsened with time. Tamils, partly because of reluctance in the community and partly because of the discriminatory attitude of the government, were hardly recruited to the armed forces and their presence in the police declined to disproportionately small numbers.

Another claim reads as: "During the 1970s, university admissions were standardized to benefit Sinhalese students at the expense of Tamils. Gaining admission to university became increasingly difficult for Tamil students, whose numbers consequently declined at the tertiary level." This is too is flawed because its points to an injustice without reference to the circumstances that led to it.

Standardization was a hasty move by the government in 1970 to placate the middle class Sinhalese who suspected foul play in admission to the only university faculty of engineering at the time, since Tamils qualified for 80% of the 150 places, whereas in earlier years Tamil admissions constituted typically 30-35% and occasionally reaching 50%. The reason for the anomaly was that private tutoring for the qualifying examination had taken root in the Jaffna District, giving tutored students an advantage over the rest.

Although there was no foul play as an inquiry by a committee of inquiry of the government into the translation of question papers and marking of papers revealed some months later in 1971, the damage was done. I should gratefully add that Drs CLV Jayatillake and MP Ranaweera

of the Faculty of Engineering (the only one in the country then, located in Peradeniya) promptly wrote to the Ceylon Daily News criticising rumour mongering about cheating by Tamils and appealing for calm until a formal inquiry was concluded. Although they received abusive mail denouncing them as traitors to the Sinhala race, they courageously stood their ground.

The way things went from then on, communal relations were doomed to deteriorate. The government opted for media-wise standardization and followed it with transforming a college of technology into a university campus to ease tension among the Tamils, but not adequately. What is equally deplorable is the lack of sensitivity on the part of Tamil leaders who rather than seeking a compromise by appealing to moderate forces in the government chose to whip up communal tension. Within two years the government replaced standardization with a district quota system, which put the educationally advantaged districts of Colombo, where most of the elite live, and Jaffna at a disadvantage, but the move benefitted the middle classes of the backward districts in the North and East, so that opposition to the system of university admission weakened among the Tamils as a whole.

The NPC resolution is correct about the decline in employment opportunity, but ignores the lack of vision of the Tamil leadership which was incapable of imagining employment alternatives for the Tamil youth who were still at an advantage educationally. Obsession with professional degrees and careers in medicine, engineering, accountancy and law, which are accessible only to a fraction of a percent of the population even today, has been the curse of the Tamil middle class. While state discrimination against Tamils is an important factor, 'denial to members of a certain group its *elementary means of existence* enjoyed by other sections of the population' is partly the making of the Tamil elite mentality which has infected the middle classes.

While charges of 'historical genocide' under the third criterion are rather exaggerated, arguments for recent genocide are valid for a sizeable section of the war affected population which is still denied its right to

normal livelihood. The Tamil diaspora, on the other hand is spoiling families and relatives by remitting large sums of money to squander on non-essentials and luxury goods. This has deformed beyond recognition the once frugal Tamil community of Jaffna now resident in Jaffna and Colombo, and has adversely affected youth attitude towards learning, work and community. The Chief Minister of the NPC had strongly denounced this trend in public during his early months in his post.

Two categories of victims have somehow escaped the radar screen of the NPC. The livelihood of the fishing community of the North has been affected by restrictions placed by the Sri Lankan navy, but the bigger blow has been from South Indian fishing trawlers using illegal fishing equipment in Sri Lankan waters close to the coast, harming the livelihood of local fishers in the short term as well as the long term. The other concerns the Tamil agricultural community who have been displaced from Sampur, a fertile paddy cultivating region in the East, to make way for the proposed Indian-built coal-fired 500 MW power station. This failure has to be seen in the context of the failure of the NPC resolution to refer, under the first two criteria, to the harm inflicted by the Indian Peace Keeping Forces between 1987 and 1989.

Charges under the fourth criterion are designed to argue that it was government policy to implement forced sterilization of Hill Country Tamils. Given the strength of rabid communalism in the country, the backwardness of the Hill Country Tamil community and its lack of leadership, sterilization overdrive by medical professionals is a possibility. But the claim based on the story from "Home for Human Rights" (whose documents are not easily accessible to the public) that "more than eighty percent of Tamil women in central Sri Lanka were offered a lump sum payment in return for their ability to reproduce" needs verification. The charge that a named private doctor "performs forced abortions, often under the guise of a regular check-up, on Tamil women suspected of being aligned with the LTTE", even if true, is inadequate to generalise the incidence of such events.

It should be noted that the Hill Country Tamils have been the most oppressed nationality in the country that have been deprived of their fundamental rights (including citizenship for a several decades) and uprooted from their homes under various pretexts, including development. None of these receives even a mention in the resolution. Notably, several Tamil leaders contributed directly or indirectly to the disenfranchisement of the Hill Country Tamils.

Also, the Muslims, claimed even now to be part of the “Tamil nation” by some Tamil nationalists, receive no mention despite their being victims of anti-Muslim violence as recently as June 2014. Perhaps there is good reason, since the LTTE was guilty of ethnic cleansing of Muslims in the North in addition to genocidal attacks on Muslims in the East by the LTTE and its rival Tamil nationalists.

Based on the pattern of evidence, it is surprising that no evidence has been produced for the fifth criterion of ‘forcibly transferring children of a group to another group’.

Limitations of the Genocide Convention

Attention has been drawn to shortcomings of the Genocide Convention (http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/war/overview/crimes_1.shtml). Some of them are particularly relevant here.

The objection that the convention excludes targeted political and social groups brings us to the question of unlawful killings of unarmed people during the two JVP insurrections. The governments of the time and the armed forces are mainly answerable as is the JVP for its misdeeds in 1988-89. Not only the LTTE but some of its rivals too will be faulted on counts of attacks against rival movements.

The objection that the definition excludes acts against the environment which sustains people and their cultural distinctiveness is particularly relevant to the impact of development activities that have displaced large communities, most recently under the Upper Kothmale Project, and the

systematic deprivation of the *Attho* in the Uva and Eastern province in the name of development.

While proving intention beyond reasonable doubt is extremely difficult, punishments are generally selective and motivated by geopolitical interests of imperialism. Even where genocide is public knowledge, charges have never been levelled against powerful states, like for example against the US for genocide in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and many thereafter. Likewise, Israel boldly continues with genocide of Palestinians in the certainty that it will never be punished.

That brings us to two questions. Firstly what are the authors of the NPC resolution likely to achieve? Secondly what are their true intentions? Besides these, there are issues of morality and integrity.

Possible Outcome

The unsuccessful bid in the UNHRC in 2009 May — only days after the end of the civil war — for a resolution demanding an international inquiry into war crimes and human rights violations in Sri Lanka was prompted by the US. The move was pre-empted by Sri Lanka by getting a resolution adopted commending it for defeating terrorism. But US retaliation was quick to follow. Tamil nationalist groups among the Tamil diaspora congratulated themselves for all the resolutions adopted critical of Sri Lanka and calling for an international inquiry.

A picture was painted that the “International Community” — meaning the US and its imperialist allies— were solidly behind the Tamils of Sri Lanka. But what was forgotten by those who promoted this fiction that it was the International Community which provided the Government of Sri Lanka with weapons, intelligence and strategic support during critical periods of the war. Some either believed or pretended to believe that the US was serious about persuading the Rajapaksa regime to address the national question in a reasonable manner by subjecting it to international pressure. Some others were fully aware that the US agenda in targeting the GoSL had nothing to do with justice for the Tamils. Yet they argued

that there could be some benefit for the Tamils in the course of US imperialism acting to punish Rajapaksa. But none of the Tamil nationalist leaders could say in what way the International Community could act in the interest of the Tamil people. Their claim that the International Community will act in the matter was at best wishful thinking, but more probably a cruel trick played on the Tamil voters to give them false hopes in return for their votes.

The Rajapaksa regime had successfully played for time and the US played along because the regime was not as defiant as the regimes of Venezuela or Iran. The threat of punishment has proven to be more effective than punishment itself, and the Rajapaksa regime yielded to pressure where it mattered most.

With the new regime in place, the US has signalled its willingness to settle for less than an international inquiry. But it will not abandon its trump card until the country has a stable pro-US government. Britain and Canada are playing cunning games keeping alive the hopes of the Tamil populations in their countries on the one hand and building closer ties with the new regime in Sri Lanka on the other. The leadership of the Tamil diaspora knows well that it will be the US that will have the final say.

Thus, while the signs are that there will be no international inquiry into war crimes and human rights violations, what did the authors of the NPC resolution hope to achieve by demanding an inquiry into genocide?

The Game Plan

Tamil nationalists of all shades know that people are losing, if they have not already lost, faith in the International Community. The people are also aware that Tamil leadership is not in a bargaining position with the new regime. Public protests are on the rise on a number of issues such as continued occupation of land by the armed forces, Indian poaching in Sri Lankan waters and oil contamination of well water; and political initiative is slipping from the hands of the Tamil nationalist parties when parliamentary elections are only months away.

The genocide resolution which was brushed aside when it was first submitted to the NPC in 2014 was reactivated and rushed through with the Chief Minister now presenting the resolution. His claim that it was the right time to bring in the resolution defies logic since the claimed acts of genocide were committed by successive governments over an extended period and the new President had been in office for barely a month and had made a few conciliatory moves, although far from addressing the real issues.

The only feasible reason for the timing of the resolution is that the International Community had shown its true colours by allowing the deferral by six months of the report on Sri Lanka scheduled for the UNHRC sessions in March 2015. Having portrayed the International Community and India as the last hope for the Tamils, the leadership stands exposed. Controversy about the resolution could deflect attention from the failure of the NPC and restore the fortunes of the ruling Tamil National Alliance. But that was not to be the case and within a few weeks the matter lost political significance nationally. However, perhaps unintentionally, it helped to divert attention from the controversy about the top leaders of the TNA participating in the Independence Day celebrations on 4th February 2015. The Chief Minister too met the President soon after the passage of the resolution to placate him by personally assuring that the resolution was not aimed at him. The Tamil electorate could not have been impressed by this theatre of hypocrisy.

Questions arise as to why charges of genocide were never levelled against successive governments accused of committing them since 1948. The Tamil nationalist leadership have been partners in government and supported political parties and candidates whom they explicitly or implicitly accuse of genocide against Tamils.

Questions arise as to why charges are not levelled against the member states of the International Community and India who were party to many acts of genocide since the escalation of the national conflict into war.

Tamils and Muslims have been killed and injured and subjected to ethnic cleansing in the hands of the LTTE as well as its rivals. The Muslims have been systematically targeted by extremists with help from the state in the past several years. Historically, the Hill Country Tamils have been the severest victims of Sinhala chauvinism. Why have these acts of genocide been ignored?

Acts of genocide have been committed by successive governments not just against the Tamils but also against the Sinhalese. Would not the case against genocidal regimes be strengthened by drawing attention to offences against the Sinhalese?

Why have the Tamil nationalists been consistently averse to speak up for other victims of genocide in the island as well as in other parts of the world in the hands of the "International Community"?

Sadly, the Tamil nationalist leadership has never spoken against genocide anywhere in the world. If at all it has sided with US imperialism and its allies when they launched genocidal wars against innocent people and turned a blind eye to genocide inside India.

The Tamil nationalist leadership has painted itself into a corner by joining the imperialists who were demanding, for their own benefit, an international inquiry into war crimes and human rights violations, without fully exploring the prospect of an impartial internal inquiry by a panel acceptable to the communities of the victims through joining hands with the progressive forces in the country.

The NPC resolution is yet another act of folly for which I fear that only the Tamil people will pay dearly, not their misleaders.

Confront Consumerism to Protect Environment

Deshabakthan

“Production produces consumption: first by providing the material of consumption; second by determining the mode of consumption; and finally by creating in the consumer a need for the objects which it first presents as products.”

(K Marx, *Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy*)

“But *let us not flatter ourselves overmuch for our human victories over nature. For every such victory it takes its revenge on us.* Indeed, each in the first place brings about the consequences on which we counted, but in the second and third place it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel out the first ones.... Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature -- but that we with flesh, blood and brain belong to nature and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to know and correctly apply its laws.

“And in fact with every day that passes we are learning to understand its laws more correctly and getting to know the more immediate and also the more remote consequences of our interference in the usual course of nature. Especially since the mighty advances made in the natural sciences in the present century, we are in a better and better position to know and, hence, to control even the more remote natural consequences of at least

our most ordinary productive activities. *But the more this happens, the more will men not only once more feel but also know their oneness with nature, and the more impossible will become the senseless, unnatural idea of an antagonism between mind and matter, man and nature, soul and body* which arose in Europe after the decline of classical antiquity and which obtained its most elaborate expression in Christianity.”

(F Engels, *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*)

Capitalism and environment

The purpose of this comment is to draw attention to the multi-faceted role of consumerism in destroying the human environment in the process of sustaining capitalist production long after it outlived its usefulness.

Capitalism has been responsible for the wanton destruction of the natural environment in its search for profits. The destruction has been effected in ways ranging from the extraction of minerals and denuding of forests without consideration for human and environmental consequences to the disposal of waste resulting from over-production. Capitalism has also wrecked the human environment through war on countries and peoples, particularly since its transformation into imperialism. What underlies the damage to the environment is the ceaseless drive of capitalism to increase consumption of non-essential goods in order to keep up the profits of the super rich capitalist class. Much has already been written on these matters; and concern for the environment, initially based on contextual issues, has grown into awareness of the impending threat to life on the planet as a whole. Yet, many environmentalists seem to think that the environment can be rescued within the framework of imperialist capitalism. Their approach is at best naïve.

The consumerist way of life that capitalism has instituted and continues to encourage in order to sustain and expand markets has in the process deprived capitalism of its control over the production and consumption of goods. The mechanisms of production and consumption that it created have spun out of control to wreck the environment in many ways and

push the world into a global environmental crisis, which is now edging towards environmental disaster. Capitalism, by its very nature and being the source of the crisis, could not avert the crisis and, despite the many environmental agreements reached on individual subjects, has proven incapable of solving the crisis. National — actually capitalist — interests of powerful countries militate against the implementation of many of the agreements. Key players — the US in particular — have even refused to be party to important, although inadequate, agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gases. The capitalist system as a whole had for long denied the existence of the environmental crisis and still underplays the scale of the problem after increased public awareness made denial impossible. Capitalism is stubborn that the environmental crisis is not a result of capitalism, and does all possible to shift the burden of the crisis to the Third World.

Capitalist concerns about emissions are disingenuous and, as in the cases of issues like the ozone layer and greenhouse effect, are often poor responses to public clamour. Matters like oil spills and nuclear hazards have generally been underplayed, except when the offender is not from an imperialist country. There is also a tendency to blame the Third World for the emission of greenhouse gases and ozone depleting emissions, although a major cause for the steep rise in carbon dioxide emissions from Third World in the past few decades is the manufacture of goods for export to developed capitalist countries. The imperialist countries, having emitted more than their fair share of CFCs and other ozone depleting substances, demand that the Third World should switch to ozone-friendly substances and technologies and thus seek further profit from cleaning up the mess created by them. Thus imperialist response to the environmental crisis should be judged in the context of imperialist conduct in related issues.

Sources of environmental crisis

In addressing the environmental problem, one has to be clear about the source of the problem and the mechanisms which caused and continue to sustain it. What are perceived as human needs have been continuously

reshaped, redefined and imposed on society by capitalism in order that its surplus production capacity is absorbed so that capitalist production and thereby the capitalist system are kept alive. Thus, consumerism as a means of expanding consumption of goods has been promoted as beneficial to the economy, regardless of long term social, economic and environmental consequences. Consumerism is now an integral component of capitalist ideology.

While the advertising industry and consumerism continue to nourish each other, relatively new lending mechanisms including soft personal credit facilities and microfinance in the Third World have contributed very much to the boom in consumption under neo-colonial globalisation, with neo-liberalism the dominant voice of capitalism. Easy terms of credit have become a substitute for higher wages to enable the working population to buy consumer goods and inevitably suffer growing indebtedness.

Addiction to non-essential goods has grown apace with the breaking up of communities and the rapid decline in sharing of facilities and resources even in the rural communities of the Third World as well as in former socialist countries. The surge of selfish individualism at the expense of community spirit has accelerated the growth of consumption of non-essential goods as well as of waste.

Consumerism has also meant that goods are mostly not produced to last or for lifelong use. This tendency is fuelled by the growing craze for fashion and urge to possess goods with the latest technological features. Consumerism has also penetrated society by taking advantage of real and imagined human anxiety about health, safety and appearance in an increasingly insecure and competitive society. The direct effects of the resultant growth in consumption on the environment are, on the one hand, the steady rise in demand for natural resources and, on the other, an even faster growth of waste and environmental problems relating to waste disposal. Its negative socio-political impact on communities as groups of collective interest has harmful implications for mobilizing people in the cause of defending their economic interests as well as their environment.

Capitalist environmentalism

Solutions offered by capitalism for the problem of waste are only partial and highly inadequate. Recycling of waste, even under best of conditions, is a poor substitute for controlling consumption, and achieves little more than soothing the consciences of individuals whose consumerist way of life gets the better of their environmental awareness. Waste disposal and recycling require much human effort and material resources, including energy, and thereby give rise to unforeseen environmental problems.

What capitalism can offer is at best an array of half-hearted patchwork solutions. Capitalist schemes based on hopes of slow/zero growth and sustainable growth are not in the nature of capitalism which, to survive, has to keep growing. NGOs in the pay of the capitalist system plead the case for consumer sovereignty as a means of environmental protection. The theory that when a 'critical mass' of individual consumers go 'green' the effect would snowball to transform the system is idle dream. Green groups from around the world have come up with numerous plans for an ecologically sustainable world, comprising commonsense solutions to global warming and other environmental issues. They fail not because proposals for a rapid shift to renewable energy and rationalization of production are unrealistic but because they ignore that capitalism is the main obstacle to rational change. Only a society that has the producers of wealth in control can find the way to a sustainable society. All reformist measures, at best, amount to a call for enlightened consumerism without questioning capitalist relations. The tragedy of most Green movements is that they miss the point that capitalism is no more the cause of the problem but now the problem itself.

One needs to be particularly wary of the faith that technology would eventually come up with an answer. Technology, since it is guided and governed by the interests of the classes that control society, has often failed to address the problem even where it seemed to have the answer. A ruling class guided by self interest and living by the cruel exploitation of fellow human beings cannot offer wise leadership to technology.

It is against this background that concepts of clean energy and other clean technologies need to be assessed critically. Electric transportation (which only shifts the location of pollution), natural gas as clean hydrocarbon energy and thorium as safe nuclear fuel are among gimmicks that divert attention from the overall problem faced by earth. Even more unacceptable are 'geo-engineering' ideas fringing on fantasy which are offered as solutions to global warming.

Anyone with socialist leanings will be instinctively suspicious of links between big business and environmental organizations. Capitalist philanthropy in any matter is not out of bad conscience but good business acumen. Environmental organizations are thus used as shields against exposure to public attack and are reined in when they spin out of control.

Besides, many environmentalists like to be apolitical to avert the ire of governments and big business. They avoid linking the existing global economic order with the environmental crisis. Thus the environmentalists as a whole, including "left" Greens, are confined to solutions within the global capitalist framework. Not surprisingly, the term 'imperialism' is rare in their discourses on the environment even as they identify consumerism as a major cause for the crisis without pointing at the forces that promote and sustain it. These failings do not necessarily make environmentalists enemies of socialism. However, as long as the wish to appease capitalism persists, they cannot be the friends of the oppressed people and nations.

Addressing Consumerism

Consumerism is certainly at the centre of the environmental crisis, and the political right uses that argument to blame consumer thirst for goods for consumerism and its consequences. It is conveniently forgotten that consumerism does not grow out of the members of society but is thrust on them by capitalism. Thus the campaign against consumerism as a source of environmental degradation has to be in the context of fighting capitalist greed for profit, which is the source of consumerism.

During the last quarter of the 20th Century, the environmental burden of consumerism has been shifted to the Third World through outsourcing of manufacture under imperialist globalization. Even as late as the 1960's imperialism was reluctant to allow industrial development in the former colonies which therefore turned to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and later China, for assistance. That pattern has changed since the 1980's to make the Third World not only the source of raw materials but also of cheap labour to produce industrial and consumer goods for the imperialist countries. Agriculture which was the mainstay of most Third World economies has been and continues to be subverted to make them rely on imperialism for agrochemicals such as fertiliser, weedicides and pesticides, and now seeds, to yield massive profits to imperialism. With advances in genetic engineering, US imperialism, which has the lead in genetically modified crops, is exerting pressure on Third World countries to shift to 'high yielding' and 'agrochemical responsive' crops so that imperialism, with the help of intellectual property laws, gains a stranglehold on their economies through control over agricultural crops.

A key consequence of imperialist penetration of the agricultural sector has been rural impoverishment and displacement of the rural population to new industrial zones or to urban centres as a source of cheap labour, and thereby adding to levels of consumption as well as environmental pollution, with no matching economic benefit.

The imperialist neo-colonial strategy of globalization has consolidated consumerism which has adversely affected humanity in several ways. Its direct impact on the environment is compounded by its attack on the cohesiveness of communities as economic units with potential to resist imperialism.

From a revolutionary Marxist Leninist point of view, the central role of consumerism in society is as a mechanism that sustains capitalism. While its impact on the environment is serious enough and needs urgent attention, the social and economic impact of consumerism on the economy of countries, especially in the Third World, is as important and needs to be

addressed without falling victim to conservative, traditionalist and parochial attitudes.

Concluding remarks

It is vital to remember that people are not consumers by nature whereas profit is an end in itself for capitalists. Capitalism has no interest in fundamental human needs and does not care whether its pursuit of profit will lead to the destruction of humanity or even the planet itself.

Marxists have for long been aware that capitalism is increasingly dominated by marketing, and that advertising has successfully altered human behaviour in every land that has been touched by capitalism. The capitalist system is so desperate to sustain its profit so that advertisers are heavily targeting children to make them early starters as consumers. Without massive public protest, capitalist governments will do nothing to rescue children from the clutches of consumerism, because capitalism is aware that victims of consumerism are unlikely to be effective opponents of the capitalist consumer society.

While energy-efficient production and replacement of fossil fuels with cleaner and more efficient 'renewable' sources, as well as recycling and environment friendly disposal of waste are desirable, they are inadequate to avert the impending environmental crisis. In fact, capitalism could be supportive of such measures as long as there they pose no threat to profit. What matters is to ensure that the net result of such environment friendly measures is a meaningful reduction in the generation of waste and pollutants. Such an outcome is unlikely under capitalism and targeting consumerism is an essential political step to identify capitalism as the main culprit and to mobilize the people against it.

Changing the Pillowcase to Cure a Headache

The Political Background

One does not cure a headache by changing the pillowcase, the saying goes. It may be an overstatement that the nature of the state is not changed by changing the government, but not excessively so. The election of the SLFP-led government in 1956 changed things. The return of the UNP in 1977 reversed the gains made by the masses through democratic struggle. On both occasions, mighty winds of change, more significant than elections and consistent with global and regional trends, acted on society. The first marked the rise of the national bourgeoisie and the second its fall and the affirmation of the neo-colonial order. The period between 1956 and 1977 also marked the decline of the left as a political force and the assimilation, in all but name, of the parliamentary left into the SLFP. The ruinous changes brought about by the UNP regime under the constitution of 1978 were enduring and coincided with the global resurgence of imperialism.

Persecution of SLFP leaders and the harassment of all parliamentary rivals by the UNP regime, with some help from the JVP in the early stages, and bullying of the trade unions into submission by using strong arm tactics in addition to repression by the state thoroughly demoralised the opposition at least until the government faced a crisis of its own making which India took advantage of in 1983-87. The SLFP was denied the chance to return to power in 1988 by a JVP-imposed boycott of the polls, which was most effective in districts where the UNP regime was deeply unpopular. Subsequent recovery of the SLFP (with the parliamentary left now a fully compliant partner) in 1994 was helped by public resentment of

the anti-democratic conduct and brutal violence of both the JVP and the armed forces under the UNP government.

By then, the SLFP had lost its anti-imperialist initiative and was willing to continue with the economic policies pursued by the UNP. The only significant differences between the SLFP and the UNP concerned the pledge by the SLFP presidential candidate Chandrika Kumaratunge to restore peace and resolve the national question, and end the spate of privatization of state assets. Neither pledge materialised, and the war against the LTTE escalated and privatization continued on the pretext of funding the war. The UNP wrecked attempts by the Kumaratunge regime in August 2000 to address some important aspects of the national question; and, in turn, President Kumaratunge and the SLFP, aided by the JVP and JHU and more than a little help from India, played their part to wreck the peace negotiations with the LTTE, which along with the UNP was to blame for the failure of the negotiations and resumption of war under Mahinda Rajapaksa who was elected President with the backing of a broad-based alliance including the parliamentary left, the “left” chauvinist JVP and the right chauvinist JHU.

Although ideologically and politically there was little to tell apart the UNP and the SLFP, there are long standing group and personal loyalties and old memories which influence the electorate. The JVP — which secured 39 out of the 105 seats won by the SLFP-led alliance (the UPFA) in the 225 seat parliament in 2004 and left the alliance in June 2005 — grabbed the opportunity offered by the presidential polls later that year to return to the fold by supporting Mahinda Rajapaksa. President Rajapaksa, always suspicious of the JVP, lost no time to secure a parliamentary majority free of reliance on the JVP by enticing members of the UNP to cross over. In the process, he also forced splits in the UNP and the JVP. Party loyalties eroded further with the revival of war in 2006 and the rising prospect of a military victory for the government since late 2007.

The parliamentary and presidential elections held after the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009 brought about electoral alliances which

transcended ideology. The UNP and JVP joined hands to support General Sarath Fonseka in the presidential election in 2010 and the JVP and Fonseka (now leader, Democratic Party) forged an alliance to face the parliamentary elections that followed. .

In matters of short and long term interests of the people there has been no difference in direction between the camps led by the SLFP and the UNP, respectively, since 1994. Meanwhile, JVP's politics of exigency led to a split induced by Rajapaksa in 2008 and later to a more serious split in 2012 following a series of failures in elections held after 2009.

Muslim and Hill Country Tamil leaders, who by the 1990s were reduced to opportunistic groups vying for cabinet posts in governments desperate for a parliamentary majority, continued on the same lines. The politics of Tamil nationalism denied the Tamil nationalist leadership — but not the renegade EPDP — opportunity for political horse trading. There has been no sensible policy difference between the partners of the TNA and their Tamil nationalist rivals.

The Run-up to the Election

The UNP, the main political rival of the ruling UPFA alliance, knew that prospects were weak for a UNP candidate to defeat the incumbent, despite general resentment about the way the Rajapaksa family ran the affairs of the country. Amid the appalling record of corruption, nepotism, abuse of power and denial of democratic freedoms, including attacks on the media, arbitrary arrests and abductions, the cleverly cultivated image of Mahinda Rajapaksa as the saviour of the Sinhala race from Tamil terrorists was still strong among the Sinhalese, although its charm had considerably worn off, as shown by the results of the Uva Provincial Council in September 2014. Besides, the UNP, its leader Ranil Wickramasinghe especially, had been consistently targeted by the chauvinists and the media, which by 2009 had turned loyal to the Rajapaksa regime. Also, the UNP had patched up only in the latter half of 2014 its internal splits — some induced by vested interests in a media empire with a reputation for having politicians

under its influence if not control — and the wounds had only superficially healed in the months preceding the presidential election.

The idea of a common ‘democratic’ opposition candidate was floated by Maduluwawe Sobitha Thero in a newspaper interview on 2nd February 2014. The UNP saw its opportunity in the proposal and pulled the wool over the eyes of the enthusiasts for the single issue common candidate for the elimination of the executive presidency by springing a surprise on nearly all including Rajapaksa, shortly after he announced the presidential polls and his contesting for a third term as President.

That Sirisena was not a common opposition candidate but a UNP proxy was borne out by the fact that his supporters comprised those who would have supported Ranil Wickramasinghe if he was the UNP candidate. The NSSP, which had sold out to the UNP some years ago, was the only left party to openly endorse Sirisena, although it fielded its own candidate. Thirteen Central Committee members of the LSSP who were expelled from the party for refusal to endorse Rajapaksa’s candidature were among other left enthusiasts for Sirisena.

The JVP cunningly avoided openly identifying with Sirisena — with whom it allegedly made a secret deal — but canvassed for him indirectly by not fielding a candidate and calling for the defeat of Rajapaksa.

Like all UPFA allies in the South, except the chauvinist JHU, the parliamentary left comprising the LSSP, CP and the Democratic Left Front (DLF) supported Rajapaksa. The estrangement of the JHU with Rajapaksa occurred early in 2014 when it realised that the Rajapaksa regime favoured its newcomer rival, the Bodhu Bala Sena.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party and the United Socialist Party argued that there would eventually be no difference between the two candidates. The NDMLP, conscious of the mass dislike of the national minorities towards the Rajapaksa regime, noted that the Rajapaksa camp was opportunistically pushing a chauvinist line to benefit from fears among the Sinhalese about possible LTTE revival and foreign conspiracies

against the country. The Frontline Socialist Party, NDMLP, USP, Communist Party (Maoist) and others failed to agree on a common left manifesto, and the FLSP and USP fielded their own candidates. The FLSP, perhaps out of spite for the JVP, erred in indicating a preference for Rajapaksa, and thereby opened itself to accusations of a deal with the Rajapaksa regime.

The national minorities had decided against Rajapaksa, well ahead of their leaders who feared that their support for Sirisena would be used by Rajapaksa to whip up Sinhala chauvinism early in the campaign. Significantly, Sirisena's election manifesto and the 100-Days Work Programme said nothing on the national question or the grievances of the victims of war. It is likely that there was some understanding with the leaders of national minority parties but without any pledge as Sirisena had also made a deal with the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist JHU.

The Fallout

The outcome of the election was mostly as expected, and compared with the results of the election of 2010, outside the North and East, there was an 8-12% swing away from the incumbent throughout, except in the districts of Badulla and Hambantota with only 4% and a much larger swing in Polonnaruwa, the home district of Sirisena. Polling rate in the North was noticeably less than in the rest of the country, probably due to threats by interested parties. It appears that around 80% of the national minority votes went to Sirisena so that he would have received a little over 42% of the Sinhala votes against 57% or less for Rajapaksa. Eric Solheim placed Rajapaksa's share at 55%. However, the share of the Sinhala vote received by Rajapaksa is unimpressive in the context of the blatant abuse of state resources, bribery and other unethical campaign practices on his behalf.

President Sirisena dismissed the government and asked Ranil Wickramasinghe, leader of the UNP to form the government, which was formed with a modest number of cabinet members but has since swelled, in breach of a key election pledge on the size of the cabinet, to

accommodate the flood of defectors from the SLFP. The JVP demands that the promise to dissolve Parliament on 23rd April be honoured while the JHU and the SLFP are keen to complete the electoral reforms before the elections and the UNP prefers an early election while the SLFP is in a state of demoralisation and disarray. The positions adopted have more to do with electoral calculations than with any democratic principle.

An electorate wise analysis based on electorates as in 1977 (prior to the district wise proportional representation system) would place Rajapaksa ahead of Sirisena in terms of parliamentary seats and analysis based on the existing district wise proportional representation will place Sirisena at advantage. It is as a result that the UNP would prefer to retain the present system in the forthcoming elections to parliament and the SLFP prefers the mix of first past the post with proportional representation as envisaged in the proposed electoral reforms pledged by Sirisena. The entire arithmetic will be significantly altered by the JVP entering the fray and seats in the North and East mostly shared between the Tamil and Muslim parties.

The Muslim and Hill Country nationalist parties and the JVP will be major losers under the proposed reforms. The JHU, although a bigger loser, it is pleased at the prospect of losses for the JVP and the minority nationality parties. Whereas the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils can salvage a small part of their representation by contesting on the ticket of a bigger party, their parties will be losers. As things stand, the JVP will only secure a handful of seats even with performance as good as a decade ago.

The parties have worked with the proportional representation system for too long and not many sitting members can comfortably identify with any electorate, and the major parties will face difficulties in selecting candidates. The Elections Commissioner expressed reservations in view of the unfamiliarity of a majority of the voters with the first-past-the-post system. The signs are that Parliament will not be dissolved in April and elections will be held after the electoral reforms are adopted.

The government has delivered only on some promises, especially those with electoral benefit, but is unlikely to deliver on major issues that are in

the interest of the people. The pledge to bring to book persons guilty of bribery, corruption and fraud seems unlikely to be fulfilled, since there are far too many who have joined the present government who are vulnerable. The likelihood is that punishment will be selective and politically driven.

Although the government claims to have delivered on its pledge to adopt the National Medicine Regulatory Authority Bill, serious flaws in the Bill stand in the way of making medicinal drugs available at fair price to patients. Given the extent of corruption in the health and pharmaceutical sectors, the impact of the legislation is likely to be small.

Differences among the ruling alliance, now including a number of SLFP defectors and striving to become a national government, have come into the open on a number of issues, including the now deferred abolition of the executive presidency and the prospect of the country being left with an executive presidency with only a few of the arbitrary powers taken away. At the time of writing, the draft of the promised 19th Amendment is being hotly debated by interest groups within the government. Inter-party and intra-party rivalries are spilling into the open amid acrimony stirred by spokespersons for various factions and interested parties. If the SLFP and the UNP contest each other neither will secure absolute majority and the country will face political instability in the immediate future. If an alliance is forged, squabbles about nominations could lead to splits in the two parties and rival factions fielding candidates. Either way, the JVP is set to gain credibility in elections to follow.

The old left trio comprising the LSSP, CP and DLF is in a state of limbo without a clue of who would want them as partners at the parliamentary elections. Lacking a voter base and driven by desperation, Vasudeva Nanayakkara (DLF), Dinesh Gunawardena (MEP), Wimal Weerawansa (National Freedom Front) and Udaya Gammanpila (formerly JHU) entered into an unprincipled alliance calling for the re-entry of Mahinda Rajapaksa as prime ministerial candidate of the UPFA. Although the series of public meetings for the purpose attracted impressive crowds, the

prospects of Rajapaksa leading the UPFA have faded. Rajapaksa's return is still possible, but much depends on how the government runs its matters in the run up to the elections.

A matter which was not a major issue during the election campaign but was very much in the minds of all parties was the March 2015 Sessions of the UNHRC where the Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Investigation on Sri Lanka was due to be presented and discussed. Tamil nationalists were hopeful that a resolution critical of the Government of Sri Lanka will be adopted.

The "International Community" was quick to send a favourable signal to the new order and is keen to ensure its success in forming a stable government which will be friendlier than the Rajapaksa regime. The decision of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to defer the submission of the report on Sri Lanka was a signal to the Government that the UNHRC could settle for less than a full fledged international inquiry.

Tamil nationalists were perplexed by the decision and, having built the hopes of the Tamil population about support from the International Community, needed to design a new illusion to retain public support. The resolution of the Northern Provincial Council demanding an international inquiry into genocide against Tamils is a thoughtless outcome political desperation. Its implications for relations between the nationalities are negative. But that has never been a matter of concern for Tamil narrow nationalists and their chauvinist counterparts.

The government is likely to yield on some of the Tamil demands, but without seriously offending the sensibilities of Sinhala chauvinism which is still very much alive.

Elections are operations like "the Changing of the Guards". Overall, little changes, and a headache is not cured by changing the pillowcase.

Avenging a Failed Coup d'état

On 9th March 2015, US President Obama issued an Executive Order declaring a national emergency affirming that the situation in Venezuela poses an “unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States”. Obama has thus confirmed that all US moves thus far in Venezuela have been driven by US imperialist interests. The recent desperate move indicates that a large-scale military attack is the only avenue left for the US to achieve a regime change in Venezuela, after thirteen years of subversion, waste of millions of dollars on a pro-coup opposition incapable of winning elections, instigation of destabilizing violence, generation of disruptive shortages, promotion of smuggling of goods across the Colombia border, and pressure on the currency.

An overview of US intervention in Venezuela is useful at this stage. President Chavez's rejection of the US demand that Venezuela supports its “war on terrorism” won worldwide support. The US reacted by organizing and backing a military-business coup on 12th April 2002 which was soon overcome by a mass uprising backed by constitutionalist armed forces. The US followed it with backing for an executive lockout in the oil industry from December 2002 to February 2003 aimed to bring down the government but was defeated by the workers and engineers.

In 2004, the US unsuccessfully conspired to bring down Chavez through a referendum, organized by NGOs funded by the subversive agency “National Endowment for Democracy”. This was followed by an unsuccessful US backed boycott of Congressional elections in 2005. Chavez got re-elected in 2006, humiliating the US-backed candidate.

However, in 2007 a US backed coalition secured a victory by narrowly defeating constitutional amendments aimed at socializing the economy.

But Chavez reversed the setback in 2009 by winning a referendum on constitutional amendments including the abolition of term limits, and got re-elected for a fourth term in 2012 against a US financed candidate. Following Chavez's death in 2013 Chavez's selected candidate Nicolás Maduro was elected President defeating Obama's favourite. The opposition and the US challenged the result for many months after the rest of the world accepted it.

Repeated electoral defeats persuaded US political strategists to resort to violent, unconstitutional means. The progressive domestic policy of the Government of Venezuela and its foreign policy opposing US domination of regional political bodies such as the OAS and US military missions in Latin America made Venezuela a key target for regime change.

Venezuela played a leading role in promoting organizations that encouraged Latin American and Caribbean integration to the exclusion of the US and Canada. Petro-Caribe, a Venezuelan sponsored trade and investment organization to benefit Caribbean and Central America countries excluded the US and Canada. The regional political organization UNASUR (Union of South American Nations) effectively sidelined the US dominated OAS and includes 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries. Venezuela also joined MERCOSUR, a free trade organization which includes Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. These moves made the Chavista regime a barrier to the political dominance of the US in Latin America. Also Venezuela's strong political and economic ties with Cuba helped to weaken the aggressive stand of the US towards Cuba.

Venezuela played a leading role in opposing US imperialist meddling and aggression in many instances including the US backing of the coups in Haiti and Honduras and US-led invasions of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya. Its strengthening of trade ties with Iran in defiance of US sanctions, set it on a collision course with US plans of a global empire.

US imperialism has always concocted lies to justify its brutal invasions. Demonizing the victim has been necessary to make the invasion more

palatable during the build-up to and early stages of the invasion, although it has not taken long to expose the lies after the event.

The motivation for the present threat against Venezuela arises from the pathetic failure of US policy, firstly to stop Maduro from getting elected in 2013, and then to bring him down by a prolonged smear campaign against the voting process, by encouraging violent riots in 2014 organized by US-backed terrorists which killed 43 and injured 870, and by backing the failed coup of February 2015 in which several US embassy personnel used their diplomatic cover to infiltrate and recruit Venezuelan military officials to plot the overthrow of the government and assassinate Maduro.

Obama's desperation is self-evident from his bizarre unsupported claim of a Venezuelan "threat to national security and foreign policy". On the contrary, it is the US that has financed proxy political and military actions designed to overthrow legally constituted elected governments of Venezuela as well as have warships, military and air forces bases in the vicinity of Venezuela. Thus, Obama's cantankerous tone is partly a battle of nerves to test the resilience of the regime, partly a threat and partly a test of political will of Latin American regimes. He failed on all counts when the 16th March emergency meeting of the foreign ministers of UNASUR unanimously rejected US sanctions and military intervention. The European Union too failed to adopt the US sanctions although the European Parliament echoed Obama's demand to free the jailed terrorists.

President Maduro has stood firm, and declared a national emergency and asked for special powers. Although an immediate invasion is unlikely, the US strategy could be to polarize Latin America, create conditions to run down Venezuela's economy and thus create a "humanitarian" pretext for a costly military intervention. Anti-imperialists and democrats around the world cannot leave anything to economic sense prevailing over brutal imperialist arrogance. There is a need to stir public opinion internationally on US intentions in Venezuela and build a campaign to defend Venezuela.

Terrorists and Fascists

The terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris on 7th January 2015 provoked much anger in France, and four million people demonstrated on 11th January against the assassinations. The protests were also usurped by leaders of bourgeois governments to present themselves as champions of democratic freedom.

There is a dangerous tendency to lump together all acts of terror in the name of Islam, regardless of context and the forces behind any fanatical group. It should be noted that in all contexts Islamic terrorism had at most a nuisance value against imperialism and its overall impact had been to help imperialism to restrict democratic rights and liberties, make the state more authoritarian, worsen discrimination against immigrants and thereby divide the oppressed masses. Left and democratic forces need to be especially cautious in such matters.

Every leftist should unconditionally denounce the Paris killings, the planners and perpetrators. But revulsion of the act should not rush one to hasty subjective conclusions. Thus far no one knows who was behind the assassinations, although the French neo-fascist National Front promptly accused "fundamentalist Islamists". While that is possible, we should also remember the 77 people murdered by the Nazi, Anders Breivik in Norway on 22nd July 2011 and the more than 40 people burned alive by Ukrainian Nazis in Odessa on 2nd May 2014 to remind ourselves that Islamist fundamentalists do not have a monopoly on terror. We should also examine who inspires, arms, finances, guides and supports the Islamist fundamentalists. It has always been the US and its clients, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Arab regimes loyal to the US. Imperialist-friendly Arab regimes still arm and finance the ISIS to fight their secular enemy, Syria. Paradoxically, the monsters do not take long to turn on their makers.

Let us also look at the attitude of imperialist countries towards the Islamic faith which has little to do with Islamist fundamentalism. Colonial

arrogance and contempt for 'people of colour' and their faiths are still alive in Europe, and serve as ideological inspiration for the manifestations of fascism in Europe.

The Charlie Hebdo cartoon which was at the centre of the brutal killing should be seen in the context of ongoing stigmatizing of Muslims, which feeds the worst resentments based on race and religion and justifies hatred towards the Muslim worker in Europe. Thus, it will be dishonest to denounce "Islamist fascism" without denouncing all forms of European neo-fascism. Very few comments on the Charlie Hebdo killings refer to earlier acts of provocation, firstly "the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis" of 2005-2006 concerning the cartoons in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten under the headline "The Face of Muhammad" and their reproduction, mostly to offend the sensibilities of Muslims. Many have forgotten the deliberately offensive "Innocence of Muslims" video of 2012 uploaded to YouTube in July 2012. Despite strong protests by Muslims, little was done in the West to rectify the situation. These and the Charlie Hebdo cartoons deserve to be seen in the context of the desecration of the national flag and insulting the monarch among other things being punishable offences in many European countries which dismiss lightly the insults against Islam as freedom of expression.

Freedom of expression to intentionally offend a people is not a truly democratic freedom and inciting hatred based on gender, ethnic, religious, caste and other such identity is unacceptable. Mass solidarity with Charlie Hebdo was in view of the unlawful punishment meted out to its editorial staff and should not be allowed to be interpreted as licence to insult in the name of freedom of expression.

Defence of the demonization of Muslims and Islam or for that matter any community or faith in the name of freedom of expression by the bourgeois press will finally play into the hands of fascism.

NDMLP Statement to the Media

24th March 2015

Hold a Proper Inquiry into Water Contamination

Comrade SK Senthivel issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party on the Report of the Committee of Experts of the Northern Provincial Council on oil contamination of ground water.

In recent years fresh water in the region around the Chunnakam Power Station has been contaminated with waste oil. The affected people, public organizations and social activists brought the issue into the open and initiated mass activities. Consequently, the Northern Provincial Council set up a task force for clean water and appointed a committee of experts to investigate and report on whether there has been pollution of fresh water by waste oil contamination. Day before yesterday the committee of experts revealed their findings in the form as a preliminary investigation report. That report stated that there were no toxic chemical elements in the water identified by the people as contaminated. This has shocked the nearly 20,000 people using the four hundred or so affected fresh water wells. If the preliminary report is thus, one need not say how the reports for the stages that follow will be.

There is fair suspicion among the people whether this finding has been revealed with the intention of concealing the danger realized by the people that the fresh ground water is contaminated. This has led to the Committee of Experts of the Northern Provincial Council losing credibility among the people. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly criticizes the anti-people conclusion of the Committee of Experts. At the same time the Party is at one with the people in endorsing as reasonable the doubts and questions raised in the publication of 23rd March 2015 by the Association of People Affected by Oil Contamination.

Further the Committee of Experts claims that it has come to its conclusion by analysing water from 40 wells. But waste oil deposition has spread like the

“Grease monster” on a wide scale to the north up to Tellipalai, to the west to Chankanai, to the east to Neerveli and to the south to Kokkuvil. Hence the Party demands that the Provincial Council and the Chief Minister come up with proper answers for the problem of contamination of fresh water which has jeopardized the daily lives of our people.

Also it should be found by proper investigation how waste oil came to be collected within the premises of the power station and what practices were adopted that caused it to find its way into the soil, and the findings should be made public. The Party points out on behalf of the people that it will be an unforgivable crime to betray the people to protect the profits of Northern Power Company and its shareholders or the interests of certain personalities.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP Statement to the Media

29th February 2015

Protect Local Fishers from Attacks by Intruders

Comrade K Selvam Kathirgamanathan, Northern Regional Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement condemning the attack on local fishers by armed Indian fishers.

Three days ago, local fishers fishing in the waters off Kattaikkaadu in Vadamaratchi North have been attacked and grievously injured by Indian fishers who arrived in several hundred fishing trawlers, welding sharp weapons, batons, lead weights used on fishing nets and bottles. The poachers also intimidated local fishers by firing shots and destroyed the nets used by local fishers. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party vehemently condemns this attack and urges the Northern Provincial Council and the Central Government to take prompt action in this matter.

Those who intrude into our territorial waters in Indian trawlers to catch fish are not ordinary Indian fishers but poachers in the pay of big fisheries businessmen. One cannot lightly dismiss the action of arriving in a hundred trawlers on Thursday and attacking local fishers in addition to plundering

fish. The Northern Provincial Council and the Central Government should not be indifferent about such illegitimate trawler fishing, brutal attacks on local fishers and damage to fishing nets and take immediate steps to put an end to such acts. We urge that the local fishers and their work should be protected and the security guaranteed for their work for a livelihood.

KS Kathirgamanathan
Northern Regional Secretary
New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party

NDMLP Statement to the Media

31st January 2015

The Doubtful Impact of the Budget

Comrade SK Senthivel issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party on the interim budget of the government.

The interim budget of the Maithri-Ranil government has not made a significant impact on the rise in cost of living to meet the expectations of the people. Price reductions for essential foods are not matching the reductions in fuel prices. Price reduction by a few rupees can only be nominal. This is like feeding popcorn to sate an elephant's hunger. The price reductions are a make believe to cover for pledges made during the elections and with a view to the forthcoming general election. It remains questionable whether the price reduction is for a hundred days or until the next budget. Thus the working people are disappointed in their expectations. The budget is a foreword to the neo-liberal globalization policies that the government is committed to follow.

The granting of wage increase by Rs10,000 in two stages for 1.4 million government employees will be some relief for them to meet the rise in cost of living. But a definite scheme of adequate wage increase has not been announced for the 7 million private sector workers. A small sum of Rs2500 alone has been nominally recommended. This is a planned let down of these workers. This demonstrates that the Maithri-Ranil government has thereby shown the green light for blatant exploitation by multi-national corporations, large business establishments and private organizations and companies. Besides that, the price reduction for food items such as wheat flour, sugar,

lentils, coriander and sprats is also a form of deception. The budget which has raised the guaranteed price for paddy has not determined the control price for rice. Thus adequate relief has not been offered to the vast majority comprising the working people for their burden of cost of living compared to the consolation offered to the lower middle and upper middle classes through price reductions and wage increases.

The Budget has, in particular, ignored the hundreds of thousand workers in the plantation sector, the free trade zones and other private organizations. This shows the anti working class stand of the comprador capitalist Maithri-Ranil government. Thus this budget is a good example of how change of government will not bring about changes in the basic economic structure and the pattern of exploitation. Hence the Party emphasises that the workers, employees and toiling masses have no way but to transcend differences of race, religion, language and region and unite as toiling masses and struggle to win their dues.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP Statement to the Media

17th January 2015

Unacceptable Levels of Water Contamination

A mass struggle took place opposite the Ceylon Electricity Board, Chunnakam with slogans such as “We want clean water” “Do not ruin our wells” “Close down the Northern Power Company which pollutes our environment”. Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party who participated in the struggle issued the following statement.

Waste oil rejected by the electric power generation plant located in Chunnakam and operating under the Ceylon Electricity Board continues to pollute ground water. Thus far waste oil deposition has occurred in more than 500 wells in Valikamam South and Valikamam North regions making them unsuitable for human use. In the past week waste oil was observed in the wells of two schools. This is a breach of human rights that has been imposed on the lives of the people. It is reprehensible that, while the government is indifferent in this matter, fresh water for human consumption is being ruined in the interest of massive profits for Northern Power, a multinational electric

power company. The people expect the government to pay attention to this problem and find an alternative solution. But the way for solving the problem is for the people to go beyond thus relying on the President, ministers and MPs and mobilize by the tens of thousands in mass struggle. It is welcome that the initial campaign of public organizations has taken place as a forerunner to it.

Waste oil deposition observed in wells close to the Chunnakam power station has extended to reach wells in the regions of Valikamam South and Valikamam North. This situation could worsen to make fresh water wells to fall into disuse and lead to the dangerous situation arriving where it will be impossible to cultivate crops in the fertile red soil region.

The people of the region who have already been affected by the war and military expansion now face the danger of losing fresh water, a fundamental human need, for an electric power company to make huge profits. Supplying drinking water by bowsers to the affected people is only a short term remedy. At the same time, it is necessary to stop immediately the activities of the multi-national company Northern Power which is responsible for the pollution of the fresh water in the wells. Urgent measures must be taken to fulfil the electricity need of the North with hydroelectric power from the South. The Party welcomes as entirely just this demand of the people and urges the continuation of mass struggles for the purpose.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP Statement to the Media

14th January 2015

Outcome of the Presidential Election

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party on the results of the Presidential Election and the change of regime.

The severe economic crises, the anti-democratic fascist dictatorship of the family, abuses of the rule of law and the judiciary by the executive power, corruption, irregularities and repressive abuse of power, chauvinistic

oppression against the Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils under the Mahinda Chinthana government have led to much discontent and hostility at various levels among the people. That was the reason why there was a general opinion that there should be a change of regime. Mahinda Rajapaksa was defeated and sent home and Maithripala Sirisena was elected as the new president as a result of the Common Opposition taking advantage of it. In addition Ranil Wickramasinghe was nominated Prime Minister and the Common Opposition took power. Thus, the role of Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities and minorities including Christians had been important in this victory and change of government. Their votes contributed around 30% of the total votes gathered by President Maithripala Sirisena. These votes which decided the outcome of the election were many times more than that the hard line chauvinist JHU had secured for him.

Hence the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people are keenly looking forward to see the extent to which the new regime under the Maithri-Ranil leadership will go towards resolving the national question. Neither the election manifesto of the Common Opposition nor the 100 Days Programme of Good Governance nor the two addresses by the President have referred to the national question. This is a pointer to the stand of the new regime. At the same time it is said that the President and the Prime Minister have paid attention to the issues raised and approached matters positively at the meeting with the Tamil National Alliance. Under these conditions, it is important whether the Tamil National Alliance will, as in the past, negotiate from the position that the Sinhalese are enemies, based on the formula of Sinhalese v. Tamils, or will approach the solution to the national question by securing the goodwill of Sinhalese working people as a part of the national whole through participating in their problems and issues.

It is the parties of the comprador capitalist ruling class forces that got together as a common opposition to secure the above victory and change of regime. The American and European imperialists and Indian hegemonists have functioned as a powerful force in the background to make their contributions based on ulterior motives. Under these circumstances, the people in power have changed and there will be some changes that will take place. But the political reality is that there will be no change in the basic political and economic infrastructures. Yet the people are full of expectations

about the “New Nation in 100 Days” through the National Government under the Maithri-Ranil leadership. How well the hopes and expectations of the people will be realized in a way favourable to the people will be seen at the end of 100 days by the people on all sides.

Thus it is important for the entire toiling masses including the workers and peasants and the oppressed nationalities to realize that solutions to the basic problems of life and livelihood faced by them will not be attainable by changing the regime and the persons in power. Otherwise to entertain the hope that it could be achieved through voting at the next election is a form of political superstition. They should instead put forward their hopes and expectations as demands and build mass movements with political clarity and far sight. They should prepare to go forward in a broad-based mass uprising. This is the message that the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party wishes to impress upon the masses.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP News

NDMLP delegate at the 10th Party Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party sent a delegate to the 10th Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Red Star held from 26th February to 2nd March 2013, at Lucknow, India. The Party delegate also participated in the seminar “Proletarian Internationalism and the Importance of ICOR” held in connection with the Congress. The Party also sent its revolutionary greetings to CPI (ML) on the occasion of the Congress.

NDMLP sends Revolutionary Greetings to the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Turkey/Northern Kurdistan

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, Sri Lanka sent its revolutionary greetings congratulating the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Turkey/Northern Kurdistan on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary Celebration of the MLCP, Turkey/Northern Kurdistan held on 18th October 2014 in Germany.

Struggle to protest contamination of water

Following the spread of contamination of well water by waste oil from the Chunnakam Power Station, a mass campaign took place opposite the Ceylon Electricity Board, Chunnakam with people raising slogans calling for clean water, protection of well water and stern action against the electric power company. Members of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party were among key participants in the demonstration.

Demanding the right to housing and land!

The Hill-Country Mass Organization for Social Justice (HMOS) organized a massive demonstration in Matale on Sunday 1st March 2015 emphasizing the demand for the right to individual housing with a village structure and 20 perches of land, and wage increases in line with the cost of living for the Hill Country Tamils. Left parties such as the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, the Frontline Socialist Party, civil society organizations such as *Adaiyaalam*, Monlar and the Hill Country Social Studies Centre, and several youth organizations lent support and cooperation for the demonstration.

This was the first occasion in Matale when people consciously mobilized for their rights. People marched in procession with slogans such as “Human, Human, We are also Human” “We Demand, We Demand, We Demand 20 Perches of Land”.

KA Subramaniam commemorated in Jaffna

The 25th commemoration of Comrade KA Subramaniam, founder General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party (then Communist Party of Sri Lanka, Left) was held in Jaffna on 15.1.2015. Comrade R Thavarajah chaired the meeting compered by Comrade T Sri Prakash. Mr N Parthipan, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, Vavuniya delivered the memorial address, and the book “Memories of Comrade Maniam” (in Tamil) by Comrade SK Senthivel was released in Jaffna and Mrs Valliyammai Subramaniam wife of Comrade Maniam issued the first copy to Senior Comrade R Selvanayagam. The meeting was also addressed by Comrades S Thanikasalam, M Rasanayagam, SK Senthivel, V Mahendran, S Thanujan, S Thevarajah and K Selvam Kathirgamanathan.

Where Have All The Flowers Gone?

Pete Seeger

*Where have all the flowers gone, long time passing?
Where have all the flowers gone, long time ago?
Where have all the flowers gone?
Young girls have picked them everyone
Oh, when will they ever learn?
Oh, when will they ever learn?*

*Where have all the young girls gone, long time passing?
Where have all the young girls gone, long time ago?
Where have all the young girls gone?
Gone for husbands everyone
Oh, when will they ever learn?
Oh, when will they ever learn?*

*Where have all the husbands gone, long time passing?
Where have all the husbands gone, long time ago?
Where have all the husbands gone?
Gone for soldiers everyone
Oh, when will they ever learn?
Oh, when will they ever learn?*

*Where have all the soldiers gone, long time passing?
Where have all the soldiers gone, long time ago?
Where have all the soldiers gone?
Gone to graveyards, everyone
Oh, when will they ever learn?
Oh, when will they ever learn?*

*Where have all the graveyards gone, long time passing?
Where have all the graveyards gone, long time ago?
Where have all the graveyards gone?
Gone to flowers, everyone
Oh, when will they ever learn?
Oh, when will they ever learn?*

[This song of 1955 by Pete Seeger, who died on Jan 28, 2014 aged 94 years, is one of the most familiar American folk songs.]

The Times are A-Changin
Bob Dylan

*Come senators, congressmen
Please heed the call
Don't stand in the doorway
Don't block up the hall
For he that gets hurt
Will be he who has stalled
There's a battle outside
And it is ragin'.
It'll soon shake your windows
And rattle your walls
For the times they are a-changin'.*

(From the lyrics of the song of the same title by Dylan)

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