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# Revenge

## Anand Patwardhan

At the side of the road, dead cattle  
Abandoned in the night  
By hands that cannot claim  
Water from the well.  
Silent figures bearing their load  
The fresh carcass of an old cow  
Holy, but nevertheless sold  
To one whose sin is pre-ordained.  
Dark figures nursing their hate  
Tongues held in sullen waiting  
The impotent rage of men  
Forced to believe themselves unclean.  
Silent figures depositing their gift  
Taking in the familiar smell  
With the satisfaction of knowing  
It will soon become unbreathable.  
At the side of the road, dead cattle  
Abandoned by night  
Will lie for days.  
Untouchable.

*[The author, Anand Patwardhan is an Indian documentary filmmaker well known for his socio-political, human rights oriented films. He republished his above poem (written between 1972 and 1974) in July 2016 as a tribute to the inspiring Dalit response to the Hindutva atrocity against Dalits in Gujarat.]*

## *Editorial*

The parliament of Sri Lanka, whose understanding of democratic government is limited to the bourgeois parliamentary system, was based on the British model as was its system of election. The Left, like the Right, know that it was not in the interest of the working people. From the outset, the Communist Party (CP) urged People's Democracy. However, parliamentary and local government elections contributed to the illusion that the people had a say in bourgeois parliamentary government. The CP, which while working towards a genuine democratic alternative to the bourgeois parliamentary system was aware that keeping off the electoral process could isolate it from the masses and that there were basic rights of the working people that could be won through Parliament, chose to tactically participate in parliamentary politics. And that was correct.

The Left knew that— besides obstacles such as the financial muscle of the capitalist class, its access to media resources for propaganda and intervention by governmental establishment standing in the way of a left political party taking parliamentary political power —even if the left captured parliamentary power despite heavy odds, any step by it that hurt capitalist class power risked intervention by the state machinery and international capital on behalf of the local capitalist class.

Nevertheless, the Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP), belonging to the Trotskyite tradition of Sri Lanka, was tempted by the prospect of forming government by mobilizing a parliamentary majority. Although the total number of parliamentary seats won by the three left parties in the General Election of 1947 gave room for such an illusion, the true electoral strength of the Left at the time was neither island-wide nor based on adequate political instruction. The Hartal of 1953, however, indicated the prospect of expanding the left movement across the country. But the LSSP, which misinterpreted the mass resentment of the United National

Party (UNP) regime as island wide support for the Left, neglected all mass politics other than electoral politics. When Bandaranaike seized in 1956 the electoral political space which the Left failed to capture, the leadership, instead of building a people's political base, immersed themselves deeper in the mire of parliamentary politics.

Ten years after the Hartal, opportunity came in 1963 in the form of the "21 Demands" campaign of the Joint Committee of Trade Unions and the formation of the United Left Front comprising the three left parties of the time. This opportunity to reunite the left— which has continued to be divided since the 1930's —and secure the demands of the workers was wrecked by the decision of the LSSP to join the Sri Lanka Freedom Party government in 1964. Thus a chance for the revival of the Left was let slip. Besides, in 1964, the rise of parliamentary opportunist politics within the LSSP and the CP led to splits in both parties.

Post-1964 parliamentary left politics led to the tragic situation where the Left, almost entirely, could not win any parliamentary seat without the support of the SLFP. Although the LSSP and the CP were boastful of the number of seats that they secured in the General Election of 1970 with help from the SLFP, the election of 1977 revealed their real strength.

Betrayals by the parliamentary left very much helped the chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) to grow strong using a leftist facade. Besides, tactical mistakes of the revolutionary left too benefitted the JVP. The 'proportional representation system' introduced in 1978, which benefitted the JVP and minority nationality parties, further weakened the parliamentary left. The New Left Front founded in 1999 to rescue the left movement from this sad plight was wrecked by the craving of the leader of the Nava Samasamaja Party (NSSP) for position. This experience which hampered the revival of the left movement was also a warning against those with interest in the parliamentary path.

The three political parties belonging to the Samasamaja tradition with significant social activity stumbled after 2005. One joined Mahinda Rajapaksa only to degenerate rapidly. The other two warmed up to the

UNP, with one now reduced to a propaganda organ of the National Government led by the UNP. Meanwhile, the parliamentary left is miserably caught between blatant support for Mahinda Rajapaksa and shameless support for the UNP. Their main political issue is not the grave economic crisis facing the country; nor is it the national question. It is the question of choice between Ranil Wickremesinghe and Mahinda Rajapaksa. The political privation which haunted parliamentary left politics during the two elections of 2015— when political bankruptcy with no programme other than being rid of the executive presidency, or more precisely the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime, clashed with blind faith in Mahinda Rajapaksa —still prevails.

This is time for deep thinking by members and supporters of all left parties. Genuine leftists and other progressives should dare to challenge the leaders who meekly follow the two reactionary camps that treat the people like herd; to reject the ruining of the country under capitalist and imperialist diktat, in compromise with chauvinism; and to evolve a solid political alternative. It is only through a credible alternative political programme that the left movement can grow and lead the people.

The prospect for it is in the making and growing. Mass initiatives for democratic revival and moves towards a united front in which genuine leftists and other progressives could work together are afoot in the spheres of political theory and mass struggle. The New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party is working hard, shoulder to shoulder with other good left and progressive forces.

Marxist Leninist New Democracy sends its revolutionary greetings to genuine leftists and other progressives to advance courageously to enfeeble the tendency to seek shelter reactionary capitalist camps, totally reject the parliamentary path incapable of resolving the problems of the country, and evolve and implement with revolutionary clarity of mind a fresh political alternative.

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# **New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party Proposals for a Solution to the Sri Lankan National Question**

1. The Northern and Eastern Provinces which comprise the traditional regions of the Tamil-speaking people of Sri Lanka should be merged permanently and a fully-empowered Autonomous Regional Structure should be established along with Autonomous Inner Structures within it.
2. The Structure so established should be named the North-East Regional Autonomous Territory, and its borders should be that of the existing Northern and Eastern Provinces.
3. The powers and activities of this Regional Autonomy and of the Autonomous Inner Structures within it should be clearly defined. At the same time, regulations should be drafted and clarified to ensure that there is no conflict between the respective powers and activities of the Centre and of the Region; and the powers and the right to activities referred to here should be constitutionally guaranteed.
4. Room should be allowed for the self-reliant economic development based on agriculture and industry within the North-East Autonomous Regional Structure and legal guarantee provided for its administration without hindrance or interference.
5. The North-East Regional Autonomy should be given full powers to undertake land distribution, organize irrigation and arrange settlements in the North-East Regional Autonomous Territory. The Central Government and the Regional Autonomy should discuss the matter of colonization undertaken with ulterior motives and arrive at a conclusion based on good understanding. At the same time, the Regional Autonomy should have the right to accept or reject any colonization scheme proposed by the Central Government.

6. The North-East Regional Autonomy should have the right to undertake matters relating to finance, judicial administration, language, education, employment and cultural affairs in accordance with the needs of the people of the region, and in accordance with the Constitution.
7. Responsibility for local security should rest with the administration of the Regional Autonomy for purpose of maintaining law and order in the North-East Regional Autonomous Territory. In the absence of foreign threat or aggression, the Central Government should take decisions about maintaining or expanding military bases in the Autonomous Territory in consultation with the Regional Autonomy.
8. At the National level and at the level of the Regional Autonomy, firm action against discrimination based on race, language, caste, religion and gender should be clearly defined based on fundamental and human rights and trade union and democratic rights.
9. Official use of Sinhala, Tamil and English, the three official languages of Sri Lanka, should be fully implemented in practice; and the Constitution should guarantee the right of each citizen the right to communicate with the Central Government or with the Regional Autonomy in his/her mother tongue and receive a reply in the same language.
10. The Regional Autonomy should provide with due guarantees facilities and concessions for the social advancement of the oppressed people in various parts of the country who still remain economically, educationally, socially and culturally backward and deprived of land, health care and employment.
11. Muslims should be recognized as a distinct nationality and, on that basis, one or several Autonomous Internal Structures should be set up in regions which have been the traditional home to the Muslims, comprising individual territories in each District or across Districts. The Muslims should through such structures be enabled to fully

enjoy full rights in matters including their economy, natural resources, employment opportunities and education.

12. Powers and rights of the Autonomous Inner Structures should be clearly formulated and guaranteed in a way that neither the Central Government nor the Regional Autonomy could interfere or intervene in matters within the purview of an Autonomous Inner Structure for the Muslims.
13. Autonomous Inner Structures should be established firmly for the Sinhalese living in the North-East Autonomous Region so that their rights and aspirations are duly attended to; and the powers and rights of such Autonomous Inner Structures are clearly formulated and guaranteed.
14. Autonomous Inner Structures should be set up in every region according to population concentration to protect the rights and aspirations of the Tamil people living outside the North-East Autonomous Region; and the powers and rights of such Autonomous Inner Structures should be clearly formulated and guaranteed.
15. Autonomous Inner Structures should be set up in every region according to population concentration to protect the rights and aspirations of the Muslims living outside the North-East Autonomous Region; and the powers and rights of such Autonomous Inner Structures should be clearly formulated and guaranteed.
16. The Hill Country Tamil community which has existed in this country for over 200 years with distinct political, socio-economic and cultural identities should be recognized as a distinct nationality of the country, and their ethnic identity should be affirmed as Hill Country Tamils in all legal documents including certificates of birth, death and marriage.
17. An exclusive Autonomous Structure should be established for the Hill Country Tamil nationality in order that it could cherish its unique ethnic and cultural identities and develop them further and thereby fulfil its aspirations and expectations.

18. As a prelude to establishing an exclusive Autonomous Structure for the Hill Country Tamils, village structures should be established incorporating their right to housing combined with the confirmation of their right to land. Such villages should be brought together to form Village Officer Divisions (Grama Niladhari Divisions) with at least one Divisional Secretariat for 40,000 persons as their administrative centres.
19. While the Autonomous Structure for the Hill Country Tamils will include regions of the Central, Uva and Sabaragamuwa Provinces and have guarantees for the land and housing rights of the people, self-reliant economy, employment opportunity, education, healthcare, language rights and the protection and development of their culture, there should also be provision for setting up Autonomous Inner Structures, with guarantees of their powers and rights, outside the above Autonomous Structure, combining regions of other provinces where the Hill Country Tamils live in significant concentration.
20. Minorities including Burghers, Malays and the Attho (Veddah), irrespective of whether live in significant concentration or sparsely among the population of the country, should be acknowledged as National Minorities according to their preference, and Autonomous Inner Structures set up suitably combining regions in which they live, defining clearly their powers and rights and guaranteeing them in order that their identity, culture and all rights are protected.
21. Steps should be taken to ensure that all Autonomous Structures and Autonomous Inner Structures and have Constitutional guarantee to operate independently with language rights and to undertake financial, judicial and administrative measures.
22. In the event of those who left the country under conditions of conflict wishing to return to the country, they should be offered full citizenship irrespective of their race, religion, language and region; and those needing dual citizenship should be allowed that right.

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# Why India's Big Push for Economic Cooperation in Lanka may Backfire

*Ahilan Kadirgamar*

*(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.)*

New Delhi's policy of hustling its smaller neighbour comes at a time when the Wickremesinghe government's mismanagement of the economy is apparent and will end up helping the xenophobic political forces in the country.

New Delhi's relations with Colombo may appear to be at a high point but ironically, anti-India sentiments are on the rise in Sri Lanka. This divergence in sentiments between the Sri Lankan government and its population is largely a consequence of moves to liberalise trade in services and investment between the two countries.

It is no secret that there was a major sigh of relief in India and the United States following the regime change in Colombo in January 2015. China's inroads into the country with the Rajapaksa regime had polarised the region and raised the geopolitical stakes. However, Sri Lanka's relationship with China was built on an economic foundation of large investments in infrastructure. It also has a historical basis from the rubber rice deal during the Korean War to the massive Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall in Colombo, gifted by the Chinese in the

early 1970s. Nevertheless, in India's efforts to ensure its regional dominance and counter China's influence, there has been a singular focus on trying to lock Sri Lanka into the Indian economic orbit.

### **Expanding trade and financial agreements**

The India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement of 1998 was followed by efforts towards a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) to liberalise trade in services and investment starting in the mid-2000s.

However, the CEPA negotiations dragged on for nearly a decade in the face of increasing opposition within Sri Lanka, particularly by the business community and certain interest groups such as the medical lobby. With the new momentum in closer bilateral ties last year, India is pushing for a new trade pact called the Economic and Technological Cooperation Agreement (ETCA). The pro-liberalisation government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has been actively championing the proposed trade pact.

Meanwhile, the deterioration of the Sri Lankan economy in recent months – including a major balance of payments problem – has forced Colombo to seek support from external actors. India has boosted Sri Lanka's foreign reserves by US\$ 1.1 billion with a Reserve Bank of India credit swap for six months drawn last September, followed by a further emergency credit swap in March to wade over the tough financial tide.

The credit swap is a temporary measure to increase Sri Lanka's forex reserves, until the country receives an IMF loan. The IMF's extended fund facility of US\$ 1.5 billion coupled with US\$ 650 million in multilateral and bilateral loans are to take effect in June this year. The government believes these loans will create momentum for further global financial flows into the country.

The ETCA, widely perceived by the Sri Lankan public to be advantageous to India, is likely to become a trade-off for economic and political support from India to the Wickremesinghe government.

However, Wickremesinghe's visit to Beijing last month has strengthened relations with China – a shift from the soured relations which followed the defeat of the Rajapaksa regime last year. The possibility of equity swaps, where Sri Lankan debt to China is traded for financial stakes in Sri Lankan enterprises, is now being considered. Sri Lanka has also initiated negotiations with China and the US on new free trade agreements. Seizing this opportunity, the IMF and the World Bank are also pushing to liberalise trade as part of a larger strategy of liberalising the Sri Lankan economy – from encouraging the privatisation of state owned enterprises to labour reforms.

## **Reactions to ETCA**

Many of the Colombo-based neoliberal think tanks see the Wickremesinghe government in power and the crisis facing the economy as an opportunity to accelerate liberalisation, including in trade. However, the ETCA is coming under considerable fire from a range of interest groups and political parties – from the chauvinistic remnants of the Rajapaksa regime to the 'left' opposition Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna.

So what fuels this tremendous reaction to the ETCA? After all, the agreement is only one part of this liberalisation push. To start with, the trade picture is not pretty. According to the Central Bank, Indian exports to Sri Lanka were US\$ 4,268 million while Lankan exports to India stood at just US\$ 643 million in 2015 – reflecting a massive trade deficit between the countries.

There have been various explanations put forward by Indian officials and pro-liberalisation advocates in Colombo on what has been gained with the previous free trade agreement, including claims that the high Indian exports to Sri Lanka are mostly independent of the free trade agreement. However, India's eagerness for the trade pact and the stark trade deficit is difficult to miss.

In this context, the current economic crisis and the neoliberal economic policy trajectory have become the political ground for the mobilisation of

forces opposed to the government. And this campaign has zeroes in on the ETCA as the catch-all word to describe any and all impending economic woes. Political forces and middle class interest groups such as doctors and IT professionals are opposing the agreement and mobilising broader sections of society. Furthermore, these forces have assumed a xenophobic character, propagating anti-Indian sentiments.

## **Recent economic crisis**

Much of the current economic woes in Sri Lanka have been inherited from the Rajapaksa government's economic development policies of construction-led growth on high interest debt. In addition, the deterioration in global economic conditions over the past year has created difficult financial conditions for Sri Lanka to roll over such debt. However, the Wickremesinghe government needs to take part of the blame for mismanagement and certainly for its flawed economic vision.

Having come to power over a year ago, and having crossed the milestone of the parliamentary election in August 2015, it nevertheless chose to continue on the path of further exposing the economy to international debt in its November 2015 budget. It ignored the warning bells about the increasing import bill and falling revenues, which have made the country far more susceptible to the current crisis conditions of capital flight from the emerging markets and increasing cost of capital in the global financial markets.

At the core of the Wickremesinghe government's economic programme is the liberalisation of trade and capital flows; the trade agreements and the IMF facility reflect this economic vision. In other words, it is counting on enticing inward capital flows despite the winds of global capital blowing in the opposite direction. Worryingly, even trade agreements in services and investment are known to lead to further speculative investment flows into finance, insurance and real estate, rather than traditional forms of foreign direct investment leading to the building of factories for production and exports. However, the Sri Lankan

establishment has been satisfied with such fickle policies that also lead to considerable rent-seeking by the financial elite.

### **Opposing xenophobia and liberalisation**

Trade liberalisation is always contentious for its impact on society, but it is all the more so now in the context of the global downturn and a national economic crisis. It is likely to aggravate the rising inequalities and jobless growth in Sri Lanka – by pushing for lower wages to compete in international markets – and the inflow of cheaper commodities, wiping out local production.

With the ETCA debate polarised between the free trade elite and the anti-Indian forces, there has been little informed debate including critical analysis of trade liberalisation, broader neoliberal reforms and the deteriorating global economic situation. For those bothered by xenophobia and economic marginalisation, the challenge is to oppose both the reflexive anti-Indian campaign of the nationalists and the neoliberal policies of the liberalisers.

In this context, New Delhi's policy of hustling its smaller neighbour cannot be more ill-timed and is likely to generate a political backlash. The hubris of the Indian and Sri Lankan establishments in pushing through this trade pact may well result in losing the great opportunity that emerged last year of rebuilding Indo-Lanka relations on a broader footing.

*Ahilan Kadirgamar is a political economist and a member of the Collective for Economic Democratisation in Sri Lanka ([www.economicdemocratisation.org](http://www.economicdemocratisation.org))*

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# Prospects for Scandinavian Democracy in a Society in Conflict

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## Introduction

*The Paradox: In many of the oldest and most stable democratic countries, citizens possess little confidence in some key democratic institutions. Yet most citizens continue to believe in the desirability of democracy.*

*Robert A. Dahl*

The Scandinavian model of Democracy has to varying degrees provided a model for programmatic change in Eastern and Central European countries. This transformation happened in late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with the probability of transfer determined by the ‘proximity’ (geographical, ideological and cultural) of the ‘exporter’ party to the ‘importer’ party. Thus, the challenge now is whether it is possible to export the Scandinavian model of democracy in the more globalised 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The story of our increasingly global order— ‘globalization’ —is not singular. Globalization is not just economic it is also political for it also involves growing aspirations for international law and justice. There is also another narrative— a narrative seeking to reframe human activity and entrench it in law, rights and responsibilities. The principles of equal respect, equal concern and the priority of vital needs of all human beings are not principles for some remote utopia— they are of central significance to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’s legal and political developments.

The three Scandinavian polities— Denmark, Norway and Sweden — constitute an obvious test case for an analytical perspective much in

vogue in comparative political studies. The recent focus on public policy outcomes suggests a shift from the view that politics is an epiphenomenal activity determined by social and economic forces towards an analysis which emphasises the role of political structure and political beliefs as independent variables affecting the content of public policy and, thereby, the quality of life experienced by individuals who are members of different political units. During the last half century, democratic socialist politics was infinitely more successful in Scandinavia than elsewhere in Western Europe (O'Kane, 2004). Since democratic socialist ideology strongly emphasises the values of welfare and social equality, the political achievements of Scandinavian Social Democratic parties should in the eyes of the public be matched by achievements in respect of welfare and egalitarianism.

The main objective of this paper is to explore the possibility of applying the Scandinavian model of democracy to Sri Lanka. It looks into specific aspects of the Social Democratic model as the way forward to bring peace to Sri Lanka, and compares that prospect with one for a form of popular democracy or a protective state with grass roots democratic structures that emphasize egalitarian social justice. It also examines if it is possible to transfer the Scandinavian Social Democracy model, in whole or part, to Sri Lanka not as a lasting solution to its current political crisis but as a useful step towards popular democracy or a people's state. In Sri Lanka, options for future development are narrowing to a choice between totalitarian and democratic routes. This paper is based on a preference for the democratic option such as a people-based democracy.

Democracy is essentially about people and concerns meeting the needs, obligations, rights and development of individuals. Representative government is the political face of democracy. Democracy also concerns economic and social aspects of life. A yardstick of its measurement is the degree of active, voluntary participation of individual citizens in diverse activities of society. As democracy in Sri Lanka can be preserved only through a collective national response of all democratic parties, the call

for national unity would take centre stage, and ways remain to be devised to enable that. Some features of Scandinavian democracy could serve to fulfil the purpose of unifying the people.

The essay, in its analysis of social democracy as a model for emulation, will explain how and why transfer occurs within the broader process of 'policy learning', and assess from the perspective of the exporter parties the opportunity structures for policy transfer. The two channels explored represent the 'push' and 'pull' factors of policy transfer: 'ideational transfer' (the attractiveness of social-democratic ideas as a model) and the transfer of policies through interaction in concrete 'transfer networks'.

Firstly, the extent to which Scandinavian social democracy could serve as a 'model for emulation' will be discussed, by exploring how social democracy and its policies could be attractive individually, what makes their transfer desirable, and the aspects which are transferable. It is noted that proximity favours substantive policy transfer because policy transfer relates not just to the desirability but also the feasibility of transfer across different socio-economic and institutional settings. The historical background to the present conflict in Sri Lanka and the state of democratic process will be presented next, followed by a comparison of the class nature of the societies in Scandinavia and in Sri Lanka, in the context of identifying key unifying factors that would enable a people's movement for achieving popular democracy. The final section addresses issues of applying the Scandinavian model to Sri Lanka and the relevance of the model in the current context.

## **The Scandinavian Model of Social Democracy**

Firstly, we need to be clear about what social democracy has been historically. Gamble and Wright (1999) place at the core of the social democratic enterprise the attempt 'to build and sustain political majorities for reforms of economic and social institutions which will counter injustice and reduce inequality'. Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm (1996) identifies social democratic politics with the desire 'to regulate and

socialise the wealth-creating and directionless economic dynamism of capitalism, not replace it'. These admirably lucid and economical definitions are, however, not designed to fully describe social democracy. Social democratic experience is hard to be located under a simple unique formulation. Some schools of thought have treated it principally in terms of the name of a political party and analysed it in terms of the dynamics of political parties and party systems. Others have identified it with a tightly-specified model of a strong corporatist regime uniting a party of labour and a centralised trade union organization. Yet others view social democracy as an expansive term covering almost anything broadly 'left-of-centre'. Besides, there are authors to whom social democracy means the Scandinavian model and at times systems which have sought more or less successfully to emulate it.

The Scandinavian model was associated with great progress in living and working conditions, unprecedented in the history of mankind. Public health, life expectancy and social security improved enormously over a short period as the welfare state developed in the last century (Mishra, 2004). It therefore became enormously popular among ordinary people. This social model which developed in a specific historic context cannot be assessed or followed independently of its social and historical origins and the power relations which enabled it. A deeper and more thorough analysis and understanding of this particular social model is crucial to get to grips with the potential, the actual development and the perspective of the welfare state.

The Scandinavian model as we know comprises high quality public health services, national insurance schemes, social security and other public services were introduced and improved upon as a result of the rise in power of organised labour. Public ownership and control of the basic social infrastructure including utilities form an important aspect of these new power relations in the Scandinavian context, and serve as a 'model to emulate' for many countries.

It was the product of power relations and social struggle in the context of specific historic developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Contrary to being the result of social dialogue and tri-partite co-operation, as many in the labour movement prefer to have it, the model which created the welfare state was the result of prolonged arduous social struggle and class confrontation (Asbjørn, 2007). Capitalism, since becoming the dominant mode of production globally, has undergone cycles of boom to bust and bust to boom. The capitalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century comprised severe exploitation of workers in general, accompanied by extraordinary misery during its bust periods (Esping-Andersen 1990). The response of the working class was to organise and fight— at workplaces as well as politically. Through it the labour movement gradually achieved better wages and working conditions as well as high quality social welfare provisions, especially in Scandinavian democracies. These features make transfer desirable.

The Scandinavian welfare state is thus more than a sum of social institutions and public budgets. It represents, first and foremost, specific power relations in society. Capital control, in particular, enabled governments to pursue a policy of national and social development without continual confrontation with capital's exit strategies, where big corporations could threaten to flag out and move to countries with more favourable conditions, if their interests were hurt. In essence, public welfare has been a question of power (Asbjørn, 2007).

It is important to note that this social partnership between labour and capital came about a result of the combined strength of the trade unions and the labour movement. The employers and their organisations, having realised that they cannot defeat the trade unions, recognised them as representatives of the workers and sat to negotiate with them. In other words, this peaceful cohabitation between labour and capital rested on a strong labour movement— a strength which came about through the many struggles and confrontations between labour and capital in the previous period (Kautto, 2001). In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, however, the power

of the capital has risen through multinational companies and neo-colonial policies while the labour movement and organisations have weakened owing to the harsh approach of the government manifesting in strict regulations. Thus attempts to emulate the Scandinavian model in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century against this backdrop will pose fresh issues.

The welfare state was not the expressed aim of the labour movement but the result of a specific historic compromise between labour and capital, as reflected in the mixed characteristics of the welfare state. The uncertain prospect for compromise between labour and capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is another issue that stands in a way of transferring this model.

Now, half a century later, we realize that capitalism to a large degree has succeeded in its strategy. With the policy of the social pact gaining massive support among the working class owing to important achievements in welfare, wages and working conditions, the more radical and anti-capitalist sections of the labour movement became growingly marginalised (Swank, 2002). Dominant sections of the labour movement also were inclined to see social progress as an outcome of social peace and co-operation with more amicable capital owners. To many trade union leaders of the time, social confrontation was a negative event with adverse impact on workers' conditions and thus avoidable; and social democratic parties played their historic role of administering this policy of class compromise.

Another aspect of the capitalist strategy was the restructuring of capitalist production on a global scale. Production chains cutting across national boundaries, lean production, outsourcing, off-shoring and relocation at will of assembly lines as well as of supportive services were salient features of this process. Workers and social models were pitted against each other through this increasingly unlimited freedom of movement of capital, goods and services (Macarov, 2003). New Public Management now located private sector models within the once state-dominated public sector.

Market freedom and ability to compete on increasingly deregulated international markets became guiding principles of government policy. As a result, the rise in competition in the labour market and a rapid growth of precarious work undermined trade union and workers rights (Hacker, 2002). The welfare state, particularly the Scandinavian model, which represented enormous social progress for a great majority of the population, now came under attack. Why is something, which, despite all shortcomings, was hailed as one of the most successful social models in human history, now attacked and undermined?

Firstly, the social pact was not eternally sustainable. It was only a compromise which came about in a very specific historic context, when the main economic and social characteristics of classical capitalism were still intact. Secondly, the labour movement sleep walked into the delusion that the social pact was a long-term strategy although, despite its value and importance, it was only a short term tactical compromise for both the working class and capitalism. Rather than being seen as a step towards a fundamental social emancipation, the class compromise and its true-born offspring, the welfare state, gradually came to the end of its life. Thirdly, and linked to the previous point, the ideology of the social pact was flawed. Democratic control of the economy was never fully achieved, crises-free capitalism was not created, and class struggle was not over. Fourthly, the labour movement was taken by surprise by the neo-liberal offensive. Rather than mobilise socially to defend the achievements of the welfare state, and take the social struggle forward, a great part of the trade union leadership and the labour movement found themselves on the defensive, clung to the social peace and social dialogue model, and negotiated concessions, while adopting much of the neo-liberal ideology.

On the other hand, the most important historical lesson of the welfare state, as we see it develop today, is that it stopped well short of taking democratic control of the economy. Although for long the welfare state ensured a fair redistribution of income in society, it left intact the core relations of capitalist production. The growing concentration of the

ownership of capital and means of production in the hands of an increasingly powerful capitalist class, in course of time, enabled it to launch an attack on the equitable distribution of goods and services in welfare societies. This is exactly what we witness today in the form of the on-going global neo-liberal offensive (Wahl, 2004).

Finally, social democrats have generally been committed to economic growth and it may be legitimate to argue that elements of their particular growth regime had become counter-productive, politically and perhaps economically (Kitschelt, 1994). Commitment to economic growth is, however, an aspect of modern politics that transcends social democracy. In practice, neo-liberal opponents generated much political capital by claiming that social democracy was inimical to growth than through their repeated insistence that social democracy was the enemy of individual liberty (Zeitlin, 1984). If a key contemporary issue is 'the politics of less' of how to slow the juggernaut which ties economic growth to environmental degradation, while also addressing the growing global inequalities of incomes and resources, it is an issue which challenges social democracy, which offers almost the only successful experience of negotiated decrementalism plus social protection. It is important to note here that social democracy has always had to walk the tightrope of hard choices and negotiate fuzzy edges— and this, at least, has not changed.

## **Democracy in Sri Lanka**

There is a broad consensus on the use of a minimalist definition of democracy that goes back to the works of Schumpeter (1993) and Dahl (1977) who describe democracy as a political system that meets at least three conditions: firstly, it features competition among organized groups and individuals over government power on a regular basis and without the use of force; secondly, it allows for political participation through regular free elections that should not exclude defined social groups; and thirdly, it offers a certain level of civil and political rights that ensures competition and participation (Lijphart, 1990).

Applying this definition to Sri Lanka poses several problems. The first criterion—peaceful competition over government power through regular elections—does not present a major problem. The emergence of political parties representing the different social layers of different communities is as much a feature of Sri Lankan politics as it is elsewhere. There is a great variety in Sri Lankan political parties, based on regional, linguistic, religious, ethnic and caste identities, and secular values as well as on class interests, ensuring some form of competition for political power. The condition that the conduct of elections should be free of force, however, is growingly unmet, with violence as a regular feature of electoral politics.

The next condition to consider comprises the conditions under which elections are held. That is, do civil and political rights such as freedom of press and association, that are meant to ensure fair competition and equal participation, exist? It is hard to quantify the extent to which these criteria are met in Sri Lanka. Media freedom was restricted during the civil war as well as when the ruling party and the dominant media had a close relationship and even shared interests, as was arguably the case in Sri Lanka in the 1980s. There has, nevertheless, been a greater degree of media freedom in the country in the latter part of the 1990s and in the early 2000s.

Thus, even the minimalist definition of democracy confronts several problems in the Sri Lankan context. However, despite problems such as polls-related violence and restricted civil liberties, democracy survives to the extent that elections serve their first and foremost purpose: changing governments. That such change occurs is particularly remarkable in a society with vast socioeconomic inequality. The popular assumption that state resources are readily transformed into political power by the incumbent is not fully applicable to Sri Lanka, although there has been abuse of public resources to defend political power secured by the electoral process.

Discussion of the sustainability of democratic systems has for long been influenced by modernization theories that emphasize the close

relationship between economic factors and successful democratic development like Lijphart's (1990) dictum that "the more well-to-do a nation the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy".

Przeworski (1996) and collaborators too emphasized the importance of economic factors, especially per capita income, to the capacity for democracies to endure, saying that "with per-capita income of more than \$6,000 a year, democracy is certain to survive, come hell or high water". But transition to democracy in any society is too complex to be explained by economic or other socio-structural variables alone.

The ideological foundations of democracy as broadly understood in Western societies— defined as equality, individual freedom and autonomy, and pluralism —were realized in the course of political development of social democracy. The pre-capitalist culture in the Asia-Pacific which still holds sway to varying extents along with a political culture deriving from foreign intervention as the mediator in social transformation, have, besides, led to the creation of social norms dictated by a partisan state, dominance of bureau-technocratic elites, and a managed public sphere.

Zakaria (1997) has drawn attention to an increase in such democracies, a category in which he includes regimes where elected governments have tended to restrict civic rights and freedoms but without authoritarian control. He points to the conceptual problem of simply equating democracy with the constitutional liberalism of Western industrialized societies. Pleading for the strengthening of constitutionalism, Zakaria argues that "Western liberal democracy might prove to be not the final destination on the democratic road, but just one of many possible exits."

Yet, the argument on the impact of culture on democracy seems understated. While political systems are influenced by the cultural traditions of the societies in which they are situated, it is almost impossible to isolate specific cultural factors to evaluate their explanatory value. Countries of South Asia have shown that democracy— understood in terms of competitive elections as the instrument of political change

—can function under diverse cultural systems dominated by religious, caste and other dominant ideologies. Notably, in 1972, Buddhism secured foremost place in the Constitution of Sri Lanka, negating the earlier nominally secular state. In electoral political terms the only valid conclusion to draw seems to be that cultural factors play a visible role in influencing voter behaviour and, more importantly, in dismantling democracy. However, the way in which such factors influence democratic development depends on the institutional setting and the motivation of the relevant actors. Social Democracy is of value in this context in facilitating the setting up the platform for popular democracy, through reforming institutional settings and also eradicating actors hindering the development of democracy in the country. Thus an understanding of the link between historical development and institutional and cultural factors as a key element will help to explain what makes ‘democracy’ work. Discussion of the need to consolidate democracy in Sri Lanka at the present juncture could usefully draw on positive features of the experiences of social democracy.

Merkel (1996) developed a model of democratic consolidation that unfolds at four different levels, namely institutions, representation, behaviour, and civic culture. Consolidation starts at all four levels simultaneously but requires different lengths of time to achieve; institutional consolidation, for example, is reached much faster than democratic consolidation of a civic culture.

The foundation of a democracy rests on the state and the endeavours of its leadership in the fields of state- and nation-building. Many models of democratic consolidation take for granted the existence of a state, if not some form of central government. But on close examination of the acts of state- and nation-building, one notices a number of developments that question this assumption. The concept of fragmented democracies would help to explain the similarities of South Asian democracies and their paradoxes by connecting the questions of democracy and consolidation with the problems of state- and nation-building. Political fragmentation

can generally be defined as a process by which political institutions are progressively disabled to restrict enforcing of their decisions to their territorial units, and could lead to a situation in which the democratic process takes place under conditions of latent deinstitutionalization in the fields of both state- and nation-building, as has been the case with Sri Lanka in the past several decades.

Attempts to create a commonality of a people as a nation, either by the declaration of a common language or the imposition of a dominant state ideology, have often resulted in conflicts that constitute a good part of identity-based domestic problems in South Asian countries as well as determined the course of democracy. Again, the failure to develop mechanisms by which compromise can be reached between competing aspirations of ethnic groups could be a major obstacle to nation building. The path to integration of the different communities in Sri Lanka had been hindered by the rise of ethnocentric politics in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and its consolidation following election to government.

Nation-building has been made even harder by the imposition of religious allegiance on national identity; pressure exerted by Buddhist nationalist groups on the main Sinhalese parties continues to obstruct any autonomous structure that could meet the demand of the Tamils for greater devolution of power.

Sri Lanka provides an instance of how state building fails when one ethno-national group (once the Sinhalese and now Sinhala-Buddhists) attempts to build ethno-religious juridical, political and economic structures to the exclusion of ethnic as well as religious minorities.

In efforts to explain if not rationalise Sinhala nationalism and the ensuing conflict, some scholars point to the over two millennia long influence of Buddhism in shaping an indelible Sinhala consciousness, while others emphasize the colonial presence with its attendant cultural and economic influences and policies of stratification along racial, class and religious lines (Ellison, 1987). There also those who hold that Sinhala nationalism and the subsequent ethnic conflict is more or less the creation

of political elites, while Tamil nationalism is cast as a construct of high-caste and middle-class northern Tamils whose design was to subsume intra-ethnic cleavages, especially those emanating from the disgruntled Tamil lower classes (Smith, 1978).

Unfortunately, none of the above adequately explains the nature of the conflict in Sri Lanka. Some useful insights of the decay of democracy are, however, provided by raising the question as to why Tamil mobilization, in fighting for a separate state, generated such enthusiasm among a community which, in the main, had relied on democratic institutions to express its grievances.

One may sum up the essence of the Sri Lankan conflict as follows, in a historical perspective and in the context of Social democracy:

1. Sixty years of Sinhalese-dominated politics and the marginalization and making scapegoats of the Tamils within the context of a "control democracy"— a democracy in which the majority group eschews ethnic compromise with the minorities and instead solely controls the levers of power—in an attempt to create a Sinhalese ethnocracy. It also juxtaposes the concomitant institutional decay as applied to the Tamils.
2. Tamil mobilization which came up after the massive breakdown of institutions during the anti-Tamil violence of 1983, which marked the creation of a chasm between Sinhalese and Tamils, which explains both the durability and intractability of the country's civil war.
3. Even after a quarter century of utterly destructive armed conflict, Sri Lanka's control democracy continues to preclude ethnic compromise and the restructuring of political institutions.

### **Class content of Social Democracy and relevance to Sri Lanka**

Marxists emphasise class and class struggle, and hold that state welfare has to be seen in terms of the 'needs of capital' and/or the 'limits on state action' imposed by the capital accumulation process. This is not to argue,

however, that the Marxist account of the welfare state is an overly simplified functional explanation. The principal theoretical concern of Marxist analyses of the welfare state is that ‘an examination of the functioning and management of state welfare suggests that it remains part of a capitalist state which is fundamentally concerned with the maintenance and reproduction of capitalist social relations’ (Ginsburg, 1979).

The Marxist emphasis is, in the first place, accompanied by analysis of the ‘contradictory’ nature of state welfare. For example, Fine and Harris (1976) see state expenditure as being both ‘indirectly productive’ and an ‘unproductive burden’ for capital in the sense that it is a drain on surplus value. Gough (1979) notes that, while the welfare state tends to benefit capital, ‘the very scale of state expenditure on the social services has become a fetter on the process of capital accumulation and economic growth’.

Secondly, the functional account of state welfare is supplemented and/or qualified by a class struggle perspective, in which the actions of the state are seen as the outcome of class struggle, for the state is not fully ‘determined’ by the needs of capital but rather is conceived as being relatively autonomous. Thus welfare policies are seen as the net outcome of conflict between the needs of capital and demands of the working class. The precise articulation of these two elements varies and may be combined with other elements such as the decisions of a “class conscious political directorate” within the state machine.

Saville (1957) argues that ‘the welfare state, through social democratic principles, has come about as a result of the interaction of three main factors: (1) the struggle of the working class against their exploitation; (2) the requirements of industrial capitalism for ... a highly productive labour force; (3) recognition by the property owners of the price that has to be paid for political security’. Most Marxist accounts of the welfare state and social democratic theory, their structural emphasis notwithstanding, see the working class as a central actor.

The Marxist notion of 'the working class' is an abstraction which conceals a diversity of experiences and interests within the class. Of particular historical importance has been a division between the labour movement and the unorganized residuum. Here too it has to be recognized that the labour movement is really a metaphor, and cannot be treated as a single unified entity. Furthermore the class has historically been divided along lines of race and gender. This fractioning and diversity have major implications for the form of class struggle. For the class as such does not enter into struggle— class struggle usually involves sections of the class pursuing their particular interest. This sectionalism which serves to reproduce intra-class divisions, is the material basis of reformism, and is reflected in state welfare provision. Any analysis of class struggle and the welfare state must take into account the relationship between 'class' and 'popular-democratic' struggles. These points indicate the directions to be taken for a proper understanding of the role of class struggle in the development of state welfare.

In the Scandinavian context reference to 'working class pressure' too is an abstraction, since the labour movement as such did not enter into class struggle, while struggles almost always involved specific sections of that class. The point concerning the need to examine the relationship between 'class struggle' and what may be termed 'popular-democratic' struggles will be examined further in the context of Scandinavian model.

**Working Class Campaigns:** Since in Scandinavian countries 'class struggles' does not involve any class as a whole, it becomes questionable whether these struggles, be they against capital or have as their object the state, are necessarily in the interest of the whole working class or to promote consciousness of class interests. They may nevertheless involve only sectoral aims and competition among sub-groups of the class, thus serving to reproduce the divisions referred to earlier. Far from the struggle promoting a consciousness of collective class interests, the pursuit of sectoral interests provides the material basis of reformism, the pursuit of piecemeal reforms within the existing system. As Hall (1982)

comments, the fractioning of the class 'has helped to sustain the reformism and economism of the labour movement by stimulating competition between different sections of the class, turning it inward into compromise and negotiation within the class.' The way in which working class struggle has been involved in the pursuit of perceived sectoral interests at the expense of the interests of significant sections of the class is particularly evident in the support shown for racist and sexist assumptions and practices in Scandinavian countries.

It is argued, however, than an analysis of intra-class division and the way it is reflected in class struggle is necessary for a complete understanding of the state's welfare activities. In other words, it is argued against a tendency within 'functional' or 'structural' accounts to explain the state's activities in terms of conscious strategies and initiatives on the part of the capitalist class and to downgrade the specific form of working class pressure (Wetherly, 1988). In this view, the welfare state is seen primarily in terms of a response to 'working class pressure' with the state and the capitalist class as central actors. For example, Ginsburg (1979) argues that 'in many examples of welfare reform... conscious initiative has been made by the bourgeoisie in order to forestall and contain the potential or veiled threat to capital... which the working class inevitably represents'.

In other words, in this explanatory agenda, working class pressure is important but plays an essentially secondary role. The problem is that in taking working class pressure as given, failing to analyse the form of agency, and by focussing instead on the response of capital and the state, there is danger of seeing the form of state welfare purely in terms of the strategic actions of the ruling class and failing to see how it is rooted too in working class reformism.

**Class Struggle and Popular Democratic Struggles:** The trade unions, as organizations of the working class, are the main organs through which the class exerts pressure on the state and influences society. The point to

note here is that it is not solely, or even mainly, class organizations which are active in the field of welfare provision. Indeed it could be argued that, historically, it is the relative absence of trade unions from this field that has a parallel in the plethora of pressure groups that press demands for welfare reform upon the state and which together constitute the 'welfare lobby'. As Ginsburg (1979) notes, 'a political space has developed in the area of welfare in which pressure groups and interest groups of a great variety of social and political complexions bargain over small-scale reforms'. The development of these groups largely mirrors the expansion of state welfare to the point where the state, through its welfare activities, generates sites of resistance or struggles for reform around which campaigns and pressure groups emerge.

These groups, then, are neither generated by nor arise directly from, class relations of production. Nor do they form around the capital-labour division in society but are based on counterpoising the 'state' and the 'people'. For this reason they may, for ease of understanding, be grouped under 'popular-democratic' struggles as they involve various categories of people organized around demands for restricting the activities of the state.

In the Scandinavian perspective this poses the important problem of the relationship between 'class struggle' and 'popular democratic struggles'. It should be noted that the two can neither be radically separated from, nor collapsed into, one another. Separation is not possible, firstly, since 'class' and 'the people' do not represent distinct or discrete groups. For example, individuals could be organized in trade unions as well as be active in welfare campaigns. In other words, individuals are situated simultaneously along both the capital-labour and state-people axes of division in society so that their interests are structured around both class and popular democratic issues.

Secondly, a radical separation of class and popular-democratic struggle is unfeasible since the actions of the state are not simply determined by the people but are, in part if not predominantly, responses

to the needs of capital and therefore as determined by the class relations of production.

Nevertheless, despite any relationship of popular-democratic struggles to class division, the two do not collapse into one. The pressure groups and campaigns which make up the 'welfare lobby' in Scandinavian countries have diverse social composition and political complexion. They are not working class organizations and embrace different classes and social strata which cannot necessarily be associated with the working class or labour movement.

### **The case of Sri Lanka**

Several Third World Marxists assert that the national struggle is a matter of class struggle. While it is true that, over the past century, the development of the national question in Sri Lanka has been based on contradictions between the ethnic majority and minority, what has escaped the attention of many is that class issues underlie the development of the national question. Failure to recognise the central feature that the political forces that champion the cause of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism have been the representatives of the ruling classes with a feudal-capitalist lineage blinds one to the class relationships inherent in the national question. The class content that forms the essence of the national question could be understood only through an analysis of the objective realities of the Sri Lankan social structure (Imayavaramban, 1988).

The Sri Lankan national question cannot be approached in a superficial and detached manner or be based on subjective desire, ignoring objective reality. The breadth and depth of the national question need to be assessed by considering the historical circumstances in which the seeds of national conflict were sown and nurtured before as well as after formal independence in 1948. It is thus that the historical role of the nationalities and classes, their relationships and contradictions could be understood (Imayavaramban, 2007).

To review the development of the political history of Sri Lanka or to examine the current political situation is not possible without considering class. Class considerations have continued to be important among the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities. Hierarchical differences between the propertied and un-propertied, the exploiting and exploited, and the ruling and ruled classes persist so that class identity cannot be easily ignored. Pompous utterances about democracy, people's era, free elections and the possibility for anyone to be elected to parliament fail to defy the unwritten rule in Sri Lankan politics that, for one to reach the top in the bourgeois parliamentary democratic government, one has to be in 'high' position by class, nationality, race and religion. Considerations of class, nationality, race and religion and feudal social values have been decisive in determining the endurance of the political leadership of the ruling classes.

It is from among the feudal elite that the Sinhalese capitalist class emerged to develop into comprador bourgeoisie, national bourgeoisie and big bourgeoisie. This development was invariably guided, in theory and in practice, by feudal ideology and hindered the democratisation of society. Bourgeois parliamentary democracy and the electoral system were mere façades that if at all blocked the implementation of broad democratic practices. Instead, the descendants of the afore-mentioned caste and class based ruling elites extended their respective dominant positions into parliamentary democracy.

In the context of democracy in Sri Lanka, the class divide has been the dominant force and working class struggles have at their most effective been uprisings rather than rebellions or 'popular struggles' as in Scandinavia. Thus it is important to understand the sharp difference between Sri Lanka and Scandinavia in the matter of class struggle.

### **Relevance of the Scandinavian model to Sri Lanka**

Let us now turn to the important question of applicability of the Scandinavian model to Sri Lanka. When we seek to apply a model that

has served one country well to another country, it is useful to know the current status of the model to be applied. A brief review of the current status of the Scandinavian model is thus necessary to assess the prospects for its application elsewhere. Attention needs to be paid to two major developments: firstly the effect of globalisation and secondly the demographic changes in Scandinavia.

**The Effect of Globalisation in Scandinavia:** There is ample evidence of the impact of globalization. Abandoning of capital controls has reduced the macroeconomic repertoire of domestic governments. Increased mobility has affected the incentive for capital to participate in corporatist arrangements, making 'exit' a less costly option. Tax regimes have become flatter and less progressive. The capacity to operate across borders has further empowered multi-national corporations. The need to attract and retain foreign investment has become an important consideration to the national treasuries. However, globalisation has not been a 'pure loss' for social democratic forces.

It is true that the end of the Breton Woods era led to an epoch of completely unregulated international finance and trade. Indeed, in many ways, the terrain of 'global governance' is now more crowded and 'enmeshed' than ever. The World Bank, the IMF, the GATT, WTO, the meetings of the G7 (G8 for a while), large corporations and a wide range of international NGOs are all a part of this process. Critics draw attention to the neo-liberal agenda of these organizations and their power to dictate terms to impoverished nations (a function which imperialist states alone performed earlier). But a sub-theme is that the global economic order is certainly subject to rules and regulations and, within limits, to co-ordination while the global economy has heightened inequality and forecloses on the options of the disadvantaged social classes as well as nations. It is true that globalisation matters and has in many ways made life particularly hard in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century for social democrats, notably in Scandinavia. It has forced social democracy to abandon its traditional garb of egalitarianism to compromise social justice to economic efficiency.

**Demographic change in Scandinavia:** Demographic change presents all developed states (especially social democracies) with a range of serious challenges and even unenviable choices. The intensity and urgency of the challenge vary and may, in most instances, be addressed through a process of measured incremental reform. The issue before us is whether demographic change poses a more acute problem for social democratic politics than for their centrist and the rightist rivals. Is there a special 'premium' or 'penalty' to pay for addressing issues of demographic change within the framework of social democracy? Much depends on where the perimeter of a social democratic politics is drawn. New Social Democracy relies on the rejection of much of what it calls 'old-style' social democracy. This includes the reconfiguration of *equality as inclusion*, now seen as a principle that concerns not the redistribution of wealth but rather attachment to 'the social mainstream' (Giddens, 1998).

Giddens makes similarly accommodating moves to downplay the role of the state, redistribution (at least of resources rather than opportunities) and public provision. Is such a reformulation the only way to salvage social democracy is from itself, for itself?

Whoever governs, the challenges are profound and unavoidable. At the same time, its severity varies considerably between states. Given the generally incremental nature of the policy changes that are likely to be introduced (as in the most costly area of pensions) and the differences in existing regime types, both urgency of the reform agenda and the institutional structure of the ensuing reforms are likely to show considerable international variation. Even with real and sustained policy convergence, there will be a range of differing policy regimes. Would these regimes be 'less' social democratic than those before them? Thus, there is no *prima facie* case to argue that the only way for social democratic politics to survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is by redefining its goals to coincide with those of the leading institutions of global economic governance.

A more serious challenge is likely to arise in the long term from the interaction of the consequences of ageing and ecological limits to growth. These could be among major issues which will determine the political trajectory of the social democracy in Scandinavia. Among the many ways in which Sri Lanka and Scandinavian countries differ, three stand out in the context of contrasting backgrounds and the ground reality.

**1. Nature of ethnic composition:** Scandinavian countries are each effectively mono-ethnic, with minorities in very small number, and there is no imminent ethnic divide of significance. This has considerably facilitated social change these countries. Even on question of religion, religion has not been an issue when the social democratic process was in place. Thus, building a society with social democratic norms as the backbone of the social system was easy for the advocates of social democracy.

Sri Lanka on the other hand is multi-ethnic: Sinhalese 73.9%, Sri Lankan Tamils 12.7%, Indian Tamils 5.7%, Muslims 6.9% and others 0.8%, according to census figures for 1981. The distribution by religion is: Buddhists 69.3%, Hindus 16.4%, Muslims 7.1%, Roman Catholics 6.9%, various protestant Christians 0.7%, and other religions 0.1%. Ethnic and religious identity has played an increasingly important role in the making of the Sri Lankan polity. The social democratic project is likely to face considerable resistance because of the difficulty in persuading the population to transcend ethnic and religious considerations in the interest of social justice. The class factor too will play a strong role, with the capitalist classes, who are beneficiaries of a capitalist system subservient to imperialism, seeking to undermine the project to safeguard their class interests.

**2. Economic stability:** In Scandinavia, discovery of rich oil resources contributed to a strong economy in Norway while Denmark & Sweden benefited from heavy industry. The fishing industry helped all three countries in a big way. The availability of resources and the ability to convince the population and implement the social democratic agenda

enabled simultaneous democratisation of society and providing of welfare.

The open economic policy pursued in Sri Lanka since 1978 contributed to the decay of the national economy and widened the gap between the rich and the poor. The rich strengthened themselves economically and politically by tightening their grip over political power by every accessible means. The failure of the open economy to help national economic development is a major explanatory factor for the socio-political downturn. The specific characteristics of the social, institutional and political structures of Sri Lanka ensured that whatever the potential gains that the recent transition was said to offer did not materialise, and determined the way in which the proposed reforms were imagined and implemented.

One should note in particular the long history of patronage that moulded Sri Lankan economy and politics, and of the strength of the strong religious, ethnic and class divisions that have been essential organising principles in Sri Lankan politics (Senthivel, 2007). It took a package comprising economic liberalisation, a new constitution with an executive presidency, and a calculated attack on the checks and balances of a democratic society to set the country on a path of socio-political decay within two decades. Once set on this path, economic reforms produced outcomes that were not just unexpected but altogether undesirable, and served to accelerate and reinforce the steady downward spiral.

**3. Geographic location:** The geographic location of Scandinavia somewhat isolated the region from power rivalries in Europe in the era of imperialist upsurge so that, except for Nazi invasion during the Second World War. Again, the suffering during this invasion was considerably less than in the rest of Europe partly due to the rather pliant attitude of the regimes towards the Nazis invaders. This isolation has also meant some degree of economic isolation.

Sri Lanka, first colonised in 1505, remained colonised until 1948. The colonial rule stretching over 443 years— although not in the entire island until after the British subdued the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815 —had a powerful impact on the country. Again unlike India which had to fight bitterly for its independence, Sri Lanka was granted independence by the colonial regime to ensure that the country was ruled by a loyal elite group; and the class and communal divide which matured from the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was already sharp. Also, Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean just to the south of India has made it a bone of contention for any power seeking hegemony in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Key bidders were India and the US followed by competing interests of China, Pakistan and Russia (far less than in the Brezhnev era of the Soviet Union) arising from a desire to pre-empt domination by their rivals. The aggravation of ethnic conflict in the island suited some interests, India especially, which hoped to gain through intervention in the country has since around 1980 been a powerful influence in Sri Lankan affairs.

**Concluding Remarks:** The 1993 Nobel laureate for Economic Sciences, Douglass North observed in his Nobel lecture that "...transferring the formal political and economic rules of successful Western economies to Third World or Eastern European economies is not a sufficient condition for good economic performance. Privatization is not a panacea for poor economic performance".

We could go a step further in the light of Sri Lankan experience to add that not only are they insufficient to ensure good economic performance but, in specific settings, they may be implemented in ways that yield little short of social and economic disaster. The Sri Lankan experience asserts that much more than purely techno-bureaucratic policy solutions and programmes are needed. Reform programmes, to have broad-based success, should not only address fundamental economic issues but also be tailored to suit specific institutional settings. Where major class, ethnic or religious fault lines exist, the process needs careful management, with

policies sensitive to multi-faceted distributional issues, and taking into account predictable responses of different actors; trade-offs are inevitable to maintain social cohesiveness.

But to realise this sustainably and effectively, there must be mutually independent political and legal institutions with adequate checks and balances to protect democratic freedom. The revival of the economy and the reinvigoration of society require an immediate political response. Nothing seems more pressing in Sri Lanka than the immediate abolition of the executive presidency as the essential first step along a long and difficult journey towards a prosperous economy with social harmony and a vibrant democracy.

Application of the Scandinavian model of democracy in full or part to Sri Lanka faces serious challenges as discussed; and perhaps, a mass uprising of some kind may be needed to show the way forward for social democracy. Given the complexity and sensitivity of the economic and national problems in Sri Lanka, social democracy cannot be the first step in the process of solving them. This suggests that the Scandinavian model of Social Democracy, despite its many attractive features, cannot be emulated fully or partly as a means to solve the problems faced by Sri Lanka, whose primary need is to secure a form of popular democracy. The Scandinavian model, however, could be a model to emulate in the long run, after the obstacles and hostilities by way of class conflict and identity-based prejudice are overcome.

The existing system of government in Sri Lanka has exhausted its potential to provide valid solutions to the country's problems; the classes that presided over it have no alternative to offer but a more repressive and authoritarian form of regime (Deshabakthan, 2006). Thus Sri Lanka has a pressing need for transfer of power from the ruling elite to the true representatives of the people. This means a major shift in the role of the state and its exercise of power.

Today, a political climate prevails in which the vast majority directly confront the oppressive ruling classes. Given the alignment of forces

nationally and internationally, the fundamental social change necessary to resolve that conflict demands fresh popular mobilization and the emergence of a radical political leadership that could unite the oppressed across ethnic, religious and other boundaries including class.

Those who endorse mass uprisings as the path need to recognise new meanings, new forms and new workings for mass struggle for social change, and the imagination to develop programmes for an alternative economic defence, actions to isolate the oppressor, and a culture that integrates struggle with the lives and livelihood of the people. Mass uprisings cannot be enforced, and struggles do not transform into mass uprisings through announcements and appeals. Mass spontaneity must link to political organization and be cautious that violence is not an end in itself, even when armed struggle is inevitable. Mass uprisings need to be guided by democratic principles and be accommodative of ethnic and ideological differences for the process of struggle too serve as training ground for participants to rebuild society as a true democracy aspiring to the goals of social democracy as obtaining in societies with less complex social structures and greater economic resources.

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## **Imperialism Strikes Back**

# **The Rise of Latin America Reaction**

### **The Counterrevolutionary Build-up**

Venezuela and Brazil are current scenes of a new form of coup d'état designed to restore South America to its worst post-WW2 years in the 1960's, when US imperialism used loyalists in the military establishment to decide who rules the country. Although times have changed since the US-backed brutal military coup in Chile deposed Salvador Allende in 1973, military methods persisted.

The US waged a proxy war against the Sandinista government of Nicaragua between 1979 and 1990 using the notorious Contras who subjected the country to eleven years of terror until the US had its way, but at tremendous cost to the country. The Sandinistas, however, returned to power in 2006. In El Salvador, during the 12-year long civil war from 1980 to 1992, US military personnel and the CIA collaborated with killer squads of the repressive regime. Grenada, a small island in the Caribbean, was punished in 1983 for being friendly towards Cuba: US troops invaded Grenada and toppled the government of Maurice Bishop. The overthrow in 1989 of the once US favourite and informant, and well known drug trafficker, Manuel Noriega of Panama was overkill against a dictator without means to defend.

Haiti saw some of the clumsiest US meddling in the Caribbean. Highly undemocratic means were used to prevent the return to power of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a popular politician known for his advocacy of Liberation Theology. The US orchestrated a coup against Aristide in 2004 and then the US military kidnapped him. The Obama regime ensured

that Aristide did not return to Haiti until after presidential elections in 2011, in which his party was forbidden to contest. Haiti's relations with Cuba picked up fast from 1998 when Cuba— then without diplomatic relations with Haiti —came to the rescue of the hurricane disaster struck Haiti. However, the US took advantage of the disastrous earthquake of January 2010 to place Haiti under effective US control with Michel Martelly as the US approved President from 2011 to 2016.

The US bid to militarily topple President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela in 2002 failed miserably. The failure, besides making Chavez a bitter enemy, also diplomatically weakened the US in Latin America. The next US adventure in Latin America was in Honduras. Manuel Zelaya of the then centre-right Partido Liberal, elected President in 2006, was inspired by political changes in South America, especially Venezuela, and sought in 2008 to join the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) an inter-state organization of Latin America and the Caribbean, initiated in 2004 by Cuba and Venezuela and with a current membership of eleven, predominantly Caribbean, countries. Zelaya was punished in 2009 by removal from power by a military coup which the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean denounced. Although there was no evidence of a direct US role, Martin Andersen asserted in his article "Unpunished U.S. Southern Command role in '09 Honduran military coup" [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009\\_Honduran\\_coup\\_d%27%C3%A9tat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009_Honduran_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat)] that senior officials at US Southern Command actively supported the coup; and more recently Mark Weisbrot produced evidence Hilary Clinton, when she was US Secretary of State, acted to prevent the return of Manuel Zelaya [<http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/9/hillary-clinton-honduraslatinamericaforeignpolicy.html>].

The next successful US bid for change regime in South America was the constitutional coup in Paraguay in June 2012, where the Senate impeached left-of-centre President Fernando Lugo; his removal from office was then affirmed by the Supreme Court.

Although the US was most keen on a regime change in Venezuela, which will be discussed in more detail later in the article, regime change in Argentina came about much sooner than expected. Peter Koenig [<http://www.globalresearch.ca/argentina-a-quiet-neoliberal-coup-detat-in-latin-americas-southern-cone/5492654>] argues that Daniel Scioli, incumbent Governor of Buenos Aires Province, of the ruling Front for Victory Party who led his opponent Mauricio Macri, the neoliberal multi-billionaire Mayor of Buenos Aires of the right-wing Cambiemos Party by an impressive 13.6% margin three months before the election was cheated of victory by foul means. James Petras [<http://www.globalresearch.ca/argentina-the-end-of-post-neoliberalism-and-the-rise-of-the-hard-right/5509379>] predicted that there will be a rapid reversal of policies by the new regime to suit the neoliberal agenda.

It was against this background that moves for a regime change in Brazil gathered momentum.

## **Brazil**

The Brazilian right achieved on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2016 its aim of ending 13 years of left-wing governance, something which it may not easily achieve by the electoral process. This outcome of a process that started with Eduardo Cunha, then President of the Chamber of Deputies, agreeing to launch impeachment proceedings against Dilma Rousseff was virtually a foregone conclusion when the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB), a centrist Brazilian Christian Democratic partner of the ruling coalition announced its departure, making President Rousseff vulnerable to an impeachment vote.

What followed was a formality, after the PMDB joined the Brazilian right to bring down President Rousseff irrespectively of whether she was guilty or not of the charges against her or if the charges were adequate to impeach her as President. Events moved fast. It took less than 11 months since the country's Federal Accounting Tribunal called into question the budgetary accounting of President's Rousseff's government in 2014 until

her removal as President of Brazil. Dilma Rousseff in fact remains one of the few political leaders not tainted by financial scandal. The case for impeachment was irregularities in the calculation of the state budget, with some payments delayed, in order not to transgress the limits of the approved budget— a method routinely used by most Brazilian governments.

It was a creditable feat for the two houses of parliament packed with politicians with serious records of crime and corruption. The suspension by the Supreme Court on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2015 of the special commission elected by secret vote by the Chamber of Deputies to debate Rousseff's impeachment and its nullification by the Supreme Court on 17<sup>th</sup> December were irrelevant to the impeachment process that was set in motion. The Chamber of Deputies then elected by open vote a new commission, two-third of whose members were implicated in various crimes.

She appointed former president Lula da Silva as her chief of staff on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016, partly to protect him from political harassment by the opposition since, as a minister, he would have immunity and could only be tried by the Supreme Court in matters pertaining to the long ongoing corruption on a massive scale in the state-oil company Petrobras (the "Car Wash" investigation) was interpreted as a move to pervert the course of justice and public opinion was mobilized against Rousseff.

Things went according to plan, and Michel Temer— a right-wing member of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, Vice President since 2011 and Acting President from 12 May 2016 —was sworn in on 31<sup>st</sup> August. But the public view of Temer's government was far from what the conspirators wished for. Several members of Temer's cabinet were then under investigation in the Petrobras probe, and his government was much embarrassed by the resignation of three key ministers in quick succession: Planning Minister Romero Jucá on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, followed by Transparency and Anti-Corruption Minister Fabiano Silveira resigned on

31<sup>st</sup> May and Tourism Minister Henrique Alves on 16<sup>th</sup> June, all in connection with financial scandals linked with Petrobras.

In Early June the newspaper O Globo reported that Brazil's Prosecutor General Rodrigo Janot sought the arrests of the Leader of the Senate and other senior ruling party politicians for allegedly trying to obstruct a two-year-old investigation into political kickbacks on Petrobras contracts. Those targeted were Senate President Renan Calheiros, Senator Romero Jucá, the president of the ruling PMDB, former Brazilian President José Sarney and the suspended speaker of the lower house of Congress, Eduardo Cunha, who was heavily compromised in the Petrobras scandal and played a central role in the impeachment process. He was suspended as President of the Lower House by a Supreme Court judge in May 2016, indicted by Brazil's Supreme Court on 24<sup>th</sup> June and resigned in shame on 7<sup>th</sup> July. It was thus unsurprising that Acting President Temer, already implicated in serious allegations of corruption including bribery and barred from standing in another election, was loudly booed by the Brazilian crowds at the opening ceremonies of the Rio Olympics in August 2016.

As moves to impeach Rousseff gathered momentum, public support for her revived fast since the public realized that she had not committed any financial crime. She defended her conduct well and insisted that her impeachment had no legal basis and that her removal from office would constitute a coup that will open the way for politically motivated removal of democratically elected persons from office. Legal campaign by her supporters persuaded the Supreme Court to rule that there should be separate votes to decide her removal as President for irregular accounting procedure designed to conceal the nation's mounting economic problems and another to decide if she should be banned from public office for eight years. Her opponents in the Senate, despite an overall majority hostile to her, mobilized adequate majority only for the first part of the vote.

Many Western analysts who concede that Rousseff's removal was a farcical parliamentary coup avoid saying that the coup was plotted by

conspirators at both home and abroad. Michel Chossudovsky in his article "Wall Street Behind Brazil Coup d'Etat: The Impeachment of Dilma Rousseff" in *Global Research* asserts that her impeachment was ordered by Wall Street. [<http://www.globalresearch.ca/wall-street-behind-brazil-coup-d-etat/5526715>]. Also see highlighted item on page 50.

News analysis in teleSUR titled "Russia Blames 'Foreign Interference' for Brazil Coup" [<http://www.telesurto.net/english/news/Russia-Blames-Foreign-Interference-for-Brazil-Coup-20160512-0026.html>] indicates a strong US role in the conspiracy to remove Rousseff, while mainstream Western media would either blame Rousseff for her downfall or interpret the coup in terms of internal rivalries and attempts by politicians to escape corruption charges.

The Russian state media explained US motivation to encourage the constitutional coup in terms of Rousseff's signing the agreement to establish the (BRICS) New Development Bank; the prospect of her support for a new world reserve currency besides the threat BRICS poses to the U.S. dollar; the initiation of the 5,600 km long fibre-optic telecommunications system across the Atlantic in October 2014, which would protect against foreign espionage as well as undermine the US-backed communications monopolies; blocking the return of major US oil and mining companies to Brazil and instead looking to China for investment. It was also suggested that the CIA used subordinate media in its propaganda war against Rousseff.

Rousseff, in an interview with teleSUR, however, rejected US involvement in her country's political crisis, amid reports that opposition figures met in Washington in the days leading up to the coup.

Rousseff has commendably stood up to her enemies and at every stage declared her intention to fight back. Alongside the coup, a broad coalition called the Popular Front emerged in defence of democracy and against impeachment. It comprised progressive parties ranging from the social democratic Workers Party (PT) to the far left Party of Socialism and

Freedom (PSOL), the unions, the peasant and other social movements. Notably, this popular coalition is also critical of the neoliberal policies of the Rousseff government, and demands a radical change of orientation.

Dilma Rousseff although she ran a somewhat leftist campaign, as soon as elected she took a series of measures following a clear economic neoliberal agenda. In the context of economic crisis, inflation and recession, more and more concessions were made to the banks, to financial capital, and to the big landowners, whose main leader was nominated to be Minister of Agriculture. What should be noted is that Rousseff, although seemingly more left oriented than her predecessor Lula da Silva, was incapable of breaking the mould to act in firm defiance of imperialism.

She is not solely responsible for the economic policies that hurt her politically and made room for a corrupt parliament to vote her out of office, however unjustly. She inherited them from her predecessor who still holds sway in the PT which, along with its leader Lula da Silva, had drifted far from its militant stand against imperialism and its allies. Once in power, President Lula da Silva combined economic liberalization with revitalizing bourgeois democracy: his 'Third Way' ideology facilitated a market-led, imperial-centred model of capital accumulation. His embrace of free market-IMF structural adjustment policies simply disembowelled his agrarian reform policies and led to a rise in unemployment, decline in real wages, slashing of pension benefits and negative per capita economic growth, part of which was amid the brewing crisis of US-European capitalism.

The events in Brazil remind us that there is no middle path in a world dominated by imperialism, which will not take any more kindly to the slightest deviation from the line laid down by it than it would to outright defiance. Imperialism is in fact better placed to dominate over or topple at will regimes that are willing to accommodate imperialist demands.

The PT got close to a self-criticism only after Rousseff was cornered by the Brazilian right; and seems to have, rather belatedly, relearned the old

axiom that the main political instrument of the left is social mobilization, in which the working class takes into its own hands the helm of society and State. (<http://www.revleft.com/vb/threads/195556-Overthrowing-Dilma-Rousseff-Brazil-It%E2%80%99s-Class-War-and-Their-Class-is-Winning>)

The question remains as to why it took so long for the PT to rediscover class and class struggle. The PT is alone in this matter. It has been a common failing among left parties which were elected to power either alone or as a dominant partner in coalition government like in Nepal, several Latin American countries, and in the states of Kerala and West Bengal in India, or even as junior partner in a ruling alliance as in Sri Lanka in the 1970's, where the left suffered an illusion of lasting power and forgot the potential of the enemy to return with a vengeance.

The coup against Rousseff has its positive side. The plotters are too unpopular for the coup regime to retain power by fair elections, despite the weakness of the Brazilian left. The Popular Front coalition formed in defence of democracy and against impeachment comprising left and progressive parties, the unions, peasant and movements and other social activists has done much to educate the public about the coup and mobilize public support for Rousseff. But more is needed from the alliance since the defeat of a right, well entrenched in power and backed by US imperialism, will not be easy.

The future of Brazil hangs in the balance and choices are narrow. The left needs to mobilize as a mass movement with a clear anti-imperialist program to isolate imperialism and its big bourgeois allies in Brazil. Unity based on short-sighted parliamentary political goals lacks vision; and the broad left of Brazil, like the rest of South America needs to be weaned from the illusion that fundamental change is possible through the electoral process, an idea that was until recently encouraged by many left enthusiasts, based on the electoral success of the Left in South America, especially Venezuela.

## *Confession of a Conspirator*

### **As Brazil's New Ruler Admits Lie Behind Impeachment, US Press Closes Eyes**

In a September 22 speech to an elite foreign policy group in New York City, Brazil's legislatively installed president, Michel Temer, made the startling admission that President Dilma Rousseff was removed from office because of her position on economic policy, rather than any alleged wrongdoing on her part.

Speaking to the Americas Society/Council of the Americas, a group of "opinion leaders" and corporate executives with interests in Latin America, Temer said, as translated by The Intercept (9<sup>th</sup> September 2016):

And many months ago, while I was still vice president, we released a document named "A Bridge to the Future" because we knew it would be impossible for the government to continue on that course. We suggested that the government should adopt the theses presented in that document called "A Bridge to the Future." But, as that did not work out, the plan wasn't adopted and a process was established which culminated with me being installed as president of the republic.

The Intercept's Inacio Vieira notes that the economic plan that Rousseff refused to implement called for widespread cuts to social programs and privatization, a radically different agenda from the one approved by the 54.5 million Brazilian voters who gave Rousseff's Workers' Party its fourth electoral victory in 2014.

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/brazils-new-president-michel-temer-confesses-the-lies-and-fraud-behind-the-impeachment-us-press-closes-eyes/5548677>

<http://fair.org/home/as-brazils-new-ruler-admits-lie-behind-impeachment-us-press-closes-eyes/>

## Venezuela

The US and its minions in Venezuela tried all manner of tricks to bring down the regime of Hugo Chavez, but were outwitted at every turn by the charismatic Chavez. The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) founded in 2007 had very strong electoral support until 2015 when it lost its parliamentary majority.

Among important internal factors that weakened the PSUV were its over reliance on public admiration for Chavez and the failure to politicize the masses. Also, the much needed welfare measures in education, health, poverty alleviation and social security that benefitted the vast majority were mainly funded by the massive income from petroleum export, boosted by the high price of oil which lasted until a financial crisis shook the US and Europe in 2009. Chavez also used the oil income to boost anti-imperialism in the region. Diversification of the economy was, however, slow to realize and the rapid fall in oil prices after 2009 initially slowed down economic progress and soon led to economic recession in a society where the steady rise in living standards led to greater consumer expectation. There were besides, corruption which was endemic to Venezuela and a rising crime rate aggravated by criminal gangs from neighbouring Colombia and encouraged by the political opposition.

Conditions for destabilization matured amid deepening economic recession, double digit inflation, falling living standards and weakening political support owing to the global economic slowdown combined with falling oil prices. Economic sabotage by hoarders and cross-border smuggling of goods into Colombia combined to cause real as well as artificial shortages of essential goods; and criminal elements acting in collaboration with the opposition aggravated social violence.

There was also vicious manipulation by the US and global bankers to force a collapse of the Venezuelan currency, the Bolivar, its net effect being an escalation of the cost of imports and domestic inflation, and thus a fall in real income especially of low income groups. The resultant crisis comprising the collapse of the currency, inflation, recession and flight of

capital, led to a vicious cycle of general economic collapse, for which the PSUV government is blamed although the sources were elsewhere. It was against this background that the opposition attempted to overthrow the Maduro government.

The US and its clients in Venezuela who during the years of Chavez unsuccessfully resorted to political violence, all out media warfare, economic sabotage and military coups saw their opportunity in the aftermath of the death of Chavez in 2013. Imperialism scented blood in the slim electoral majority with which Chavez's hand-picked successor Nicolas Maduro was elected in 2014, and went in hot pursuit. It urged the opposition to act to bring down Maduro through destabilizing the government on several fronts.

In February 2014, the US opted for a confrontation and backed a most violent extra parliamentary opposition led by Leopoldo Lopez, which openly called for a coup and resorted to extreme violence which killed 43 people, injured 870 and inflicted immense economic damage on public property. The government took two months to overcome the terrorism. The detained perpetrators of terror were hailed as "political prisoners" by the US government, its 'human rights' outfits and mass media.

Maduro government's lack of control over foreign funding of local organizations allowed the US to channel through the notorious National Endowment for Democracy tens of millions of dollars to all manner of organizations and individuals who were amenable to the civilian-military coup slated for 12<sup>th</sup> February 2015, but thwarted by military intelligence and resistance by lower level loyalist soldiers.

Amid the economic dislocation in Venezuela, money seeped through various channels to the opposition parties and their politicians, already well funded by US-assisted NGOs and agencies for political intrigue. The opposition, having gained control of the national assembly in December 2015, has been in a hurry to remove Maduro from power well before the end of his term in 2018. It planned to remove Maduro from power constitutionally by forcing a recall referendum, failing which it would

make it impossible for him to govern. However, unless achieved by 2016, a recall will not lead to fresh elections but to the Vice President succeeding as President, leaving destabilization as the sole option.

The strength of the Maduro government is its legacy of nearly 15 years of progressive measures that socially and economically benefitted the majority and the rise of community-based grass-roots democracy. Thus, despite severe economic hardships since 2013, forty percent of the electorate backed the PSUV in the last elections, and can be counted on to support government efforts to reverse the economic decline.

So far the Maduro government has successfully overcome offensives by US proxies. More recently Maduro has kept the coup makers at bay by resorting to firm security measures and the use of competent intelligence. He minimized the role of the US embassy in internal matters and hence its subversive potential by trimming US diplomatic staff from 100 to 17 to match Venezuela's staff in Washington. Such measures can, however, have only a short-term effect as the enemies can reorganize and adopt fresh strategies.

The government can achieve real and lasting strength only by addressing the deep, fundamental issues of the Venezuelan economy and state. Venezuela has to learn important economic and political lessons from its negative experience of the past decade.

A Venezuelan economy based on a petroleum export is unreliable, as it depends on a market dominated by the US and its allies. The consumer economy based on oil revenue has proven to be unsustainable as well as politically disastrous. Thus, national defence in the medium and long term against the imperialist offensive demands a self-sufficient economy, based on strong local production free of bureaucratic control.

US intervention and destabilization comprise a serious external threat. But the bigger threat is internal and comes from a sizeable section of the political and bureaucratic elite. These forces have already hampered the implementation of major projects by deviating from plans. It was such

social groups that played a key role in undermining socialism in the USSR and China to become the new capitalists who exercised direct control over the state. It requires strategic planning and informed mass involvement to stop the rot; and most importantly a long term view of the economy and proactive economic planning.

It is necessary and correct to arrest and punish anti-government conspirators, individually and collectively. But conspirators breed like vermin; and breeding grounds exist at home and abroad. Thus, it is most important to control the conditions that enable their proliferation.

Thus what Venezuela needs is social as well as economic mobilization to sustain itself during the critical next two years and to steer the economy along a stable and sustainable route in subsequent years, which means replacing a consumerist economy with one primarily based on production to meet the needs of the toiling masses.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Reaction secured a marginal electoral victory in Argentina in 2015; and the reactionary regime of Mauricio Macri lost no time to reverse every meaningful gain for the ordinary people under the left-of-centre governments of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner from 2003 to 2015. Macri, who has moved aggressively to the right, rules by decree, bypassing the left-dominated legislature. He devalued the peso by 40% hoping to increase exports but also inducing inflation which will mainly hurt the poorer population. He has liberalized the financial sector by removing capital controls, lifted import restrictions, and waived taxes on mining to benefit foreign and local big business. He also ended subsidies for electricity and made redundant thousands of civil servants to add to the misery of a people suffering under an economic crisis. To the glee of Wall Street's vulture capitalists he also pledged to pay US\$4.6 billion to the US hedge funds, which held Argentina to ransom during its disastrous depression leading declaration of bankruptcy in 2001. [Source: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/latin-americas-revolution-under-attack/5526891>;

In May 2016 President Macri sent a military delegation to the US to sign a military cooperation agreement which entails the establishment of a US military base in Ushuaia on the southernmost tip of the Argentina. Among other matters reportedly discussed is the negotiation of another military base in Argentina's Misiones Province, located in the north-eastern corner of the country at the border between Paraguay and Brazil. [Source: <http://www.telesurto.net/english/news/Macri-Gives-Go-Ahead-to-US-Military-Installations-in-Argentina-20160518-0029.html>]

The moves are not surprising; and much more is due in the months and years to come. The only hope, with good reason, is that the people of Argentina have further matured politically since 2001-2003, when they unceremoniously disposed of a succession of reactionary rulers. Public opposition to Macri's 'reforms' is strong, with trade unions firmly resisting his anti-labour moves. But it takes more than protests, law suits and parliamentary political resistance to reverse the damage that Macri will inflict on Argentina during his tenure, unless terminated soon.

What is important about the turn of events in Argentina is that it is a sign of what awaits Brazil and more importantly Venezuela if reaction is allowed to have its way. All is not lost in Brazil yet, but a limited agenda like restoring Rousseff or returning PT to power will only postpone the evil day when reaction will return more strongly to dominate over a population which would have lost its will to fight by wasting its efforts on campaigns lacking a long-term view. Things are less gloomy on the Venezuela front, with the opposition retreating a little against a massive show of strength on the streets by government supporters on 1<sup>st</sup> September in contrast to a rather poor show by the opposition on the same day, despite weeks of preparation. But that does not mean that the Maduro government can take anything for granted or be complaisant, since the ominous regime change in Argentina and the ability of Colombian reactionaries to mobilize sufficient support to reject at a referendum held on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2016 the accord between the Government of Colombia and FARC revolutionaries brought about by the untiring

efforts of Cuba, with Norway as moderator, over four years to put an end to 52 years of conflict are not conducive to peace in Venezuela.

What happens in Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela in the coming months will be decisive for the future of Latin America. Events in Venezuela will be crucial since in the past decade the US has targeted the government of Venezuela more than any other in Latin America, not just because the US resents what has been achieved in Venezuela but more because of the inspiration that Venezuela has been to several countries in the region including Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua to openly defy US imperialism and others to at least occasionally stand up to the US.

Thus the US and its pro-business allies in the Venezuela National Assembly should be stopped well before they could repeat in Venezuela what the US–Macri alliance is implementing in Argentina. Besides the struggle for national survival within Venezuela, there is strong need for international solidarity with Venezuela; and all left, progressive and democratic forces should take a firm stand in support of Venezuela against imperialist meddling.

This is also the time for rethinking our understanding of global issues and the dangers of subjectivism. Those, including some Marxists, who called the process in Venezuela "Socialism of the 21st Century" should undergo an exercise in serious self-criticism, especially for promoting the illusion of a "peaceful path to socialism". Equally, revolutionary dogmatists who, besides their criticism of the Venezuelan project, refused to defend Venezuela against sustained US attack should realize their folly. There are lessons for all of us to learn.

Other sources: "Reactionary Tide in Latin America" by Michael Löwy [<https://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/4695>]; "US and Venezuela: Decades of Defeats and Destabilization" by James Petras [<http://www.globalresearch.ca/us-and-venezuela-decades-of-defeats-and-destabilization/5434884>]

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## **Plenary Address by Comrade Senthivel**

*[Text of the Plenary Address by Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2016, the final day of the Annual Plenary Session of the Party]*

None of the development programmes put forward by the “Good Governance” regime led by Maithripala Sirisena and Ranil Wickremesinghe to solve the array of rising economic crises faced by the government will lead to prosperity. Likewise, the constitution which is being drafted anew by the regime will not find an appropriate solution for the national question, which is the main contradiction facing the country. Anyone counting on such a solution will be spinning his wheels.

To invite foreign capital and investments for development programmes and to pompously sound off about goodwill between nationalities and a political solution are not to ensure that the country is made prosperous for the people to live free of problems but to reinforce the neo-colonial neoliberal economic programmes to thrust forward the imperialist globalization programme under the leadership of US imperialism. Ruling class forces had in the past, in collaboration with foreign imperialist and the regional hegemonic powers, transformed the national question into war for the same purpose.

It is the same forces that are today enacting a form of political theatre in the name of goodwill between communities. In this climate, chauvinist politics is being projected in the South in order to capture parliamentary political power. As a counter to it, initiative is afoot in the North to advance an imperious narrow nationalist agenda. It is right for the oppressed Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities to put forward just demands for their basic rights and to politically educate the

people and mobilize them with a long term view. But to promote politics of emotion without self-critical consideration of past policies and practices will again lead to wrong conclusions. While the imperious political forces will be able to build vote banks and thereby gain posts and positions by this approach, the people who remain in a sad plight will suffer further losses on top of uncompensated for past losses.

This does not mean that people should not mobilize or struggle against injustice but that just demands and correct struggles should include all people. That is, while national rights of Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people are justly put forward, the long-standing demands for the basic rights of workers should also be asserted. Caste-based hierarchical thinking among Tamils and its socio-economic ramifications need to be taken up to secure just solutions. Likewise, the demands of women who are oppressed by gender and are denied a place in society should be upheld.

At the same time, as much as foreign forces should not be allowed to meddle in the country's economic and political affairs there should be no foreign meddling in the national question. Appropriate policies should be adopted to avert the recurrence of the tragedy of the recent past when foreign meddling led to conflict, war and losses for the people.

It is in consideration of these issues that the Party endorses the concept of Progressive Nationalism as a political alternative to the anti-people identity politics of the past and present which has been identified with conservative reaction in the name of Tamil nationalism and promoted by foreign forces.

It is appropriate for all progressive, democratic and left forces to unite with progressive nationalism on the basis of a common programme to address the problems faced by the Tamil people and to encourage progressive Tamil nationalism to take an interest in matters affecting all oppressed people.

*[based on a press release by the NDMLP, dated 26<sup>th</sup> September 2016]*

## Let live the people of Sampur

S Don Bosco, Secretary, Mass Organization for Social Justice, Vavuniya District issued the following statement in his call to mobilize the public to join the awareness campaign: “The ancestral land grabbed from the people of Sampur should be returned to them. The plan to set up a thermal power station there should be abandoned in view of the grave environmental harm that it will cause. Through it, way should be made for the people of Sampur to live at ease.”

He further added that 505 acres of ancestral land of the people of Sampur in the Muthur region has been sequestered by the Government to enable an Indian company to set up a thermal power station. This land is endowed with fishery, agricultural and forest resources. It has 110 acres of paddy land, eight tanks and 41 settlements, and includes fishing areas and forests. The peasants, fishers, indigenous people and workers have lost their livelihood. Hence, to restore their lives their lands should be returned to them.

There is a risk, besides environmental warming, that the fly ash and high concentration of carbon dioxide that emanate from the coal thermal power station when it becomes functional will cause respiratory and other diseases. Consequently, a region extending 5 km from this area, in which 5000 families live, will be adversely affected and their lives will be under threat, with the prospect of displacement. Besides, there is risk that during the monsoons fly ash will disperse to the Northern, Eastern and North Central Provinces. Thus it is important to think about these issues. Are we to wreck the lives of the people of the country in the name of development, only to serve the greed of foreign companies for profit?

Countries across the world are shutting down coal thermal power stations in the interest of averting further global warming. Even India is closing down coal thermal power stations. Under these conditions, why should a coal thermal power station be set up here? Has this country become a place to dump foreign waste?

India is adamant on the use of coal as fuel. The “Good Governance” regime is hesitant to respond firmly. The Tamil National Alliance constituting the Parliamentary Opposition refuses to comment.

Meantime the people of Sampur are in struggle demanding their ancestral land and protesting against potential environmental pollution; and we express support for their demands. The Mass Organization for Social Justice along with other public organizations in collaboration with the “Green Trinco” organization has organized an awareness campaign in support of their demands opposite the Vavuniya Bus Station at 10.00 a.m. on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

The Secretary, Mass Organization for Social Justice, Vavuniya District, on behalf of the Organization called upon trade unions, public organizations and political parties to transcend difference of race and religion to join the awareness campaign.

*Issued by Secretary, Mass Organization for Social Justice, Vavuniya District*

***[Note: In September 2016, the Sri Lankan government announced the abandoning of the Sampur power project.]***

## **Has Sri Lanka become a state of India?**

Illicit fishing by thousands of Indian fishing trawlers seriously affect our fishers. Such fishing also adversely impacts on the economy of the country. While talks on the subject drag on, there is no solution in sight.

Why does India which, during the annual church feast in Kachchativu, banned fishing by Indian fishers in the adjoining region refuse to prohibit fishing by thousands of trawlers each day?

The Indian Minister of External Affairs who visited Sri Lanka recently and the Sri Lanka Minister of External Affairs released a joint statement on the problem of the fishers. That statement claims that the problem is complex and solution should be sought in ‘innovative ways’. Although it

is possible for India to stop intrusion by Indian trawlers, the Sri Lankan government has conceded in this joint statement that the problem is complex, showing that Sri Lanka has yielded to Indian pressure.

India is persisting in its 'big brother' like behaviour. An incident that occurred much earlier than the dumping of dry food packets in 1987 is memorable in this context. During the Bandung Conference in 1955, Indian Prime Minister Nehru asked Sir John Kotelawala, then Prime Minister of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), to show him the text of his speech at the Conference. Commendably, Kotelawala, refusing to yield to pressure from Nehru, responded "Why should I show it to you?"

In the context of the announcement that the proposed coal thermal power station in Sampur will proceed as planned, the people of Sampur who have been expelled from their lands are continuing to participate in protest demonstrations.

Owing to the absence of coal resources in Sri Lanka, at least a three months' supply of the imported coal needs to be stored to ensure uninterrupted operation of the plant. Thus the use of coal further requires a large extent of land for the storage of the fuel.

Coal-operated thermal power stations emit besides massive volumes of carbon dioxide significant quantities of acidic sulphur dioxide. Several countries have plans to shut down their coal-operated thermal power stations; and India too has such intentions. Then, why is India building one in Sampur? The motive is simply profit.

Solar thermal power will not have adverse impact on the environment. It is worth pondering why little importance is given to the development of solar electric power, although both Sri Lanka and India are well placed for its development. Coal, which has to be imported from India, causes environmental pollution and subjects people to all manner of disease. Particulates carried by coal smoke could be scattered across long distances, and this has already been seen in Nuraicholai, Puttalam.

India has also undertaken to expand the airport in Palali. For this purpose, large extents of agricultural land are to be acquired by the government. Already, this land has been sequestered by the armed forces in the name of a Security Zone.

The extension of the airport for civilian use needs engineers and other staff. But India proposes to use the Indian Air Force for airport extension work. Both Tamil nationalists and Sinhala chauvinists have chosen to ignore the fact that the extension of the airport is being done in Indian military interests.

The Sri Lankan government has announced that the Indo-Sri Lanka Economic and Technology Cooperative Agreement (ETCA) will be signed in June, and that the Agreement will go through irrespective of objections by any. It is true that India has commendable technology. It is also said that through this Agreement Sri Lankan professionals can find employment in India. But the reality is that, with hundreds of thousands of engineers, doctors and other professionals either unemployed or underemployed in India, there will be an invasion from India in search of employment. What is uncertain is the number of undercover agents who will be among them.

There is a proposal to construct an underwater road linking Sri Lanka and India. Interestingly the matter is discussed in the Indian media while there is no information to that effect in Sri Lanka? What is the need for a road link between Sri Lanka and India? The military significance of such a project is understandable.

Already textile retailers have complained that their business is affected by Indian pavement hawkers arriving on tourist visas conducting door-to-door textile trade. Several RAW spies are active in the name of pavement hawkers.

Besides, it is worth noting that Indian development schemes are based mainly in the North and East of the country.

*[based on a note by Sri in Puthiya Neethi, Tamil journal of the NDMLP, June-July 2016]*

## Is Thaandikkulam a Suitable Site for the Vavuniya District Economic Centre?

Hon. Mr Harrison, Central Government Minister for Economic Development has allocated two billion rupees for the Vavuniya District to set up an Economic Development Centre. The Ministry the time of allocation of funds announced among a multitude of conditions that the Centre should be located the within 2 km of Vavuniya town and that availability of electric power should be assured.

As it was not possible to identify land within 2 km from Vavuniya and the allocated fund was about to be diverted to another district, disputes and debates arose among politicians of the North. Shutdown of shops in the Vavuniya Market and an awareness campaign took place to exert pressure on the Northern Provincial Council. Personalities from the UNP and Provincial Council members from the SLFP, who were opposed to the TNA, participated in the awareness campaign. This campaign was conducted to urge the release of 5 acres of the 45 acre land belonging to the government's seed production farm in Thaandikkulam in order to set up of the Centre.

Those concerned should note that, besides the adverse implications for Vavuniya town in the event of setting up the market complex there, the only Tamil medium Agricultural Training College for the North is located in Thaandikkulam. Already, with little foresight, part of this land has been acquired to accommodate a private bus station, and fragmentation of this land in this manner could lead to the extinction of the Agricultural Seed Research Station and the Agricultural Training College.

If the market complex is set up at the location of the Training College, will not noise from the market complex disrupt educational activity in the College? Besides, will not there be problems due to increased road traffic in the early morning along A-9 highway? Despite adequate land being allocated in the Omanthai region off the A-9 highway, why are some people adamant to acquire this land? Also it should be noted that location

of the Centre at Omanthai will facilitate farmers from regions such as Nedungkeni, Ottusuttaan, Omanthai, Paalamottai and Maangkulam where many small cultivators of vegetables live to market their produce. Besides, rather than erect all buildings for development in Vavuniya, only to pollute the town further, it will make sense to seek ways to develop and link small towns like Omanthai.

There are besides various complexities in this financial allocation such as whether the income from the investment of the Central Government should go to the Central Government or to the Provincial Government. If the land comes within the purview of the Northern Provincial Council, the Chief Minister and the Agriculture Minister of the NPC should clearly state that it cannot be acquired without the consent of the NPC. Also it is the wish of honest political forces that not only should the income generated go to the Northern Provincial Council, but that should be used to brighten the future of the farmers of the region by establishing it at a most appropriate location in the Vavuniya District.

The text below is a statement issued by the Mass Organization for Social Justice on the subject.

### **Locate the Vavuniya District Economic Centre in Omanthai**

Debates as well as hunger strikes and demonstrations are going on in Vavuniya about the location of the Vavuniya District Economic Centre. The Vavuniya District General Secretary of the Mass Organization for Social Justice, S Don Bosco issued a press release in which he has pleaded that the location should be decided based on considerations of the future of the people of the country, the regional economic structure and environmental impact among others.

He added that a comparison of Omanthai, as proposed by the Chief Minister of the Northern Provincial Council, and Thaandikkulam as proposed by Mr Harrison, Central Government Minister for Economic Development indicates that Omanthai is the more suitable location and listed the following reasons:

Omanthai is the central station of the transport network for Palamoattai, Kanakaraayan Kulam, Maamadu, Nedungkeni, Naattangkandal and other areas comprising the agricultural regions of the Vavuniya District. Locating the Centre there will help to rebuild this urbanized area which before the war was developing into a small town, and to reduce the population density of Vavuniya.

This location already has a central college, banking services, a medical centre, a railway station, and the A-9 highway passing through it. The low population density and availability of adequate space in Omanthai makes the handling of environmental issues such as the disposal of waste and the control of traffic congestion and noise relatively easy.

If, on the other hand, the Centre were to be located in Thaandikkulam, it will have the following adverse impacts: Vavuniya, whose development was unplanned, already has a dense population and suffers traffic congestion. Location of the Centre nearby will worsen congestion and environmental pollution as well as create problems for waste disposal. Besides, it will adversely affect work done in Tamil in the Northern Province at the Agricultural College, on agricultural development, and on agricultural seed production activities.

Therefore, the Mass Organization for Social justice points out that since this is a matter within the purview of the Provincial Council, the members of the Council should set aside their personal likes and dislikes to arrive at a unanimous decision in the interest of national development, public interest and the protection of the environment; and that, the TNA which is in power in the Provincial Council should not make the historical mistake of being indifferent and create room for conflicts based on race, religion, language and region.

*(Vavuniya correspondents)*

# **Bad Working Conditions of Women in Garment Factories in the North**

Following the end of three-decade long cruel war in the North & East, under the cloak of foreign investment and in the name of employment opportunity, garment factories have set foot in all districts of the Northern Province, excluding the Jaffna District. Three garment factories have been set up in Vavuniya, one in Mannar and one in Kilinochchi; and arrangements are afoot to start one in Mullaitivu.

Women sought employment in the garment factories of the north in the face of rising unemployment, and were offered jobs. But the cruelty suffered by the working women in their workplaces is indescribable. The Garment factories look massive as well as attractive. But the shameful exploitation and violation of fundamental and human rights of women employees in the garment factory has compelled women employees of the Kilinochchi garment factory to unite and express their protest. Before the unrest in Kilinochchi settled, women in the Mannar garment factory launched their struggle.

What messages do these struggles deliver? Do the women receive the essential basic wage to meet the essentials of life? Are their employment rights protected? Is their place of work safe? Are they served nutritious food? What is their basic wage? What is their monthly leave entitlement? How many hours of work are extracted from them per day?

The Central and Provincial governments raise these questions with the employers and arrange to inspect the factories and resolve the problems faced by the women.

It is commendable that women workers of the garment factories took the progressive step of launching a united struggle. Nevertheless, they should note that only through united struggles that the workers can win their rights. The working women should note that the Tamil National Alliance has not on one occasion spoken on the exploitation of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim women workers in the garment factories, regardless of

their race, and that it will take a series of broad-based campaigns to make them speak on such subjects.

*(Kilinochchi correspondents)*

## **Wages in the Plantations**

Comrade K Ganapathy, General Secretary of the Communist Workers' Union, Ratnapura addressing the media in Matale on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2016 noted that the 'Good Governance' regime which is answerable for the dragging on of the wage dispute is only siding with the Employers Federation.

He added that while the Central Bank has observed that a monthly earning of Rs 63,000 is necessary to meet the rising cost of living, the wages earned by the plantation workers is less than Rs 10,000 per month, and insisted that the government should secure a minimum daily wage of Rs 1000 in the plantations.

He accused the leading trade unions of extracting substantial sums as subscriptions from the wages of the workers only to use the workers as shields for their political ambitions. During the three important elections that took place recently, union leaders, as usual, pledged to the workers that they will resolve the questions of individual housing units for the workers and wage increase, gathered their votes and secured seats and posts as ministers in the Provincial Councils and in Parliament.

The Wages Agreement which is renewed once in two years has dragged on unresolved for 15 months, with only 9 months due for the next Wages Agreement. But the dominant unions are indulging in cunning acts of deception, while voting with the government on all issues. The most that they did about the wages was to stage a 'satyagraha' in Colombo. While the large trade unions are avoiding struggle to preserve the self interest of their leaders, the smaller unions, rather than acting according to their strength, idly watch like bystanders.

In all, the workers suffer as a result of the non-implementation of the wage increase in the face of the rising cost of living. Besides, the EPF, ETF, service gratuity and bonuses are calculated based on the earlier wage structure causing further losses to the workers. In addition the 12% payment by the employers in respect of their contributions has been suspended. The consequent overall loss suffered by the workers as a result of non-renewal of the Wages Agreement ranges between Rs 100,000 and Rs 150,000 per worker.

Under the conditions, steps taken by the Department of Labour to make available to the workers the Rs 2500 allowance offered to private sector employees is unacceptable, as it requires a daily wage earner to work for 25 days in the month to secure the full allowance. Employers offer at most 22 days of work, and excess payment for work during public holidays does not count for the purpose. The decision is that only Rs 2000 will be paid for 20 days of work and Rs 1500 for 15 days of work. As the allowance is not a part of the wage, there is no entitlement to EPF and ETF for this sum.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe pledged Rs 1000 daily wage during the parliamentary election campaign, but it is now 16 months since he was elected. His government and trade unions associated with it have failed the plantation workers, who remain the lowest paid workers in the country, denied of wage increases made available to the state and private sector workers.

The workers will not achieve anything until they reject the trade unions that deceive them, and unite as workers transcending difference of trade union and party affiliation.

*(Matale correspondents)*

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## **Wage Struggle in the Plantations**

### **Press Release**

*1<sup>st</sup> October 2016*

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Party Politburo on the plantation workers' struggle for a fair wage.

The decision of the plantation workers after a long wait to take to the streets to press their demand for a daily wage of Rs 1000 is not only just but also welcome. The workers, having realized the futility of relying on their trade union and parliamentary political leaders, decided on their own to take to the streets. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party while supporting and welcoming the spontaneous street demonstrations for wage increase points out that it is necessary for workers as a whole to transcend differences relating to trade union and political party affiliation to unite and carry forward the struggle in an organized manner through setting up a campaign committee for wage increase.

It is entirely just that the plantation workers, who are the lowest paid category of daily wage earners, have launched a struggle for a daily wage of Rs 1000, something which the plantation owners have continuously rejected in the negotiations for the Collective Agreement. This stubborn refusal by the Employers Federation more than one and a half years since the last Collective agreement lapse is deplorable. It is a matter of concern that the Good Governance regime is indifferently silent on the matter and the plantation trade union leadership adopts a complaisant attitude. It is in such context that the struggle launched by the workers is just and necessary. Hence, the Party urges organizing the street demonstrations as firm struggles and announces its participation.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary

# Drug Shortage in Nuwara Eliya

## Press Release

*1<sup>st</sup> August 2016*

Comrade V Mahendran, National Organizer of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on the shortage of drugs and prevalent abuses in the Public Health Department of the Nuwara Eliya District.

Severe shortage exists in the public health sector in the Nuwara Eliya District for eighty varieties of drugs, including paediatric medication, vitamins and medicines for expectant mothers. The problem is especially acute in the Base Hospital under the purview of Health Department of the Nuwara Eliya District and in the Health Centres and Maternity Centres of the plantation sector. Health care for children and expectant mothers is totally neglected in the health centres and maternity centres in the plantations of the District. During the past several months polio vaccine and other vaccines for infants have not been administered in time. Delays have exceeded days and weeks to be months; and other drugs too have not been available when due.

Mothers and pregnant women who visit the centres to obtain medication suffer undue inconvenience. Provision of nutritional food like 'Triposha' under the balanced food programme for expectant mothers is not implemented properly in the plantations. Mother and Child Welfare Programmes are either not implemented or are done improperly. Mothers and expectant women have to travel long distances to get children vaccinated and for medical examination. Late arrival of doctors and nurses and failure to provide the necessary treatment and supply the necessary medication cause undue difficulties.

Thousands of patients who visit the Nuwara Eliya Base Hospital daily; they complain that they are forced to purchase the necessary medication in private pharmacies.

The statement of the ministry of Health denying drug shortage and blaming administrative irregularities in the Health Department of Nuwara Eliya District for the shortages is deplorable, and the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly denounces it and urges the Ministry of Health to act to resolve immediately the problem of drug shortages and poor service in the health sector of Nuwara Eliya.

V Mahendran  
National Organizer

## **Violence in the University of Jaffna**

### **Press Release**

*19<sup>th</sup> July 2016*

Comrade S.K Senthivel, General Secretary, New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party condemning the violent clashes between students in the University of Jaffna on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2016.

The violent clashes between students of the University three days ago and the consequent injuries are regrettable as well as deplorable. It is important to determine whether this meaningless violence was pre-planned with ulterior motive or accidental. Attempts in the North and the South to blow up this incident out of all proportion should be arrested immediately. The Party thus urges that amicability and understanding based on goodwill are restored soon within the student community.

It is unethical for students in the field of higher studies to indulge in petty rivalries and narrow-minded assertion of superiority leading to clashes and injury. Woes of the economic crisis are hurting students in universities and other institutions of higher education who are also affected by the erroneous educational policies. The Party points out that students who need to stand together and speak in one voice in this

context should realize that it is in no way correct to yield to nationalist emotion on trivial issues and indulge in clashes.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary

## **Public Meeting of Activists for Democracy**

### **Press Release**

*6<sup>th</sup> September 2016*

Comrade S.K Senthivel, General Secretary, New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party made the following announcement on behalf of the Party.

A public meeting of Activists for Democracy will be held at the auditorium of the Hindu Youth Association, located close to the Thirunelveli Junction on the forthcoming Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2016. The meeting of Activists for Democracy has been jointly organized by the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, the United Socialist Party, the Frontline Socialist Party along with left, democratic and progressive trade unions.

The organizers have announced that the purpose of the meeting was to enhance public awareness of the current economic, political and social issues by through reiterating demands for the granting of political rights of the people of the North and East, the release of all political prisoners, provision of due answers regarding 'disappeared' persons, return of seized land, houses and work places to the people and granting of citizenship to all political activists denied of that right.

It is also significant that such meetings are being held across the country.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary

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# The Deluge and the Tree

Fadwa Tuqan

When the hurricane swirled and spread its deluge  
of dark evil  
onto the good green land  
'they' gloated. The western skies  
reverberated with joyous accounts:  
"The Tree has fallen!  
The great trunk is smashed!  
The hurricane leaves no life in the Tree!"

Had the Tree really fallen?  
Never! Not with our red streams flowing forever,  
not while the wine of our thorn limbs  
fed the thirsty roots,  
Arab roots alive  
tunnelling deep, deep, into the land!

When the Tree rises up, the branches  
shall flourish green and fresh in the sun  
the laughter of the Tree shall leaf  
beneath the sun  
and birds shall return  
Undoubtedly, the birds shall return.  
The birds shall return

*[Fadwa Tuqan (born, Nablus, 1917; died 2003) is among the best pioneering Arab contemporary poets. She began with traditional forms, but became a leader in the use of the free verse in Arabic. Her works deal with feminine explorations of love and social protest. After 1967, she also began writing patriotic poems.]*

## Enough for Me

Fadwa Tuqan

(1917-2003)

*Enough for me to die on her earth  
be buried in her*

*to melt and vanish into her soil  
then sprout forth as a flower  
played with by a child from my  
country.*

*Enough for me to remain  
in my country's embrace  
to be in her close as a handful of  
dust*

*a sprig of grass  
a flower.*

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Phone, Fax: 011 2473757; E-mail: newdemocraticmlparty@gmail.com  
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