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# TAJMAHAL

Hari Prakash Sharma (1934-2010)

FAR away.  
Beyond the sacred cow.  
Beyond the every-day people.  
FAR, FAR away.  
Beyond the marsh  
and agricultural fields.  
FAR, Very FAR, away.  
Beyond the dry  
almost dry  
bed of Jamuna river.  
By the hazy horizon.  
There is the Seventh Wonder of the World.  
The marvel in marble.  
Monument of love.  
Immortal love.  
Royal love.  
Tajmahal.  
The darling of tourists.  
India's jewel.  
India's crown.  
But.  
Tajmahal or no Tajmahal.  
Tourist or not tourist.  
Glory or no glory.  
Love or no love.  
People need food.  
Food needs chillies.  
Chilies have to grow.  
Chilies need to dry.  
Chilies need pounding.  
Day after day.  
By every-day people.  
Chilies need...

## *Editorial*

The economy is deep in trouble and the government is desperate. During the presidential election campaign, opponents of Mahinda Rajapaksa hope that the West will economically assist the post Rajapaksa regime in order to diminish China's influence in Sri Lanka. But the country's outstanding internal and foreign debts have grown since, partly owing to weakening trade balance. The GDP growth rate which fell from 9.1% in 2012 to 4.5% in 2014 is yet to recover. Loss of investor confidence caused by a faltering rupee induced capital flight and a decline in foreign exchange reserves. The slowing of growth of inward remittances from overseas employment amid falling oil prices and prolonged political turmoil in the Middle East, added to the country's economic woes. The depreciation of the rupee against the US dollar made imports more costly and trade deficit bigger, mostly because of increase in non-oil imports.

The heavy burden of debt, admittedly, includes debt inherited from the previous regime. But the government has done much to relieve the country of the burden. Like the earlier regime, it resorted to commercial loans with its desperation shown by its willingness to accept massive credit from dubious sources. Besides, the government raised US\$2.15 billion in 2015 through two Sovereign Bond issues, with the exercise to be repeated in 2016. The Central Bank, under a program approved by the Government, will issue International Sovereign Bonds up to US\$3 billion in the international capital market in 2016. Besides, the Central Bank has signed a currency swap agreement with the Reserve Bank of India to draw US\$1 billion in 2015. Here, India was partly driven by a desire to strengthen ties with Sri Lanka to counter Chinese influence as well as to strengthen bilateral relations and economic ties as argued by the RBI in defence of the deal.

In 2009, when financial reserves fell below US\$1 billion at the peak of war, IMF granted Sri Lanka US\$2.6 billion as loan to boost its reserves. When the new government soon after its election in January 2015 sought

a bailout, the IMF declined the request in view of the comfortable level of the country's reserves. Early this year the Finance Minister boasted that he will not plead with the IMF, but soon negotiated a loan of \$1.5 billion which was agreed in April subject to economic reforms to reverse the decline in tax revenue over the past two decades and to revive growth.

Stirring anti-China passion was part of the election campaign, with Chinese projects shown as part of the corruption of the Rajapaksa regime. That attitude persisted for months after election, in anticipation of a flow of foreign investment and credit facilities from the West as reward for distancing the country from China. Reality was otherwise.

Acting promptly on the Presidential election pledge to halt the Chinese funded Port City project in Colombo, the Cabinet temporarily suspend work on the project. Environmental implications of the project and its economic benefit were serious issues besides the offer of long term and indefinite leases of part of the reclaimed land to the construction company. But the new regime, having made the project a key election issue, made its cancelation an affront to China. Economic reality forced the government to retreat, but with face-saving changes to the original agreement. The government also further softened its attitude towards China, rather to the disappointment of its Western and Indian sponsors who played a big role in bringing it to power. The Prime Minister, during his visit to China in April, besides consolidating existing deals, committed the government to more Chinese funded development projects— a recent development being a Chinese global industrial conglomerate expressing interest in boosting Sri Lanka's mineral sector.

India while expanding military support and developmental aid in various sectors has three outstanding issues with Sri Lanka, namely implementation of 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Indian trawler fishing in Sri Lankan waters and Sri Lanka's proximity to China.

India's interest in the Sri Lankan national question was peripheral to its desire for regional hegemony. While the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, an outcome of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987, was the only concrete move by

any Sri Lankan government to solve the national question, India's interest in ensuring its implementation was limited by its wish to retain influence with the Sri Lankan government. The chauvinist regimes of Sri Lanka, to the dismay of Tamil nationalists, knew this too well. India only feigns interest in the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment for internal political reasons and pretends to the Tamils that it is using its position in the UNHRC to exert pressure on Sri Lanka. However, its control over Sri Lankan affairs is limited and India knows which side the bread is buttered on.

As for India's China concerns, subtlety has not been the forte of Indian diplomacy. In the past three decades, several Indian High Commissioners had acted more like viceroys rather than like diplomats and, as recent events have shown, India will lose to China unless it adopts a better diplomatic style. India has, however, developed loyalist groups within political parties besides fully controlling some. Its meddling in politics in the North is tolerated, owing to expectations about India, but less so in the South. There are two current issues in which Indian pressure on Sri Lanka is resented.

On the question of poaching by bottom trawling fishing vessels, India has bullied the Sri Lankan government into releasing the poachers and their vessels by using its diplomatic missions and by taking Sri Lankan fishers hostage to secure the release of Indian poachers who inflict untold damage to the livelihood of northern fishers.

Despite strong Indian pressure, the Rajapaksa regime deferred the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), largely because of the bitter experience of Sri Lankan businesses with the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) of 1998 which proved to be mainly to India's benefit. Fresh pressure has been exerted on the new regime by the Modi government to sign the Indo-Sri Lanka Economic and Technology Cooperation Framework Agreement (ETCA) which has replaced CEPA. ETCA is not just about economic benefits to Indian investors from the Agreement, but also aimed at thoroughly integrating Sri Lanka into a US-led strategic alignment against China. Lack of

transparency has been a central issue for opponents of ETCA, including professionals in the IT sector and the medical profession, who have strongly denounced the lack of communication and consultation with the relevant stakeholders. The claimed benefits to Sri Lankan businesses and the professions are strongly questioned and the government is at a loss to answer the charges. It is likely, however, that the Government will push the agreement through Parliament, but resistance will persist.

The International Monetary Fund and World Bank have always controlled the economic policy of the country, but the open economic policy of 1978 allowed room for total control of economic policy. Sri Lanka's indebtedness to the IMF has been IMF's leash to restrain the country. The statement that "This agreement will be subject to completion of prior actions and approval by the IMF's Executive Board, which is expected to consider Sri Lanka's request in early June" by IMF's chief for Sri Lanka, following IMF consent to release \$1.5 billion over a three-year period in support of the reform agenda left little for imagination. The IMF said that the Sri Lankan government will seek to raise its tax-to-GDP ratio to 15% by 2020 from the current 11%. The Sri Lankan government has already obliged and announced the increase of Value Added Tax (VAT) to 15% and the lowering of the threshold for Nation building Tax (NBT) from Rs 25 million to Rs 3 million per quarter, except for locally procured agricultural produce in the preparation for sale. Many tax exemptions and concessions for essential services have been slashed. But tax revision is kind to high income groups. Personal income tax threshold has been raised from Rs 500,000 to Rs 2.4 million per annum and the tax rate at 15% in place of a graded scale ranging from 4 to 24%.

Economic burdens on the people are bound to escalate as a result of a lack of clear economic policy of the government, which is increasingly likely to be jostled about by rival international interests. For survival the state is likely to become more dictatorial on one pretext or another. The Left has the duty not only to warn the people but also to ready them for a prolonged struggle for survival.

# Considerations for the Proposed Constitution

The constitution of a state describes how it is structured and functions, and identifies with the interests of the dominant social class. Thus, although Sri Lanka has lived through three Constitutions since independence from direct colonial rule, the system has served only the exploiting capitalist classes, the landed gentry and their imperialist masters. Needs of the toiling masses have been neglected all along and the country has not been delivered from its economic woes resulting from continued imperialist domination in the form of neocolonialism. The Constitution of 1978 with an Executive Presidency designed to deliver the country to imperialist plunder had disastrous consequences. It plunged the country into a worsening national question and civil war and deeper economic crisis, while undermining all democratic institutions.

A Constitutional Council constituted in March 2002 under the 17th Amendment to the Constitution for rectifying serious anti-democratic features of the Constitution of 1978 was passed into law in October 2001. But it did not function and was subverted in 2010 by President Mahinda Rajapaksa who replaced it with the Parliamentary Council. Following the election of Maithripala Sirisena steps were taken in 2015 to reinstate the Constitutional Council, constituted in May 2015. The Council invited proposals from individuals and public organizations for a New Constitution to be drafted by the Constitutional Assembly. The Parliament of Sri Lanka convened as the Constitutional Assembly on 5<sup>th</sup> April to take the initial steps necessary to draft a new constitution.

The painful end to the war failed to resolve the national question and the country headed towards a fascist dictatorial rule by the Rajapaksa family. Electoral defeat of the regime in 2015 raised hopes among the

public that errors of the past will be rectified. The government appeared to deliver on a few of its election pledges, but changes were mostly cosmetic, but for partial curtailment of the powers of the executive presidency. Hopes have been raised about a new constitution which will reform the existing political system, but signs are that the country will end up with a halfway house between the constitutions of 1972 and 1978.

Left and progressive forces cannot decide what emerges as the new constitution. More importantly, the revolutionary left knows that a constitution adopted by the representatives of the ruling classes will only serve the interests of those classes and their imperialist masters. It also knows that only a revolutionary change — a New Democratic Revolution achieved by revolutionary mass struggle led by the working class — can deliver genuine democratic change and liberate the country from foreign and local oppressors and resolve the basic problems facing the country.

The Left, nevertheless, has a duty make proposals within the confines of the bourgeois democratic system — but with a long term view of matters — to urge the right of every citizen to decent livelihood, fair minimum wage, safety and dignity at work, financially secure retirement, freedom from abuse and from discrimination based on gender, race, religion or caste, and equality before the law. The proposals must demand the defence of the sovereignty of the country against foreign economic, political and military domination. They should emphasize that national unity could be secured only through devolution of power to the people, based on the right to self determination and the defence of human rights, with all nationalities and national minorities placed on equal footing. They should assert gender equality at all levels including elected bodies, with representation ensured for all significant ethnic and political identities. They should also urge writing into the constitution protection of the environment and national resources, both human and material, from unfair exploitation by big capital and foreign powers.

The text below is an approximate translation of the document submitted by the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party to the

Constitutional Reforms Committee in March 2016. The proposals have a long term perspective for the left and progressive forces to evolve a common minimum programme in their long march for social justice.

## **Important Considerations Presented by the NDMLP for Inclusion in the Proposed Constitution**

### **1. Sovereignty of the Country**

Sri Lanka is the native land of all Lankans and belongs to all of them. There is need for constitutional guarantee to protect and defend its sovereignty. The Constitution should assure that the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and that a foreign policy is adopted which will not let room for any form of foreign pressure or interference.

### **2. People's Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka**

The Westminster style constitution of the past and the later executive presidential system should be rejected and a Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka should be drafted that grants full independence to all people of Sri Lanka. This Republic should through the Constitution assure all fundamental rights of the entire people including the workers, peasants and other toiling masses, nationalities, national minorities and women of the country.

### **3. The House of People's Representatives (Parliament)**

The Government should comprise representatives of the people who are freely and democratically elected to the House of People's Representatives or Parliament through a multi-party electoral system. The Constitution should affirm provisions to recall any Member of Parliament — elected on the basis that he/she will serve the people and country — if he/she indulges in irregular practices, corruption or abuse of power or involved in illegal activities.

#### **4. Multi-Ethnicity**

The Constitution should affirm that Sri Lanka is a country with people of several ethnicities, several languages, several religions and several cultures and assure that Sri Lanka is a secular multi-ethnic country. The Constitution should forbid all activities that induce contradiction and conflict among the people, based on ethnicity, language, religion, region and caste.

#### **5. Use of Language**

The Constitution should recognize Sinhala and Tamil as National Languages of Sri Lanka, and Sinhala, Tamil and English as Official Languages, and assure the right of every citizen to be educated in his/her mother tongue (among the national languages), conduct his/her daily affairs and communicate with Government in that language, and receive the due response in that language

#### **6. The National Flag**

The national flag of Sri Lanka should be redesigned to reflect the multi-ethnicity, secularism, unity and solidarity of the people.

#### **7. National Resources**

All national resources of Sri Lanka belong to the entire people of the country and their descendents. The Constitution should guarantee the protection of the land and water resources of the country and its marine resources from over-exploitation for big profit by multi-national companies and their local big capitalist allies, bring all resources within the scope of protection of national resources and put them to use for national development, and prevent the sacrifice of national resources — especially the denuding of forests and destruction of marine life — to feed the greed of foreign capital and local big capitalists.

## **8. National Economic Development**

The Constitution should incorporate guarantee of state stimulation for all national economic activities which will yield all the essential needs of the people, control of the import of all luxury goods and prohibition of all imports injurious to the development of the national economy, while providing guarantees for self-reliant local production.

The Constitution should make provision to prevent the country from entering into agreements with other countries to the detriment of national economic development and favour foreign countries.

## **9. Workers**

All rights of the workers — especially those which were divested by the Constitution of 1978 — should be restored and affirmed by the new Constitution. The Constitution should assure the workers their right to work, right for industrial action, fair wage, guaranteed pension, provident fund, Employees Trust Fund, fair working hours, guaranteed holidays, security of employment, health care, protection from abuse of power including victimization by employers and high officials.

## **10. Women Workers**

The Constitution should assure the protection of the rights and safety of women workers serving in the plantations, garment factories in the Free Trade Zones and in other state and private sector organizations.

## **11. Plantation Workers**

The Constitution should guarantee to plantation workers all legal rights including the right to work and trade union rights that workers in other sectors are entitled to and wage determination not different from other sectors of employment. The Constitution should provide to rectify the defective aspects of livelihood that are a continuation of the colonial structure and to recognize the plantation workers as a major labour force of the country. The Constitution should recognize Hill

Country Tamils as a nationality and grant them the right to housing, land and employment. Besides, the Constitution should endorse special programmes for their educational, health, social and cultural development of the community which remains backward.

The Constitution should affirm the recovery of the estates transferred to 22 plantation companies and vesting their administration in the hands of cooperatives that include workers. The Constitution should affirm the elimination of domination by administration by plantation companies by bringing all plantations and workers' settlements under the administration of Provincial and Local Government.

## **12. Peasantry**

The Constitution should affirm guarantees for all aspects of livelihood of the peasantry. The Constitution should affirm the allocation of land for landless peasants along with the necessary irrigation, housing and essential needs. The Constitution should assure guaranteed prices for agricultural produce consistent with cost of living, assured price concessions for essential fertilizer and non-hazardous agro-chemicals, prohibition of agro-chemicals posing health hazards, encouragement and guarantees for alternative agro-chemicals, training in safe modern agricultural practices, and a pension scheme for cultivators. The Constitution should affirm prohibition of the allocation of agricultural land and water resources to foreign and multinational companies.

## **13. Fishers**

The Constitution should guarantee without regional variation a common policy on fisheries, work security, personal security, safety at sea and health care for fishers and price subsidy for fuel, guaranteed price for all fishing equipment, protection against attack and damage to equipment by foreign encroachers, and a pension scheme for fishes. The Constitution should also guarantee modern career training that is friendly to the fisheries environment.

## **14. Nationalities and National Minorities**

The Constitution should recognize as nationalities and guarantee national rights to the four nationalities, namely Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils.

The Constitution should recognize as national minorities communities including the Burghers, Malays and the Attho (Vedda) who consider themselves as distinct communities and guarantee their social and cultural rights.

## **15. Solving the National Question**

The Constitution should guarantee the setting up of regional and internal autonomous structures within a united Sri Lanka, based on the principle of the right to self determination in order to affirm the existence, rights, development and security of the nationalities.

The following aspects should comprise key components of the above.

- Setting up of a regional autonomy in the region comprising the merged North and East
- Setting up of autonomous units for the Muslim nationality within the above regional autonomy
- Setting up of autonomous internal structures for the Sinhalese within the above regional autonomy
- Setting up of autonomous units in regions with a large concentration of Hill Country Tamil population
- Setting up of autonomous internal structures outside the North and East for Tamils, Muslims and for Hill Country Tamils
- Setting up of autonomous internal structures for all national minorities including Burghers, Malays and the Attho (Vedda) in all districts according to intensity and distribution of population.
- Ensuring that there is no undue interference by the Central Government in regional autonomies and autonomous units and internal structures

## **16. Impact of Caste**

The Constitution should affirm measures designed to change the direct and indirect effects of casteism including social inequality, untouchability, landlessness, lack of economic resources, and backwardness in education and health.

## **17. Women**

The Constitution should affirm the guarantee of fundamental and human rights of women based on gender equality and the protection of women, women's health and equal opportunity to women as well as freeing of women from social oppression including the dowry system.

## **18. Children**

The Constitution should assure prevention of the children of the country — children of the toiling masses especially — from becoming child workers, protection of their education and their physical and emotional well being through the enactment of special laws, and the termination of subjecting children to acts of sexual abuse, torture and assault.

## **19. Political Representation**

The Constitution should guarantee that representation in Parliament, Provincial Councils and bodies of local government will be in fair proportion to the political and social identity and that equal representation of women is ensured alongside proportional representation in the respective districts.

## **20. Religions**

The Constitution should assure equal state protection for all religions of the people and legal protection against the use of religion for anti-social purposes. The Constitution should provide for the teaching, besides religious education, secular and tolerant moral values.

The Constitution should, besides subjecting to public view particulars of income and expenditure of religious establishments, affirm that all members of the clergy participating in social activity are subject to the normal laws of the country relating to such activity, and prevent the involvement of clergy in parochial political activities and thereby entering Parliament, and attempts by religious organizations to dominate government.

## **21. Education and Employment Opportunity**

The Constitution should affirm the implementation of a national education policy for pre-school education that complements primary school education, guarantee free school education of quality, and minimum necessary resources and educational standard in all schools.

The Constitution should guarantee that no school has a population exceeding 2000 and that no class exceeds 30 in size and that schools of good standard are located so that every school student takes no more than 30 minutes to go from home to school.

The Constitution should assure that everyone has full educational rights up to a university degree based on educational proficiency, higher education with employment prospects in mind, and financial assistance and concessions according to need to enable students lacking in financial resources and students who are socially backward to undertake higher education.

The constitution should assure adequate and appropriate employment opportunity for those who have completed their education, based on competence and ethnic proportion in the population.

The constitution should assure that just and reasonable national policies are developed and implemented in relation to appointment for government employment, promotions and, transfer of service.

## **22. Cultural Infiltration**

The Constitution should include guarantees to prevent local cultural decadence and poisonous cultural influences detrimental to the country and the people.

## **23. Health**

The Constitution should assure a national medical service which besides prioritizing preventive medicine over therapeutic medicine, provides free medical service and patient care, the right of everyone to free medical treatment, and the location of hospitals with essential facilities so that a patient could be taken to hospital for urgent medical attention within 30 minutes.

The Constitution should assure the setting up of a pharmaceuticals procurement policy based on the proposals of Professor Senaka Bibile and a legal mechanism for its implementation and supervision of private sector import of pharmaceuticals by the government medical sector.

The Constitution should assure firm control over fees for private medical services and standard of service as well as moderate and need-based use of medicine and medical equipment, and that private medical service does not interfere with the free medical service provided by the government.

## **24. Social Welfare**

The Constitution should affirm that every citizen of the country can receive without hindrance the essential needs of life and has means of livelihood and that resources and social support are made available to ensure that poverty, disability or chronic illness does not obstruct anyone from leading a life of self-respect and social value.

The Constitution should assure the availability of services essential to the well being of people in all parts of the country.

## **25. The Environment**

The Constitution should affirm the prevention all acts of pollution of land and waterways, primacy to protection of the environment in all public ventures, severe action against harming of the environment for profit, and creation of wholesome environmental awareness in schools.

The Constitution should emphasize that it is individually and collectively the responsibility of all members of society to limit the consumption of goods that lead to the proliferation of waste and to encourage recycling of waste.

## **26. Law and Justice**

In order to affirm that all are equal before the law, the Constitution should guarantee legal aid for the needy, full protection for litigants and witnesses, and strict time limits for arriving at a judicial verdict without procrastination of court cases.

The Constitution should guarantee responsible conduct of all Courts of Law and the enacting of firm legal protection against abuse of power by defining clearly the powers of all members of the judicial and legal systems and the police.

## **27. The Defence Sector**

The Constitution should comprise guarantees to confine the duties of the defence sector solely to matters concerning the defence of the country, and prevent interference by the defence sector in civilian matters, the daily lives of the people and politics.

## **28. Human Rights**

The Constitution should incorporate in full the UN Human Rights Charter.

The Constitution should guarantee firm and impartial legal action against all acts of violation of human rights and the elimination of every oppressive piece of legislation that is in practice.

## Introducing Gramscian Concepts

# Towards a Re-analysis of Bangladesh's Political History

Dr Peter Custers

[Dr Peter Custers (1945-2015) journalist, researcher and international activist authored the books **Women in the Tebhaga Uprising**, **Capital Accumulation**, **Women's Labour in Asian Economies** (with Jayati Ghosh) and **Questioning Globalized Militarism: Nuclear and Military Production and Critical Economic Theory** (with Samir Amin) among others. He has written widely on Bengal, Bangladesh, and on a wide spectrum of other subjects from a Marxist perspective. This article, from *Aritro*, quarterly magazine of Bangladeshis in Germany, October-December, 2000 is reproduced here with the kind permission of Dr Custers' family. Italicized parts of the text are as in the Internet source: <http://www.petercusters.nl/index.php?topic=gramsci>]

### 1. After the Demise of Asian Revolutions

In recent decades, interest in the theoretical ideas of the Italian revolutionary philosopher Antonio Gramsci has steadily grown in India and in Bangladesh. Along with the demise of the great 20th century proletarian revolutions in the Asian continent, a critical search has started. This search for renovation - almost inevitably it seems - leads us to Antonio Gramsci, who was incarcerated by Italy's fascist regime after having led his country's Communist Party for a brief period in the 1920s. Gramsci posed, and tried to overcome as no other theoretician, two central weaknesses in the Marxism of his days: the lack of a thorough

understanding regarding the role of intellectuals in society, and the lack of a comprehensive theory covering society's superstructural relations. Thus, Gramsci sought to construct a theory of politics as an autonomous sphere in society, and to this end he devised a number of original concepts.

In the below essay I will summarize the meaning of the Gramscian terms *civil society*, *ideological hegemony*, *passive revolution* and the *historical bloc*, and I will also briefly indicate what in my view is the significance of Gramsci's conceptualisation of the *role of intellectuals*.

A truthful review of the meaning of Gramscian ideas today has become imperative for more than one reason. On the one hand it is my conviction that one of the reasons for the demise of Asian revolutions is to be sought in the fact that these revolutions, by and large, failed to develop a dialectical understanding regarding the role of society's professional intellectuals.

Policymakers in the Cambodian revolution, for instance, combined the peasantry' deep distrust of educated people with an orthodox Marxist view of the superiority of the manual over mental labour. This attitude resulted in murderous practices vis-a-vis society's professional intellectuals. Again, it appears to me that the lack of a sharp distinction between *recognized* and *non-recognized* intellectuals and the lack of a refined analysis regarding the various distinct layers and groups of intellectuals in society, are factors laying at the roots of the deformation of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Hence, a study of Gramsci's theoretical approach which identifies politics as the job of intellectuals appears to be crucial for any evaluation of what went wrong in China. Such a study, most likely, will also result in new insights into the process of political evolution of East Bengal/Bangladesh.

Unfortunately, the adoption of a Gramscian theoretical approach has been complicated by the work of the so-called *Subaltern School*. Interest in Gramscian ideas, in the wake of the demise of Asian revolutions in the 1980s, was initially promoted by the Calcutta-based *Subaltern School*.

This school of thought derived its very name from a term Gramsci employed in his writings to pinpoint the fact that the autonomous

experience of society's oppressed is often skipped in academic writings on history. Yet while the *Subaltern School* for a while adopted certain Gramscian concepts, members of the *School* have evolved towards a profoundly anti-Marxian position. Partha Chatterjee, for instance, whose analytical work on the history of India/Bengal has drawn much attention, has been criticised heavily for his interpretation of the history of Indian nationalism. In Chatterjee's interpretation, the notion of (religious) community reportedly replaces that of class. Though Chatterjee initially had advocated the application of typically Gramscian concepts to Indian history, his more recent evolution in thought threatens to discredit any efforts to apply Gramscian concepts to political life in the subcontinent (1).

Hence, the urgent need for a truthful and integral presentation of Gramsci's theoretical ideas. Below, I will provide a summary and no more than a brief summary, of the key concepts which Gramsci devised (or redefined, as in the case of the concept of *civil society*) (2). However,

I would like to stress from the start that my advocacy of Gramscian concepts will not be an uncritical one. For instance, Gramsci's *categorisation* of intellectuals, no matter how profound if compared with the categorisations of intellectuals that have been offered by V.I. Lenin and Mao Tsetung, remains rudimentary: in order to formulate a credible Marxist policy on intellectuals we need to introduce further categorisations. Also, Gramsci nowhere discussed how the social division of labour between tasks that are predominantly mental and those that are mainly manual in nature, intersects with the *gender* division of labour. Hence, from a *feminist* perspective too, Gramsci's theoretical work was incomplete. Nevertheless, as I will seek to demonstrate in this two-part essay, the set of concepts proposed by Gramsci offers us a very powerful tool to understand the political evolution of East Bengal/Bangladesh in the 20th century. It helps us in one go evaluate the past, *and* advance an innovative Marxist politics for the future.

## **2. Distinct View Regarding the 'Superstructure'**

The last decade of the 20th Century has heralded a new phase in the history of Marxism— a period in which the ideology of 'Marxism-

Leninism' that guided the first period in the building of socialist societies (1917-1989) will see a powerful transformation. The Marxism of future generations, I expect, will be qualitatively richer in content than the Marxism which previous generations of humanity have known. Further, in opting for and advocating the enrichment of philosophical Marxism, we need to give importance to the specific theoretical contribution that was made by the Italian socialist politician and thinker, Antonio Gramsci. While he was imprisoned under fascism, after having briefly led the Communist Party of his country as General Secretary, Gramsci performed a vast work of historical and theoretical investigation, resulting in a unique conceptualisation of political processes in class society. While defenders of Gramsci, in decades when orthodoxy held sway in the international workers' movement, have stressed his loyalty towards leading theoreticians such as Lenin, Gramsci's originality in thought was really large.

First, as well known, Karl Marx taught that all class societies consist of a 'base' and a 'superstructure'. The *base* consists of production relations, i.e. the economic relations between exploiting and exploited classes, which relations are determinant 'in the ultimate analysis.' The *superstructure* that arises on the basis of these economic relations consists in the state's legal and political apparatus. This is erected by society's dominant class in order to ensure its control over the entire social life, and in order to provide guarantees for the economic exploitation by this class. Antonio Gramsci agreed with and used the framework of analysis laid down by Karl Marx, but he also carried Marx's work forward, by putting forward a distinct view regarding the superstructure of class societies. Here he emphasized the point that there exists an *intermediate sphere* between the state on the one hand and the economic base of society on the other. In Gramsci's view, the analysis of this *intermediate sphere* is essential, if we are to understand fully how class domination is maintained.

Now, in pursuing his analysis of the *intermediate sphere*, Gramsci employed two concepts which had been used by Marxist and non-Marxist teachers before him, but without the precise meaning which he attached to them. These two concepts are those of 'civil society' and of 'ideological hegemony'. Both concepts can be traced in classical Marxist

literature, but it is nevertheless true that Gramsci employed them in a novel manner, precisely in order to highlight the existence and functioning of an intermediate sphere in class society. Moreover, this intermediate level of society is not a vague or mystical entity, but is a sphere which is occupied by concrete human beings, i.e. by society's professional intellectuals. While Gramsci was aware of the fact that all intellectuals have a class position, that in one way or another they do form part and parcel of the economic base of society, he nevertheless insisted that intellectuals have a superstructural task: namely the building of consent, of public opinion among the diverse social classes and layers, in favour of society's dominant class. Hence, Gramsci taught us that (professional) intellectuals perform an *autonomous* social function, located between state repression - and the direct appropriation of labour's fruits by capitalist enterprises.

### **3. Gramsci's Use of the Term 'Civil Society'**

Let's now try to delineate the meaning of each of Gramsci's concepts separately. The term civil society can be traced to the great 19th Century German philosophers. It was used both by Marx and by Hegel, from whom Marx borrowed (a part of) his method of analysis. Hegel had used the term civil society to refer to all *pre-state* relations, i.e. to all relations beyond the immediate sphere of the state. Thus, for Hegel, the term civil society included all economic relations. Further, Marx too had employed the term civil society in his writings, but contrary to Hegel had restricted it to refer only to the *economic base* of society. It can be very confusing to compare the definitions given by various philosophers for the same concept. Nevertheless, for a proper understanding of Gramsci's system of thought it is necessary to know that the definition of the term civil society has historically evolved, and that Gramsci transformed the meaning of the term to suit his own theoretical ends (3).

To repeat for the sake of clarity, what has been briefly stated in the section above: Antonio Gramsci, contrary to Hegel and Marx, used the term civil society exclusively to describe and conceptualise the *superstructure*, and in particular those institutions of the superstructure which do not (or not officially) form a part of the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state. They include church institutions; the educational

establishments, ranging from primary schools to the academia; the media such as newspapers, journals and the radio; trade unions and political parties; and all other intermediate institutions that play a distinct role in the intellectual and moral life of society. In short, the term civil society covers *all the institutions located in the intermediate sphere of class society*. Gramsci realised, perhaps more sharply than other theoreticians of the workers' movement in his time, that the 'weight', the influence, of these institutions expands gradually as capitalist society evolves.

Further, there were concrete historic reasons impelling Gramsci to conceptualise capitalist society in the given manner. Gramsci believed that the failure to achieve a revolutionary transformation in countries of Western Europe after World War I needed a specific explanation.

After all, the expectation of imminent revolution had been quite widespread, reflected for instance in the theory of more or less automatic 'breakdown' of capitalism. Gramsci from his side believed that (then) existing Marxist analyses of revolutionary transformation were one-sidedly '*economistic*': they wrongly presumed that a crisis in production relations, in the base of society, would inevitably result in a revolutionary outburst, in the conquering by the working class of the institutions of the capitalist state. As Gramsci argued, Marxists had underestimated the influence which institutions belonging to civil society hold over the thought processes of subaltern classes. These institutions serve to ideologically reinforce the subservience of society's oppressed.

In other words, Gramsci's theoretical ideas were grounded in his analysis of European history, and it would not be wrong to state that the '*Prison Notebooks*' which contain his mature theoretical ideas, are Eurocentric in content. When comparing the political processes in France, Italy and other European countries, Gramsci primarily addressed the increasing complexity of superstructural institutions and relations in so called 'advanced' capitalist societies. Yet, as we will see in the second part of this essay, the term civil society and other Gramscian concepts can very well be used to analyse the political evolution of East Bengal/Bangladesh during the twentieth century. Though most institutions belonging to the intermediate sphere were erected only in the later part of British colonial rule or more recently, - they have in course of

the previous century come to exert a crucial influence upon the intellectual and moral life of East Bengal/Bangladesh.

Lastly, it is necessary to emphasize once again that Gramsci considered civil society to be an arena of class struggle. It is here that different classes compete for ideological hegemony in society, and their competition can take a variety of forms, including both non-violent and violent forms. In recent decades, the concept of civil society, while neglected by Marxist parties, has been much *abused* by reformist propagandists, who aim at mystifying social relations and at confusing the public. Non-governmental organizations, for instance, project civil society as their arena for participation in bourgeois politics. Yet for Gramsci, the use of the term civil society was closely related to his conceptualisation of class society. He used the term not to weaken or undermine, but precisely to strengthen the class struggles of the proletariat and other classes striving to achieve liberation from exploitation, from oppression and from ideological domination by the bourgeoisie.

#### **4. The Concept of Ideological Hegemony**

Gramsci's use of the term 'ideological hegemony' is closely related to his conceptualisation of civil society, and it too underlines the originality of his Marxism. First, the term is used with the specific purpose of highlighting the fact that a society's ruling class applies two methods to maintain, enforce, the loyalty of its citizens. On the one hand, the ruling class does not eschew the *use of physical force* to suppress dissent and impose obedience, but it generally tries to also build social consensus by applying non-violent means. While the state's apparatus of repression (the police, the army) are entrusted with the task of applying force and coercion, the institutions of civil society and the functionaries employed here undertake the task of *building consent*.

Ideological hegemony, then, refers to the cultural and moral leadership exerted by the ruling class over society's citizens via the institutions of civil society, in order to ensure acceptance of the ruling class' policies. Like the term civil society, the term (ideological) hegemony was not invented by Gramsci himself, but was derived by him from the

writings of his Marxist precursors, more particularly from the writings of Lenin. As well known, Lenin's historic contribution towards the Marxism of his days was that he (re)asserted the primacy of political over economic struggles, and that he devised many ideas to advance the political struggles of the Russian proletariat. Previous to Gramsci, Lenin waged intense philosophical and political battles against the danger of 'economism'. Now, the concept of hegemony quite clearly was a part of the vocabulary of Lenin and of his party, the 'Social Democrats'. In Lenin's writings, the term referred to the role of leadership in a class alliance. Thus, he spoke of the hegemony of the proletariat over the peasantry, meaning the leading role of industrial workers over their rural allies in the democratic revolution. While this hegemonic role was based on the proletariat's central economic position, it according to Lenin had to be asserted politically. Hence, *hegemony* signified: the political leadership of the working class (4).

Gramsci did not copy Lenin's term, but re-adapted it to elaborate his theory of society's intermediate sphere. In employing the concept of ideological hegemony, he sought to develop an original, Marxist understanding of superstructural relations in class society. While Gramsci fully agreed with Lenin on the need for working class leadership, he laid great stress on the need for the proletariat to (also) assert its leadership culturally and ideologically. Just as the ruling class made sustained efforts to build consensus in favour of its policies *via* the school system, the media, etc., the working class too should undertake sustained efforts, via all structures of civil society, to convince the various classes and layers of the oppressed that its policies were just.

Otherwise, any working class power is bound to be short-lived, ephemeral, and the bourgeoisie will easily re-assert its predominance. In short, Gramsci's theoretical work was geared towards rethinking the preconditions that need to be fulfilled before the proletariat is ready to conquer state power. In putting forward his distinct concept of ideological hegemony he reformulated the nature of proletariat politics.

## 5. Intellectuals and Politics

I now wish to discuss what is perhaps the most decisive contribution which Gramsci made towards Marxism, i.e. his conceptualisation of intellectuals. So far I have referred to two elements in Gramsci's analysis of the superstructure of class society: i.e. the intermediate sphere which he termed *civil society*, and the method of consensus building via the institutions of civil society, referred to as the construction of *ideological hegemony*. We now need to look at the strata which 'populate' these institutions, i.e. the strata that are entrusted by the ruling class with the task of consensus building. These strata are identified by Gramsci as the various layers of professional intellectuals. Although other Marxist theoreticians, such as Lenin and Mao Tsetung, discussed what contribution intellectuals can make to the emancipation of the oppressed, Gramsci's views on intellectuals to my knowledge are (comparatively) the most mature views on the issue of intellectuals in the history of Marxism (5).

First, Gramsci refused to consider intellectual activity as an exclusive activity, undertaken only by a very privileged layer in class society. Seeking to *democratise* the meaning of the term (which originally referred only to the very most prominent opinion-builders in society, such as famous philosophers and novelists), he insisted that human beings commonly engage in intellectual activity, since it is common for peasants and workers to think about the broader world, i.e. the world beyond the immediate sphere of their own production. Thus, Gramsci's thesis states that '*all human beings are intellectuals*'. Parallel to this, Gramsci also countered the mechanistic notion which counterposes 'physical' and 'mental labour' as two *disconnected* forms of labour. In Gramsci's view, purely 'physical labour' does not exist, for all productive labour involves the use of the human brain! Hence, Gramsci tried to re-instate a dialectical understanding regarding the character of human labour, and his conceptualisation is essential to an understanding of 20th century capitalist management methods, i.e. Fordism and Toyotism (6).

Returning now to our discussion on civil society, it is nevertheless true that there is a section of the population in class society, which makes a living on specialised knowledge, i.e., society's *professional* intellectuals.

Admitting this, Gramsci proceeds to identify a number of *categories* of intellectuals, which are unique categorisations. A distinction which is immediately relevant for the struggles of the oppressed is his distinction between '*organic*' and '*traditional*' intellectuals. *Organic* intellectuals are those intellectuals who represent the interest of 'rising classes' under capitalism, i.e. either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. When representing the oppressed, such intellectuals directly hail from slaves, from feudal peasants, waged workers, etc., and they develop their own worldview primarily in course of their organizational work in the revolutionary movement (7). *Traditional* intellectuals, on the contrary, form an intrinsic part of the old class structure of society; their interests are tied up with the interests of the aristocracy and landlords, i.e. those classes which have a vested interest in opposing societal change.

While it is often presumed, by superficial 'post-modernist' readers of Gramsci's, that the distinction between traditional and organic intellectuals is the main line of distinction he draws between sections of intellectuals, this is far from true. Another key-line of demarcation which he draws is that between *urban* and *rural* intellectuals, and this distinction is equally important for a re-analysis of (East) Bengal's socio-political history. Like the former distinction, this distinction brings out the fact that there are a large number of intellectuals - such as school teachers, rural doctors, journalists, lawyers, etc. - who in view of their profession form a part of society's intellectual community, but whose labour is not recognized as intellectual labour by the dominant section of (urban based, comprador) intellectuals. *Rural intellectuals*, according to Gramsci, are closest to the peasantry, and they often mediate between the peasantry and the institutions of the state. While rural intellectuals include a traditional segment (for instance, religious preachers) and a non-traditional segment (e.g., teachers in secular schools), both categories lack social recognition for the intellectual work which they contribute to society.

Gramsci's above-summarized categorisation of professional intellectuals was rudimentary, and it can be refined on the basis of further social investigations. Nevertheless, it represents a departure, an innovation, in the history of Marxism, for these categorisations were not put forward by any other Marxist philosopher. Moreover, Gramsci as no

other Marxist theoretician argued that political work is the task of intellectuals: whether they be recognized or non-recognized, it is society's intellectuals who engage in the work of *opinion-building* on behalf of the various social classes aspiring to achieve or preserve hegemony. Hence, Gramsci also defined the work of building a political party as intellectual work, and argued that all those who participate in it are either already intellectuals, or, in the process of party-building, are bound to be transformed into intellectuals! This conclusion follows logically from his conceptualisation of civil society, and from his definitions of intellectuals and intellectual activity. Yet it surely constitutes a departure from the views that have held sway in 20th century peasant-based revolutions in Asia!

## **6. The Terms '*Passive Revolution*' and the '*Historical Bloc*'**

Just like the terms *civil society* and *ideological hegemony*, the concept of *passive revolution* was not introduced by Gramsci himself; it was a borrowed term. As he himself admitted in his writing on the history of the Italian Risorgimento, i.e. on the process of the formation of the Italian unitary state, Gramsci took over the term from the historian Cuoco, and then re-interpreted it (8). He used it to designate a process whereby a new political formation comes to power, replacing an older one. Contrary to what happens in a real or active revolution, however, in a passive revolution no fundamental restructuring of social relations takes place.

Hence, the term *passive revolution* refers to a political process that is reformist in nature. Such a process according to Gramsci can either be steered by a liberal party, or by a fascist political force. Hence, Gramsci applies the term *inter alia* to explain the events that led to the victory of fascism in Europe, in the thirties of the last century.

Now, while Gramsci nowhere discussed the applicability of the concept of *passive revolution* to events elsewhere in the world, the term can well be used to characterise the process of political transformation that took place in East Bengal in the 1940s, i.e. the process whereby the Bengal Muslim League formed a political alliance and campaigned for construction of the state of Pakistan. In the given process, an indigenous ruling class replaced the former British colonial administrators, and it

succeeded in achieving its aim via a transformative political program, targeting the 'decapitation' of the feudal economic order, i.e. dispossession of the absentee landlords, the *zamindars*. Yet the Muslim League, as we all know, did not aim at a fundamental restructuring of agrarian relations, and its Muslim-communalist orientation precisely served to redirect peasant energies away from the path of *active* revolution as propagated by the Left. Indeed, what the Muslim League accomplished can best be characterized as a *passive revolution* in Gramsci's theoretical sense.

Yet it would hardly help us re-analyse the political history of Bengal if we were to adopt Gramsci's term of passive revolution in isolation. What is required in the interest of a reinterpretation of history is that the various terms which Gramsci proposed to facilitate the analysis of society's political domain, be applied in combination. Thus, the key question in relation to the Muslim League's project of a passive revolution, is how the party's leading politicians succeeded in building a *historical bloc* composed, first, of various groups of intellectuals, who effectively convinced the peasant masses of East Bengal to opt for its project of a Muslim-separatist state. Adoption of the concept of passive revolution, in other words, should lead us to (re-)analyse the specific role of traditional intellectuals, of *maulanas* and *mullahs*, who enabled the Muslim League to gain ideological hegemony (9). For only a combined use of Gramscian terms serves to lay bare aspects of East Bengal's political history which are insufficiently brought out in a classical Marxist interpretation of history.

This means, in the context of the analysis of East Bengal's history, that we combine the concept of passive revolution, with Gramsci's original conceptualisation of the united front. This concept, in Marxist theory, refers to the building of a broad alliance, including all those classes whose labour is exploited, and a part of society's wealthier classes, such as rich peasants and the national bourgeoisie (10). In the 1940s, both the Communist Party and the Muslim League each sought to build a united front to gain political hegemony: hegemony for the working class in the case of the Communist Party; for the petty landlords, *jotedars*, in the case of the Muslim League. In this competition for hegemony it is the Muslim League which gained the upper hand, and it is Gramsci's concept of the

*historical bloc* that helps us best understand why. For in Gramsci's conceptualisation of the united front, the role of intellectuals is decisive, and in this respect the efforts at united front building of the two political forces contrasted sharply. For whereas the Communist Party could count on the cooperation of only a few traditional intellectuals, the Muslim League counted a very large number of Muslim religious preachers among its opinion-builders.

In conclusion: my plea is in favour of adoption of Gramscian concepts of analysis, but not in a piecemeal fashion. Too often, Marxist interpreters of Gramsci's theory have lifted out single concepts or theoretical parts from his *Prison Notebooks*, without taking due account of the structure of his thought, without taking account of the interconnectedness of these conceptual ideas. As I have just indicated briefly, and will seek to further illustrate in the second part of this essay, a Gramscian interpretation of East Bengal's history can be extremely fruitful, since it helps reveal aspects in the country's political evolution which orthodox Marxists (including myself) for long have overlooked. Yet this exercise in Gramscian re-interpretation, to repeat, can only be effective, can only lead to a new conceptualisation of the politics of social transformation, if our approach is *integral*. We thus need to grasp and apply the full *set* of Gramsci's concepts, which as I have explained above centrally comprises: the concepts of *civil society* and of *ideological hegemony*; the concepts of *rural and organic intellectuals*; and those of *passive revolution* and the building of a *historical bloc*.

## **7. Feminism and Gramscian Thought**

Lastly, a brief note on some limitations in Gramsci's thought. I have already stated that Gramsci's categorisation of intellectuals is rudimentary, but this is not a major drawback in his theory. A more serious limitation, in my view, is the fact that Gramsci nowhere discussed how the structure and functioning of civil society helps to perpetuate patriarchy. Gramsci lived in an era in which feminist theory-building, the theory regarding the liberation of women, was still rather weak, and, perhaps understandably, Gramsci overlooked feminist issues in building his own theory of the superstructure. Yet feminism *is* relevant to Gramsci's theory of civil society.

For in all class societies, the rulers employ not just the legal, judicial and repressive organs of the state to (re-) enforce patriarchal relations, but the institutions belonging to the intermediate sphere of society as well. Invariably, these institutions are used to propagate and strengthen male dominance over women.

A patriarchal policy is easily implemented, since the institutions of civil society are overwhelmingly 'populated' by men. The sexual division of labour that prevails in most societies, imposes, first, a double burden on (many) working class women. On the one hand, they are responsible for all domestic tasks, i.e. cooking, cleaning, childcare, etc. On the other hand, women of the labouring classes often are allotted, also, secondary tasks in agriculture and industry (11). But the sexual division of labour also intersects with a division between forms of labour that are predominantly manual, - and those that are predominantly mental in character, and relegates women to the first mentioned category. Hence, the sexual division of labour stretches from the domestic sphere, *via* the public economic sphere, and up to the intermediate sphere of civil society and the apparatus of the capitalist state. Both in the *base* and in the *superstructure*, women's position is subordinate to that of men.

Further, that women's labouring position is always secondary, is *particularly sharply* reflected in the intermediate sphere of society, where most functions are monopolised by men. On the whole, women tend to be excluded, or nearly excluded, from most job positions defined as 'intellectual professions', and the task of building a *historical bloc* that takes full account of the interests of all sections of the oppressed is complicated much by the fact that society's opinion builders are overwhelmingly male. Such a liberationist project can only succeed, if those who build mass organizations of the oppressed make special efforts to promote women labourers to the position of organic intellectuals; it can only succeed if organizations of rural and other non-recognised intellectuals recruit *female* professionals, such as female school teachers, on a priority base. If not, patriarchal views will easily regain the upper hand, even as the struggle for human liberation *appears to* gain ground.

In short, a *Marxist-feminist theory regarding the intermediate sphere of class society*, regarding civil society and the struggle for ideological

hegemony, can take Gramsci's conceptualisation as its starting point, but cannot afford to accept his views uncritically. A Marxist-feminist theory needs to, first, amplify Gramsci's categorisation of intellectuals, and take account of new theories of public-opinion building which have been constructed in the US and elsewhere in the decades since Gramsci's incarceration and death. But it also needs to rethink and refine Gramsci's ideas in the light of feminist theory-building, which theory-building has advanced rapidly in the last quarter of the 20th century. For while Gramsci's concepts help us much to re-analyse the political history of East Bengal/Bangladesh, i.e. to understand the causes that led to the formation of Pakistan and to the founding of the independent state of Bangladesh, - they only partly suffice to reconstruct, re-launch, today's movement of the oppressed.

### Footnotes

- 1 For a critical assessment of the evolution in thought of the *Subaltern School*, and of Partha Chatterjee's ideas in particular, see Himani Bannerji, 'Projects of Hegemony. Towards a Critique of Subaltern Studies' 'Resolution of the Women's Question' (*Economic and Political Weekly*, March 11, 2000, p.902); a brief critique of Partha Chatterjee's use of the concept of religious community is given in Kumkum Sangari, 'Politics of Diversity. Religious Communities and Multiple Patriarchies' (*Economic and Political Weekly*, December 23, 1995, p.3300-3301)
- 2 For summaries of Gramsci's basic concepts, see e.g., David Forgacs (ed.), *An Antonio Gramsci Reader. Selected Writings 1916-1935* (Schocken Books, New York, United States, 1988, p. 420); Carl Boggs, *Gramsci's Marxism* (Pluto Press Limited, London, United Kingdom, 1976); and Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi, *Pour Gramsci* (in French: Editions du Seuil, Paris, France, p.74); for a summary of Gramsci's conceptualisation of cultural life, see Sabine Kebir, *Die Kulturkonzeption Antonio Gramscis. Auf dem Wege zur Antifaschistischen Volksfront* (in German: Akademie Verlag, Berlin, German Democratic Republic, 1980)
- 3 The differences between Hegel's and Marx's usages of the term *civil society* on the one hand, and Gramsci's on the other, have been discussed in depth by Norberto Bobbio, *Gramsci e la Concezione della Societa Civile*

(which essay appeared in a Dutch translation in the Dutch Marxist journal *Te Elfder Ure* No.28, January 1981, p.367); here Bobbio argued that the theory of Gramsci heralded a fundamental renovation vis-a-vis the whole Marxist tradition; as Bobbio stated: in Gramsci's conceptualisation 'civil society does not belong to the base but to the superstructure (p.378)

- 4 Lenin primarily elaborated this theory of his in *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (Foreign Languages Press, Peking, People's Republic of China, 1970); for the meaning of hegemony in Gramsci's theory, see Forgacs (1988), op.cit. p. 422-424, and Boggs (1976), op.cit., p.36
- 5 See Gramsci's concise article 'The Intellectuals' (in Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, New York, United States, undated, p.3-23); also Forgacs (1988), op.cit., p.300; Gramsci's original analysis of the role of intellectuals was already reflected in his essay 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question', Forgacs (1988), op.cit., p.171; it should be kept in mind that while Gramsci's conceptualisation of the role of intellectuals represents a crucial advance in Marxist thinking, his conceptualisation remained rudimentary, and in my view *incomplete*
- 6 For Gramsci's analysis of Fordism, see e.g., Peter Custers, *Capital Accumulation and Women's Labour in Asian Economies* (Zed Books, London, 1997, p.295); Gramsci's dialectic conception of manual/mental labour is reflected in his notion of the 'psycho-physical nexus' in the labour of professional industrial workers; see his essay 'Americanism and Fordism' (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, op.cit., p.279); the same thematic, but from the position of clerical workers, is discussed by Harry Braverman in his *Labor and Monopoly Capital. The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (Monthly Review Press, New York, United States, 1974, p.293);
- 7 A truly brilliant example of *organic intellectuals* who emerged from among colonial slaves is provided by C.L.R. James in his account of the slave revolt in San Domingo (Haiti); see C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins. Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (Allison & Busby, London, United Kingdom, 1980);

- 8 For Gramsci's use of the term *passive revolution* in the context of the 19th century struggle for the unification of Italy, see David Forgacs (1988), op.cit., p.250-251; as Forgacs stresses in his explanatory notes on Gramscian terminology, - contrary to the liberals of the Italian Risorgimento, for Gramsci the term *passive revolution* was merely an analytical tool, a 'criterion of interpretation', and not a programme - see Forgacs, op.cit., p.428;
- 9 Some important sources on the role of traditional intellectuals in the political evolution of (East) Bengal are: A.T.M. Atikur Rahman, *Maulana Mohammed Akram Khan in the Politics of Bengal* (in Bangla: Bangla Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1995); Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906. A Quest for Identity* (Oxford University Press, Bombay/Calcutta/Madras, 1996); Taj Ul-Islam Hashmi, *Peasant Utopia. The Communalisation of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920-1947* (University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1994).
- 10 A classical Marxist statement on united front work is Mao Tsetung's essay, 'On New Democracy' (Mao Tsetung, *Selected Works Vol. II*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, People's Republic of China, 1965, p.339); also: Truong-Chinh, 'The Party's Policy Concerning the National United Front' (Truong-Chinh, *Selected Writings*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi, 1977, p.455); for a summary of Gramsci's views on the *historical bloc*, see Forgacs (1988), op.cit., 424-425.
- 11 See for details on the sexual division of labour, Peter Custers (1997), op.cit.; an author who was keenly aware of the fact that men monopolise intellectual labour, is for instance Clara Zetkin - see her 'Die Arbeiterinnen- und Frauenfrage der Gegenwart' (The Contemporary Question of Female Workers and the Women's Question), in Gisela Brinker-Gabler (ed.), *Frauenarbeit und Beruf* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 1979).

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# Trade Liberalisation in a Time of Global Economic Crisis: Economic and Political Implications of ETCA

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*(This article is based on a talk by the author at the Socialist Study Circle's Left Discourse titled, 'Sri Lanka and the Global Economy: ETCA, FDI and other options' on March 11, 2016.)*

The global economy is in crisis. The global recovery that was hoped for following the Great Recession of 2008 has failed and is now in the throes of deflation. Not since the Great Depression of the 1930s has the dangers of deflation — leading to falling prices and falling demand in a downward uncontrollable spiral — shaken the global economy on this scale.

Part of the blame for the present crisis should go to the Western powers — the US, the Europeans led by Germany and their agents the IMF and World Bank — who are the economic policemen of the world. Despite the severity of the crisis of 2008 they stuck to their neoliberal ideology and continued on the path of austerity as they have remained loyal to their true masters called finance capital; the investment and commercial banks, the mutual and hedge funds, and all those who sit in Wall Street and the City in London. They did not even consider a serious economic solution, which would have involved the reversal of the process of financialisation and initiate a process of growth with jobs through productive investment by the state. Instead consumption and speculative investment through expansion of private debt was encouraged, which has fizzled out sooner than expected.

## **Neoliberal globalisation**

In any event, there is no easy solution to the global economic crisis. This is not a crisis that began in 2008 but is a continuation of the crisis from the mid-1970s. Following the two decade long global economic boom after World War II, a major economic downturn emerged explained by some economists as caused by falling profits and others as under consumption. The solution put forward in the late 1970s to that crisis was neoliberal globalisation; it broke open the barriers to capital flows and trade, attacked the welfare state and organised labour, and privatised all services that could be, all to ensure higher profits and accumulation by finance capital. As real wages fell, working people around the world were encouraged to consume on debt and keep the wheels of the economy turning.

The alternative for capitalist revival after the Great Depression in the 1930s was much worse; it was a World War that wiped out the economies before rebuilding them. Neoliberal globalisation since the 1970s was never a solution, it merely prolonged a long crisis through repeated and deepening bouts of financial crisis, but the years of reckoning might be closer now.

Over the last decade, there was the rosy story of the Emerging Markets. There was talk of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and their inherent potential. Indeed, there was tremendous economic growth in those countries propelled by the inflow of capital seeking investment. However, much of that process did not escape the speculative logic of finance capital, as investment in infrastructure and real estate dominated.

China having fallen from its heavenly position with falling growth, there is now much talk about India as the new engine of Asian growth. While the levels of private financed debt as a ratio of GDP are not as high in India, it is too early to congratulate India. Less than three years ago, India was on the cusp of a banking crisis with capital flight. The point is not about China or India, it is the fragile make up of our global economic

system, where having opened up all our barriers and defences, both on the borders of countries and within the national financial systems, a major crisis in one location can spread like a tsunami to another location wiping out all and sundry.

## **Rajapaksa regime and financial liberalisation**

It is in such a turbulent global economy that Sri Lanka is sailing. The national crisis we are facing today will be influenced by external developments. Since the open economic reforms in the late 1970s, around the same time that neoliberal globalisation emerged, we have become increasingly susceptible to global economic forces. Yet, it is with policies of the Rajapaksa regime soon after the war that neoliberal policies centred on financialisation gained full steam.

Let us not forget, the IMF and the World Bank cheered and supported the Rajapaksa regime's policies, with an IMF Standby Arrangement in 2009 and the World Bank considerably increasing its aid commitments. Financialised construction in urban and infrastructure development led to high growth as high as 8%, but did little for longer-term employment creating productive investment. The Rajapaksa regime for all its claims of guarding Sri Lanka's sovereignty initiated the sale of billions of dollars in sovereign bonds. It also encouraged state banks and enterprises to borrow in capital markets abroad and continue the growth propelled by construction and consumption on debt.

As it often happens, the new Government has inherited the massive debts including the short-term commercial borrowings at high interest rates. The country is facing a balance of payments problem as imports are much higher than exports, and without new loans and falling foreign reserves, a crisis is looming. In a time of global economic crisis, such debts cannot be rolled over. We have to go with our begging bowl to the IMF, who will advise us again on the path to hell. The IMF agreement it is hoped will buy us time, perhaps the confidence and mercy of global finance capital, long enough for the winds of capital flow to help us again

to roll over our debts. But the path itself is not different, this is what happened to Greece and so many other countries around the world, the IMF helped them dig deeper and deeper graves with financialised debt.

## **Agenda of trade liberalisation**

What does the Government seek to do? They are now talking about opening the other major barrier to the economy, which is trade. To seek support from India, the West and its donor agents, trade liberalisation is projected as the solution that will also increase growth and production. The economic think tanks in Colombo, with support from the World Bank and other donor agencies and committed to neoliberal policies, provide the ideological rationale as they advocate a long-term transformation of the economy through opening trade. Their convoluted logic even calls for trade liberalisation in agriculture; to create a crisis in the rural economy and accelerate urbanisation.

The donor agencies have ensured there is no investment in the rural economy, even though Sri Lanka continues to import considerable agricultural and food products. The think tanks and donor agencies were silent when the Government continued with imports of luxury items including vehicles, even though that is also a reason for the balance of payments problems with increasing imports. Their commitment to open trade is such that all imports are considered welcome, and the emergent crisis is in fact seen as a further opportunity for trade liberalisation.

If financial liberalisation by the Rajapaksa regime created a serious crisis some years later, trade liberalisation by the new Government may aggravate our problems even faster given the unfavourable global conditions. While financial liberalisation drowns people in debt, trade liberalisation can directly assault people's livelihoods and employment. It can undermine wages and labour rights as international competition creates a race to the bottom. And the timing could not be worse, when the demand for goods produced around the world is falling with the global

economic crisis; opening up trade is a recipe for disaster as our little market in Sri Lanka will be flooded.

At times of global economic crisis, the worst thing that can happen is for the major economies with their large markets to turn protectionist. If the large economies close their borders, it will bring the global economy to a grinding halt. Global deflation characterised by falling prices and cheaper commodities can trigger countries to shut down their borders to protect their markets. Instead of increasing global demand and production during the time of crisis, such protectionism will deepen the crisis. There is also a political cost to deflation. Xenophobia and forces blaming outsiders for people's economic woes and fears can create chauvinist and even fascist movements.

Sri Lanka today also faces two dangers in relation to the deflationary global economy. First, the danger of a foolish move by the Government to open up trade, precisely when there is over production and falling prices in the global market that could undermine production within the country. The other danger is the increasingly xenophobic and chauvinistic mobilisations by the remnants of the Rajapaksa regime capitalising on our economic woes and linking it to fears about trade liberalisation. The political damage of the latter can be as deadly as the economic damage of the former. It was just a few years back that the Rajapaksa regime, to deflect attention from its economic failures, encouraged attacks on Muslim businesses and polarised the country.

## **Opening the flood gates with ETCA**

The last few weeks have seen a mounting debate on Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA), the proposed trade pact with India on investment and services. But what is available for critique is merely a framework, which is a commitment towards signing a more detailed trade agreement in the months ahead. That is why any discussion on ETCA cannot be limited to ETCA but has to be about trade liberalisation, including the dangers of opening the flood gates of trade

liberalisation during a time of global economic crisis. Indeed, the Government claims it wants to move on further trade agreements with powers like China and the US.

India is of course very keen to have ETCA or some such agreement for the purpose of consolidating its regional hegemony. That is more for political reasons than economic reasons. Last week, the Indian Cabinet approved a US\$ 700 million currency swap for up to three months or until such time as Sri Lanka signs an IMF agreement. This was followed by Sri Lanka drawing another US\$ 400 million facility from India available for three months for SAARC countries. Furthermore, Sri Lanka had drawn its US\$ 1.1 billion credit swap in September last year, which expired earlier this month. So, it is clear that Sri Lanka is increasingly dependent on India to strengthen its foreign reserves, and will be under considerable pressure to oblige India on the new trade pact.

While the Indian Government is interested in such a trade agreement for political reasons, once an agreement is in place, some Indian businesses may use the asymmetric power of the Indian state to aggressively move into Sri Lanka. In the modern world, the political logic of states and the economic logic of capitalist businesses work together in different ways. It is also such dynamics that might lead to the economic imperatives and fears of the Sri Lankan public being co-opted by the discredited remnants of the Rajapaksa regime.

Trade can contribute to economic growth including jobs, but it has to be timed well and part of a credible economic vision and industrial policy, which are lacking in Sri Lanka. It was greater integration with global capital markets and increased financial flows after the war encouraged by the previous regime that led to our current crisis. Similarly, opening up trade and further integration with the global market in goods and services to gain short-term support could lead to a serious crisis in a few years.

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# Building 65,000 Houses and the Economics of Reconstruction

Niyanthini Kadirgamar

*(This article which first appeared in DailyFT 5th April 2016, and also accessible at <http://www.ft.lk/article/534700/Building-65-000-houses-and-the-economics-of-reconstruction#sthash.EcUib9On.dpuf> is reproduced with the kind permission of the author.)*

In the post-war North and East housing is a dire need. The provision of permanent housing, as well as livelihood creation, is pivotal for the resettlement of communities. As such, a Cabinet decision to build 65,000 houses for war-affected communities seemed to be a move in the right direction for a Government that came into power on promises of reconciliation and economic prosperity.

However, with a foreign contractor about to be handed the task of handling the housing project, many have now labelled the initiative a disaster deal and hope is fast fading. The deal will offer Arcelor Mittal, a company headquartered in Luxemburg, a contract to build 65,000 prefabricated steel houses, which are to be imported and assembled within a short period of time.

That the drop in steel prices in the world market and losses for the world's leading steel producer led to the decision to seek out a post-war destination to export ready-made steel is understandable. However, as to why the Sri Lankan Government agreed to make Sri Lanka a dumping ground for a multinational is more baffling. Does this point to a

continuing failure to initiate reconstruction and curb increasing economic costs such as that seen during the rule of the previous Government?

## **Foreign Loan and Economic Impact**

It is in the wake of an announcement that the excessive foreign borrowing of the previous regime has contributed to the present economic crisis that the deal is being negotiated.

Each steel house that Arcelor will build costs Rs. 2.1 million. Thus, the Government will incur a foreign debt of over \$ 1 billion for the 65,000 houses, to be paid back over a 10-year period.

A financing arrangement through HSBC offers two options: a six-month EU currency-based facility at EURIBOR +1.34% and a six-month US dollar-based facility at LIBOR +1.74%.

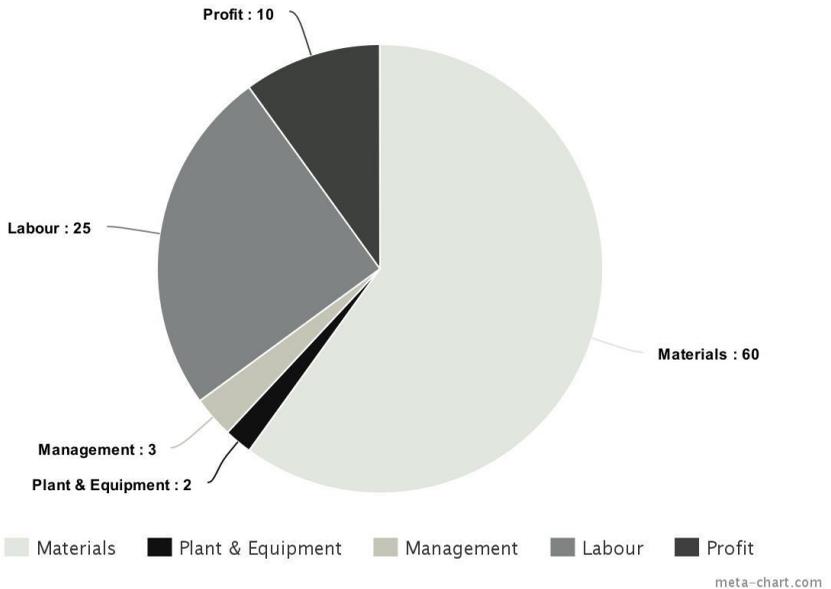
These concessionary rates apply to 85% of the loan. The remaining 15% will be based on commercial rates of LIBOR +5.61%. For example, based on the current rates for LIBOR, the applicable interest rate for the loan is 3.23%.

Perhaps the Government is attracted by the opportunity to take this loan and show macroeconomic growth. Certainly, such large-scale construction activities will account as economic activities of the country and contribute to its GDP figures.

However, taking another massive loan will only add to the crisis by continuing to increase our foreign debt. It will deplete our foreign reserves and add to our future balance of payment problems. Although the financing comes with a one-year grace period, the Government will eventually have to pay back the dollar loan. A few years down the line it may contribute to another similar crisis like the one we are presently experiencing.

Alternatively, obtaining financing for the housing project through local financing will have less impact on the country's external finances. The required financing can be raised through a combination of

Government fund allocation, local bank borrowings and an arrangement with a donor agency like the ADB. This is how many of our highways and roads have been built. Housing should be a more important priority than highways.



**Figure 1: Typical distribution of construction cost of a house**

## Costs of Building

Previous housing schemes, like the one constructed with an Indian housing grant, were built for a much lower cost of Rs. 550,000. Local analysts point out that this amount was insufficient to build a good quality house and many recipients were compelled to obtain loans in order to complete it.

According to current estimates, a good quality traditional concrete house of 550 square feet can be built for anywhere from Rs. 800,000 to Rs. 1 million. Thus, the cost of building 65,000 houses can be limited to \$ 500 million.

Furthermore, based on these cost measures, if the Government is to allocate the current budget of \$ 1 billion, the entire housing need for the North and East, estimated as 137,000 houses, can be fulfilled.

The Rs. 2.1 million proposed by Arcelor Mittal for a steel house is too expensive. While the economic costs of pursuing this deal is great, the social costs of going ahead with prefabricated steel houses is greater.

Steel houses are unsuitable for our local climate and lifestyle. Furthermore, concerns about the durability for long-term dwelling and toxic nature of the material used have been voiced. If the communities were consulted, it is certain that no displaced person would choose steel over brick and mortar in the construction of their house.

Underlying the belief that such projects can be forced through without proper consultation with local communities, is the blatant disregard shown by the state in fulfilling the needs of marginalised sections of society. However, permanent reminders of such disregard, in the form of one's own dwellings, may have greater political costs for the Government.

## **Economic Stimulus and Benefits for the People**

There is a major opportunity cost for a reconstruction project of such prefabricated houses; it is not just about GDP growth. A massive loan on the scale of \$ 1 billion can produce a multiplier effect if utilised as investment in the local economy.

Opting for imported prefabricated houses, however, will only benefit the foreign contractor with a sizeable profit and leave the country dry. Had the Government chosen to fund a locally-driven model for building the houses even at a cost of \$ 500 million, it could have been a significant economic stimulus. For that the Government must ensure local labour and local materials are utilised for building.

As shown in the chart of Figure 1, typically 25% of the share of the cost of building a house is spent on skilled and unskilled labour. The

remaining is spent on material (60%), management (3%), plant and equipment (2%) and profits (10%).

The share for labour of a house costing Rs. 1 million is Rs. 250,000. It is equivalent to a construction worker's yearly income in the North. Thus, 65,000 houses can provide income for 13,000 workers over a period of five years. It could mean steady income for 13,000 households or 52,000 people.

There are around 17,500 skilled labourers (masons, carpenters, welders, plumbers, electricians, etc.) available in the Jaffna District alone (District Secretariat, 2014 statistics). The available labour pool for construction works in the North, however, is much larger when including unskilled day labourers in Jaffna and skilled and unskilled labourers in all five districts.

Income can be generated for local industries by utilising local material for building (cement, sand, concrete blocks, bricks, steel, timber, plumbing, sanitary items, electrical items, tiles, ceiling, chemicals, paint). Thus, more indirect employment through linked local industries and the provision of support services can be created.

Over the past several years, resettled communities that have returned to war-ravaged villages faced with complete erasure have acquired valuable knowledge and skills, including expertise on construction and homebuilding. Community-led construction of houses can not only ensure an equitable process but can also help strengthen the resilience of local organisations such as cooperatives, rural development societies and women's rural development societies.

## **Why do they Fail?**

Reconstruction of the North and East has been slow. Investments for new industries that can generate steady employment or revive traditional livelihoods have failed to come through.

The Government will promise to raise funds for long-term development at a donor conference later this year. However, given the declining income from traditional livelihoods and the slow progress in creating new jobs for people, there is a desperate need in the North and East for immediate employment.

It is through infrastructure and housing projects that large sections of people in the North and East managed to earn a living in the post-war years. A construction project like the one which will create 65,000 houses could meet that immediate need for employment if those from the North and East are included in the construction work.

It is baffling as to why the Government will spend \$ 1 billion and let go of an opportunity to invest in stimulating the local economy. Why does the Government continuously ignore the genuine economic upliftment of the people for jobless economic growth on debt?

As with many other development initiatives, we are repeatedly faced with the same dilemma of disconnect between the Government's economic policy decisions and the socioeconomic needs of the people.

While large foreign loans are obtained for the sake of development, what is passed down to the people often fails to improve their lives in meaningful ways. Granting the project to erect 65,000 houses to Arcelor Mittal to dump prefabricated steel houses might become one of the disastrous examples of development failing the Sri Lankan people.

*(Niyanthini Kadirgamar is a researcher based in Jaffna and a member of the Collective for Economic Democratisation)*

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# **Proposed Construction of 65,000 Houses in the North and East**

## **A Statement by Concerned Civil Society Organisations and Individuals**

The government of Sri Lanka's commitment to deliver 65,000 houses to war affected communities in the Northern and Eastern provinces through the Ministry of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs is welcome.

The government's readiness to embrace responsibility for such a programme can help fulfil the right to housing and enhance post-war social development. However, there are significant concerns regarding the process so far and the overall approach because it sidelines lessons and insights from recent programmes and Sri Lanka's rich history in housing policy.

### **Lack of an Overall Policy and Institutional Framework**

There is no evidence that a clear policy and institutional framework or mechanism has been developed to oversee the programme. A programme of such magnitude must bring together the knowledge and experience available with various agencies of the state— from the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA) to the Urban Development Authority and the National Physical Planning Department to district, divisional, and local government bodies. Effective horizontal institutional integration rather than centralization is crucial to building on lessons learnt and transferring expertise and knowledge.

## **Equity Concerns**

The lack of an overall policy framework also means there is no justification for the number 65,000. There is a significant shortfall of houses in the North and East but this number is an especially serious concern because no criteria of eligibility have been developed and it is not clear how the number of beneficiaries was arrived at and how they will be identified. Moreover, the cost per house has been pegged at over two million rupees. Apart from the fact that the basis for this costing is unclear, it is also four times the amount in the Indian Housing Project and significantly more than all other housing programmes completed or currently underway. Apart from inequities and multiple standards, it risks precipitating tensions within communities and undermining ongoing programmes.

## **Sidelining Community-driven and Owner-led Approaches**

The contractor-driven approach being advocated by the programme ignores the benefits of a people-centred and owner-led approach to housing borne out by over 35 years of domestic experience pioneered in Sri Lanka and evaluations of post-crisis housing programmes in several other countries. Such an approach enjoys higher beneficiary and community acceptance in comparison to contractor-driven projects because it enables a true sense of ownership, adaptability and sensitivity to evolving needs as well as beliefs and traditions regarding space and structure.

Indebtedness in relation to housing programmes in the north and east has arisen because of the absence of equitable and non-exploitative financing modality and other reasons including a lack of secure and remunerative livelihoods. It is not a result of being owner-driven. Rather than address these and other concerns with regard to recent housing programmes, a major policy shift in favour of contractors is being envisaged without sufficient explanation.

## **Risk of Missing Economic Integration, Livelihoods Promotion and Multiplier Effects**

Community-driven approaches to housing are significantly cheaper and also more compatible with local labour, materials, and contractors and supply chains. Contractor-driven approaches, absent clear guidelines, are not conducive to strengthening local industry and the economic fabric or generating livelihoods. We are especially concerned that contractors may import expertise, materials or even labour to maximize profits. Besides losses for the local and national economy, incurring foreign debt to the tune of nearly \$1 billion for a project rushed through without proper consultation and planning is a cause for additional concern.

## **Land, Spatial and Environmental Concerns**

A programme of this magnitude must be preceded by identification of suitable lands and as settlement planning that takes into account social, legal and environmental concerns. The multitude of land ownership and tenure issues, a continuing source of tension across both regions, and the lack of clarity regarding locations and land-use raise further concerns regarding unsustainable land use, deforestation, and impact on water resources.

## **Concerns with the Contractual Process**

The call for expressions of interest (EOI) was issued on October 4, 2015 and final bids opened on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2015— a very short window for a project of this magnitude. Though almost all 15 initially shortlisted parties appealed for an extension of the deadline for submitting final bids from the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2015 to late January 2016, it was extended only up until 28<sup>th</sup> December— only by three working days. Only 8 final bid proposals were submitted, most without adequate financial guarantees mainly due to lack of time. The priority appears to be speed above all else— the time period for the project was reduced from 5 to 4 years after the tendering process began. The design and construction specifications are either arbitrary or incomplete and contractual conditions unclear,

raising possibilities of delays, contractual claims and cost overruns. Besides, no effective risk management framework has been outlined.

## **The Way Forward**

Given the social, economic and political significance of this programme, we urge a thorough review of the current plan, approach and contracting process of the 65,000 houses project. We urge that the programme be comprehensively but expeditiously redesigned in keeping with the following principles emerging from Sri Lanka's pioneering history in the field of housing:

- Full participation and an owner-led approach integrating community mobilization
- Ensuring equity amongst beneficiaries of different housing programmes
- Just resolution of land tenure and title issues and joint or co-ownership for women
- Environmentally sustainable and disaster resilient planning
- Ensuring promotion of livelihoods and local and national supply-chains
- Integrating multiple institutional capacities and mandates at all levels of government
- Establishing an equitable, universally accessible non-exploitative financing modality
- Pursuing transparent and sound procurement processes that maximize national value

These principles must underpin all housing programmes for vulnerable communities so they can deliver adequate shelter, equity and meaningful social development outcomes.

*(For further information contact: [housingrightslanka@gmail.com](mailto:housingrightslanka@gmail.com))*

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# Strategies to Wreck Higher Education

*Dr S Sivasegaram*

*(This is an approximate translation of an article by the author in the Tamil academic journal, Mozithal, 2 (2), 2015 December.)*

## **Sri Lankan Education Policy**

Educationists have expressed their thoughts about a national education policy appropriate to Sri Lanka. They have helped to advance the spread and standard of education in the country. Our education sector could, however, not overcome the flawed social perception of the purpose of education. One cannot blame educationists or the education sector for it. We need to think why assignments meant to enhance the interest of the students in practical work, social surroundings and the environment have from a very young age become burdens on students instead of being tasks that they fulfil with joy.

We know the consequences of school education continuing to be a series of races from Year Five to the final year in school. Educationists are aware of the proliferation of institutions for private tuition as a result of the stiff competition to enter certain fields of study, and of the consequent distortion in the view of students about education. Yet governments have not sought to analyse it extensively or take steps to rectify it. Educationists who struggled to increase the allocation for education to 6% of the gross national product too have not emphasized this matter adequately. Although the Government poses to have accepted in principle the allocation of 6% for education, what form the 6% will take when it arrives is another matter.

Several of the measures taken by successive governments on pretext of increasing places in the university have been risky. Universities, fields and institutions of higher education have been initiated without adequate resources. The number of students in various disciplines grew despite the shortage of resources. The Course Unit System of education which demands even more resources was introduced amid such handicaps and has been in place for over 15 years in the universities of the country. It will be proper to assess its merits or otherwise in the social contexts in which it functions.

Apart from whether universities emphatically told higher authorities about situations where it failed to function and where it was inappropriate, it is important to note that external pressures operate through the University Grants Commission (UGC), overriding any objection whatsoever. The Course Unit System was introduced as part of a continuous scheme to assess student performance.

## **New Ideas**

Even if a scheme education of educations continues to yield quality results, it is not harmful to rectify or improve it. However, when an alternative educational scheme is introduced in its place, it is important to assess whether the long term benefits of the change over offset the losses and confusion resulting from the transition. Besides, it is necessary to examine whether sufficient resources exist to implement the change within a short period. Most importantly, it is necessary to inquire into earlier experiences if any with such changes.

In the 1970's some positive changes occurred in Sri Lanka's school education. But the country also failed to learn from the experiences of other countries. In particular alternative approaches used in the West to teach language and mathematics were introduced here. The practice of teaching language based on grammar was relaxed in England and the US. The language skills of the students weakened as a result. Worse than that was the rapid fall in standard in mathematics following the introduction of "New Maths".

Comprehensive criticism of the methodology of New Maths in the book titled “Why Johnny can’t add” [1] accelerated the end of New Maths. But the standard of mathematics was not restored in England and the US. The crisis was compounded by the shortage of teachers and the arrival of pocket calculators [2]. The latter served as a warning against the unmonitored use of modern gadgetry. This, however, is not the place to discuss the adverse effects of the rapid expansion of Information Technology. Nevertheless, since New Maths came under review in England at the time, teaching of mathematics did not go too far along the wrong track.

However, school education in Sri Lanka has suffered much decline during the past few decades owing to various political reasons, want of resources and planning deficiencies. But higher education is offered without consideration for the consequences of this flaw. In particular, the amount of laboratory practical experience that the students receive at school is minimal. Often students who have not handled the simplest of equipment enter university in the fields of science, medicine and technology.

University dons with academic interest know that students choose their courses of study based on external pressures rather than their abilities and natural inclinations and that the desire to search for information of importance that should be encouraged during school days is destroyed as a result of competition for university admission. Under the circumstances, adoption of changes to higher education without rectifying the shortcomings of school education whose standard is declining and rehabilitating students’ attitude towards learning could aggravate existing defects of higher education.

In this essay, the impact of the “Course Unit System” introduced in the country at the dawn of the century on university education will be commented on briefly and will be followed by an inquiry into the dangerous thinking behind curriculum development methodology which the UGC is itching to thrust upon all universities under its purview.

## **Effects of the Course Unit System**

The system of education in the universities prior to the Course Unit System was based on three academic terms of ten weeks each per academic year. Subjects of study were taught on an yearly basis. In nearly all subjects the outcomes of end-of-year examinations were used to assess the earning capabilities of the students. This, undoubtedly, was an inadequate method of assessment. Besides, the practice of not counting the performance of the students in practical work and assignments alongside end-of-year examination marks hurts students who take those tasks seriously and favours those who work merely to secure good marks in written examinations. This shortcoming could have been rectified within the framework of the old three-term scheme.

Besides the above, the choice of subjects before the students was rather rigid, and compelled all students who opted for a particular discipline to read a few specific subjects. This weakness had already been corrected at least to a small extent by a variety of methods. Often, in the Final Year, the students were given the option of choosing subjects of their preference from among certain subjects offered by their department of study. This benefitted students seeking to specialize in some branches of their field of study, and universities, subject to availability of resources offered a choice of subjects to the students. Nevertheless, domination by the end-of-year examination persisted.

The system of continuous assessment is successfully practiced in the US. Owing to the rise in the number of Sri Lankan university academics going to the US for postgraduate degrees since the 1970's and US influence in the country overshadowing that of Britain, at least some Sri Lankan academics urged the introduction of at least the Course Unit System in practice in the US, even if not continuous assessment. However, since Sri Lankan universities did not have the resources that universities in the US had, there was reluctance to go beyond increasing the choice in subjects of specialization and introduce the Course Unit System. The UGC, however, under external pressure, urged changes

since the late 1990's. There was discontent in the universities about replacing the old Academic Year with two semesters. One important reason could have been that university teachers were not used to such teaching. But lack of resources was a reason that could not be ignored.

In the universities in the US, the number of students in a lecture session could range from less than a hundred to a few hundred or even more occasionally. But the important part of the teaching is not in the lecture halls but in discussion classes which comprise small groups of students. A tutor assigned to ten to fifteen students on the one hand monitors progress of the students and on the other clears students' doubts about the course material. In the larger universities most tutors will be postgraduate research students. This lowers the teaching load on the professors who are thus able to allocate time for research. Besides, the teaching skills of all teachers are assessed by the students and, at times, by colleagues. Such assessment determines not only their promotion but also extension of service. It is possible to sustain continuous assessment in such an environment which also eases the pressure to study to pass examination since there is less need to regurgitate just before an examination what was learned in lectures.

It is welcome if the UGC is a body that ensures academic standards in the universities, assesses the needs of the universities and facilitates securing of the necessary resources, and regulates university admissions, in the absence of an independent body for the purpose. It will be good if it does not interfere in the internal affairs of universities, except in case of crisis. But the UGC, from the day that it was founded, has been a device to subject universities to state political power. As a side effect decisions about higher education were imposed on universities regardless of the preferences of the universities. Some faculties — like Architecture and Medicine — have avoided accepting everything that the UGC imposed on them. Others readily accepted the Course Unit System and continuous assessment scheme imposed on them by the UGC.

The continuous assessment scheme, with by itself has many positive features, when thrust upon Sri Lankan universities proved to be like fake jewels. In 2002, the UGC published a Quality Assurance Handbook [3] and a Procedures Handbook [4]. But there was no evidence of assessment of resources to implement the scheme. In practice, the students did not appreciate the relationship between one course unit and another. Besides, irregularities worsened in both teaching and assessment.

My observation is that the examination load on the student has roughly quadrupled. This is because the students tend to treat mid-semester examinations like end-of-semester examinations and prepare in much the same way. Meanwhile, the interest of most students in laboratory work, laboratory reports, design reports and industrial training has declined.

One of the consequences of the Standardization of GCE(AL) marks for university admission was that practical work by students at school, especially laboratory work, effectively ceased. There is thus a need for special measures to be adopted in course of formal university teaching to compensate for what the student had missed as a result of changes to the school curriculum as well as irregularities in the education system. While excessive enrolment to degree programmes and inadequacy of teaching resources have weakened the Course Unit System and the continuous assessment scheme, university education has not commendably improved in any sense except by way of student pass rate, which was a major flaw of the earlier university education system.

Besides shortage of human resources, conducting four examinations each year for a batch of students challenges the integrity of the examinations. In some instances, everything from the course content of a course unit to the skills or knowledge delivered is solely in the hands of an individual. Among students too a tendency to see every course unit as a free-standing entity with no link to other course units was evident, alongside inability to relate different things that they had learned. These should be treated as a fault in the implementation of the Course Unit

System and not as the failing of any individual. Without continuous assessment and continuous monitoring of progress of students, there is a loss of interest to attend lectures. As a result, the mandatory 80% attendance for each course unit loses meaning; and I am aware that in some university faculties there is no practice of properly recording student attendance.

### **Stumbling of Education amid Administrative Decadence**

The University Academic Year which fell into chaos as a result of the political turmoil of 1988-89 has not yet been straightened. The UGC, which is unable to ensure that all universities commence their Academic Years concurrently and conduct their final examinations according to a predetermined schedule, is now, under external pressure, interfering with teaching methodology as well.

The concept of “Outcome Oriented Curriculum” was promoted by the UGC in 2014, in its Induction Programme for Probationary Staff, delivered through the Staff Development Centres of the universities. This was an attempt to further advance the commercialization of education.

Earlier concepts of education were based on liberal thought. It is true that it created many a scholar who isolated the search for knowledge in a university from social need. It, nevertheless, accepted the view that education should be broad-based and the need for searching in depth and open debate. Higher education is not merely gathering of information or acquiring certain skills. Thinkers capable of developing knowledge come into being through intellectual capability to start from the basics and arrive at useful conclusions. The reason why New Maths and modern language teaching hurt school education was that they refused emphasis on fundamentals.

Fundamental principles and rules applicable to each field of study need to be learned by every learner. It is after learning that one thinks in depth to refute what was learned and argue an alternative. One should

first know what exists in practice. That makes the difference between not knowing and not conforming.

## **Commercializing Education and Outcome-Based Education**

The currently promoted concept of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) considers every graduate as a manufactured product. We have witnessed how education — thus far a social property — has changed into a tradable commodity. This final move seeks to make the university graduate a commodity.

Given below are some thoughts from “Training Manual: Curriculum Development for Undergraduate Study Programs” [5] released for use in staff development programmes by the UGC in its bid to promote OBE together with Problem-Based-Teaching. (Italics are mine.)

1. Defining curriculum as the deeds-experiences the student *ought to have to become the adult he or she ought to become*
2. Fulfilment of the *expectations of the Industrial community*
3. Industry will seek employees who have an *appropriate graduate profile to fulfil the societal needs*.
4. As a result, the labour market can only accommodate individuals with the *appropriate graduate profile that will meet the needs of the society*.
5. In OBE, the specifications (of the overall study programme) are based on required competencies for the graduate to tackle working world scenarios. Hence, in OBE, *the program is more in control of its product*.
6. The problem-based approach presents information as problems, and *students learn what they need while they try to solve the problem*. The students gather information in context, so that they can readily use it in practice.
7. The advantage of the systematic approach method is that irrespective of who the teacher/trainer is, *all students receive the same systematic training*.

8. It should also be noted that *the needs of the labour market are determined in turn by the needs of the society.*

The first four statements seek to establish that capitalist industry is there to serve industry. Reality is otherwise. Under Globalization industries worldwide are more profit-driven and socially unconcerned than ever before. Here the expectations of a socialist society have been twisted round to appear as the expectations of capitalist industry.

The kinds of skill expected of graduates in professional fields such as Medicine, Engineering and Agriculture are manifold. But it is pretentious to rule that they should be in specific proportions and to assess graduates on that basis [5, 6]. In fact, attempts to cast all graduates in any given field in a single mould will destroy their individuality and personality. It is not accidental that the fifth statement refers to graduates as 'product'. Not only university education but also the graduate who receives it becomes a saleable commodity.

A worse approach is evident in statements 7 and 8. It is not always possible to defer the teaching of rules and theories to teach specific rules only when they are useful to solve a practical problem and theory as it becomes applicable. Besides, that will not be an approach where one understands the rules and puts them to use. To classify each problem and then summon for use the relevant rules and theory is an approach that is diametrically opposed to one where the student works out what kind of assumptions will be valid and which analogies are useful in solving a problem. The former will encourage a form of parroting rather than independent thinking.

It cannot be said with confidence that a Course Unit System developed for the commercialization of education in a given socio-economic context will be applicable to a different context. We are told that the Course Unit System is flexible and offers choices to the students. But it can be seen that where the purpose of higher education is to produce graduates to suit the market, such choices are bogus. Thus the final statement is a

disingenuous inversion of the capitalist reality that the market creates social needs under capitalism.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The urgent and important need of our educational system concerns the creation of a new, socially concerned generation which will zealously act to make its expertise socially beneficial rather than making mere experts of students. I hope that socially concerned academics will think deeply about it.

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## **Campaign on Major Issues Faced by People of North and East**

A protest drawing attention on three major issues faced by people of North and East was held on Saturday 9th April 2016 opposite the Jaffna Bus Station. Placards displayed the following slogans which were shouted out by the participants.

*Stop the steel housing project and replace it with a concrete housing project!*

*Stop the Sampur coal power project which will destroy the lives and future of the people of Sampur! Develop sustainable alternative power sources!*

*Take action to rectify the damage caused by oil contamination of ground water in Chunnakam!*

The Mass Movement for Social Justice called upon all social movements, social activists, environmental activists and affected people to protest against plans to build 65,000 houses in steel for the victims of war in the North and East as they do not suit the climate and the socio-cultural conditions. Social activists and experts have pointed out that these houses may cause health hazards for the occupants. The government must take steps to halt the steel houses project and instead build permanent concrete structures for the war victims.

Developed countries and major countries such as India and China have taken steps to reduce reliance on thermal power production and are moving towards renewable energy. In spite of the global call against the growing carbon emission, the government has initiated construction work on a coal power plant in Sampur with Indian assistance. This plant

will mostly affect agriculture, fisheries, and wild and marine life including blue whales in the adjoining sea. This will directly affect the livelihood of the people of Sampur. Sampur is the entry point of the North-West Monsoon winds which bring rainfall to the Northern, Eastern, North-Central and North-Western regions. Now it will also carry the smoke and ashes from the coal power plant which will eventually wreck the ecosystems of the country. Hence the government must halt the thermal power project and invest in renewable energy to ensure the survival of future generations.

We also demand immediate remedial action and steps to prevent further destruction caused by the contamination of drinking water by oil and heavy metal in the four divisional secretariats adjoining Chunnakam.

*Issued by*  
*K Anandakumaasamy, President*  
*S Thanujan & A Seevaratnam, Joint Secretaries*  
*Mass Movement for Social Justice*

## **World Water Day**

The Mass Movement for Social Justice carried out a pamphlet campaign on World Water Day Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016. The text of the pamphlet with the heading "What is your answer for oil contaminated water? The Central and Provincial Governments should answer the people" follows.

Ground water in the Chunnakam region, located at the heart of the Jaffna Peninsula and blessed with fertile soil suitable for agriculture, was contaminated with waste oil and grease owing to the irresponsibility of a multi-national company with big profit as its sole aim, the state and state officials. The voices of the people of Chunnakam affected by it were originally ignored by those concerned. Following continuous struggles by the people amid the apathy, the Ministry of Health and the Water Supply and Drainage Board conducted studies in the region and observed that water in localities such as Tellippalai, Uduvil, Sandilipay and Kopay was

contaminated with waste oil and the use of that water was prohibited as it posed a health hazard. The studies pointed out that water in more than 73% of the wells in the region could be contaminated with oil and heavy metal. Since then, a situation arose where people had to reject as poison their well water which they for long treated as nectar to quench their thirst. Besides, from then, they were also compelled to resort to temporary water troughs and bottled water.

Subsequently, as the next move of the people's struggle, the matter went to courts. Suspicion was raised that the electric power company, Northern Power was responsible for the oil contamination, and the court ruled that the company should suspend operations in Chunnakam. This was the first victory for the people's struggle.

This was followed by the report by the Panel of Experts appointed by the Northern Provincial Council which stated that there was no waste oil in the groundwater. Even after receiving the report, whose full particulars were not made public, neither the Northern Provincial Council nor the central government affirmed that the water was safe to consume as usual and without fear. As a result, there was confusion in the minds of the two hundred and fifty thousand people who were affected. Hence, the Mass Movement for Social Justice joined the people in the struggle demanding a clearer and extensive response and the continuation of the supply of water to the people affected thus far for drinking and food preparation.

The report of the Panel of Experts refers to contamination of the water by faecal matter and nitrates from excessive use of fertilizer. But no details are given about their concentration and hazards. The information provided by the media, says very little about the quality of the groundwater in Chunnakam and talks about groundwater in the Jaffna Peninsula as a whole. This points to the Panel of Experts attempting to protect some interests. The people are being deceived.

Meanwhile, the Water Supply and Drainage Board which has since 2012 been talking about the hazards has, besides not putting forward a

meaningful solution for the problem, been indifferent about distributing fresh water to the affected regions.

The Action Group for Clean Water including the GA Jaffna and the Chief Minister, Northern Province too is maintaining silence about the report by the Panel of Experts and is not taking any concrete steps.

It is disappointing that, while the Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Health have said nothing about the report by the Panel of Experts, the Minister responsible for environment and irrigation in the Northern Provincial Council too disowns the problem.

Lead and nickel, which are among the most hazardous toxic heavy metals dissolved in groundwater, are invisible and harmful to physical health, and could lead to infertility, cancer and other serious diseases.

Since the distribution of water which was earlier carried out in the affected regions has been suspended in many areas, people are most inconvenienced and have been forced to wander about bottles in hand for potable water. This situation compels people to consume contaminated water as well as use it for bathing and cultivation, and the effects could be experienced in generations to come.

Today medical expenses are rising at pace with expenses for food. Hence, feeling should arise in the minds of the people that clean water which is essential to the life of people should be preserved not merely for our needs but also for needs of generations to come. People cannot win anything without struggling in unity for their needs and interests. Water, which we once thought of as unsalable and used liberally has now become a commodity and accumulates wealth in the hands of a few. If as people we do not wake up, we will be pushed to a situation where we "live in a dream of a silk gown only to forfeit even the loincloth". To destroy self sufficient economy and self sufficient production will be the ultimate act of destruction of the nation. Hence those affected and those waiting to be affected should mobilize to carry forward the demand for clean water. Let us expose and oppose the forces who are wrecking clean

water, which is a natural resource of the people in the interest of the profits of the company and the protection of the shareholders, and their deceit.

1. Ensure without delay the continuous distribution of fresh water to all regions within the four affected Regional Councils.
2. The Water Supply and Drainage Board should pay fuller attention to this calamity and subject the water in all wells in the affected areas to analysis and provide individual instruction to the owners of the wells.
3. The people of the affected regions should be medically examined. Medical relief should be provided for those physically affected.
4. A long-term programme of action to protect the soil and the people should be developed and promptly put into effect. It should be a programme of action to fully remove all waste oil and heavy metal contaminants in the groundwater. Locations where harmful toxic oil deposits lie buried should be identified and steps taken to remove the toxic waste safely.
5. Every house in the affected area should be provided with activated carbon filters free of charge to filter well water.
6. A hydrological research centre should be established in the region. Sustained research should be carried out promptly and properly.
7. The people should mobilize and struggle relentlessly until the correct solution is found for this disaster, those responsible for it and their accomplices are identified and punished, and proper compensation is made for the ill effects.

**Let us protect the earth, water and air!**  
**People's power is the greatest power!**

Issued by Mass Movement for Social Justice, Jaffna

## **Workers Must Fight for Rs 1000/- Daily Wage**

### *NDMLP Statement to the Media*

*31<sup>st</sup> March 2016*

Comrade V Mahendran, National Organizer of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on the need for the works to struggle to secure their demand of a daily wage of Rs 1000/-.

In the year since the lapse of the Collective Agreement, the prices of essential goods have increased but the wages of plantation workers have not and the problem is dragging on. The CWC, which in order to strengthen its influence during the parliamentary elections took up the question of the Rs 1000 daily wage, has as usual, betrayed the workers.

Minister of Plantation Industries Naveen Dissanayake, participating as Chief Guest in the Women's Day event of the CWC — which boasted that it will certainly secure the Rs 1000 daily wage — said in his address that the government can secure only a wage of Rs 770. That exposed a possible conspiracy between him and Arumugan Thondaman, leader of the CWC, who spoke more like a representative of the Employers' Federation.

This process should be seen as a joint conspiracy of the Government and the Employers' Federation. The workers should come forward to defeat the conspiracies of these partners in deception in order to secure a daily wage of Rs 1000.

Arumugan Thondaman, Digambaram, Rathakrishnan and Mano Ganesan, each on his own crowded on election platforms that they will secure the Rs 1000/- daily wage, only to gather the votes of the people to

become MPs, ministers and junior ministers and relish the comfort of position.

People like Minister of Industrial Relations John Senaratne and Lakshman Kiriella keep saying in parliament and in the media that the payment of Rs 2500 payable to private sector employees will be paid to plantation workers as well.

Although there were showers of statements to the effect that for the first time in the history Rs 2500 is to be granted to plantation workers and that this was the achievement of the Tamil Progressive Alliance, there was no sign of anything forthcoming. The CWC after being fully bowled over when Naveen Dissanayake said in Parliament that the government position is a daily wage of Rs 770, kept saying that “Rs 770 is the government’s position, but we are firm on Rs 1000”. They are again and again playing tricks to hoodwink the people.

The Digambaram-Rathakrishnan alliance, unmindful of their refuge in the government, are trying to wriggle out by declaring that it was the CWC that has let down the workers on the question of wage and not them. They besides indulge in the petty politics of increasing their vote base by using the desperation of the workers. Overall, the main trade unions and the government are spokespersons for the Employers’ Federation.

The workers should dare to reject such opportunist survivalist cheats and fight from an alternative political platform. There is no power to match people’s power, and if the people cast aside their doubts and join in struggle they will win their demand of a daily wage of Rs 1000. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party will join hands with the plantation workers.

V Mahendran  
National Organizer

# **New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party May Day Processions and Rallies**

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party held its May Day rallies at three stations, namely Puththur Valikamam East in Jaffna, Vavuniya town in the Vanni and Matale town in the Hill Country.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party had called upon all workers, peasants, fishers, women and youth to participate in its processions and rallies. The May Day rallies were preceded by processions, and the events were conducted under the theme "Let us Take Forward Mass Politics for People's Power".

## **Jaffna**

The mass meeting in Jaffna was held at the Puththur Kalaimathi Playground, Valikamam East following the May Day procession starting from Avarangal Junction, Point Pedro Road, Jaffna. The meeting was presided by Comrade K Selvam Kadirgamanathan, Northern Regional Secretary of the NDMLP; and addressed by Comrades SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDMLP, Comrades K Thanikasalam and S Thevarajah, members of the Politburo of the NDMLP, T Sriprakash, M Mauran and S Kumar of the New Democratic Youth League , K Panchalingm, trade union representative, P Murugesu of the Agricultural Front, S Thanujan of the Mass Movement for Social Justice and Ms K Vahini and Ms K Jenita of the Organization for Women's Liberation Thought and N Pratheepan, Vavuniya District Secretary of the NDMLP.

## **Vavuniya**

In Vavuniya, the May Day procession started from the A9 highway near the Vavuniya Madhya Mahan Vidyalayam and went along major roads to conclude at the New Cultural Hall, Vavuniya where the rally was held. The meeting was presided by Comrade M Mahendran Secretary of the Road Maintenance Workers' Union, and addressed by Comrades SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDMLP, S Don Bosco, Central

Committee Member, NDMLP, Ms K Jeyavanitha of the Association for the Missing, Ms S Jeyamalar of Pandarikkulam, Ukkilamkulam, P Chandrapadman of the Mass Movement for Social Justice and N Pradeepan, Vavuniya District Secretary of the NDMLP.

## **Matale**

In Matale, the May Day procession which started from the Nugagaha Bus Station proceeded through major roads to reach the Municipal Council Hall, where the rally was held. The meeting was presided by Comrade V Mahendran, National Organizer of the NDMLP, and addressed by Comrades David Suren, and S Panneerselvam, members of the Central Committee of the NDMLP, T Anojan and Seba Mohan of the Mass Movement for Social Justice, Samaya Karuppi of the Organization for Women's Liberation Thought, Kalaimakal, representative of Meeriyabedda Victims and Gnanaprakasam, workers representative.

Revolutionary songs were sung and cultural events took place in all three events.

## **May Day Address by Comrade Senthivel**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party addressed the Revolutionary May Day Rally of the Party, chaired by Comrade K Selvam Kadirgamanathan, Northern Regional Secretary of the Party and addressed by representatives of the trade union movement and the youth front affiliated to the Party, held at the Puththur Kalaimathi Playground, Jaffna. The text of his address is given below.

The Good Governance regime headed by Maithri and Ranil is in essence a continuation of previous regimes. Promises were made that changes will be brought about, but nothing worthwhile has been achieved in the past one and a quarter years. Thus the bottle is old as is the wine therein. Nothing is new but the label of "Good Governance". Under the circumstances, it will be foolishly vain expectation to hope for

solutions to the worsening economic crisis in the country or to the national question.

The President continues to talk about a national economy and local production from the standpoint of his Sri Lanka Freedom Party. But the Prime Minister is speaking highly of the foreign policy of his political mentor JR Jayewardene. Consequently, there is a situation in which the country is in a state of uncertainty regarding its path to progress. The message of the Party on this May Day is that the people should appreciate the political and economic bases of these and dare to advance along the path of alternative mass politics that suits them.

The country's economy faces severe crises. The principal policy of the government to face the crises is to borrow massive sums as foreign loans and bring in foreign investment. The International Monetary Fund, which is under the control of the US, has granted a loan of US Dollars 1.5 billion, subject to five conditions. It is because of that the Value Added Tax has been raised to 15%. As a result, the prices of goods will increase and the cost of living will rise further. Thereby, the ordinary toiling masses will face the harsh consequences.

At the same time, in the name of development the southern part of the country is being handed over to China and the north eastern part to India. Various investments from the US and Europe are to be introduced in various parts of the country. There are, besides, moves afoot to sign the Indo-Sri Lanka Economic and Technology Cooperative Agreement (ETCA). The consequent issues and crises will be affecting all the people of the country.

Likewise, the solution to the national question too is plodding along with mere expectations. This government, like the earlier government, appears to drag on the national question. Meantime, we see the Tamil National Alliance which is conducting political business with the government and its leader R Sampanthan are on the horns of a dilemma and deluding the Tamil people that a solution is in sight. They have thus far been unable to secure from the Good Governance regime solutions to

the main problems facing the Tamil people through their politics of accommodation.

At the same time, in order to distract the attention of the Tamil people, they pledge, aloud in the Northern Provincial Council and in a subdued tone in Parliament, that their solution is a federal solution. The pattern of their politics of accommodation will eventually bring political disappointment and frustration to the Tamil people.

Hence, the people should view, based on their experience, the impotence of the policies that could not be fulfilled by their Tamil nationalist leaders. It is thus necessary for the people to clearly understand the current political reality and arrive at alternative politics for the people through mass struggles.

## **Revolutionary May Day Slogans for NDMLP May Day Rallies, 2016**

1. Workers of the world unite!  
Toiling masses mobilize!  
Oppressed nationalities unite!
2. Maithri-Ranil regime, what happened to your election pledges?  
Have prices of goods decreased?  
Has the burden of debt been relieved?
3. Do not impose the VAT! Do not strike at people's livelihood!  
No! No! No to VAT!
4. Uncle Senior went away! Uncle Junior came in his place!  
Pledged everything under the sun!  
What did we get? Our plight is the same!
5. Free the political detainees!  
Answer question on the disappeared!  
Annul the Prevention of Terrorism Act!  
No to the return of the White Van!

6. Good Governance to Maithri and Ranil—  
False Governance for the folks.  
Consensus politics of TNA abandons the National Question.
7. Wages do not match the work. Prices do not match harvest.  
Graduates have no work. Women have no protection.
8. The Coal Power Plant is destruction—  
Destruction to the Sampur folk!  
No! No to the Sampur Power Station!  
No! No to ash emissions.
9. Sampanthan Sir, what is your answer for Sampur?  
Elder brother Mavai, what is your answer for Chunnakam water?
10. Central Government, Provincial Government  
What is your solution for contaminated water?  
Waste oil in well water— Business in bottled water.  
Massive profit for companies— Mass destruction for the people.
11. Chauvinism in the South— Narrow nationalism in the North.  
Ruling classes at Centre— Politics of dominance in the Province.  
Alliances to gather the votes— Who is responsible for issues?
12. You entered the Provincial Council—  
Two and a half years have passed.  
You sat through 50 sessions and enjoyed the perks of office.  
You passed resolutions and issued statements.  
Amid all your infighting, what did the people get?  
Is this the outcome of Tamils being ruled by Tamils?
13. Stop the Indian trawlers!  
What business do Indian fishing businesses have here?  
Protect the marine resources of the fishers!
14. No to ETCA! Not for us! Do not make this an Indian state!  
Let us embrace the Indian people!  
Let us oppose the ruling classes!

15. People's land for the people! Let them live on their own land!  
Do not grab people's lands! Do not destroy our lives!
16. Swaminathan sir! We want not prefab houses!  
Get us suitable stone houses!
17. Housing schemes only for the affected people!  
Not for the profit of multinationals!
18. Imperialist globalization is disaster for the Earth!  
Life is destroyed by consumer culture!
19. The scorching heat chars the earth!  
Imperialist production destroys the environment!
20. Imperialism belches as neocolonialism gobbles the country!  
Let us unite with the people of the world to defeat imperialism!
21. Do not aggravate the national question!  
Do not conduct politics of procrastination!  
Put an end to chauvinist fanaticism!  
Bring about a political solution!
22. Political power to the people along the path of mass politics!  
Reactionary nationalism will not resolve issues!  
Progressive nationalism offers a solution for the Tamil people!
23. Resettlement and thermal power station—  
Do they offer food and poison together?  
Stop! Stop the thermal power station!
24. Let us win power for the people along the Mass Line!  
Let the hands of toilers Arise! Arise!  
Let the unity of the toilers stand upright!  
Let the unity of the toilers ascend!  
Let the Red Flag Arise, Arise!

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# **Mass Campaigns**

## **Matale**

On 5<sup>th</sup> April 2016, the Hill Country Mass Organization for Social Justice (HMOS) organized a demonstration in Hunnasgiriya, Matale calling for a daily wage of Rs 1000 per day for plantation workers and denouncing trade unions that were deceiving the workers.

## **Jaffna**

An awareness campaign was organized by the Mass Organization for Social Justice opposite the Central Bus Station, Jaffna on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2016 calling for the resolution of the three pronged problems facing the Tamil people of the North-East.

The following demands were put forward.

Plans for 65,000 prefabricated steel houses for war victims should be replaced with plans for stone houses.

Plans for a thermal power plant in Sampur, Trincomalee should be scrapped and alternative energy schemes developed in its place to meet energy demand.

A lasting solution should be found for the problem of waste oil contamination of ground water in Chunnakam and relief should be granted for those affected by the contamination.

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# Naxalbari

Hari Prakash Sharma (1934-2010)

It is time to start again.  
‘Cause it rained.  
Not a lot.  
But the earth is soft.  
More, for sure,  
will come.  
For now,  
soil must turn.  
The cycle must churn.  
It is my land.  
And it isn't.  
It is mine because I work on it.  
Plough it. Seed it. Nurse it.  
Know every bit of it.  
Have done so all my life.  
My father too.  
And his father.  
It is not land.  
It is *Ma*  
*Dharti Ma*.  
Eternal *Ma*.  
Mother Earth.  
Bountiful. Kind. Generous.  
Season after season.  
Year after year.  
It gives us all what we need.  
It is all what we seek.  
Yes, it is all what we seek.  
‘Cause this land is NOT mine.  
‘Cause I do not get all what it gives.  
The mother gives.  
As reward for my labour.  
Our labour.

The landlord takes much of it away.  
As rent.  
As interest for the money  
his father gave my father.  
He does not labour.  
He only owns my land.  
Many people's land.  
All that we changed.  
We rose.  
Thousands upon thousands of us.  
Together.  
With bows and arrows. Spears. Guns.  
They ran away.  
The landlords.  
The money-lenders.  
The State.  
We became *Naxalbari*.  
And the land, this land  
was all mine.  
But they came back.  
Something went wrong.  
Army. Police. Tanks. Flames.  
Our leaders in jail.  
Our brothers and sisters,  
our neighbours, slain.  
There will be time to start again.  
To take it over.  
No more rent.  
No more interest.  
In the meantime,  
it is time to plough the land.  
My land.  
Our land.

[Hari Prakash Sharma writer, activist and friend of the Naxalbari movement, was inspired by the Naxalbari peasant uprising in 1967. He remained a sympathiser and friend of the movement all his life.]

## A Profound Thought on the Worth of a Human

*"The value of a man was reduced  
to his immediate identity  
and nearest possibility.*

*To a vote.*

*To a number.*

*To a thing.*

*Never was a man treated as a mind.*

*As a glorious thing made up of star dust.*

*In very field, in studies,*

*in streets, in politics,*

*and in dying and living,"*

*(From the suicide note of Rohith Vemula,  
January 17, 2016)*

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