

Marxist Leninist

New Democracy

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The True Prison

Ken Saro-Wiva

(10 October 1941 – 10 November 1995)

It is not the leaking roof
Nor the singing mosquitoes
In the damp, wretched cell
It is not the clank of the key
As the warder locks you in
It is not the measly rations
Unfit for man or beast
Nor yet the emptiness of day
Dipping into the blankness of night
It is not
It is not
It is not
It is the lies that you have been drummed
Into your ears for one generation
It is the security agent running amok
Executing callous calamitous orders
In exchange for a wretched meal a day
The magistrate writing into her book
Punishment she knows is undeserved
The oral decrepitude
Mental ineptitude
The meal of dictators
Cowardice masking as obedience
Lurking in our denigrating souls
It is fear damping trousers
We dare not wash of our urine
It is this
It is this
It is this
Dear friend, turns our free world
Into a dreary prison.

Editorial

Nothing surprises us about scandalous scams or the even more shameful attempts to cover them up. Such things are now part of our parliamentary political landscape. Yet, people still seem to expect some change when they change government, or really when government is changed in their name, although they know that votes are gathered by bribery, deception, electoral malpractice and abuse of power. The scale of election campaign expenditure incurred by candidates, both winners and losers, is stunning. But parties and alliances still campaign in the name of clean government; and elected governments declare themselves to be clean and just.

Experience has shown that nothing positive for the people emerges from a change of government, and people have mostly ceased even to express anger at the deception by political parties and candidates. But they have yet to learn that the political system itself is loaded against the exploited and oppressed masses. Thus, hopes still linger for at least a superficial change, mainly after periods of corrupt, authoritarian government amid continuing fall in their standard of living.

It was reasonable to hope for return to normalcy and some improvement in economic conditions after war ended. There was hope of rehabilitation of war affected people and regions and steps to resolve the national question, lying at the root of the economic woes, issues of law and order, and restoration of democratic rights.

The Mahinda Rajapaksa regime not only failed to address the problems but acted to worsen relations between ethnic groups and, in the name of 'development', further indebted the country. It took advantage of its being in power when the LTTE was militarily defeated to claim all credit for "overcoming terrorism", and impose a much resented corrupt, fascistic family rule. But, notably, the parliamentary system enabled the regime to accumulate even more power and personal wealth.

The Rajapaksa regime was defeated but its politics has survived, partly because of the lack of credibility of the Maithripala-Ranil regime heading an opportunistic alliance of the UNP and a fragment of the SLFP. Pledges

to probe criminal acts of murder and abduction and mass scale economic crimes of bribery and corruption have either not started or been delayed deliberately, while the new regime itself is embroiled in its own scandals.

The promised fair wages and control of cost of living did not arrive, with the IMF dictating national economic policy. Despite pledges to increase investment in education and health, state investment has been reduced while foreign and local private investors are encouraged to profit from private education and health. The defence budget, however, has risen steadily in the nine years since the end of war.

The process initiated by the UNP when it came to power in 1977 to surrender the country and its economy to imperialism continued in the name of meeting war expenditure. Imperialist and hegemonic powers that aided the government to win the war hold the country to ransom using issues of human rights, war crimes and unresolved aspects of the national question. China's economic influence in the country grew in this context to become an issue for leading sections in the government loyal to imperialist and hegemonic powers. The government, rather than control Chinese investment in ways to protect the national economy, yields to imperialist and hegemonic pressure to strengthen their grip in the name of containing Chinese influence, which is still strong in the economy.

Amid the current political and economic crisis, including issues of economy, national question, post-war rehabilitation, law and order and deteriorating education and public health, the government now holds the long delayed elections to local government. The bankruptcy of electoral politics has led to much attention to matters of a sensational and even personal nature in the bid of the parties to control local authorities.

Local government is not about national policy and has for long been perverted by parliamentary politics to become an extension of political power at the national level. The people should see this clearly, and use the revived ward-wise elections to break the hegemony of big political parties and make local councils and elected representatives answerable to their electorate. Greater power to local authorities could be made the stepping stone for devolution of power to the people

Notes on 21st Century Imperialism

Understanding Imperialism

Transformation of capitalism into imperialism, which Lenin recognized as the highest state of capitalism, is inevitable. Lenin's understanding of imperialism enlightened the working classes of capitalist countries and inspired national struggles against colonial rule to weaken imperialism.

The development of imperialism was neither territorially uniform nor temporally linear. Following the collapse of colonialism after the Second World War (WW2), imperialism, to retain control of the global economy, renewed its strategy. Replacing colonialism with neocolonialism also led to the replacement of European colonial powers with the US as the dominant power. The continuing crisis of imperialism led to its adoption of the strategy of globalization, the rise of neo-liberalism, and the re-emergence of fascism. Thus the functioning of modern day imperialism differs in important ways from that of imperialism in the colonial era. But that does not change the essence of imperialism or capitalism.

Rigidly defining imperialism in terms of a set of features fixed in time will be counterproductive, as definitions are beneficial when they help us to understand phenomena but not when they restrict our thinking and make us dogmatic. Hence it is useful to understand imperialism dialectically and in terms of its salient features, taking into account its mutability and define it in an inclusive fashion that could accommodate likely developments.

The following features of imperialism as set out by Lenin serve as a valuable reference point:

1. Concentration of production and capital to a level that it gave rise to monopolies which dominate economic life;
2. Merging of bank capital with industrial capital leading to the emergence of finance capital controlled by a financial oligarchy;
3. Export of capital gaining primacy over the export of commodities;
4. Formation of international monopolist capitalist cartels seeking to share the world among themselves; and
5. Territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers.

It is thus appropriate to understand imperialism as the stage of capitalism where a small number of monopolies and finance capital establishments dominate the economy, the export of capital acquires precedence over export of goods, and international cartels effectively carve up the world among themselves through the agency of capitalist powers. The ways in which imperialist institutions and the state function have, however, changed as imperialism adapted to changing global conditions.

Today's imperialist system is more complex than what it was less than 50 years ago. Its salient features include the continuing growth of finance capital alongside the growth of giant monopolies into entities free of control by banks, and financed directly and indirectly by private savings and public funds. Speculation, now a major driving force of finance capital, compounded the vulnerability of the system, with advances in information and communication technology making the transfer of capital much easier and faster, and economies of countries highly susceptible to manipulation by big investors as well as speculators.

Rapid and unrestricted flow of capital across national borders in the past several decades has been accompanied by increased transfer of labour across national borders, driven by economic need, political instability, wars and civil wars. Economically backward countries were forced to open their natural resources and labour to neocolonial plunder, thereby

subjecting them to imperialist re-colonization via control over natural resources including water and agricultural land. Meanwhile, nearly all capitalist countries adopted market fundamentalism as the guiding ideology of their economic and political systems at the expense of public interest and democratic institutions; and the state has been compelled to minimise its social role, with multinational corporations and international financial markets subverting the sovereignty of the state.

Monopoly capitalism, while preserving its essential nature, has become even more ruthless so that the five features identified by Lenin remain valid under neocolonialism and the now shaky scheme of imperialist globalization. The capitalist state is now an agent of imperialism that imposes the monopoly capitalist will on its people. The US, which in the period between the two World Wars grew to become the strongest capitalist economy, also became the most influential political force and military power in human history. US imperialism used the challenge posed by the 'Socialist Bloc' that emerged in the wake of the Second World War as pretext to set up US-dominated military, political and economic global alliances. Although such alliances did not eliminate imperialist rivalry, confrontation has been subdued unlike in the periods leading up to the World Wars.

Imperialist states lacked unanimity in the way they addressed colonial hangovers, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, and the 'communist threat'; and US hegemony is still resented. The European Union, set up in 1957 as the European Economic Community, was a partly successful bid by Europe to become an economic power on par with the US and free of political control by the US. Nevertheless imperialists have been together in resisting left ideology, especially in the neo-colonies.

Restoration of Capitalism in Socialist Countries

Khrushchev's rise to power in the Soviet Union led to a split in the socialist camp and in the international communist movement in 1964. Restoration of capitalism under Khrushchev occurred under the guise of

a call for 'peaceful coexistence' of the socialist and imperialist systems. Such tolerance was, however, absent towards Albania and China which upheld revolutionary struggle as the path to socialism. The split hurt the left movement globally and weakened anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles. Khrushchev's fall did not mean a change in course of the Soviet Union; and the imperialist Cold War against the Socialist Bloc turned into rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union for global influence until the latter fell apart in 1991. The collapse of the socialist regimes in East and Central Europe was rapidly followed by privatization and flow of foreign capital.

Capitalism was restored in China under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping but more gradually and cunningly by calling it "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics". Internationally, a vast majority of Marxist Leninists accept that capitalism has been restored in China. But there are still others who plead that the socialist features of China are stronger than what seem to be capitalist features. It is true, however, that China has accepted the imperialist world order, and state capitalism in China is collaborating with growing capitalist sectors, local and foreign. What is in question is China's place in the global imperialist order.

By the end of the 20th Century all socialist countries but North Korea and Cuba had accepted capitalism as their economic system. But that did not mean the end of the imperialist economic and military alliances designed originally to combat the Socialist Bloc. Those alliances exist and new ones have been formed based on new-found threats, real and imaginary, that are mostly creations of imperialism. Real wars of aggression have been launched in the name of war on terrorism.

Impact of Globalization

The imperialist project of globalization initiated in the 1980s combined with the collapse of the Soviet Union was expected to lead to a uni-polar world dominated by the US. But that was not to be. The miserable failure of globalization in South America, its prime trial ground, also resulted in

a decline in US influence in Latin America and the Caribbean. The global capitalist system was also haunted by a series of crisis through the 1990s, notably the Asian financial crisis of 1997, and continues to be plagued by crises in the 21st Century. Notably, the 2007-2009 financial crisis which struck the US hard in 2008 grew into a global economic crisis with a lasting impact on the Western capitalist system and threatens the survival of the European Union as an economic entity. The crises have been compounded by the influx of refugees of war waged by imperialism in Afghanistan in 2001 followed by wars in Iraq, North Africa, and Syria.

There is pressing need for strong anti-imperialist international action to resist imperialism and overcome imperialist subversion and aggression. That the people will win if they dare was demonstrated not long ago in Gaza, and that countries that dare to stand up to imperialism will not be cowed easily has been seen in Syria, North Korea and Iran. The lack of strong working class based anti-imperialist international organizations implies high prices for any significant victory. In this context, not only Marxist Leninists but all left and anti-imperialist forces need to correctly assess the global situation and identify the principal enemy of the people internationally as well as in any local context.

Certainly, capitalism to grow cannot confine itself to a country and a strong capitalist country will become imperialist at some stage unless socialism interrupts such transition. One should also note the changing role of the state in advancing the interests of monopoly capitalism, which Lenin defined as imperialism. The neocolonial mode of imperialism, the emergence of the more complex trans-national corporation from multi-national corporations (with roots in colonialism) and neoliberal ideology have combined to undermine the role of the state.

While the headquarters of MNCs and TNCs have home countries, the control that the state has over the companies has been on the decline. Advances in communication and information technologies have enabled MNCs and TNCs to wield considerable control individually and collectively over the state in countries where they operate as well as in

international policy making bodies. Thus anti-imperialism in the current neocolonial context should combine opposition to the imperialist powers that exploit and oppress the Third World with opposition to the MNCs and TNCs in whose interests the imperialist powers act.

The pecking order among imperialist powers changed rapidly since WW2 owing to the rise of the US as the dominant economic and military power, the loss of colonies and economic weakening of European powers. Despite the weakening of the US economy and the rapid recovery of the economies of Germany and Japan, the US remains the leader of the group of major capitalist countries of North America and Europe, and Japan constituting a mighty imperialist camp which accommodates client states including Australia and Israel, and now India, as strategic partners.

New Capitalist Countries

In Russia and China, capitalism resulted from the subversion of socialism and thus lacked several key features that marked the transformation of capitalism into imperialism in the leading capitalist countries of North America, Western Europe and Japan. The fall of socialist rule in Eastern and Central Europe did not give rise to powerful capitalist economies from among them on par with West European rivals. The disintegration of the Soviet Union left Russia as a military power but with a weak economy, further weakened by liberal economic reforms and opening up of Russia to foreign capital under Boris Yeltsin. The economy has since recovered, but still relies much on export of natural resources and primary goods. Russia, which owing to its large residual military power ranks among global powers, it is not a fraction as assertive as the Soviet Union was in global affairs. It has, however, well stood up to economic threats in the form of sanctions and military threats by the US and allies.

China grew into an economic power owing to its trained and disciplined labour force developed under socialism and by drawing on its large reserve of cheap rural labour seeking to escape rural poverty following the dismantling of the agricultural communes in the 1980s. The rise of the

service and finance sectors of Western capitalist countries at the expense of manufacturing helped to transform China into the world's largest manufacturing economy and largest exporter of manufactured goods. Controlled opening of the economy to foreign capital ensured that China was in control of its industrial development and that its export-driven economy withstood global economic crises better than the capitalist West. But economic growth was accompanied by lack of attention to negative socioeconomic impact, by way of social inequality, economic insecurity, environmental degradation, mass migration to the cities, want of urban housing, corruption and poor industrial relations. For a country still considered to be a developing country in view of its low per capita GDP, the consequences can be grave in the medium and long term.

Several countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa became strong economies in the Post Colonial era. Of these, India, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Mexico, Brazil and South Africa are territorially large. Some of them have been notoriously assertive and interfere in neighbouring countries. Israel and South Korea, despite their small size, have strong economies and pursue militarist policies which menace neighbouring countries. Oil wealth and US pressure encouraged small Arab countries like Qatar and UAE to interfere in the affairs of countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Colombia, a large country with a struggling economy, remains a threat to neighbouring South American regimes disliked by the US. Pakistan and now India are proxies of US imperialism in Afghanistan. If export of capital is a criterion, Singapore holds more foreign direct investment than all countries listed above except China; and South Korea and Taiwan are not far behind Russia.

Problems in Identifying Imperialism

Capitalism can either expand or perish and, to sustain profit, it needs to expand. It strives for greater access to resources and markets and seeks monopoly. Thus undoubtedly a powerful capitalist country is potentially imperialist, and competing interests make it necessary for imperialist countries and ones aspiring to be imperialist to form alliances.

There is little unanimity among political commentators or even Marxist Leninists on the list of countries that can be called imperialist. All accept that the US is a major imperialist power and generally agree that the US and its allies constituting the G7 (really G8 less Russia which since 2014 is effectively out of the group of key capitalist countries) comprise an imperialist alliance dominated by the US. Many would extend the list to include all countries of the EU; others include all NATO countries; yet others include all US allies including Israel, Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies, Australia and New Zealand. Other Asian, African and Latin American allies also seem eligible to join the list. Despite deep differences and antagonism among several of the US allies and the prospect of some spinning out of the US orbit, countries in the groups identified above are either partners or clients of US imperialism. In fact, most are neocolonies of US imperialism; and it is desirable to distinguish between partners and clients. Despite changing loyalties in a rapidly changing global milieu, it is possible to identify US-led imperialist alliances and key actors that constitute such alliances in specific contexts.

After WW2, the Soviet Union led an alliance called the Socialist Bloc even after it gave up on revolution and socialism. The Warsaw Treaty, a political and military alliance, was essentially East and Central European (and later included Cuba, Mongolia and Vietnam) and remained more or less intact but for the estrangement of Albania in 1961 and its withdrawal from the Warsaw Treaty following Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) was a response to the Marshall Plan designed to assert US imperialist domination of post WW2 Europe. Both organizations came to an end with the fall of socialist regimes in Europe.

It will be useful to note here that from the time that WW2 ended, the US and UK had been developing military plans to dismantle the USSR by wiping out its cities with a massive nuclear strike. Successful detonation of a nuclear bomb by the Soviet Union in 1949, however, frustrated their plans. (<https://www.globalresearch.ca/wipe-the-ussr-off-the-map-204-atomic->

bombs-against-major-cities-us-nuclear-attack-against-soviet-union-planned-prior-to-end-of-world-war-ii/5616601).

We need to distinguish between imperialist powers that work as partners and countries with varying degrees of capitalist development that belong to imperialist alliances.

We also need to distinguish between different types of economic, military and political alliances of countries, i.e. between alliances of an imperialist nature and those which are not imperialist in nature. We should be aware of the possibility that a country which is not imperialist could be in an imperialist controlled alliance and the possibility that one or more countries that one identifies as imperialist may play key roles in alliances without an imperialist aim or even serve anti-imperialist purposes.

Arguments have been presented to plead the case for naming or not naming a country as capitalist or imperialist. Such debates could take long to resolve. But there are issues on which decisions need to be taken at a local, national or international level, sometimes urgently. In such contexts the stand that a Marxist Leninist takes vis-à-vis a particular regional or global power can be very much contextual. There is the risk of falling victim to subjectivity in such matters, and exigency can get the better of principled long term view of matters.

As in the case of other definitions, like that of a nation, for example, rigid adherence to a set of rules does not help one to appreciate problems holistically and in context. There is a tendency to use economic criteria like export of capital or the emergence of finance capital as the key factors that decide whether a country is imperialist or not. Some give prominence to military might; such an approach ignores the reality that it was the military might that defended socialism in the Soviet Union and that without possession of a nuclear weapon the Soviet Union would have been subject to nuclear blackmail by the US and UK. One should, thus, be cautious and consider context before pronouncing judgment on any country.

At this stage, it will help us to use a comparative approach to examine the conduct of capitalist countries in different global and regional contexts. We are aware of the difference between the approaches of imperialism in the colonial era and after. Imperialist powers operate in ways similar to corporate cartels. The national character of imperialism has considerably yielded to collective interest. That is not to say that there is no rivalry or national considerations despite the role of MNCs and TNCs in global capital. Even within imperialist alliances there is tendency for national interests to dominate. But from the point of view of the oppressed nations and people of the world, imperialism dominated by the US has to be seen and contested collectively.

It will still be useful to study how rivalries within the imperialist camp work and examine if there is room for anti-imperialist forces to take advantage of such rivalry or play one imperialist power against the other the way some nationalists under colonial rule did until the end of WW2.

Some are firm in the belief that there are imperialisms besides the US-led imperialist camp. Others argue that emerging capitalist economies are potentially imperialist. There are also differences in opinion about which capitalist economies are imperialist or close to becoming imperialist or potentially imperialist. Such differences are relevant to the extent that the impact of any capitalist country on oppressed nations and people and implications for the anti-imperialist campaign and the socialist cause.

Understanding the economic, political and military roles played by major capitalist countries individually and as alliances in different parts of the world could, even if it will not settle the debate on which countries are imperialist, help us to achieve consensus on the stand that we take on specific international issues. Hence the International Affairs Study Group of the NDMLP, commencing in this issue, will present studies of the role of foreign capitalism in major regions of the world.

Twenty-first Century Imperialism

Re-colonizing Africa

Colonialism strikes root

Imperialist colonization of Africa was assisted by advances in science and technology, which led to rapid industrialization and advancements in transportation, communication and medicine. These achievements of science and technology together enabled the penetration of vast expanses of the African continent, which was the most through in colonial history. The process is still not over, since the colonists and their successors have been most unwilling to part with their African possessions.

Although, unlike in the Americas and Australia, White colonists did not settle in Africa, except for South Africa and in smaller numbers in Azania (then Southwest Africa) and much less in other colonies, plunder of mineral resources and exploitation of human beings (in the form of exploitation of labour and mass export of labour as slaves) was thorough. Colonialism in Africa was also marked by racist contempt for the natives, which found its fullest expression in the system of Apartheid in South Africa. Racism also meant that, on the whole, African liberation struggles were more bitterly fought than in Asia or Latin America.

Although parts of coastal Sub-Saharan Africa was subject to colonial settlement by European powers such as Portugal, Spain, Britain and France, the only major settlement was in South Africa by the Dutch. Occupation of enclaves along the coast was for mainly for trade purposes including slave trade. While there was long standing rivalry among colonial powers, the scramble for Africa started in earnest in the last three

decades of the 19th Century. The Dutch were edged out by their rivals except in a part of South Africa where descendents of Dutch settlers identified themselves as Boers (the ancestors of today's Afrikaners). The British who took over the region subdued the Boers at the dawn of the 20th Century. South Africa, with a large European settlement, was also the site of persistent African resistance. It was also an exception to the pattern of extracting raw materials without enabling local African industrialization. But colonial development there had uneven benefits which led to crude colour-based racism, and resistance led to legalized racial segregation known as Apartheid, between 1948 and 1991.

The rest of the continent, but for Ethiopia (with a monarchy and brief occupation by Italy between 1935 and 1940) and Liberia, founded in around 1825 as a US-controlled settlement of freed slaves and, fearing risk of British annexation, proclaimed a free and independent state in 1847, making it the first decolonised African state. The rest of the continent was split between Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Italy. North Africa, closely identifying with Arab countries but not comprising Arabs alone, was trapped between the Ottoman Empire of Turkey and its European rivals, and control went to France, Spain, Britain and Italy (in Libya for two short spells in the 20th Century). Imperial Russia, which expanded eastwards, was a notable absentee.

Since European capitalists gave priority to the plunder of raw materials, mainly mineral resources in which Africa was very rich, to serve their industries, scant attention was paid to social modernization. Industrial development was poor even in late 20th Century, with only South Africa and to a much less extent Zimbabwe, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco having an industrial infrastructure. Sub Saharan Africa was essentially a cultured tribal society which knew no national boundaries. The colonial powers which carved up Africa among them also created boundaries with no relation to ethnic identity.

In general, colonial laws, imposed by force, invaded people's lives, restricting their right to work or live in certain places and to travel freely.

Their right to use their own languages and practice traditional religions was also often denied.

Colonial systems, however, differed in strategy. The British, for example, chose “indirect rule” and used British officers supported by local chiefs and puppet administrators drawn from local circles. South Asians were settled as indentured labour in their colonies in East Africa and in South Africa. This was followed by the arrival of a South Asian middle class including traders, which served often as a buffer between the Colonial regime and a resentful local population. However, violence against the Kikuyu on pretext of suppressing the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya rates among the worst of British colonial oppression and on par with British cruelty against Boers in the notorious Boer War (1899-1902) in South Africa. Armed struggle was necessitated in the late 1960’s in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) by British hypocrisy which averted firm action against the regime of Ian Smith who unilaterally declared independence to deny transfer of power to the black majority. The French who preferred “direct rule” used French colonial officials. However, Africans who adopted the language and lifestyle of French nationals could become French citizens. French oppression of North Africa was ruthless and Algeria fought perhaps the bloodiest liberation war in Africa (1954-1962) to end 132 years of colonial rule. Belgian rule in the Congo was the most cruel and brutal colonial rule ever inflicted on a people. Most Africans in the Congo worked in the mines and plantations as indentured labour on long contracts. The Belgians did not invest in the land or its people; and on the eve of independence in 1960, of more than thirteen million Congolese, just sixteen were university graduates and there were no Congolese engineers or physicians. The record of Portuguese colonialism was no brighter, and its emphasis was on economic exploitation, including slave trade, rather than colonial administration. The presence of racist South Africa, backed by the US and Britain, in the region helped Portugal to hold on to its colonies into the 1970’s, until the collapse of the fascist regime of Salazar in Portugal.

Resistance to colonial rule

Early African resistance to colonial rule, between 1880 and 1910, was marked by militant anti-colonialism with military resistance as the norm. Many African states took up arms to safeguard their independence during this period. Although armed resistance had failed by the early 1900s, anti-colonial efforts by other means persisted. Anti-colonialists took advantage of the indigenous press which had emerged by the early 1900s. The Pan-African movement with a global character made a strong impact on the attitude of the African intelligentsia to move them from pacifist reformism to revolutionary anti-colonialism. Africa also had several rebellions in response to colonial exploitation, such as the Maji Rebellion against the German colonial authorities in Tanganyika (now part of Tanzania) in 1905; peasant revolts in Madagascar in 1904-1905 and 1915; Mahdi revolts in Sudan in 1900 to 1904; the protracted rebellion in Somaliland from 1895 to 1920; and the Egba revolt in Nigeria in 1918.

By the second decade of the 20th Century, colonial powers had adapted administrative policies directly affecting Africans. This led to alliances between the African intelligentsia and the native chiefs and the bringing together of urban and rural people. The 1917 October Revolution inspired emergent political parties that questioned colonialism, and mass support grew for nationalist parties between the two World Wars. The global impact of WW2 propelled Africa towards eventual decolonization.

European expatriate firms dominated import-export trade in Africa in the 1920s and 1930s. Using their monopoly over trade they dictated not only the prices of African cash crops, but also of goods imported from Europe. This adversely affected local farmers as well as the fortunes of African merchants who, since pre-colonial times, played a key role in the import-export trade. It led to new forms of anti-colonialism and some African societies boycotted European goods and even refused to sell their cash crops to expatriate traders. This form of resistance intensified during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when prices of cash crops fell sharply while those of imported goods increased astronomically.

The economic downturn in the 1920s and 1930s inspired the rural people who had used armed resistance in the 19th Century to stage boycotts and holdups to oppose colonialism. Seeking redress for injustices, including poor prices for their crops, the rural people increasingly teamed up with urban residents who suffered escalating costs of living, partly owing to increasing prices for imported goods. Organized labour was another area of economic anti-colonialism, with African workers demanding fair working conditions from their European employers. Several major strikes occurred across the continent.

Political movements that emerged in the 1930s and after had greater revolutionary content and force than their predecessors. They rejected the idea of reforming the colonial system and sought to overthrow it. Among them were the New-Destour Party of Tunisia (founded in 1934); the Istiqlal Party in Morocco (late 1930s); the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (1944); and the Convention People's Party (Ghana, 1949). The rapidly growing population from around the 1930s provided a mass support base for the militant political parties, and the educated middle class was a source of strength for the cause of independence.

The Pan-Africanist movement, which led to the nationalist idea that empowered Africans to address colonialism, also motivated anti-colonial movements to transcend national boundaries. The fifth of the series of Pan-African congresses, held in Manchester, UK in 1945 attracted several future leaders of independent Africa. In the course of independence struggles, Kwame Nkrumah organized a series of Pan-African congresses in the 1950s and 1960s in Accra, Ghana (the first Sub-Saharan country to win independence in 1957) aimed to empower other African nationalist leaders to overthrow the colonial yoke.

Formal freedom from colonial rule started in the predominantly Arab North Africa with Egypt gaining nominal independence in 1922 and a fuller version of it in 1936; but Britain's influence in Egypt remained strong until the overthrow of the monarchy in 1952. Direct colonial rule lasted in much of North Africa into the 1950's, and France yielded its

brutal hold on Algeria only as late as 1962. Spain let go of Spanish Sahara (now Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic) in 1975, but the Kingdom of Morocco soon brought most of the territory under its control. Spain, however, still holds on to several enclaves on or off the north coast of Morocco and the off-shore Canary Islands to the west of Morocco.

By the late 1950's, the colonialists had learned that holding on to direct colonial rule was not profitable. Much credit is due, however, to leaders of the calibre of Franz Fanon of Algeria, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sékou Touré of Guinea for expediting the process. Release from direct colonial rule in sub-Saharan Africa (except White-ruled South Africa) started with British-ruled Ghana (then Gold Coast) in 1957. Eighteen more colonies were free by 1960, and twelve more by 1965 — if one counts the 'Unilateral Declaration of Independence' of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) by its White racist Prime Minister Ian Smith, with covert backing by imperialism — and another five by 1968. The process slowed, however, because the fascist regime in Portugal was reluctant to part with its colonies and was encouraged by the apartheid regime of South Africa. Bitter struggles were fought in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, and Portugal yielded following the fall of the fascist regime to a military coup in 1974 leading to a left-oriented regime. South Africa, acting in connivance with US imperialism, however, challenged the political stability of post-independence Angola and Mozambique.

France held on to Djibouti in North East Africa until 1970 and to the islands of Comoros east of Mozambique until 1975. Djibouti since 2001 has been home to the only permanent US military base, Camp Lemonier, in Africa, and more recently the much smaller bases of China and Saudi Arabia, along with a more modest military presence of Britain, France and Japan. France still possesses the archipelago of Mayotte to the east of Mozambique and the Reunion Island east of Madagascar and several atolls in the vicinity of Madagascar.

The apartheid regime of South Africa, which became a major colonial power in southern Africa by taking control of Namibia (then called South

West Africa) in 1915 following the departure of Germany, ran a brutal regime in Namibia until 1990 as well as colluded with US imperialism to subvert independence struggles in southern Africa.

While militancy was necessary to throw out direct colonial rule, its degree depended on the conduct of the colonial power. Struggles to decolonize Ivory Coast (then Cote d'Ivoire), Upper Volta (then Burkina Faso), Tanzania and the Central African Republic were comparable in violence and pain to the better known cases of Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Namibia, Belgian Congo (later Zaire, and now Democratic Republic of Congo) and Zimbabwe.

Neocolonial take over

After WW2 most African leaders engaged the colonial state through recognized political parties and trade unions. However, most of the parties that led the transition to independence between 1950 and 1963 to become the ruling parties of independent Africa had no alternative but to cooperate with the outgoing colonial powers.

There were notable exceptions. Guinea, led by Sékou Touré, who was its president from 1958 to 1984, sought total independence, rejecting continued association with France. Nkrumah who led Ghana to independence was exemplary in his defiance of imperialism as was Patrice Lumumba of the Congo who soon paid for it with his life. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania is among others who distanced themselves from imperialism. Anti-imperialism was strong among leaders of countries which fought wars of liberation to win independence. But leaders like Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya were early to compromise with the colonialists.

Neocolonialism was recognized in course of 'decolonization' and was implicitly identified in the "Economic Dependency Theory" of Hans Singer and Raúl Prebisch — a Marxian perspective of which was developed by Paul A. Baran among others and recognized in the context of decolonization by Franz Fanon and others. Neocolonialism was explicitly referred to and critiqued during the All-African Peoples'

Conference meetings of the late 1950s and early 1960s; and the Tunis conference of 1960 and Cairo conference of 1961 denounced what they labelled neocolonialism, singling out for criticism the French Community comprising France and several of its former colonies. Its "Resolution on Neocolonialism" was the first to define neocolonialism and describe its key characteristics. Credit is due to Nkrumah, then head of government of Ghana, who in his "Neocolonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism" published in 1965 theoretically developed and extended the socio-economic and political arguments of Lenin in "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism" (1917) to the post-WW2 period. Predictably, he was deposed as President early next year by a bloody coup by lower-ranking military and police officers directly aided by the CIA and the State Department of the US, when he was out of Ghana on a peace mission to bring an end to US intervention in Vietnam.

Post-independence leaders of Africa soon found that their independence was unreal and that colonial rule has been replaced by economic control by the former colonial master— either alone (as in the Francophone countries) or in alliance with other imperial powers, often the US. Thus neocolonialism in Africa comprised former colonial powers and the US, which soon became the dominant neocolonial force.

While neocolonialism used various means to achieve its ends, a common feature was the domination of poorer countries by developed countries which paid low prices for primary goods including agricultural products while flooding the former with their cheap manufactured goods. Since the export of raw materials was the main revenue base of most African countries, Western industries thrived at the expense of development of industry and national economy in African countries.

The anticipated political and economic upsurge in the former colonies did not materialize, and neocolonialism exploited the lack of industrial growth in post-independence Africa to make it a victim of imperialist economic aid. Even Liberia and Ethiopia, which never suffered classical

colonial rule, become neocolonial states by their reliance on international finance capital, owing to their fragile economic structure.

Meanwhile, rivalry for global domination between the US and the Soviet Union — which since the late 1950's had abandoned its socialist ideals — neared its peak in the late 1960's, when most of Africa had won independence. Armed struggle was raging in the Portuguese colonies and in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), besides rising militancy in against the apartheid regime in South Africa. The US increased its economic aid as well as intervention in African states to deter them from aligning with the Soviet Union. Loans from the US and Europe bonded independent governments to imperialist exploitative forces. Most foreign aid was in the form of loans with high interest rates; and loan repayment aggravated underdevelopment as interest payment further impoverished the people.

The 1960's and 70's saw regime changes akin to those in Latin America in the 1960's and early 1970's targeting governments with anti-imperialist inclination. The apartheid regime of South Africa acted to defend imperialist interests in southern Africa in return for backing for its racist order. Electoral politics was no guarantee for political stability and several governments defiant of imperialism were easily overthrown, owing to weak politicization of the masses and the willingness of some governments to collude with imperialism. Despite the general impression that coups in Africa resulted from factional rivalry, the coups mainly replaced governments with anti-imperialist tendencies by ones more amenable to imperialism. The socialist government elected in 1963 in Congo which later declared itself the People's Republic of the Congo, however, endured destabilization until after the fall of the Soviet Union. Notably, no regime change by a coup led to a left-inclined government but for two exceptions. In Ethiopia, a coup by junior army officers led to a pro-Soviet left government which collapsed in 1989, owing to civil war in the wake of the drought induced famine of 1983-85. In Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), the Marxist and Pan Africanist Thomas Sankara and a group of soldiers with popular backing overthrew a corrupt regime

in 1983. Sankara was murdered in 1987 while he was still a popular ruler. The only other instance of a 'communist' bid to take power in Africa was the abortive pro-Soviet communist-led coup attempt of 1971 in Sudan.

Although neocolonial exploitation of the Third World has changed in style since the imperialist project of globalization, changes in Africa seem less than those evident in Asia and Latin America. Sub-Saharan Africa is poorly industrialised amid an abundance of minerals, and the plunder of unprocessed or semi-processed minerals is aided by an unequal global pricing system, which is loaded against producers of primary goods. Most African countries that defied imperialism into the 1970s, including Senegal and Tanzania, which aimed for a distinctly African socialism, yielded to imperialist pressure in the face of economic crisis.

Thus, imperialist control and plunder of post-colonial Africa's resources continued with the consent of the state in many countries. Consent when not 'voluntary' was secured through agency of civil war. Defiant regimes were punished through support for reactionary terror backed by the apartheid regime of South Africa and the White rule in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) as in Mozambique and Angola, where even after imperialism came to terms with its defeat, the forces of terror let loose by imperialism continued to stir trouble. Economic sanctions were used to punish Zimbabwe since 2002 for distributing to the landless native population the vast extent of agricultural land stolen by White landowners.

Failing resistance to neocolonialism

By the 1970s, most models of national development in the former colonies came a cropper. Ad hoc cures for economic ills aggravated the curse of underdevelopment. Doing away with the old ruling class, nationalizing the means of production, redistributing income and land, and forced accumulation failed to stand up to the challenges of neocolonialism. The contrast in size and scale of industry made weaker economies even less competitive. Thus one wonders why, if the ways of neocolonialism were clear to many theorists of the time, independent African countries did not

respond accordingly and move toward economic models that would make them more competitive in the world market.

Among feasible explanations is the "balkanization" of the continent under European colonialism as suggested by Nkrumah. The break-up of the continent was as arbitrary as that of the Arab Middle East and obstructed the unity of the African people. Nkrumah encouraged inter-African trade to wean the continent from Western imports and championed the cause of Pan Africanism to unite Africa and enhance its bargaining power in the world market. But there were other requirements that had to be met for an industrially backward Africa to stand up to neocolonial dominance.

To Fanon, the exploitative ways of the West were inherent to its capitalist nature and Africa had no place in global capitalism. He drew attention to a serious handicap for newly independent countries of Africa in the form of the class nature of the leadership. The African petit bourgeoisie, mostly Western-educated and favoured by European powers for their assent to changing from colonialism to neo-colonialism, received the reins of power from the departing colonial regime to become facilitators of neocolonialism in Africa. (This was also true of the African National Congress that took over from the apartheid regime in South Africa in 1994). Fanon accused them of collaborating with the colonial power to ensure that the interests of both would continue to be served even after formal independence. This class of Africans betrayed the revolutionary masses behind the various nationalist movements. For Fanon, complete independence for Africa needed a leap from national consciousness to political and social consciousness by the masses in order to overcome the governing class, which merely replaced the colonial administration as the most direct exploiters of the people; and he advocated violent revolution as the only means to be rid of the oppressive neocolonial forces.

Fanon's ideology influenced many political actors in Africa, especially Amilcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau who, until assassination in 1974, defied the deeply entrenched Portuguese colonial regime. Cabral was acutely conscious that Eurocentrism was a hurdle for the Left to understand the

history of class struggle in the African context. He rejected erroneous Eurocentric views of the development of class society and drew attention to socio-historical and cultural aspects of the impact of colonialism. He also rejected sentimental longing for the pre-colonial past and demanded the grasp of current reality to go forward along the path of class struggle against the main oppressor, namely imperialism. His comment below shatters all illusory images of the national bourgeoisie nurtured by sections of the Left, based on their positive role during the colonial era.

“Another important distinction between the colonial and neocolonial situations is in the prospects for the struggle. The colonial situation (in which the nation class fights the repressive forces of the bourgeoisie of the colonizing country) can lead, apparently at least, to a nationalist solution (national revolution); the nation gains its independence and theoretically adopts the economic structure which best suits it. The neocolonial situation (in which the working classes and their allies struggle simultaneously against the imperialist bourgeoisie and the native ruling class) is not resolved by a nationalist solution; it demands the destruction of the capitalist structure implanted in the national territory by imperialism, and correctly postulates a socialist solution.”

[Amilcar Cabral, *The Weapon of Theory*, 1966]

Several factors prevented the growth of national independence into an organized anti-imperialist movement. Among them are the class nature of the new elite that took power in African countries and the failure of even anti-imperialist elements in Africa, including those in power, to put class struggle in command. Lack of industrial development and absence of a strong industrial working class were contributory factors as were dogmatic and Eurocentric tendencies among Marxists. Even in South Africa, with a militant working class, the Communist Party failed to develop as a mass political organization. Although Marxist Leninist and other left organizations exist in many parts of Africa, and have been part of mass struggles against reactionary regimes, the Left has yet to gain the initiative to revolutionise and lead the masses.

A serious handicap to anti-imperialism in Africa was that, while Africa was still emerging from the yoke of colonialism and confronting South African racist rule, the anti-imperialist momentum of the Third World had begun to steam. By mid-1970's, governments in several Third World countries had compromised with imperialism, which by the late 1970's had perfected its neo-colonial strategy. Also the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the betrayal of socialism and revolutionary mass struggles by China since 1978 had an adverse impact on the socialist and anti-imperialist struggles worldwide.

Impression was created that, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the surrender to capitalism of all socialist states but Cuba and North Korea to capitalism, socialism was defeated and a new US-dominated world order had come to stay. The deepening crises of capitalism since the late 1990s proved that to be wrong.

Imperialist control today

The aims of control are much the same as those of the colonial era but for the substitution of old mechanisms with new. Neo-colonialism operates in the Third World in fundamentally the same way, although differences exist between countries and regions. Let us first look at its general style of operation and then at features more specific to Africa.

Neocolonial exploitation persists in industry, commerce, agriculture, shipping, insurance and finance, with the acquiescence of the weaker country. Unequal trade treaties; trade barriers in favour of the powerful state; agreements for economic co-operation; unrestricted flow of capital; meddling in internal finances and foreign exchange; protection of the interests of private investors; loans called aid with high interest or terms that let the lender profit by dictating how the funds are to be used; and forcing the use of most aid funds to buy from the donor are well known. Also, the political and military will of imperialism is thrust on the Third World by an array of mechanisms relating to trade and finance including funding through credit agencies like the IMF, the World Bank and

development aid agencies. To this list one may add international NGOs, which imperialism uses to implement its neo-colonial agenda, and the organs of the UN which are under total control of the US since the 1980s.

Regional strategic and economic partnerships, besides existing global alliances, play an important role in US imperialist control. Increasing invisible trade, including insurance, commissions, agency fees and shipping, is still dominated by imperialist countries, although their share has shrunk a little following the entry of new players.

Greed for profit moved manufacturing and sectors of service industry to lands with cheap labour and lower overheads. Outsourcing also made manufacturing more complex by involving labour from several countries to create a single product. Investors sought after countries with skilled disciplined labour and laws to protect the interests of the investor against the legitimate rights of workers. Third World countries, trapped by growing unemployment and the burden of foreign credit became more suitable candidates than the weaker capitalist countries of the West. Special Economic Zones offered concessions such as tax holidays as well as immunity from laws that ensured the rights of workers. The threat of shifting to a 'friendlier' country hung like the sword of Damocles to ensure compliance of the neocolony. Thus, imperialist exploitation of labour in the neocolonies involved pressure on the government to control wages and increase productivity, especially in the SEZs which have proliferated since the 1980s.

Migration of labour, including 'intellectual labour', induced by social and economic crises in the neocolony as well as the attraction of higher wages benefitted the capitalist West since the post-WW2 decades when it faced a shortage of labour. Displacement of people by poverty, armed conflict, natural disaster and famine provide an army of cheap labour in the form of refugees who, out of desperation, will accept casual, informal and even illegal employment. Owing to isolation from the working class of the host country amid racial prejudice and xenophobia, it takes years for them even to assert their legal rights. However, during times of economic

slowdown, unemployment among the native population leads to resentment of immigrants as well as to racism and the re-emergence of fascism. Capitalism uses this too as a means to keep the working class divided and to subdue militancy among immigrants.

The emergence of multinational corporations (MNCs) as economic power houses changed the way in which global capital operates. Some MNCs are wealthier than whole countries and do not rely on the protection of an imperial power to defend their business interests. Some even act like a parallel government with control over territory and power to defend it.

The neoliberal ideology that gripped the capitalist West in the 1980s had adverse implications for the neocolonies as well as the toiling masses in metropolis. Economic liberalization and privatization accelerated since the 1980s. Third World countries were forced to open up their economies to the flow of foreign goods and foreign capital and waive controls that protect native industry and agriculture. Any residual control of Third World over its resources was further weakened by pressure to abandon state responsibility for health, education and social security, and to restructure state institutions in favour of control by the private sector.

Advances in Information Technology since the 1980s and its rapid surge in the past two decades facilitated speedy enactment of financial transactions and rapid transfer of capital in and out of countries. Many Third World economies fell victim to speculative capital and currency speculation by cynical operators in the banking and investment sectors. A low level of market capitalization in the African continent but for South Africa, however, spared African countries the economic instability resulting from global capitalist crises.

Although imperialism led by the US had adapted to changing conditions in Asia and to some extent in Latin America, its approach to Africa has not changed very much, partly because the near complete surrender of Africa to neocolonialism, especially since the ANC in South Africa struck a deal with imperialism. Africa continues to be seen as an unlimited source of primary goods and a dumping ground for surplus production.

Policies and practices of multinational companies, including tax dodging, unfair trade policies and practices, and the brain drain of skilled workers drain Africa so that Africa's losses directly benefit rich countries.

Foreign direct investment in manufacture is very low in Africa but for South Africa. Nigeria and Ethiopia are among countries increasingly attracting FDI in manufacture but the emphasis is on primary goods, mining related industry and apparel. Outsourcing of manufacture and services by Western imperialist countries, however, has mostly been to Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. This, on the one hand, points to economic and industrial backwardness of Africa and, on the other, to the imperialist view of Africa as a mere source of primary goods, mostly minerals. The growth of Chinese investment in manufacture in Africa since Year 2000 was a rude awakening for US and its allies.

The working of neo-colonialism in Africa can be summarised as follows:

Economic control:

Investment through MNCs is mainly to plunder resources. Extension of global production lines have mostly neglected Africa but for South Africa and a few countries such as Nigeria.

Fixing of prices of minerals and cash crops has kept Africa dependent on imperialist aid.

Loans and grants through financial institutions dominated by the US attract very high interest rates and impose restrictions on the use of the funds. They serve to worsen the debt burden, underdevelopment and dependence, and have political implications as well.

Development of modern technology is much denied to Africa to ensure dependence, and technology transfer from the West to the poor countries of Africa is minimal even when the set up manufacturing in Africa.

Socio-cultural control:

The worldwide mass media controlled by the West disseminate news and information in ways that psychologically condition Africans, the growing middle class especially, to accept the imperialist world view.

Curriculum is informed by imperialistic rather than practical education so that, while advanced countries use practical education to produce and innovate, scholars in impoverished Africa gather certificates.

Cultural indoctrination occurs through inculcation of Western values through the mass media, books, magazines and the internet. Adoption of western cultural ideals have implications for life style and a preference for imported goods be it food clothing or other consumables, even when local goods of quality are available.

While imperialism uses the cultural and identity cards to divide people in Asia, religion is now an imperialist weapon in Africa. In contrast to the colonial use of Christianity to conquer Africa, US imperialism uses Islamic extremists to destabilize regimes in Africa, although not always with the desired outcome.

Political control

With very few exceptions, the West has cordial relations with the ruling classes of Africa, many of which are client states.

The West resorts to meddling in internal affairs, including regime change and destabilization by promoting regional and internal conflict if a regime appears to act counter to imperialist interests.

Economic penalties including economic blockade and selective targeting based on human rights violations and war crimes are common means to 'discipline' regimes that defy.

Military control

Among methods of neo-colonial domination and control are occupation of territory and stationing of troops, supply of arms and weapons, and waging war, including proxy war.

The former colonial rulers either had no need for military presence in the former colonies since the loyalty of the successors was assured or ceased to be global powers as in the case of Belgium and Portugal; and South Africa was a bastion of imperialist interests. Colonial rulers did not maintain powerful military bases in their former colonies of Africa, but

for French military bases in Chad, Gabon, Niger, Senegal and Djibouti and the British Army Training Unit in Kenya. British military presence in Sierra Leone continues on a small scale since intervention in a civil war in 2000. France has a bigger military footprint and even recently intervened militarily in its former colonies of Chad, the Central Africa Republic, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire, and is seen as proxy for US imperialism which has crept in to fill the space left by former colonial rulers. Although the US reportedly has only one base in Djibouti, its armed forces have since early this century retained presence all the way across Africa from Senegal to Mauritania in the west coast to Djibouti, Kenya and Tanzania on the east, with civil war and terrorism as pretext for military presence. AFRICOM started in 2007 still has its base in Germany, although plans are afoot to locate it in African soil. The setting up of AFRICOM has more to do with concerns about China's growing economic influence and, with it, political influence in Africa.

It should be noted, however, that the various modes of imperialist control are interconnected and serve the sole purpose of controlling the natural resources of Africa.

Other global players

Soviet Union and China challenged imperialism in the closing decades of old colonialism in Africa. Soviet intentions in Africa were not altruistic and involvement started later in the 1950s in a bid to counter China's growing influence in Africa, despite denial of its place in the UN until 1972. Soviet involvement was later driven by rivalry with the US for global hegemony. China was noted for its support of liberation struggles and development aid to countries facing imperialist pressure. Yet, despite adverse implications of Sino-Soviet differences, anti-colonial liberation struggles, did not suffer significantly, but for the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa, where Soviet influence on the Africa National Congress caused a conciliatory line that led to its logical end after the ANC took power in 1991.

Up to the early 1970s, the Soviet bid for influence was via foreign aid (with features of imperialist aid). Despite trade partnerships and having a few African countries as observers in the Soviet-led COMECON (1949-1991), Soviet trade with Africa was small in volume and there was no capital investment. The Soviet Union enjoyed harbour facilities in a few African countries in the 1970s, but had no military base. It gave military assistance to some countries as well as to liberation movements. While its engaging the US in a long proxy war in Angola had a positive outcome, involvement in Ethiopia led to the eventual collapse of Soviet influence in Africa. Nevertheless, Soviet foreign aid and intervention, despite flaws, helped somewhat to mute imperialist domination of Africa.

Russia was the capitalist successor to the Soviet Union after its collapse in 1991, and took a decade to stand up to domination by US imperialism. It has influence in some of the republics of the former Soviet Union, and acts to assert itself against US imperialist moves to isolate and encircle it. Although a military power that can stand up to the US, its economy relies heavily on export of petroleum and minerals. Russia, however, lost its opportunity to restore its prestige in Africa by allowing the imperialist attack on Libya in 2014. Russia has yet to regain the influence it had in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.

Russia has since begun to revive old ties. Strengthening of ties with South Africa through BRICS can help to gain influence in southern Africa. Russian investment and trade in Africa lag behind many countries including India. So that Russia's impact on Africa is unlikely to be particularly significant in the near future.

After three decades of rapid economic growth built on cheap labour and heavily export-oriented industries, China is now the sole competitive rival to western hegemony, especially in Africa. But its 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' does not offer an alternative way of life and global order to that of the West; and China is a rising economic power with imperialist potential. Marxists mostly agree that China has embraced capitalism, but dispute whether it is imperialist. China is now

the leading trading partner of Africa and has established a variety of economic partnerships with African countries. These developments could propel China into a confrontational situation especially in the face of moves by the US to arrest China's influence.

Many who label China as imperialist use imperialist features based on a Eurocentric idea of imperialism, which they subjectively assign to China. As explained in earlier essays in this journal, China lacks the salient features of imperialism identified by Lenin. Also, China's capitalist transformation is not in the same league as that in the West, and China has not assimilated to the imperialist network led by the US. While the imperialist West retains several important features of old colonialism with subservient regimes doing the work of old colonial administrators, China, regardless of its intentions, scores on its ability to address Africa on an equal footing, a skill acquired when it was a socialist state that backed anti-colonial struggles in the 1960s and 70s.

It is too early to say how China's involvement in Africa will unfold. But, despite its main interest in Africa, like that of US and Europe, being obtaining minerals and petroleum, it is seen as a friendlier force.

Some see Chinese aid and development finance to Africa in terms of a selfish quest for natural resources; while there are others who see them as virtuous and laying the foundation for long-term economic development, through infrastructure projects and revenue creation. China formally adheres to the types of aid programmes declared under socialism in 1956. But capitalist China's aid to Africa although benign is not altruistic.

China's non-interference in African politics, an extension of the foreign policy developed under socialism, contrasts with the meddling approach of the US and its allies. But indifference towards state oppression was certainly not the policy under socialism.

One should, however, be warned against malicious anti-China campaign by imperialist media mercenaries. Wild charges of China's land grab in Africa, though found untrue, still circulate based on the assumption that

China is acting to feed its hungry population, whereas the truth is that China is assisting to overcome a food deficit in Africa.

Neocolonialism, having made the rulers of former colonies their vassals who facilitate imperialist exploitation by oppressing their populations, has partners among big capitalists in the neocolony. It is not unusual for big capitalists of Third World countries to have global partnerships, buy into businesses abroad and invest in other countries. Thus foreign investment alone is inadequate to identify a country as imperialist.

Military strength, which has been a requirement for an imperialist power, cannot be used to rank imperialists. Socialist Soviet Union and China developed mighty military machines and acquired nuclear weapons, not out of imperial ambition, and imperialist aggression forced socialist countries like Vietnam and North Korea to build military strength.

Armed aggression, stationing of troops on foreign territory and regional hegemony are imperialist traits, but not sufficient to designate a country as an imperialist power. Russia's military bases abroad are a hangover from the Soviet era and Russia plays a minimal role in UN peace keeping missions. Russian involvement in Syria should also be seen in the context of moves by the US to encircle Russia. China's sole overseas military base coexists with a much bigger US base in Djibouti. China needed that base after it became part of an international effort against piracy in the region. China's military presence in Africa, despite joining a few UN peace keeping missions, is negligible compared to that of the US and France.

Questions of Chinese imperialism in Africa come mostly from the West and not Africa, where Chinese involvement is mostly seen as counter to the collective imperialism of the US, Europe and Japan. Also, the level of Chinese investment in Africa (especially by Chinese state companies) very much lags its investment in the West, and Western media emphasise Chinese investments to conceal the crude exploitation by Western MNCs.

Any emerging capitalist power is potentially imperialist, and China is a prime candidate. Imperialist or not, China's approach to Africa vastly

differs from those of the US and former colonial powers, mainly France and UK. Among what attract China to African countries are terms and conditions of trade and investment, contribution to infrastructural and economic development, non-intervention in internal affairs and a cleaner historical record than the colonial powers. Notably, Chinese investment in infrastructure has created for Africa an alternative, however imperfect, to the international financial control of the US and its allies.

Concluding remarks

Neocolonialism comprises the use of foreign capital to exploit the less developed countries at the expense of development. Capital investment in this context only widens the gap between the rich and the poor countries. However, the thrust of the anti-imperialist struggle cannot be to arrest capital flow from developed countries to the less developed but to ensure that it leads to development based on the needs of the people.

Emerging capitalist powers like China, India and Russia are no more the victims of the imperialist rules of trade and tariff, fixing of commodity prices by cartels, and political and military control through various international bodies and military alliances. They may even benefit from the system, but are not partners.

US imperialism is weakening politically and economically, and will rely increasingly on military might to retain control of the global capitalist system. How its new capitalist rivals will respond is an open question. For now, the arrival of China and Russia as challenges to US imperialism is a positive development. But that is not to say that it will necessarily mean a better deal for Africa in the long run.

While one should be alert to the emergence of new imperialist powers, for now, it is wise to distinguish between rival capitalist powers, taking into account key differences between the impact of neocolonial powers and their challengers on individual countries of Africa and the continent as a whole. One should bear in mind that that US-led imperialism is still the biggest threat to Africa, economically, politically and militarily.

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Resolution on Neocolonialism

*(Adopted at the All African Peoples' Conference, Cairo,
25– 31, March 1961)*

The third All-African Peoples' Conference meeting in Cairo from the 25th to the 31st of March, 1961, having carefully reviewed the current situation in Africa;

Considers Neocolonialism, which is the survival of the colonial system in spite of formal recognition of political independence in emerging countries which become the victims of an indirect and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, military or technical, is the greatest threat to African Countries that have newly won their independence or those approaching this status.

Emphasises the examples of the Congo, the French Community, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which indicate that the colonial system and international imperialism, realizing their failure in facing the development of revolutionary movements in Africa, make use of many means to safeguard the essential of their economic and military power.

When the recognition of national independence becomes inevitable, they try to deprive these countries of their essence of real independence. This is done by imposing unequal economic, military and technical, conventions; by creating puppet governments following false elections, or by inventing some so-called constitutional formulas of multinational co-existence intended only to hide the racial discrimination favouring settlers.

Whenever such machinations appear insufficient to hamper the combativity and determination of popular liberation movements, dying colonialism tries, under the order of Neocolonialism or through the guided intervention of the United Nations, the balkanization of newly-independent States or the systematic division of the political or syndical vivid forces, and in desperate cases, like the Congo, colonialism goes as far as plots, repressive measures by army and police, and murderous cold-blood.

Considering that Neocolonialism manifests itself through economic and political intervention, intimidation and blackmail in order to prevent African states from directing their political, social and economic programmes towards the exploitation of their natural wealth for the benefit of their peoples.

Considers that such countries as the United States, Federal Germany, Israel, Britain, Belgium, Holland, South Africa and France are the perpetrators of Neocolonialism.

Manifestations of Neocolonialism

The Conference denounces the following manifestations of Neocolonialism in Africa:

- (a) Puppet governments represented by stooges and even fabricated elections, based on some chiefs, reactionary elements, anti-popular politicians, big bourgeois compradors or corrupt civil or military officials.
- (b) Regrouping of states, before or after independence, by an imperial power in federation or communities linked to that imperial power.
- (c) Balkanisation as a deliberate policy of fragmentation of states by creation of artificial entities such as Katanga, Mauritania, Buganda, etc.
- (d) The economic entrenchment of the colonial power before independence and the continuity of economic dependence after formal recognition of national sovereignty.
- (e) Integration into colonial economic blocks which maintain the under-developed character of African economy.
- (f) Economic infiltration by a foreign power after independence, through capital investments, loans and monetary aid, or technical experts under unequal concessions, particularly those extending for long periods.
- (g) Direct monetary dependence, as in those emergent independent states whose finances remain directly controlled by colonial powers.

Agents of Neocolonialism

The Third All-African Peoples' Conference exposes the following agents of Neocolonialism:

- (a) Colonial embassies and missions serving as nerve centres for espionage and pressure points on local African governments directly or through their civil or military technicians.
- (b) So-called foreign and United Nations technical assistants who ill-advise and sabotage national political, economical, educational and social development.
- (c) Military personnel in armed forces and police, as officers and advisers who serve above all, the colonial interests directly, or through local officers who remain loyal to their former masters.
- (d) The representatives from imperialist and colonial countries, under the cover of religion, Moral Re-armament, cultural, Trade Union and Youth and Philanthropic organizations.
- (e) The malicious propaganda by radio, press, literature controlled by imperial and colonial countries, as well as in some independent African Countries where press and radio are still owned by imperialist powers.
- (f) Puppet Governments in Africa being used by imperialists in the furtherance of Neocolonialism, such as the use of their good offices by the neocolonial powers to undermine the sovereignty and aspirations of other African States.

Means of Fighting Neocolonialism

The Third All-African Peoples' Conference, whose very reason of existence is the mobilization of the African masses for the liberation of Africa, is firmly convinced that it is by intensifying this mobilization that Africa will find the most efficient way to fight Neocolonialism and to extract the last roots of imperialism.

It is the duty of popular, political, syndical, youth and women's organizations, not only to inspire and wage the struggle against Neocolonialism, but also, and above all to be vigilant, to control the correct application of the general outline and to denounce all those who attempt to deviate it from its real objectives.

The Conference realizes that the struggle against Neocolonialism must be associated with the struggle against all forms of opportunism which is the mask of the accomplices of imperialism.

It is therefore by awakening of the conscience of the masses by the establishment of landmarks of real liberation, that the masses will be freed from the power of certain slogans and formulas that only serve as a camouflage for colonialism.

That is why, the Conference:

- (a) Condemns the balkanization of emerging States, whether dependent or independent, as a way to perpetuate Neocolonialism in Africa (Congo, Mauritania, Northern Rhodesia, Buganda, etc.)
- (b) Condemns the federations and communities created before independence under the patronage of colonial States.
- (c) Invites all independent African States to give aid and assistance to liberate the African countries still under foreign domination.
- (d) Urges all independent Africa States which still retain former military and para-military bases, to liquidate these bases as soon as possible.
- (e) Conference reaffirms its determination to continue to mobilize popular mass opinion to denounce enemies of true independence and agents of Neocolonialism camouflaged in all possible forms.
- (f) This Conference denounces aid with expressed or unexpressed strings attached.
- (g) The Conference urges independent African States to intensify their efforts for the creation of an effective form of cooperation among African States in the Economic, Social and Cultural domains in order to frustrate Neocolonialism.
- (h) This Conference deplores the attitude of some independent African States who, under the guise of neutrality, are passive even on matters affecting the whole of Africa, and who, by their passiveness in activities in fact promote the cause of Neocolonialism.
- (i) The Conference calls for the immediate launching of the All-African Trade Union Federation as an effective means of counter-acting Neocolonialism.

(Source: <https://www.pambazuka.org/global-south/africa-all-african-peoples-conference-statement-neocolonialism>)

The Neocolonial Situation

Amilcar Cabral

Although the colonial and neocolonial situations are identical in essence, and the main aspect of the struggle against imperialism is neocolonialist, we feel it is vital to distinguish in practice these two situations. In fact the horizontal structure, however it may differ from the native society, and the absence of a political power composed of national elements in the colonial situation make possible the creation of a wide front of unity and struggle, which is vital to the success of the national liberation movement. But this possibility does not remove the need for a rigorous analysis of the native social structure, of the tendencies of its evolution, and for the adoption in practice of appropriate measures for ensuring true national liberation. While recognizing that each movement knows best what to do in its own case, one of these measures seems to us indispensable, namely, the creation of a firmly united vanguard, conscious of the true meaning and objective of the national liberation struggle which it must lead. This necessity is all the more urgent since we know that with rare exceptions the colonial situation neither permits nor needs the existence of significant vanguard classes (working class conscious of its existence and rural proletariat) which could ensure the vigilance of the popular masses over the evolution of the liberation movement. On the contrary, the generally embryonic character of the working classes and the economic, social and cultural situation of the physical force of most importance in the national liberation struggle—the peasantry—do not allow these two main forces to distinguish true national independence from fictitious political independence. Only a revolutionary vanguard, generally an active minority, can be aware of this distinction from the start and make it known, through the struggle, to the popular masses. This explains the fundamentally

political nature of the national liberation struggle and to a certain extent makes the form of struggle important in the final result of the phenomenon of national liberation.

In the neocolonial situation the more or less vertical structure of the native society and the existence of a political power composed of native elements-national state-already worsen the contradictions within that society and make difficult if not impossible the creation of as wide a front as in the colonial situation. On the one hand the material effects (mainly the nationalization of cadres and the increased economic initiative of the native elements, particularly in the commercial field) and the psychological effects (pride in the belief of being ruled by one's own compatriots, exploitation of religious or tribal solidarity between some leaders and a fraction of the masses) together demobilize a considerable part of the nationalist forces. But on the other hand the necessarily repressive nature of the neocolonial state against the national liberation forces, the sharpening of contradictions between classes, the objective permanence of signs and agents of foreign domination (settlers who retain their privileges, armed forces, racial discrimination), the growing poverty of the peasantry and the more or less notorious influence of external factors all contribute towards keeping the flame of nationalism alive, towards progressively raising the consciousness of wide popular sectors and towards reuniting the majority of the population, on the very basis of awareness of neocolonialist frustration, around the ideal of national liberation. In addition, while the native ruling class becomes progressively more bourgeois, the development of a working class composed of urban workers and agricultural proletarians, all exploited by the indirect domination of imperialism, opens up new perspectives for the evolution of national liberation. This working class, whatever the level of its political consciousness (given a certain minimum, namely the awareness of its own needs), seems to

constitute the true popular vanguard of the national liberation struggle in the neocolonial case. However it will not be able to completely fulfil its mission in this struggle (which does not end with the gaining of independence) unless it firmly unites with the other exploited strata, the peasants in general (hired men, sharecroppers, tenants and small farmers) and the nationalist petty bourgeoisie. The creation of this alliance demands the mobilization and organization of the nationalist forces within the framework (or by the action) of a strong and well-structured political organization.

Another important distinction between the colonial and neocolonial situations is in the prospects for the struggle. The colonial situation (in which the nation class fights the repressive forces of the bourgeoisie of the colonizing country) can lead, apparently at least, to a nationalist solution (national revolution); the nation gains its independence and theoretically adopts the economic structure which best suits it. The neocolonial situation (in which the working classes and their allies struggle simultaneously against the imperialist bourgeoisie and the native ruling class) is not resolved by a nationalist solution; it demands the destruction of the capitalist structure implanted in the national territory by imperialism, and correctly postulates a socialist solution.

This distinction arises mainly from the different levels of the productive forces in the two cases and the consequent sharpening of the class struggle.

It would not be difficult to show that in time the distinction becomes scarcely apparent. It is sufficient to recall that in our present historical situation — elimination of imperialism which uses every means to perpetuate its domination over our peoples, and consolidation of socialism throughout a large part of the world — there are only two possible paths for an independent nation: to return to imperialist domination (neocolonialism, capitalism, state capitalism), or to take

the way of socialism. This operation, on which depends the compensation for the efforts and sacrifices of the popular masses during the struggle, is considerably influenced by the form of struggle and the degree of revolutionary consciousness of those who lead it. The facts make it unnecessary for us to prove that the essential instrument of imperialist domination is violence. If we accept the principle that the liberation struggle is a revolution and that it does not finish at the moment when the national flag is raised and the national anthem played, we will see that there is not, and cannot be national liberation without the use of liberating violence by the nationalist forces, to answer the criminal violence of the agents of imperialism. Nobody can doubt that, whatever its local characteristics, imperialist domination implies a state of permanent violence against the nationalist forces. There is no people on earth which, having been subjected to the imperialist yoke (colonialist or neocolonialist), has managed to gain its independence (nominal or effective) without victims. The important thing is to determine which forms of violence have to be used by the national liberation forces in order not only to answer the violence of imperialism, but also to ensure through the struggle the final victory of their cause, true national independence. The past and present experiences of various peoples, the present situation of national liberation struggles in the world (especially in Vietnam, the Congo and Zimbabwe) as well as the situation of permanent violence, or at least of contradictions and upheavals, in certain countries which have gained their independence by the so-called peaceful way, show us not only that compromises with imperialism do not work, but also that the normal way of national liberation, imposed on peoples by imperialist repression, is *armed struggle*.

(Extracted from Address to the first Tricontinental Conference of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, Havana, January, 1966.)

Zimbabwe: Coup and Consequences

British imperialism laid its hands on Zimbabwe in 1895 through Cecil Rhodes. The land seized through colonial aggression was renamed Rhodesia, and became a haven for White settlers who were granted free access to fertile land and gold mines. All resistance to foreign occupation was brutally suppressed, but resistance continued.

The British government, in order to prolong White control over millions of Africans in Zimbabwe amid growing native resentment over the loss of the bulk of the fertile land and right over mineral resources, put into place a 'constitution' of its design in 1961 that formalised the racialist system. But the White minority of Rhodesia felt threatened by emergent militant national liberation movements such as the ZAPU in 1961 and ZANU in 1963, besides Britain granting 'independence' to its African colonies since 1957. Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith unilaterally declared independence of Rhodesia on 11th November 1965. His words summing up the declaration of UDI left little to imagination:

"We Rhodesians have rejected the doctrinaire philosophy of appeasement and surrender. The decision which we have taken today is a refusal by Rhodesians to sell their birthright. And, even if we were to surrender, does anyone believe that Rhodesia would be the last target of the Communists in the Afro-Asian block?

We have struck a blow for the preservation of justice, civilization, and Christianity...." [*East Africa and Rhodesia Newspaper, November 18, 1965, pp. 204-205*]

Although the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson, on the same day, waxed eloquent in his speech to the British House of Commons about how firmly Britain will act against the illegal government of Rhodesia,

the Soviet Union was quick to point out that statements by the British government only comprised an attempt to whitewash its hypocritical policy (*Soviet News*, No. 5206, 16th November 16, 1965).

Predictably, Wilson passed the buck to the UN; and the Security Council imposed sanctions, starting 1965. Despite British warships blockading the port of Beira, in Mozambique to exert economic pressure on Rhodesia and support for sanctions from the world's nations— none of which extended diplomatic recognition to the Smith regime —a number of nations including South Africa (with help from the Portuguese colony of Mozambique) and the CIA along with MNCs including Shell and British Petroleum actively undermined sanctions. Although sanctions failed to bite, Wilson refused to intervene militarily in Rhodesia; and it was the success of the armed struggle by ZANU and ZAPU that led South Africa and the US to exert pressure on the Smith regime to accept the inevitable.

Thousands of Zimbabweans died in battle before the country secured independence in 1979 through negotiations with the British government, leading to the Lancaster House Agreement. Robert Mugabe became Prime Minister and later President. The liberation movements refused to buy their own ancestral land stolen from the people by colonialism, and the Lancaster House Agreement provided for Britain to buy land from its colonial farmers to be returned to the African owners. Britain, which overlooked the deep-seated racism of the colonial settlers, later refused to buy out the seized land for return to its African owners, in breach of the terms of the Agreement; and the ZANU PF government seized the land.

This dispute between Britain and independent Zimbabwe led Britain and its European partners to impose economic sanctions on Zimbabwe, on pretext of “violation of human rights” by the ZANU PF Government. At the same time, the European Union demanded to observe Zimbabwe elections to determine if they were ‘democratic’ or not. The European countries were not at all impartial, and their main objective was “regime change” to yield a regime that will serve European economic interests. The imposed economic sanctions hurt Zimbabwe badly. The world was

told that the sanctions were to punish ZANU PF Government officials. But the ordinary people suffered most, and even died owing to sanctions imposed by the West including the US. For instance, during an outbreak of cholera, many Zimbabweans died for lack of immunisation vaccine that could not be imported.

The attitude of Western countries to sanctions was, however, different towards earlier sanctions proposed against Ian Smith's Rhodesia and the apartheid regime in South Africa. Many were concerned that sanctions would harm ordinary people. "Ordinary people" did not matter in Zimbabwe. Notably, China and Russia opposed sanctions on Zimbabwe

Also, when President Robert Mugabe let 4000 British colonial farmers to keep over twelve million hectares of farm land, Queen Elizabeth II made him the Knight Grand Cross in order of Bath in 1994, and the University of Edinburgh awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws in 1994. Earlier in 1986, Massachusetts University had given Mugabe an honorary degree of LL.D. But when Mugabe's government later raised the land question, the universities revoked their honorary degrees and in June 2008 the Queen revoked the knighthood she bestowed on Mugabe.

Robert Mugabe was well aware that if Africa was not plundered by the colonialists it would have advanced economically and technologically, and defied sanctions to maintain that Zimbabwe and its resources are for the Zimbabweans. Damage to Zimbabwe in every form has been mostly external, and no other African country has defiantly survived as much inhuman and vicious economic sanctions as Zimbabwe, and for as long.

Mugabe's downfall has been analysed from a personal angle by several analysts, but what matter are the implications of the 'regime change' for Zimbabwe in terms of the country's stand *vis-a-vis* imperialism. Thus Mugabe's failure to ensure a firm anti-imperialist succession was his biggest blunder, since Mugabe could not have been there forever.

What the new order means to Zimbabwe is yet to be seen. Pressures are strong for a conciliatory attitude towards imperialism. It is interesting

that Transitional President Emmerson Mnangagwa while declaring that “the land reform program was unavoidable and shall not be reversed” has also pledged compensation for those white farmers who lost property. The offer in early December 2017 to a White farmer Rob Smart that he can return to his farm in eastern Zimbabwe from which he was evicted six months ago should be seen as a symbolic gesture to the West. The responses of important foreign players are indicative of potential developments in Zimbabwe:

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said, "I will not pretend to regret Mugabe's downfall: but this can now be a turning point, a moment of hope for this beautiful country, full of potential."

The US State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert called it "a historic opportunity, a historic moment for the people of Zimbabwe... to put an end to Zimbabwe isolation."

A European Union spokesperson said that the EU is “committed to support Zimbabwe in the preparation of credible elections and the delivery of political and economic reforms.”

Thus Western economic advisors are soon likely to visit Zimbabwe to urge reforms to liberalize the economy to suit Western investors.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lu Kang said that China's Zimbabwe policy will not change and that China expects to enhance cooperation under the principles of equality and mutual benefit. This has, however, led to speculation in Western media that China had a hand in the coup leading to the resignation of President Mugabe. Russia was equally uncommitted. It seems that China and Russia will steer clear of the internal affairs of Zimbabwe, as they do in other countries of Africa.

In this context, it is important that the present and future leaders of Africa recognize the heavy burden of responsibility on their shoulders. They must wake up to protect Africa from neo-colonial bullying. If they do not, it is for the revolutionary masses to undertake that responsibility.

Local Governance: Problems of Democracy

(Reflections from field experiences in the North)

MeeNilankco Theiventhran

Introduction

The long overdue local government elections which are to take place in February have created renewed interest in local governance. Local governance is not new to Sri Lanka. Within the Sri Lankan polity, besides the election of an Executive President and formation of government from among those elected to Parliament at the national level, there is provision at provincial level under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of 1987, for a system of elected Provincial Councils. At local level, there is historical evidence for an indigenous system of local government (in the form of *Gamsabhas* as well as *Ratasabhas*) which existed in Sri Lanka, but fell into disuse with the advent of the colonial rule. Elected bodies of local government were established under British colonial rule over the 1930s and 1940s.

It is significant that the current local government institutions, namely Municipal Councils, Urban Councils and Pradeshiya Sabhas, were granted constitutional recognition for the first time under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution (1987). Local government is a subject that is devolved on Provincial Councils. The powers of these local councils are moreover enshrined in the Constitution and it is specified that Provincial Councils (PCs) may only increase those powers, but not take them away.

However, local governance in Sri Lanka, particularly in the post-colonial phase of the country's history, evolved amid some contradictory and competing factors. Since independence, the Sri Lankan state underwent a continuing process of centralization of power and authority, to arrive at the Executive Presidential form of government, introduced by the Constitution of 1978. Meanwhile, there has also been pressure to decentralize and devolve. A case for administrative decentralization has been made as far back as the early 1950s. Equally, there have also been arguments for moving away from administrative decentralization and instituting a system of political power-sharing in the form of federalism. This argument emanated from the perspective of the ethnic minorities. Paradoxically, the minorities' plea for province-based federalism only served to reinforce the case for minimal decentralization while strengthening the lowest possible units of local governance instead of province-based units of power-sharing. In recent years, some advocates of strengthening local government have even argued in favour of a modified version of India's *Panchayat Raj* system of local government. Decentralization vs. devolution remains a continuing theme in the political debate on local governance in Sri Lanka.

Given that the people of the North have borne the brunt of the civil war, local government in the region has an important role to play in mediating the relationship between the state and post-war communities. As a structure of governance that is close to the citizen, engagement with local authorities is considered an important metric for measuring the extent to which citizens in the former war zones have begun to engage with the state.

As an intermediary between the citizen and the state, as exemplified by the central government, local authorities play a key role in ensuring the smooth functioning of democracy and development in the country. Given that democratization at the local level and targeted development are key platforms in the reconciliation agenda of the Government of Sri Lanka, local government structures and their relationship with the Centre as well

as the citizens can be recognized as key actors in any effort to achieve reconciliation at the local level.

This is particularly important in the context of the increased development activities taking place in these areas. Empirical evidence, however, is that despite a great deal of development projects undertaken in these areas, most of the citizens are not included in the planning or designing of these projects, although they may have been involved as voluntary workers. Thus, the local government authorities have a significant role to play in ensuring that the voices of the citizens are heard in the development processes taking place at the local level. But, in many instances, the citizens are unaware of the extent to which they can shape policies and practices at the local level through the local authority and representatives. Given the importance of the role of local authorities to democracy, development and process of reconciliation in Sri Lanka, there is pressing need to promote the awareness of citizens of the function of local authorities and strengthen the practice of democracy at the local level.

This essay outlines the main findings of field studies in the North on local governance and the impact of local government bodies functioning in the Northern Province and their shortcomings. Extensive fieldwork was conducted in 2016 by a team of researchers attached to the Social Scientists' Association, with the author as lead researcher; and field research was conducted in all five districts of the Northern Province.

Background

The institutionalization and spread of democratic institutions in the aftermath of a protracted conflict is widely accepted as a means to manage conflict and bring about reconciliation. Moreover, the spread of democratization may also serve to mitigate the risk of further violence and conflict while ensuring inclusion of the communities in mainstream political processes. However, recent scholarship has also shown that there is always a trade-off between efforts to bring about democracy and efforts to secure peace, with the risk of an adverse effect on long-term

peace. As a result, the spread of democratization in conflict affected areas has to go hand in hand with democratic evaluation as well as a constant evaluation of the challenges, opportunities and risks that may either mitigate or exacerbate conflict in the future.

The people of a locality generally elect their local authority, and hence the traditional case for local government rests on the prospect of popular participation at grassroots level. Being the democratic agency that is closest to the people and can thus focus on the local community unlike a central (or for that matter regional or provincial) government that is more concerned with issues at higher levels. Pragmatically speaking, local authorities can attend to the mundane, but nevertheless important, matters in the locality and provide those services that, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, can be best provided at local level. In this respect local governance could be the cornerstone marking the return of local democracy to the war torn regions and a resurrection of the national democratic process.

Since the end of the war between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE in 2009, the conduct of elections in war torn areas at the earliest possible seemed high priority for both local and international actors in Sri Lanka. To the GoSL holding local government elections in these areas was part of what the President referred to as his “new national political-military strategy”. To the international community, speedy conduct of these elections would activate mechanisms that would enable war-affected communities to play a role in their governance. Thus, elections to the Eastern Provincial Council were held in 2008, while in the Northern Province, local government elections were initially held for two local authorities in 2009. However, elections to all but two of the remaining local authorities were held in 2011 alongside elections to local authorities in all other provinces. That let 32 of the 34 local governance bodies to function in the Northern Province. Notably, these elections seemed the first real engagement with local government for many of the voters in the North as no Provincial Council election was held since the

dissolution of the North Eastern Provincial Council in 1991 and elections to Local Authorities held in 1983 and 1998 had a poor turnout owing to the violent situation that prevailed.

Significance of Local Government

Local Governance refers to institutions established at the lowest level within a polity. The case for local government traditionally rested on the value of participatory development, which addresses the needs, aspirations and priorities as identified by the people at grassroots level, to be incorporated into the mechanisms of planning and plan implementation at the regional or provincial and national levels.

Thus, the concept of local governance as democracy assumes that for democracy to be effective there should be a large measure of local self-governance. The other side of this assumption is that good local-governance is a pre-condition for the diffusion of democracy across difference levels of governance structures.

Institutions of local government vary in form from country to country. At one end of the spectrum are local councils as in Britain and Scandinavian countries, designed as institutions of local self-government. Subject to national objectives, they provide a variety of services to the local community. At the other end are local councils that have a subordinate role and entrusted with a much limited range of activity, which they perform under rigid central control and supervision. Between the two lie a variety of arrangements, dictated by historical circumstances, influences of dominant ideology, social structure and technology within the society.

The recent emphasis on local governance by academics as well as policy makers has three distinct sources. The first is the perceived link between democracy, decentralization and development. From this perspective, increased participation of citizens at the provincial and local levels leads not only to better governance through diffusion of the structures of authority, but also to better management of economic resources and development efforts. Local level planning, participatory budgeting and

local inputs for development priorities are the expected outcomes of the democracy-decentralization-development nexus. The second source of interest is linked to the global–local dialectic said to have resulted from the process of globalization. Paradoxically, globalization with its emphasis on global processes has also generated local dynamics of both governance and development, along with the process of capital moving into areas that were earlier considered to be both peripheral and marginal to development. ‘Empowerment of the local’ is an aspect of this global-local dynamic. The third comes from a concern for better strategies of nation-building in multi-ethnic and plural societies where minorities are increasingly excluded from the domain of state power through the working of ethnic-majoritarian democracy. The argument in this regard is that strong decentralization through devolution will offer the minorities better access to the state, public resources and benefits of development.

Key findings

Local government and its effectiveness pale beside the dominant presence of higher levels of governance.

In the process of consolidating democracy and establishing a system to manage diversity peacefully, devolution of power has become an important element that cannot, however, be regarded as a solution in itself. Democracy does not guarantee fair representation for all interest groups, as majority rule could permanently shut minorities out of power. In circumstances of politically mobilized ethnic consciousness, a unitary state is prone to leave minority ethnic groups feeling powerless, insecure and excluded.

The local population readily recognizes the dominant presence of regional and national level political actors in the local arena. As a result, local people do not recognize an autonomous local political domain but instead look up to MPs and central government Ministers to address local issues. This is to be expected since local residents are conscious that many local issues remain unresolved for lack of resources and want of organizational capacity on the part of the Pradeshiya Sabhas to resolve

the problems in its region so that local inhabitants look for help from national and regional leaders, rather than their local representatives, to solve their problems.

The Pradeshiya Sabhas and Divisional Secretariats hesitate to coordinate their efforts in view of likely bad feelings that may result from overlapping power orbits, besides the stronger executive power of the DS.

Another contributory factor for local government institutions to appear feeble in the eye of the public is the continuing dominance of central government institutions in the local context. In this context, the dominant role played by supra-national bodies and their agents also militates against the local authority. Besides, various line ministry officials act independently of the local authority, and several state-sponsored development and service provision activities are organized and delivered with nearly no reference to the Pradeshiya Sabhas (PS) or its members. In this regard, the role of the office of the Divisional Secretary (DS) is also relevant because the area of authority of the DS often overlaps that of the PS as envisaged in the Pradeshiya Sabha Act. This seems a deliberate act on the part of the national political leadership at the time to facilitate integration of the local administration with the elected local body in the interest of better coordination of local level development and other activities. In fact, it was decided at the time to make the DS the executive officer working with the PS, but the plan was aborted owing to resistance from administrative officers.

Ever since, the PS and the DS offices function almost independently of each other. The DS office, being the secretariat coordinating the activities of various state and other agencies at the local level, has close links to local communities. It is for this reason that many local people visit the DS office frequently, for a variety of purposes concerning land, income support, permits, licenses, National Identity Cards, certificates of all manner, registration of vehicles, etc. As a result, the DS office towers over the PS office as a local institution that deals with the day-to-day issues of

the people. Yet, being the local administrative arm of the central government and other external agencies, the DS office is often guided by pressures emanating from rather than by pressures from below coming from the local community.

The DS functions through a network of Grama Niladharis, who are salaried state functionaries operating in sub-regions of the Division. There are besides other local level officers such as Samurdhi officers, Rural Development Officers and social service officers who also maintain close contact with the office of the DS. The PS, on the other hand, has no regular, salaried officers functioning at the community level. The elected PS members although living in their own village do not engage in PS work on a regular or full-time basis, as they usually have other commitments including their own occupation. They also lack a regular budget that will help them with a regular program of activities.

The PS depends almost entirely on funds allocated by the central government, and the earnings of a PS in a rural area are not substantial, unlike in developed, urban areas where the local council generates considerable revenue from local businesses, and even households in the form of annual assessment taxes. For example, in an area like Mullaitivu with no large business enterprises and mostly poor local residents, the local council cannot generate much revenue on its own. This diminishes the revenue base of the local authority. As a result, the PS is unable to meet the various demands of the local residents. It should, however, be noted that Mullaitivu is not resource poor. Its many local resources, are at present beyond the control of local authorities, and if due administrative clearance is obtained, the local authority can expand the scope of activities of the PS and, by extension, its performance.

The Pradeshiya Sabhas confront serious logistical obstacles.

The PS is the only local forum where elected representatives from all communities within a specific area meet and discuss issues faced by them and try to solve them. The local leaders usually live among their

respective communities comprising their electors and, to be re-elected, need sustained support from the community. They are aware of the problems faced by the people and like to do whatever they can to help. But, given the limited resources that the PS has at its disposal, they are subject to the financial constraints under which the PS functions.

As said earlier, many of the functions formally assigned to the PS are not the exclusive concern of the local authority. This is partly or wholly due to the inability of the PS to develop and implement comprehensive projects and programs to meet the requirements of the area and its inhabitants. While resource constraints constitute a major obstacle, lack of organizational capacity is another challenge that needs to be overcome.

Although the PS is the statutorily eligible to deal with the needs of the local inhabitants in matters such as utility services, public health, roads, community development and environment, it can hardly make a dent in any. The result is that either other institutions play a bigger role in most if not all issues or the needs of the people remain unfulfilled.

Lack of knowledge, transparency, and accountability has led to a decline in the quality of service delivery of Pradeshiya Sabhas.

Members of the PS participate in the affairs of the local authority at the level of the general body and through committees. They discuss budget, activities, performance, and other issues. But the lack of knowledge, skill and training make the members not very competent. Further, no effective channels exist for the local people to have an opportunity to present their views on the affairs of the PS. As a household survey revealed, most inhabitants in remote settlements are unaware of what is done by the PS and appear to have no control over the priorities of the PS. In fact, very little reaches these settlements through projects and programs of the PS.

Antipathy towards the Provincial Council system has arrested the smooth functioning of the PS system, and the loyalty of the civil

servants serving in the Pradeshiya Sabhas is divided in favour of the District Secretariat, being the arm of the central government.

Currently, local government authorities such as Pradeshiya Sabhas are under the Provincial Councils and not the central government. While the connection between local government bodies and the Provincial Councils seems logical in terms of democratic state structures, complications do arise during transitional periods.

Divisional Secretariats continue as the arms of the central government with scant concern for Provincial Councils or Pradeshiya Sabhas. Public servants at the Divisional Secretariats, often central government employees, do not feel an obligation to serve the Pradeshiya Sabhas. This indifference does not spring from antipathy towards local government bodies themselves, but towards the Provincial Council system as a whole. Devolution of power to the Provincial Councils is something that the Sri Lankan bureaucracy at various levels has yet come to terms with.

On the other hand, the Northern Provincial Council has failed to create its own administrative arms at local and divisional levels, but for appointing several officials to provide services at the Divisional Secretariat. The system operates through ad hoc arrangements to make the Divisional Secretariats perform tasks for both central government and the Provincial Council. Such ad hoc arrangements are attributed to lack of staff, finance, office space and time. But, the entire purpose of devolution of power seems to be lost in the process owing to such style of management.

Participation vs. Representation

The difference between participation and representation at the local level is another key issue pertinent to the North. The right for political participation is simply the right to participate in institutions that make public decisions, or in deliberations relating to the decisions. Thus, the right of political participation can be considered a basic right. Firstly, it affirms equal moral status to each person. That is, each person has an equal right to express an opinion and the right to be heard with due

respect. This does not imply that the views of every person will be heard before a decision is finally taken. What matters is that each has a fair opportunity to participate fairly and equally in decision making. Secondly, political participation contributes to create informed public opinion and thus to the constitution of democratically conscious citizens. Thirdly, meaningful exercise of the right of political participation serves arrest abuse of power of the state by holding it accountable. Fourthly, it empowers citizens to demand that the state secures their right to social and economic goods.

Although rights presuppose each other, the right of political participation enables struggle for and the grant of other rights. For these reasons, the right can be considered a basic right.

Political relationships in a modern state cannot involve only the citizen and the state for the following reasons: (1) most societies are too large and too complex to permit direct forms of democracy; (2) the practices of everyday life engage citizens to deprive them of time or even inclination for political involvement; (3) since demands, perspectives and interests tend to be plural as well as conflicting, an agent is needed to process the demands and organize them for presentation at forums that decide public policy; and (4) the specialised and the highly inscrutable nature of modern legislation and administration proscribe participation of ordinary people in the process of legislation. Hence, a third party enters the political scene, namely the representative. Historically practices of representation predate democracy, but modern democracy, since inception, has come to be identified with representative democracy.

Representative democracy cannot be perfect, and has been critiqued. Three main critiques of representation concern the following themes: (1) Because the representative acquires a great deal of autonomy from what is represented or is to be represented, the process of representation tends to detach from popular will; (2) A representative cannot practically represent all constituencies and all people, so that some are inevitably left out; (3) representatives constitute the political will of the constituents

rather than represent a preformed will, and thus diminish the political competence of the citizens. These three perspectives of the representative on his or her role in representing constituencies may seem distinct from each other in terms of presuppositions and arguments, but they appear to lead to each other.

Doubts about the adequacy or acceptability of different types of representation or means of control of the representative, however, pale into insignificance against the dramatic transformation of the political context of representation during the recent decades.

Reflecting on the local government system in North in essence, its paradox comprises the following: whereas representatives may be less democratic because they are somewhat autonomous of their constituencies, democratic organisations may not be representative of the popular will. Notably these divisions have been thrust to the forefront of the political agenda by the inadequacies of systems of representation and by the incapacity of representatives to embody popular will.

Conclusion

There are several challenges ahead which need to be properly addressed to have an effective local government system which will enable people to come to terms with the post war situation and further peace building efforts, and to make people comfortable with power sharing at the local level as a way of meaningful decentralization.

Conflict and violence at local-level can undermine broader attempts to consolidate peace through democracy by causing 'disruption from below' that fosters insecurity, exacerbates differences, challenges capacity for security and boosts intolerance. Robust local democracy is better fitted than a municipal authority lacking in legitimacy and cooperation from the public to manage and contain such 'disruption from below'. There is, however, a risk of empowerment at the local level leading to the advent of 'warlord politics' in the event of a strong, intolerant, corrupt leadership already being in place or emerging from the post-war environment.

Democracy at the local level augments peace-building processes and broadens the basis of peace at the community and local levels. Strong systems of local democracy diffuse values of tolerance, inclusion, accountability, and citizen participation through a wider network of participatory government.

Two key recommendations emerge from the field study in the North. Firstly, strengthening local governance for peace and state building is not a quick fix and requires time, commitment and resources; Secondly, effective post war local governance interventions require careful addressing key issues as outlined below.

The role of local government in basic service delivery lies at the nexus between peace building, state building and recovery. Frequently in post-war settings, the overwhelming humanitarian needs together with the inability of the local government to respond, necessitates reliance on the centre for humanitarian aid, which hinders achievement of sustained peace dividends achieved in the early recovery process. Hence, a further concern and likely obstacle to the recovery and development process is the potential dependence on humanitarian aid. To mitigate the consequent dilemma, local government should be empowered and organised to handle humanitarian aid on its own, rather than await the centre.

The fragile status of local government authorities pointed to their failure to grasp in a timely and appropriate manner, basic service delivery to contribute substantively to the peace building agenda. The consolidation of peace dividends, for example, depends heavily on the legitimacy of the state and a semblance of normalcy for the returning populations. The lack of minimum intervention by the central government to respond to the most basic needs of the local population has made peace building, reconciliation among broken communities and enhancement of social cohesion a serious challenge.

State Cynicism in Housing War Victims

The government of Sri Lanka's pledge to deliver 65,000 houses to war affected communities in the Northern and Eastern provinces through the Ministry of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs was a potential rip off based on shady deals between the Government and Arcelor Mittal, a European manufacturer of steel products to provide houses at the cost of Rs. 2.1 million per steel house.

Objections arose on a variety of grounds including the unsuitability of steel houses from engineering and architectural points of view and out of sociological and climatic concerns, and as importantly the price. (See articles in MLND 59 of May 2016). The Minister responsible tried very hard for more than an year, using blackmail and bullying by declaring that if they reject the steel houses there will be none else on offer. Amid mounting public pressure, the government yielded, but unwilling to concede defeat. Attempts persisted to impose a sizeable fraction of the proposed 65,000 houses at a slightly lower price, and seem to have failed. To that extent it was a victory for the people and those who campaigned on their behalf against the proposed steel houses.

The fiasco clearly exposed a poor understanding of the housing problem of war victims in different contexts, a lack of a sound overall policy on housing and the necessary institutional framework to address housing problems. Much of it was a consequence of an authoritarian bureaucratic approach that rejects community-driven and owner-led approaches that are left to entirely to contractors, who are there mainly for the profit.

The government appears to have learned little from its failures in post-tsunami and post-landslide rehabilitation projects which saw the problem of housing in isolation from issues of livelihood of the beneficiaries and their land and spatial needs, environment, socio-economic integration of communities and implications for host communities among others.

The article in MLND-59, comprising a statement by “Concerned Civil Society Organisations and Individuals” in its conclusion urged that the scheme for 65,000 houses and all housing programmes for vulnerable communities should be based on the following principles to deliver adequate shelter, equity and meaningful social development outcomes:

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

The government has now come up with a proposal to build “50 000 brick and mortar houses”. A statement titled ‘A people-centred approach to building “50 000 brick and mortar houses” for war-affected communities’ issued in this connection by a Group of Professionals with expertise in engineering, architecture, spatial planning, community development, housing, financing, economics, development planning, law, community organisation, and project management was in Daily FT (12.10.2017) and the Island (15.10.2017). But it had very little follow-up in the media, which seems preoccupied with the ‘Bond Scam’ and Local Government elections. The MLND, in view of the importance of the issues raised, reproduces below the statement and urges individuals and organizations that care for the rehabilitation of war victims to study the statement and subject the proposed scheme to wider public scrutiny so that the long suffering victims do not fall prey to cynical political manipulations.

People-centred approach to building ‘50,000 brick and mortar houses’ for war-affected communities

We welcome the announcement made by the Government to build 50 000 “brick and mortar houses” for war-affected communities. Masonry houses are the time-tested model, technically sound and most suitable for living, cultural and climatic conditions of the North and East. Thus, we are also pleased that the government has recognised and respected the preference of the people for masonry houses.

At the time the proposal for pre-fabricated steel housing was being considered, our group, a collective of independent professionals and social activists, presented a viable alternate proposal for building 65,000 masonry houses. We stressed the importance of ensuring that the housing project is people-centred in every aspect, seeking community participation, maximising local economic benefits and financing options which will enable such a process.

The revised housing policy of Sri Lanka and the Government’s Vision 2025 also recognise the need for such an approach.

We highlight the following aspects which are important to ensuring a people-centred approach for the successful delivery of houses:

- Involving home owners: when compared to a contractor-driven approach a people-centred approach with involvement from community organisations and a network of technical support organisations in the construction of the houses has shown to better ensure quality, economical and successful completion of housing projects.*
- Benefits to local economy and sustainability: implementation of the project (e.g. sourcing of materials, labour, construction services, etc.) must create employment locally and boost the construction industry and economy in the north and east. With traditional incomes in agriculture and fisheries dwindling, housing projects in the region must ensure that incomes from construction reach those families. Requirements to bid need to be such that enable contracting companies from the region to be given opportunities and be considered, instead of only large national or international companies*
- Community participation and mobilisation: The project should not be seeking to merely deliver the houses, but consider the people as key participants and*

owners in the project. Thus, having meaningful consultation with beneficiaries and to gain vital support from them in implementation is necessary. In a post-war context strengthening the community by investing in social mobilisation and encouraging participation will also be crucial in terms of furthering social cohesion and reconciliation. The RfP provides very little space for community ownership and community participation in monitoring the construction, and seems instead to strongly favour a contractor driven approach.

- *Environmentally appropriate options: Masonry houses are not just built of burnt clay bricks (Gadol/Chengkallu), but also of cement blocks, compressed stabilised earth blocks, etc. The most cost effective and environmentally friendly option for the area needs to be considered, e.g. Burnt clay bricks are not the most cost effective in the north, accounting for a small percentage only.*
- *Financing the project: Domestic financing options rather than foreign loans will be less burdensome for the national economy. Our proposal suggested raising local resources for the housing project through issuing of rupee bonds via a consortium of local banks as a viable option. The financing method chosen must be conducive towards carrying out the most people-centred building of houses.*

We hope and look forward to the above aspects being given serious consideration in the implementation of the project to build '50,000 brick and mortar houses' for the north and east; as other programs such as the upcoming housing program in the hill country, are seeking to do. Two years have passed since the first EOI for a housing program in the north and east was issued and the need to invest in the community is that more pressing.

Recognising the hardships and long delays faced by war-affected communities, we urge the Government to implement the project in a manner that is attentive to people's wellbeing, contributes to strengthening the community and as an initiative towards reconciliation.

(The writer of the reproduced item can be contacted via email:
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Indian Intelligence Trained Gangs Stir Religious Acrimony in the North

Recently, close to Ponnalai Junction on the road leading to Jaffna via Ponnalai, Arali and Kallundai along the coast of Valigamam West in the Jaffna District, a Shiva Lingam was illegally placed overnight on a mound of earth collected from excavation for laying water pipes.

This location adjoins the statue of St Anthony that was installed on coastal marshy land in 1990. There are eye witnesses to this 'self created' Shiva Lingam being transported to that location using a construction vehicle.

Since the placement of this 'self created' Lingam opposite a building site for a housing scheme comprising 50 housing units, a small shed has been erected the next day to shelter the Lingam, in a way that it hampers water supply and road widening work in the vicinity, and arrangements have been made at speed by unknown persons to provide lighting for it.

It is significant that this area where fishers dry their fishing nets also houses a prawn processing centre set up by the Pradeshiya Sabha as well as a fish market. However, neither the Valikamam West Pradeshiya Sabha nor the Coastal Protection Unit nor the Road Development Authority nor the Police has taken notice of this act of aggression in the name of religion.

On inquiry from people in the neighbourhood, it transpired that it was likely that the Shiva Lingam was placed there by a Saivaite Society contesting the forthcoming local council elections under the symbol of a transport vehicle.

It was also mentioned that the said Shiva Lingam had been placed unprotected for some time, next to a 21 feet tall statue of Shiva erected by

them in a place with a name board identifying it as the head office of this organization, in the vicinity of a Vihara in the region called Sambilthurai, also known by its ancient name of Jambukolapattanam, and venerated by the Sinhalese as the harbour town where the Buddhist emissary Sangamittha arrived with a sapling of the sacred white Bo tree.

They also expressed suspicion that, following the people frustrating various efforts by them to create religious conflicts in adjoining villages in and around 2014, they are seeking to stir religious conflict in this region by locating the Lingam close to the statue of St Anthony, which has been there for a long time.

It should be further noted that when in around 2015 members of this organization purchased a plot of paddy land close to the Saanthai village in Sillalai close to an ancient Church of St Anthony that is venerated with devotion by people of all religions and tried to lay the foundation for a Sivan temple, their efforts were stopped by the people of the region.

It was also observed that two teenage youth arrived on a bicycle at the location where the Shiva Lingam was planted overnight and performed a pooja with a camphor lamp. When questioned, they said that they belonged to Chulipuram and that the treasurer of the said organisation had sent them there with coconut, lamp and camphor.

Many political activists have expressed the view that members of this organization and others belonging to newly created organizations with various names starting with Saiva, Hindu and Siva have been mobilised by Indian intelligence and sent in batches to India for special training and returned here with complete funding. They also said that three such teams have been brought back here after undergoing training in this manner.

People should not fall into the conspiratorial traps of these religious fanatical forces and should identify them properly and reject them.

[From our Valikamam West Correspondent]

Local Government Elections

Press Release

27th December 2017

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party regarding the forthcoming elections to local government bodies.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party will not support any parliamentary political party representing ruling class interests or the politics of elite hegemony. However, the Party declares its full support to independent groups, contesting under the symbol of a bucket, led by Comrade K Kathirgamanathan (Selvam), Northern Regional Secretary of the Party for the Valigamam East Pradeshiya Sabha in the Jaffna District and led by Comrade David Suren, Matale District Secretary of the Party, for the Ukuwela Pradeshiya Sabha in the Matale District. Moreover, the Party is willing to identify and lend support to pro-people independent groups that represent the toiling masses including workers and peasants.

Thus far, upper class elitist political parties and their representatives have dominated local authorities to the neglect of the toiling masses including workers and peasants. They secured the votes of the people and held on to their elected posts through devious means, inciting racial, religious, linguistic and regional sentiments and false promises. They used their positions to indulge in abuse of power and corrupt practices. Since it is no more acceptable for the people to put up with these forces who win votes by cheating the people, the Party calls upon the people to cast their votes in the forthcoming elections for representatives of the toiling classes, in order that they can set up local authorities free of corruption.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary, NDMLP

Call by the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party on Local Government Elections 2018

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary and Comrade V Mahendran, National Organizer of the NDMLP released a pamphlet stating support of the Party for two independent groups contesting the forthcoming Local Government Elections. The contents of the pamphlet are as follows:

In the elections to local government bodies to be held on 10th February, the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party is to contest elections to two Pradeshiya Sabhas in two Districts independent groups, under the symbol of a bucket. Comrade K Kathirgamanathan (Selvam), Northern Regional Secretary of the Party leads the independent group contesting the Valikamam East Pradeshiya Sabha in the Jaffna District; and Comrade David Suren, District Secretary of the Party, leads the independent group contesting the Ukuwela Pradeshiya Sabha in the Matale District.

An overview of the villages and estates coming under the two Pradeshiya Sabhas will show that those living there, like in a majority of the other regions, comprise toiling masses such as peasants, agricultural labourers, daily wage earners and plantation workers. Besides them, there are employees of the state and private sectors.

It is social responsibility to resolve problems arising at the Pradeshiya Sabha level. But, thus far, those elected to administer Pradeshiya Sabhas have failed even to look at the problems and needs of the people, the reason being that they belong to political parties of the ruling classes and to hegemonic political parties. As a result the toiling masses and their villages and plantations have been ignored.

But, without any sense of guilt, the parties of the ruling classes in the South and Tamil nationalist hegemonic parties of the North and East and the dominant trade union political parties of the Hill Country confront each other in their contest for seats.

All of them have indulged in corruption, deception and anti-people activities. Even now, they cheat the people seeking shortcuts and propagating ill will in

order to gather votes. The toiling masses should understand these matters well.

Hence, if the need is to take up the problems faced by the people, there is need to elect people who are capable of fighting for the people on those bases and those capable of serving the people to local government bodies that comprise the bottom level of governance.

Representatives of working women are contesting in our independent groups. It is important to use this opportunity to enable them to advance in public life and in politics. This is an opportunity for working women to attain political awakening.

Also, the leaders of the two independent groups have linked with the people in their problems and have been at the forefront to lead mass struggles. Other candidates in the two independent groups too comprise members of the Party and progressive individuals and persons interested in the welfare of the people. They are in this front for the basic interests of the toiling masses. Hence, the Party calls upon the working people to be for themselves, link their toiling hands in opposition to corruption, and enable the bucket symbol to win in both Pradeshia Sabhas. It offers its support and cooperation to ensure victory to people's representatives.

Let us the toilers unite to make victory ours.

NDMLP Delegation at the ICOR International Seminar to mark the Centenary of the Great October Revolution

A two-member delegation of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party led by Comrade SK Senthivel participated in the 3rd World Conference of ICOR held in November 2017 and the International Seminar to mark the Centenary of the Great October Revolution.

The Party delegates actively participated in the deliberations of the Conference and the Seminar, and their constructive intervention on key issues was most appreciated by participants, especially on questions of national liberation and imperialism and on the importance of the united front strategy.

Celebrating the Centenary of the October Revolution

On 26th November 2017 the Party held a revolutionary mass meeting at the Trimmer Hall, Jaffna commemorating the Centenary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. The meeting chaired by Comrade SK Senthivel was addressed by Comrades K Thanikasalam, S Thevarajah, K Kathirgamanathan, V Mahendran, N Pratheepan and David Suren from the Party, and delegates from the Frontline Socialist Party and Campaign for Democracy.

28th Commemoration of Comrade KA Subramaniam

The 28th Commemoration Meeting of Comrade Maniam, revolutionary forerunner of the communist movement and founder General Secretary of the Party took place in Jaffna on 10th December 2017. Veteran communist and trade union leader E Thavarajah chaired the meeting. Introductory address by Comrade K Kathirgamanathan (Selvam) was followed by the memorial address “Current Political Trends and Local Government Elections” by Comrade SK Senthivel. Comrade Maniam’s life partner Comrade Valliammai graced the occasion by attending the meeting at her advancing age.

Launching of Volume of Militant Poetry

The anthology “Pinameriyum Muttram” (Cremation Courtyard) comprising poems by activists in the 69-day struggle in July to September 2017 against continued use of crematoriums amid human settlements was launched on 8th December 2017 at a meeting chaired by Comrade T. Navathasan in the Kalaimathi People’s Hall in Putthur West, the bastion of the mass struggle.

Commemoration of Comrade Shan

The 25th Anniversary of the departure of Sri Lankan revolutionary forerunner Comrade N Shanmugathan will be commemorated at 4.00 p.m. on 14th February at the Colombo Tamil Sangam. The meeting will be chaired by Prof. Saba Jeyarasa. Comrade M Mayuran will deliver the welcome address, to be followed by the memorial address titled “Recent Trends in Marxism and the Future of the Working Class Movement in a Globalized Economy” by Prof. A Marx from Tamilnadu, India and a special address by Comrade SK Senthivel.

What's the Word

Lyrics by Brother Gil Scott Heron and Brian Jackson, 1975

What's the word?
Tell me brother, have you heard
From Johannesburg?
What's the word?
Sister woman have you heard
From Johannesburg?
They tell me our brothers over there
Are defyin' the Man.
We don't know for sure because the news we get
Is unreliable, man.
Yes, I hate it when the blood starts flowin',
But I'm glad to see resistance growin'.
Somebody tell me what's the word?
Tell me brother, have you heard
From Johannesburg?
They tell me that our brothers over there
Refuse to work in the mines.
They may not get the news but they need to know
We're on their side.
Now sometimes distance brings misunderstanding,
But deep in my heart I'm demanding:
Somebody tell me what's the word?
Sister woman have you heard
'Bout Johannesburg?
I know that they're strugglin' over there
Ain't gonna free me,
But we all need to be strugglin'
If we're gonna be free.
Don't you wanna be free?
Freedom ain't nuthin but a word.
Let me see your ID.
Let me see your ID.
Let me see your ID.

Injustice

Christopher Van Wyk

(19 July 1957 – 3 October 2014)

Me, I cry easy if you're hurt
and I would've carried the crosses
of both the murderer
and the thief
if they'd let me
and I'd lived then

I grasp helplessly at cigarettes
during riots
and burn my fingers
hoping.

My nose has never sniffed tear-gas
but I weep all the same
and my heart hurts
aching from buckshot.

My dreams these days are policed
by a million eyes
that baton-charge my sleep
and frog-march me into a
shaken morning.

I can't get used to injustice
I can't smile no matter what

I'll never get used to nightmares
but often I dream of freedom.

Freedom and the Republic!
Colonialism will soon end,
The flag will be lowered,
We shall lock the door.
Goodbye, Mr Coloniser,
Sir, this is no joke!
We know you're angry.
Sir, don't be mad.
Freedom and the Republic!

A freedom song from Tanzania, celebrating
the end of colonial British rule, popular on the
verge of Independence in 1961.

from **Oral Poetry from Africa 1984** compiled by
Jack Mapanje and Landeg White

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