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THREE FOLK POEMS ON PRE-REVOLUTIONARY CHINA

An Old Yi Folk Song

In our world of today, robbers
abound; whatever they see of value
they try and grab; from me
only my mouth they cannot steal
so with it I still sing
my hill songs.

* * * * *

So Much Injustice

(Yunan)

In our world too many things
are unjust; those
who do not plant cotton
wear the best padded clothes
and those who do not work the land
eat the whitest rice,
and an old gentleman with a long beard
seeks a teen-age concubine.

* * * * *

Conscription

(Hui)

Anyone who comes out from
his family too slowly, will be
hung from a beam and beaten
with a whip down which blood runs;
even if he is beaten to death,
still will he be conscripted.

Translated by **Rewi Alley**,

Courtesy: 'Folk Poems from China's Minorities'

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New Democracy

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*New
Democracy*

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

OUR RESOLUTION FOR THE FIRST MAY DAY OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

We stand shoulder to shoulder with the working class and all oppressed masses of the world to welcome the first May Day of the new millennium in the spirit of revolutionary internationalism. This May Day is a solemn revolutionary occasion on which the working class and the billions of toiling masses firmly resolve to carry forward struggles on many fronts to oppose imperialism, its current programme of 'globalisation', and all forms of reaction and oppression.

The imperialist media of information still persists with its propaganda that Marxism is a spent force, that socialism is dying and that class struggle has lost its meaning. But such concocted tales cannot conceal in any way the objective realities of contemporary world.

No one cannot deny that, towards the tail end of the 20th Century, socialism suffered a temporary setback and Marxism faced a situation in which it could be challenged. But that does not mean that capitalism can replace socialism or that capitalist ideologies can take the place of Marxism. As the saying 'The tree may like calm but the wind will not allow it' goes, capitalism and imperialism may want to have their monopoly capitalistic exploitation, and the political structures and the world order that will allow it, and may take a thousand measures for that

purpose, but the social law of class struggle will not permit their will to prevail.

Never in the history of mankind has class struggle assumed the same style or the same form. Its every success has been preceded by a series of ups and downs and several defeats. The struggle by the American working class one hundred and fourteen years ago demanding an eight-hour working day demonstrated the force and direction of class struggle. That path and orientation of struggle has been developed by Marxism and socialism through class struggle. The intense class struggle and victories scored by socialism during the past century have affirmed their correctness.

As Marxist-Leninists, we are firm in our scientific conclusion that class struggle will be carried forward with far greater vigour in the century ahead than in the century that passed. Marxist-Leninists in each country of the world have taken a close look at the successes and failures and advances and setbacks, learnt lessons, and are reorganising themselves. They will integrate themselves closely with the working class and the oppressed masses. They will unite with the masses to carry forward broad-based revolutionary mass struggles against all forms of social injustice upheld by imperialism and by local feudal and capitalist forces. Mass struggle will develop from its lowest form to its highest. The century ahead will once again confirm that the world belongs to the people and not the reactionary forces of imperialism, capitalism and feudalism.

Forces of imperialist capitalism headed by America are actively engaged in implementing the scheme of globalisation with all their strength, and are attempting to push it forward by using the might of modern information technology and the gigantic mass media at their disposal, arms expansion and military threat. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Asian Development Bank are among its main instruments of global control. But the people of the world have begun to recognise the horrors of the expansion of imperialist capital and imperialist domination of trade.

The furious uprising against the conference of the WTO by hundreds of thousands last December in Seattle, USA forced the authorities to impose emergency regulations on the city and the conference to wind up in haste. Similar opposition was faced in Switzerland too. In April 2000 the biennial meeting of the World Bank and the IMF held in Washington had to face a strong mass protest demonstration. The partnership in plunder by the World Bank and the IMF was forcefully exposed by the demonstrators.

Again, hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated against the visit to Greece at the end of last year by Bill Clinton, the President of the USA and forced him to leave within a day. Clinton who undertook a South Asian tour confounded by strong protests from the people of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. One may also mention here the very powerful anti-American protest demonstrations in the Philippines this year.

Thus the dawn of this century has been marked by broad-based mass struggles against imperialist globalisation. Further, the uprisings have been initiated on American soil in a way that gives confidence and inspiration to the people of the world. Therefore, on this glorious day on which the working class of America shed blood in struggle, let us act with even greater resolve for the working class, the toiling masses and the oppressed nationalities of Sri Lanka to unite and reinforce its solidarity with the working class and the oppressed people of the world. Let us carry forward the tasks for that purpose on many fronts. That will be the revolutionary position most appropriate to the memory of the May Day.

**Editorial Board,
New Democracy
01. 05. 2000**

IMPORTANT EVENTS

May Day 2000

The United May Day Rally of the New Democratic Party, United Socialist Party and the Left and Democratic Alliance was held at Grandpass Junction, Colombo. The May Day demonstration in which over a thousand working people participated was followed by a public meeting at the Grandpas Junction.

The meeting was addressed by representatives of trade unions and mass organisations, including Vasudeva Nanayakkara, a leader of the Left and Democratic Alliance, S.K.Senthivel, General Secretary and E.Thambiah, National Organiser, respectively, of the New Democratic Party, and Siritunga Jayasuriya, General Secretary of the United Socialist Party.

The need to bring the war to an end and to find a negotiated settlement for the national question was the most prominent feature of the demonstration and was again emphasised by the speakers who addressed the May Day rally. Domination by multinational corporations was vehemently opposed and it was demanded that the government stopped its ongoing scheme of privatisation. The various acts of the government against the masses and their well being were severely condemned.

Mass Activities in Jaffna

During the past March and April, a large numbers of people participated in broad-based mass activities. On 25.3.2000, six thousand people participated to give expression to their aspirations in the Demonstration for Peace organised by the People's

Committee for Peace and Goodwill. The demonstration in which more than forty public organisations participated demanded an end to the war and a negotiated political settlement and emphasised the need for peace and normal life.

The University of Jaffna Students' Union played a leading role in many of the mass activities. By carrying out a picketing campaign in front of the Government Secretariat in Jaffna, they exerted severe pressure on the government to free the people entrapped in Palai owing to the armed conflict in that region. They also called for a total *hartal* on 12.3.2000, and with the fullest co-operation of the people and the students made the *hartal* a complete success. These activities organised by the students received the fullest support of the People' Committee for Peace and Goodwill and other mass organisations that ensure the success of these activities. It should be stated that an earlier victory of school students in securing the release of their colleagues by boycotting school was an important forerunner to the more recent mass activities in the Jaffna peninsula with the participation of thousands of people.

What is most significant is that the people have, by participating in these activities, broken out of a situation in which Tamil extremist groups were able to control mass activities of the people and limit any such activity to suit their own purposes. This is a most healthy development. There is no doubt that, in the future, the people of the North and East will find expression to their views through such mass activities.

Wage Hike in the Plantations

The Employers' Federation representing twenty companies in the plantation sector has turned down the demand by the trade unions for a daily wage of Rs.150.00 (US\$2.00) for the workers who are now receiving only Rs.90.00 per day.

The Federation postponed discussion with the trade unions thrice and dragged the negotiations for almost a month before stating that they will not agree to any rate exceeding Rs.115.00 per day. In the meantime the trade unions have come down considerably to lower their demand to Rs.123.00 per day.

The wage demands on behalf of plantation workers have not materialised largely because of the incapability of the trade unions to put into effect the strength of the working class by providing effective leadership.

The Split in the CWC

The CWC which claims to be the largest single trade union in South Asia and a strong organisation of the plantation workers is facing a split, owing to differences between its General Secretary Ramanathan Arumugam (also known as Arumugam Thondaman) and five of its Vice Presidents. The CWC leadership, despite its capitalist class nature, is bitterly despised by the Employers Federation and the Sinhala chauvinists because they see it as a powerful organisation of the plantation workers and the Hill Country Tamils.

Statements released by the five Vice-Presidents, who are also Members of Parliament, contain allegations that the General Secretary acts undemocratically and has been mishandling the funds of the CWC.

The General Secretary, as many know, is the grandson of the late Soumiyamoorthy Thondaman, the long-standing President of the CWC until his death some months ago and a long-standing parliamentarian who served in the cabinets of the UNP and the PA governments.

It should be noted here that it was owing to differences between the former General Secretary, M.S.Sellasamy and this

grandson that the former was expelled from the CWC some years ago, but Sellasamy resorted to legal action to assert his claim to his position in the CWC. The current crisis is connected with his expulsion, while the question of his expulsion and the legitimacy of Arumugam holding the post of General Secretary are under litigation.

Following the recent rift, one of the five rival MPs had his house attacked, two were dispossessed of their offices, and death threats have been made against them. These events, occurring at the time of a demand for wage increase by the plantation workers, are certainly matters of joy for the employers.

Socialists have always condemned war between nations as barbarous and brutal. But our attitude towards war is fundamentally different from that of bourgeois pacifists (supporters and advocates of peace) and that of the Anarchists. We differ from the former in that we understand the inevitable connection between wars and the class struggle within the country; we understand that wars cannot be abolished until classes are abolished and Socialism is created; and we also differ in that we fully regard civil wars, i.e., wars waged by the oppressed class against the oppressing class, slaves against slave owners, and wage-workers against the bourgeoisie, as legitimate, progressive and necessary. We Marxists differ from both the pacifists and the Anarchists in that we deem it necessary historically (from the point of view of Marx's dialectical materialism) to study each war separately.

V. I. Lenin

Socialism and War, September 1916

THE NEED FOR MASS STRUGGLE AGAINST GLOBALISATION AND CIVIL WAR

Comrade S. K. Senthivel,
General Secretary, New Democratic Party

The period of over two decades from 1977 to 2000 was marked by two important lines of development in Sri Lanka. One concerned the arrival of the current imperialist programme of 'globalisation' and its various implications and the other the unresolved national question and the civil war resulting from it. Each has led to adverse effects and grave consequences for the economic, political, social and cultural aspects of life in this country.

Nooses thrown at Sri Lanka by the imperialist and capitalist centres in the US and Japan and several other capitalist countries through the doorway of globalisation are gradually tightening their grip on the country. The open economic policy, competitive market forces and the policy of privatisation in their interest are based on liberal practices. Many state corporations have been surrendered to the multi-national corporations (MNCs), and moves are afoot to hand over the remaining few too to them.

The United National Party (UNP), the party of comprador capitalism, and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), formerly a party of the national bourgeoisie that succeeded the UNP to power have fulfilled the wishes of the imperialists in succession

and with no difference in approach. What is strange, however, in this is that the Communist Party (CP) and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which shamelessly describe themselves as leftist parties, are members of the government led by the SLFP. This shows how the imperialist programme of globalisation has taken over these forces which are already soaked in bourgeois parliamentary politics and transformed them into total degenerates. This is not something unique to our country but a trend of degeneration that we witness in several countries.

It was in the very same period in which the various aspects of globalisation were implemented in Sri Lanka that the national question was allowed to develop into a war. Today this war has assumed the form of a terrible civil war. The national question that is at the root of this terrible civil war sprouted from the poisonous seeds sown deliberately by the colonial masters in the last century. The ruling classes of this country are actively collaborating with the local Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists and the forces of foreign imperialism in nurturing these poisonous plants into huge poisonous trees. Nearly 75,000 lives have been lost on all sides of the war during the past two decades. More than 5000 are missing and many thousands have been disabled. Property worth millions of rupees have been destroyed and several hundred thousand people have become refugees in this country and abroad.

Fundamentally this war is an unjust war against the Tamil people. In essence it is against all the people of this country. The source of this cruel war can be traced entirely to the chauvinistic forces of the ruling class. Today the state apparatus and the ruling classes are linking hands with imperialism on one side and the oppressive war on the other. The intensified civil war and practices of globalisation designed to transform the country into a complete neo-colony support and nourish each other. As a result, the country is facing a major economic crisis. During the past year, sixty billion rupees have been spent on war, under the

pretext of defence expenditure. An even larger sum of money has been allocated for war expenses in this year's budget. At the same time the people are burdened further with taxes such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the Defence Levy and increased fuel prices. As a result of these burdens the people are forced to survive under unacceptable living conditions.

Not only the urban working class and the rural peasantry but the entire working people, including state and private sector employees, suffer the effects of the increase in cost of living. At the same time, the basic democratic rights and human rights are under severe threat. Over the past two decades the country has continued to be under an uninterrupted state of emergency. At the same time well over three thousand Tamil political prisoners have been under detention without inquiry in prisons and detention camps. Political vandalism and political repression by the ruling party have continued to increase.

As a result of the economic and political crises, the social and cultural fields have been subject to serious degeneration. The open economic policy has not only allowed foreign capital to enter the country it has also enabled uncontrolled inundation by western and Indian literary garbage and obscene magazines and movies. The younger generation are badly affected by these. Narcotic drug abuse has witnessed an annual increase and the tourist sector has led to widespread prostitution and sexual abuse of children.

Consumerist culture is being propagated by the radio, television and Internet and other news media which have making money as their only target. The consequences are evident in the social practice of today. Murder, rape and robbery have become routine events, and there are underground gangs that plan and execute these crimes. Behind these gangs are influential political forces of the ruling classes that manipulate them. An overview of this situation would suggest that the, often baseless, glory attrib-

uted to this country as one steeped in Buddhist tradition is being eaten up by decadent capitalist culture. The Buddhist religious establishments and organisations that daily preach chauvinism, promote war and encourage activities against the Tamils, Muslims and the Hill Country Tamils are not ready to act in protest or condemn any aspect of the surging cultural decadence infiltrating from the West. We need to think deeply about the causes for this.

Frequent changes are being made in the field of education. The basis for such changes is by no means the development of the national economy or a desire for national cultural awakening. No changes have been implemented in the educational system for the purposes of advancing self-reliance, self-development and opposition to foreign infiltration. The educational system is being reorganised and restructured from time to time entirely for the purpose of serving well the 'open economic policy', privatisation and the imperialist multi-national companies. The school educational system has been completely wrecked. In schools which should be the centres for the development of human potential, students receive an education that will make them fit only to function as labouring machines. Instead of being trained to view things in terms of the country, the people, the national economy, social concerns and human values, they are encouraged in the direction of selfish personal advancement. The myth that advanced western technology, especially the diverse applications of the computer, will meet the needs of society and enable the advancement of the individual is being actively propagated. An educational policy is being put forward that does not recognise that our country is still 80 percent rural and has a backward agricultural economy. This educational policy is thus one entirely compatible with imperialist globalisation.

In the meantime one can see the deterioration of social welfare and health care of the people. The government is responsible for the social welfare and the advancement of the

people. The revenue collected from the people should be used to serve their social well being. But institutions like the IMF and the World Bank continue to put pressure on governments to curtail expenditure on social welfare, which they insist should be left to non-government organisations (NGOs). Thus, through the manipulation of the NGOs from the West, imperialist capitalism is able to fulfil its ulterior motives. Under neo-colonialism, the NGOs are carrying out, in a variety of ways and with greater finesse, the tasks that the missionaries carried out under colonialism. NGOs operate at various layers of society and among various social groups. For example, there are more than 2500 NGOs operating in the name of 'volunteer organisations' among the plantation workers in the hill country, who are the most cruelly exploited section of society.

Their main emphasis is on slogans such as 'No politics', 'No class', 'No need for struggle' and 'Salvation through self-advancement'. The thoughts and deeds of the NGOs have consistently been anti-Marxist. They play an important role in negating and rejecting class struggle and obstructing and deflecting the struggles of the working class and other toiling masses. All NGOs show a common interest in blurring the Marxist world view of struggling for social transformation along the path of class struggle.

Thus, during the past two decades, neo-colonialist institutions have succeeded in reinforcing their foundations, and this is a great loss and a defeat for the entire masses of this country. The responsibility and duty of reversing the loss and the defeat and salvaging the country and its people from this modern imperialist yoke is in the hands of the Marxist-Leninists, leftists, forces of democracy and patriots of this country. They face a historical need to think deeply and act resolutely.

In the last century, those who were considered as leftists were at the forefront of the anti-colonialism and anti-im-

perialism among the working class and other toiling masses. They went among the masses at the lowest levels of society, educated them and developed mass movements. It was through the anti-war Sooriyamal Campaign, the Anti-Malaria Campaign and the national independence movement that the left movement emerged as the first political movement of this country and developed with vigour. It mobilised the working class to launch strikes and to advance the trade union movement as a militant force. The General Strike of 1947 was very forceful, and it was during this struggle that Kandasamy, a government clerical servant, attained martyrdom by falling victim to police shooting.

Thus the left movement which played a leading role in the anti-imperialist struggle carried forward a tradition of struggle. The historical Hartal of 1953 was organised and carried forward by the left movement against the anti-people measures by the UNP government which had the backing of the imperialists. The urban working class was joined in that glorious struggle by the peasants and other working masses from the countryside, irrespective of race and language. This uprising marks a high point in the history of revolutionary struggles by the masses. Twelve people fell victim to police shooting to become martyrs for that struggle. Struggles of a similar nature have since occurred in the capital city of Colombo and in the plantations in the form of strikes with revolutionary character. These struggles included lawful and unlawful features.

In the early 1960s, the well known 21 demands were put forward on behalf of the working class through trade union solidarity. They went beyond the limits of the usual trade union demands to reflect a political direction. The initial trade union measures for it were characterised by a strong sense of class consciousness and an inherently militant tendency. Had the struggle for the twenty-one demands been carried forward and linked with the demands of the peasantry and other toiling masses of the country, it would have been a many times more

vigorous and forceful revolutionary mass struggle than the Hartal of 1953, and would have marked the birth of a new political milieu for the left movement. But the leadership of the LSSP and that of the CP, which were by then fully entangled in parliamentary politics, descended to the low level of betraying the working class by abandoning the twenty-one demands for the sake of a place in the cabinet. This was a great loss to the working class of this country.

Nevertheless, the multi-faceted struggles led by the Marxist Leninist Communist party with Comrade N. Sanmugathasan as General Secretary during the period from 1964 to 1971 provided some valuable lessons. While the strikes that took place in the capital city and in the plantations were based on economic demands, they also displayed revolutionary class consciousness and militancy. Some workers were martyred by falling victim to gunfire by the police.

This period was also marked by an upsurge in anti-imperialist feeling which had at its core the movement against the US war of aggression against Vietnam. The US imperialists got thoroughly exposed in this country, as they were in many other countries of the world.

Further, during this period, the north of Sri Lanka witnessed a revolutionary militant struggle led by the Marxist-Leninists against casteism and untouchability, and it was a struggle that yielded valuable lessons and rich experiences to the progressive forces. All forms of struggle appropriate to a revolutionary struggle, ranging from the lowest form of struggle like satyagraha to the highest like armed struggle, were put into practice. Mass struggles within the bounds of law and in breach of the law surged forward as a huge wave. The struggles of that period proved beyond doubt that the masses are the decisive factor in any struggle. These historic struggles were proof of the force with which the people carry forward mass struggles when they are politi-

cally motivated, organisationally mobilised and led collectively under the guidance of a communist party.

The mass struggles faced a variety of obstacles and setbacks in their advancement along the revolutionary path and in course of time lost their momentum. The adverse effects of the April 1970 insurrection by the JVP, and the negative aspects of the Tamil nationalism that was generated and encouraged in the North are among factors that need to be taken into account. The 'socialist' facade of the United Front government in which the parliamentary left participated following the elections of 1970 combined with its anti-people and anti-working-class activities facilitated the ascent to power of the right wing reactionary UNP in 1977.

The dark period of UNP rule between 1977 and 1994 witnessed the defeat of the working class and its militant tendency and the severe oppression of the working class. Even then, the parliamentary leftists who were simply impotent to go beyond the limits of parliamentary politics and adapted positions similar to those of the SLFP. The fact that they worked with the sole aim of defeating the UNP electorally in 1994 and secured positions in the People's Alliance (PA) government led by the SLFP goes to illustrate that they are not prepared to carry out even a minor struggle.

With the country becoming increasingly subject to neo-colonial rule through the process of globalisation and continuing to be entrapped in a civil war, the need for mass struggles has become even greater. But the foreign and local reactionaries are vigilant in their efforts through ideological campaigns, oppression and sabotage to prevent such struggles occurring at the level of trade unions or at a social level. It is against this background that several hundred NGOs are actively campaigning on the basis of the slogan of 'No politics' to undermine political movements.

The concept of 'No politics' has now infected trade unions as well. This is no doubt the result of imperialist infiltration. A good example that could be cited in this connection concerns the hotly debated issue of the phosphate deposits at Epawela in the Anuradhapura District. Thousands of workers had mobilised opposite the Fort Railway Station in Colombo for a few hours to protest against the decision of the Sri Lankan government to grant the right of exploiting the phosphate resources to a US based multi-national company. The trade union which issued the call for the demonstration had also pleaded that there should be no political comments, and insisted that there was no need for political leadership or guidance. But the notorious Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist Champika Ranawaka and the Sinhala Veera Vidhana organisation were allowed to participate in the demonstration and chant racial slogans. No one dared to stop them or to protest. This shows clearly what happens when there is no political leadership.

It is in this context that the historical need has arisen for us to revive and carry forward the mass struggles in their various forms on the basis of the left tradition of Sri Lanka. All Marxist-Leninists, leftists, democratic forces and patriotic forces need to unite in this task. The emergence of the New Left Front (NLF) and its initial activities raised expectations regarding the fulfillment of this wish. Its course of action comprising opposition to chauvinism and war, to privatisation and globalisation, and to imperialism along the lines of mass struggle were wrecked in a planned way. The formation and growth of the NLF were a serious challenge to the forces of imperialism and the local ruling class who sought to and succeeded in buying over the weaker elements within the NLF. Dr Vickramabahu Karunaratne was an easy prey to temptation and fulfilled the wishes of the reactionaries. His act of treachery was yet another instance in the history of betrayal of the left movement by Trotskyist deserters of the revolutionary cause.

The struggle against imperialism, it should be remembered, is not something that occurs once or twice and on just one front. As a scientific study of class struggle will show, there is need to struggle again and again, and struggles necessarily advance through failures and setbacks. Only Marxist-Leninists and sincere leftist and democratic forces have the will and the ability to persevere in struggle until final victory.

Thus it is necessary for us to mobilise the masses at various levels against the new imperialist programme of globalisation and the establishment of the vicious neo-colonialist domination through it. There is a similar need to mobilise the masses as a movement against the horror of war and for a just solution for the national question. We should be rid of all hesitation and hindrances in this matter. There is a particular need to educate the Sinhala masses about the war and the national question.

It is the duty of all Marxist-Leninists, leftists, democratic forces and patriotic forces to make every possible effort to carry forward the mass struggle through these campaigns. Let us be the inheritors of the wealth of experience that can be extracted from the achievements of the past sixty-five year history of the left movement, let us critically identify and reject its negative aspects, and let us place our faith on the masses.

The world situation and struggles have started to turn against the new conspiracies of imperialism. The continuing struggle initiated by the protest on American soil by hundreds of thousands of people against the summit meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle at the end of last year marks a new beginning of a world-wide struggle against globalisation and imperialism. Again, the rally by hundreds of thousands in Greece which forced President Clinton to beat a hasty retreat within a day deserves our attention as do the series of protests in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan against the visit by Clinton.

We should also note that in the Philippines several hundred thousands have rallied in protest against the US imperialists.

Thus the hope of the US and its allies that they can rule the world as they wish will prove to be an empty dream since the people of the world will not allow that dream to be realised. Thus it is our duty as Marxist-Leninists to join hands with other leftists and democratic and patriotic forces in an effort to open new battle fronts of mass struggle against imperialism. Let us carry forward mass movements against globalisation and civil war, and that remains our foremost duty.

[Translated from the original in Tamil]



What kept production in correct, or more or less correct, proportions? It was demand that dominated supply, that preceded it. Production followed close on the heels of consumption. Large-scale industry, forced by the very instruments at its disposal to produce on an ever-increasing scale, can no longer wait for demand. Production precedes consumption, supply compels demand.

K. Marx

The Poverty of Philosophy, 1847

The working class' invincible strength is due to its vanguard party which leads the revolution according to a judicious line, the Marxist line, and sets up a firm worker-peasant alliance to serve as the basis for uniting all popular forces with a view to isolating the enemy to the utmost and overthrowing him.

Truong Chinh

For the Centenary of Lenin's Birth, FLP, Hanoi, 1971

THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY: UNITY-STRUGGLE-UNITY

(A Short Review of Recent Events)

by Comrade E. Thambiah

National Organiser, New Democratic Party

The Background

The New Democratic Party (NDP) in its 22-year history has made major contributions to united political action, especially in opposing and defeating the seventeen year rule by the capitalist United National Party (UNP) from 1977 to 1994. The Democratic People's Alliance and the People's Alliance (PA), led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) have enjoyed the support of the NDP during this period.

In the Northern and Eastern regions of the country, the NDP has actively worked alongside all the forces that it could possibly unite with against the genocidal war and carried forward mass struggles notably under the banner of the Mass Movement for Human Rights. Mass activities and cultural activities are still being carried out against the ongoing war in order to find a peaceful political solution to the national question on the basis of the right to self determination of the Tamil people, equality among nationalities and the principle of regional autonomy.

In the central highlands the NDP has worked in unity with mass organisations including trade unions in the planta-

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tion sector to defend the rights of the Hill Country Tamils, without compromising with trade unionism.

In Colombo and its suburbs and in predominantly Sinhala countryside, the NDP has carried out its united front tasks in support of the right to self determination of the Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils and in campaigns against imperialism and privatisation.

It was on the basis of the above experience and the recognition of the need for a united front that the NDP, after a few years of co-operation with some left parties and organisations, played a leading role in the formation of a united front, for the first time in its history. The New Left Front (NLF) was formally declared on the 15th of July 1998. Despite political differences and the need for ideological struggle within the NLF, the NLF was able to campaign in protest against the genocidal war against the Tamil nationality, in support of a negotiated political solution based on the principles of self-determination and equality and autonomy for all nationalities, in opposition to racism, and in protest against imperialism and privatisation.

The NLF successfully attracted a sizeable section of the Sri Lankan people through its campaigns and struggles carried out over a short period. Although the NLF was not an organisation with an electoral political agenda, it secured recognition by the Commissioner for Elections and contested the elections for the Provincial Councils. Despite the blatant thugery and other anti-democratic activities in the North Western Province by forces associated with the ruling PA, the NLF secured a sizeable fraction of the votes polled. Subject to the limitations of the electoral political system, the NLF polled reasonably well in all the districts it contested, including the Nuwara Eliya District in the Central Province, the Moneragala District in the Uva Province and the Galle District in the Southern Province. In the Western Province, Vickramabahu Karunaratne, the

leader of the Navasamasamaja Party (NSSP) and a member of the Presidium of the NLF was elected to the Provincial Council from the Colombo District.

The Beginning of the Crisis

The NLF was composed of six organisations, namely the NDP, the NSSP, the United Socialist Party (USP), the National Democratic Movement (NDM), the Diyasa Study Circle and the Muslim United Liberation Front (MULF). Of these, the NSSP and the USP identified themselves as Trotskyist movements, the NDP as Marxist-Leninist, the MULF as a left organisation, and the Diyasa as a Marxist Study Circle. The NDM described itself as a broad-based political organisation, comparable with the Zapatista movement of Mexico.

The NLF was committed to a minimum programme aimed at uniting all the leftists of the country and to provide a viable and genuine left alternative for the country. It was also true that the NLF was the only united front of the left with a minimum programme. But there were forces within and outside the NLF that were intent on wrecking the NLF or rendering it ineffective unless it served their narrow and selfish purposes.

The crisis within the NLF started when Vickramabahu Karunaratne, the NLF Member of the Western Province Provincial Council (WPPC), without prior consultation or discussion with the other constituent organisations of the NLF, sought to make a deal with the UNP group of the WPPC in order to secure the position of Chairman, WPPC for himself with the support of the capitalist UNP.

On suspicion of the right opportunist conspiratorial move by the leader of the NSSP, the Executive Committee of the NLF was summoned on 9th May 1999 and the issue was dis-

cussed at length. All member organisations of the NLF, with of course the exception of the NSSP, emphasised that the NLF Member of the WPPC, namely Vickramabahu Karunaratne, should not accept any new position in the WPPC, including the proposed chairmanship. The stand of the NSSP, notwithstanding the general position of the NLF, was that Karunaratne should come forward as a candidate for the chairmanship of the WPPC. This position was rejected by all other members of the NLF. Karunaratne could not, however, enter the contest since his wishful thinking that he could persuade the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) to back him did not materialise.

In the aftermath of the above episode, the Executive Committee initiated dialogue with the NSSP to decide the mode of operation of the NLF in the future. Discussions were held on 1st July 1999 to establish the basis for a joint leadership for the NLF and, on the basis of Rule 7(c) of the Constitution of the NLF, Comrade E.Thambiah, National Organiser of the NDP and Treasurer of the NLF was elected Secretary of the NLF for the year 1999-2000. The NSSP not only refused to accept this decision of the Executive Committee but surreptitiously informed a section of the media that Linus Jayatilleke, the Organising Secretary of the NSSP had been elected Secretary of the NLF and gave a distorted version of the proceedings of the meeting. He also added that the other member organisations of the NLF which were too small and not recognised as registered political parties by the Commissioner of Elections had walked out of the NLF.

It was the childish behaviour of the leader of the NSSP and his unwillingness to hand over the post of Secretary of the NLF to the newly elected Secretary that led to the split in the NLF. The NSSP further tried to exercise hegemony over the NLF and grab the name of the organisation for itself by taking advantage of the bourgeois state recognition, namely that of the NSSP by the Commissioner of Elections.

Thereafter, four member organisations of the NLF, namely NDP, USP, Diyasa and NDM, continued to work together as the NLF and, although the NSSP and the MULF were invited to meetings of the Executive Committee and of the Secretariat, the two parties decided to keep out.

The first anniversary of the NLF was celebrated in the city of Colombo at a well attended and successful public meeting organised by the NDP, USP, Diyasa and NDM, despite attempts by the NSSP to wreck the meeting by issuing misleading statements to the press. The NLF also carried out various mass struggles including the picketing campaign in Hatton on 4.9.1999 against the arbitrary arrests of Hill Country Tamils and their wrongful detention for long periods without court hearing and the demonstration opposite the Wellawatte Market, Colombo on 5.9.1999 against government-backed plans to allow the Army to acquire large tracts of land to extend the military base in Palali in the Jaffna peninsula.

The Collapse of the NLF

The Presidential Election of December 1999 posed a problem to the NLF comprising the NDP, USP, Diyasa and NDM. Although it was generally agreed that the candidates of the UNP, the PA and the JVP were unacceptable, there was division over the issue of whether to support Vasudeva Nanayakkara, a leftist and a former member of the PA. The NDP and the USP preferred to support Nanayakkara since he presented a minimum programme which, although not entirely acceptable to them, included an end to the genocidal war and the initiation of unconditional negotiations with the LTTE which is waging a struggle for a separate state for the Tamil nationality. The other two organisations were hesitant to take any decision thus disabling the NLF from taking a decision or issuing a statement on the Presidential Election.

The NSSP took advantage of this situation to issue a statement to the press that the NLF, really the NSSP and, by default, the MULF, supported the JVP candidate at the Presidential Election. Thus it was also able to usurp the name of NLF for itself, at least in the eyes of the media, and thereby reduce the NLF to another name for the NSSP, in pursuance of its opportunistic policies.

A Reassessment

The NDP is currently reassessing the rights and wrongs of its role in formation of the NLF and participation in its running. It should be noted here that the split and the final collapse of the NLF was for internal reasons, i.e. those associated with the member organisations of the NLF including acts of conspiracy, and external reasons involving outside elements and acts of conspiracy.

Although the NLF was not a revolutionary organisation, it had the need to confront other political organisations ideologically. The main ideological problems concerned the right opportunism, parliamentarianism and sectarianism of the NSSP along with obsession with post-modernism and a characteristically NGO style of work on the part of the Diyasa and the NDM.

Outside the NLF, the 'old left' comprising the CP, the LSSP and others, and the JVP with pretences to becoming the only left organisation in this country did not underestimate the challenge that the NLF posed to them. Nor did the discussion of the NLF in several diplomatic quarters in the city auger well for the longevity of the NLF.

The NLF has carried out mass struggles during its short life and has been instrumental in increasing the awareness of

the masses about the imperialist scheme of 'globalisation'. The contribution of the NLF to the recognition of the right of the Tamil people to self-determination is also highly commendable.

The demise of the NLF has not seriously harmed the NDP. Also, work in unity with other forces and work as a united front are not burdens than can be carried by a single political party. The concept of UNITY-STRUGGLE-UNITY still holds, and the NDP is determined to work on that basis since in present Sri Lankan context there cannot be a single political party capable of carrying forward the struggle on behalf of the entire masses.

The experiences of the NLF have provided the NDP with valuable lessons about united fronts comprising parties with different political lines. The NDP will firmly adhere to its position that while it will continue to pursue its political line and further its political interests in any united effort it will not allow itself to act in a sectarian manner or to ride rough over its partners.

The NDP is now working closely with leftist parties such as the USP, the Left and Democratic Alliance (LDA) and other leftist organisations with the purpose of building a broader democratic and left unity leading to a healthy united front, without compromising its fundamental principles and objectives.

But successes like everything else under the sun have their seamy side. Among people who are not very skilful in politics big successes and big achievements not infrequently give rise to carelessness, complacency, self-satisfaction, overweening self-confidence, swell-headedness and bragging.

J. V. Stalin

Mastering Bolshevism, 1937

THE CULTURAL CHALLENGE OF GLOBALISATION AND SOUTH ASIAN ARTISTS

by S. Sivasegaram

On Globalisation

One may, depending on one's world outlook and approach, see 'globalisation' as a good thing or a bad thing or as something inevitable or something that has to be contested. There is, nevertheless, some misunderstanding about what globalisation is. Many believe the interpretation that it is the bringing together of mankind through modern manufacturing technology, transportation and communication. Enhanced cultural exchange on an unprecedented scale, now aided by the electronic media, expansion in international trade and unlimited access to information are seen as positive aspects or useful outcomes of globalisation. Some even see globalisation as a major step in the direction of achieving the unity of all mankind under one global system with one global culture, and the concept of 'global village' helps to promote this myth.

But what is the reality? Those who view globalisation merely as a consequence of advances in technology seem to confuse means with ends. In class society, the direction in which science and technology are encouraged to advance is mainly determined by the interests of the class that dominates society, which also seeks to dictate the purposes for which these ad-

vances are used. The globalisation that the imperialists envisage is of course one in which the world is brought together by communication whose content is determined and controlled by imperialism, becomes a world of plenty, meaning plenty for the few and little for the many, and is transformed into a global village in which imperialism is lord and master with the oppressed nations and masses its bonded slaves.

Imperialism uses innocuous sounding phrases like free competition, open market, liberalisation, privatisation and removal of state control in its sermons to the Third World. But it is well known that it uses restrictive practices to safeguard its interests while demanding strict adherence to the norms of open economy and free trade by the Third World. It talks of fundamental and political rights, freedom of expression and human dignity while it denies each one of these freedoms when it stands in the way of the plunder of the Third World by multi-national companies. When one examines the methods such as loans, aid, trade regulations, economic sanctions and military intervention used by imperialism to bully the Third World, one can see that globalisation is little more than an euphemism for imperialism. To that extent there is nothing new about the globalisation of the imperialists.

The end of colonialism did not automatically lead to a new and fair global economic and social order. The social classes that succeeded the colonial rulers, where they were subservient to the former masters, preserved the interests of the former masters and, where they were relatively progressive like the 'national bourgeois' class that led the anti-colonial struggle in many instances, gradually lost their anti-imperialist drive and initiative in the wake of economic difficulties. With few exceptions, the new ruling classes failed to deliver even on their social reform programs, let alone social justice and social transformation. The lack of vision on issues of development led invariably to the blind acceptance of the Western notion of devel-

opment as the model and, despite lip service to national needs and national development, most former colonies ended up with economies with emphasis on the often unproductive urban sector.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was preceded by over a decade of events that weakened the resolve the Third World governments to stand up to the imperialists in defence of their natural resources. Efforts to protect and to assert control over natural resources and economic zones were systematically undermined. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the imperialists who were unashamed enemies of peace in the Third World were transformed into the greatest champions of world peace, a peace more often than not imposed by brute oppressive force. Such is the 'New World Order' in which imperialism is master and wants to make the decisions for those oppressed by it. Not only does imperialism decide to its advantage the prices of the goods that the Third World buys and sells, but also what the Third World may buy or sell and how it uses its meagre resources. The arrogance of the neo-colonialists like that of the colonial masters is transparent, while their ways are significantly more cruel.

The people of South Asia are acutely aware of the mounting economic burden on them, the increase in poverty and the decline in living standards, amid the growth in consumerism. While the will to struggle against the real enemy is wanting and a sense of hopelessness has taken the place of the optimism of the earlier era of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, the urge to combat other oppressed people with different communal, ethnic and national identities seems to get stronger and receive the backing of the imperialists, hegemonists and their agencies for subversion.

Thus, in some ways, we face a desperate social and economic climate in which the oppressors are strong while the

oppressed are seemingly divided and unwilling to struggle. This is partly due to the setbacks suffered by the forces of social justice throughout the world in the past two decades, the collapse of the Soviet Union in particular, and the planned and systematic impoverishment of the Third World by imperialism. Imperialism depends on the bourgeois governments of the Third World to keep rebellion in check. Unlike in the colonial past and the wars of aggression of the post-colonial period, notably the wars against Korea and Vietnam, imperialism avoids the use of its armed forces in direct combat against the masses in revolt and chooses to rely on arming the bourgeois state and sowing discord among the oppressed masses through agents of subversion including NGOs.

The struggle of the oppressed masses of the Third World against imperialism, in the final analysis, cannot be anything but a mass political struggle. But the motivation for the struggle includes factors besides economic considerations. We know that pride in one's identity and collective self-respect made cultural identity play an inspiring role in uniting people in national liberation struggles and, if handled correctly, cultural identity can play a positive role in the anti-imperialist struggle.

Colonialism and neo-colonialism have always undermined ethnic identity and pride. Although the same is being done to ethnic minorities by some native successors to the colonial masters, their styles are cruder. Neo-colonialism uses more refined methods to destroy the collective identity of communities, fragment them and thereby impose on them a false 'global' identity, which is in essence a non-identity. The growth of the electronic media and its intrusion into most middle class homes has very much facilitated the process. It is in this context that it is important to appreciate the impact of 'globalisation' of South Asian Cultures and develop a sound response to it.

The Assault on Cultural Identity

The 'open market' economic policies of South Asian governments and 'liberalisation' have, among other things, encouraged consumerism and wasteful habits, especially among the urban elite and a wide section of the urban middle class youth, which have led to a craving for things foreign, even when they are positively harmful. The desire to imitate the West is particularly strong among these sections. There is a strong resemblance here to the attitudes of the colonial era but with some obvious and important differences. While there was considerable resistance among the masses to what were seen as alien values, social changes caused and conditioned by colonialism ultimately had an impact on the culture of the entire society. What is sad about the current situation is that, unlike in the colonial era in which a small elite group looked up to the West for guidance and inspiration, we have among us a sizeable section of the population which is attracted to what is most vulgar and obscene in what it sees as Western culture.

The television movie has effectively usurped the place of popular cinema as an opiate and a medium of cultural decay in much of South Asia, and is potentially a more powerful and harmful medium than the cinema. Television and video movies, including much of the entertainment for children, do not only cater to bad taste but also contribute to its cultivation as the norm, and violence, crime, pornography and all manner of perversion are dished out as entertainment. Thus, while the arrival of satellite television in South Asia is a mixed blessing, that of cable television is undoubtedly a curse. The various arguments put forward in defence of such media vulgarity in the name of 'freedom of choice' are not acceptable, since the exercise of this freedom here is in violation of the right and ability of people not to view or read or listen to what they consider undesirable. Choice ceases to exist in a climate of pressure in various forms of aggressive advertising and unfair competition. For

example, even independent bourgeois newspapers of quality have suffered in the West as a result of the advertisement subsidy received by the reactionary and gutter press. Very much the same is now evident in South Asia.

Leaving information, education and culture to market forces is more dangerous than accepting state control over them, since there is no free market in a world dominated by imperialism. An illusion exists about the free availability of information owing to the spread of satellite communication. But close examination will reveal the existence of monopoly of a handful of companies over the information sector. While imperialist control over 'intellectual property' denies the Third World access to useful information, imperialism is busy doling out distorted versions of history, culture and world events in the pretext of dissemination of knowledge.

Much has been said about satellite communication bring the world together. But what is the reality? What is the price that society is paying for televised international sport? Who are the real beneficiaries of the glamorous shows that reach millions of homes through television? Commercialisation has in the past few decades transformed sport into one of the most corrupt domains of human activity. Recent revelations about the distasteful links between the world of gambling and the world of sport are only the tip of the iceberg.

The plight of art in the age of imperialist commercialism is not particularly better than that of sport. Mass culture as conceived by the media moguls is commercial culture, and even there the control that the big companies have on the careers of artists by way of unfair contracts and other forms of pressure is increasingly threatening the artistic freedom that the imperialists talk about. Artists who refuse to conform to the ways of big business are increasingly likely to be systematically sidelined and denied access to large audiences by those who control the media.

What is particularly sad about the transformation of sport and art into big business is that, besides the serious damage it does to ethnic cultural identity, it has led to a dangerous decline in community participation in local sport and cultural events. Televising of mass art and international sports has severely hurt local activities and interaction of sports persons and artists with the masses. The fact that there is now a need for private sector sponsorship or NGO funding to prop up serious art forms is ample evidence of the alienation that these art forms have suffered in the wake of the assault by the media monopoly.

One may argue that without subsidy by multinational companies and NGOs certain dying art forms may never have survived the millennium. But the reality is something else. Certain ways of life have been sacrificed in the altar of 'globalisation' and what is being done today is to preserve art forms which related to those styles of existence in a sterile form, which in no way relates to social reality.

What is clear is that the damage done by modern day imperialism to various degrees to several aspects of South Asian cultures is irreversible. It is true that some aspects of South Asian cultures may have perished in the course of social development, even in the absence of the imperialist assault. Also we know that no culture has eternal and unchanging features. It is therefore neither sensible nor realistic to wail about the lost glory of the past. The task before us concerns how we confront the current reality of the imperialist assault on our social and cultural identity and values.

The Struggle Ahead

The anti-colonial struggle of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involved various trends. Some anti-colonial movements sought to inspire the people by calling for a return to

tradition. In fact such trends are still evident in many South Asian societies subject to severe social, economic and political oppression. It is true that religion and conservative nationalism were important anti-colonial forces during certain periods of South Asian history. But they are today the main source of parochial thinking, and intolerance and hostility, especially towards religious and ethnic minorities. Thus modern history has valuable lessons for all of us on the correct handling of the question of cultural identity.

Even a cursory examination of recent world events will show that the harmony of the 'global village' that the imperialist high priests of 'globalisation' talk about is only harmony among the imperialists and incitement of civil war and armed conflict among the nations of the Third World. It is therefore important to view the questions of ethnic and cultural identity and the right of every social group not merely to preserve but also to develop and enrich its distinct identity in any form that it considers beneficial. Mutual tolerance and acceptance of other identities on the basis of equality and respect is essential to the collective defence of the cultures of the whole of South Asia.

Return to tradition has in itself never been the answer to the problems of post-colonial society, and is much less likely to be one for today's issues. There is a need to redefine in terms of the new realities our social and cultural values and our identity as nations, nationalities and socio-ethnic groups. This does not and should not mean an outright rejection of tradition, for there is much to draw from the past to serve the present and to enrich the future. At the same time there is no case for outright rejection of all things from the West, as there will continue to be many things that need to be accepted and adapted creatively for our advancement. Choices are, however, not likely to be simple or straightforward.

We are all too aware of certain fanatically extreme positions on issues of social and cultural importance. The question of equality of the sexes, for example, is one with which traditionalists have to this day not come to terms with. At the same time, certain feminist groups fail to address the more pressing issues of sexual inequality and oppression in South Asia and choose to deal with the problem in the abstract or in terms of what they see as the reality of the West. This has weakened the struggle for equality by enabling the forces of reaction to equate feminism to militant lesbianism. Homosexuality is another issue where traditionalist intolerance has to be confronted. Again aggressive 'gay rights' campaigners have only helped to harden attitudes. The question of caste is another in which certain *Dalitists* of Tamilnadu (India) have worked overtime to isolate not only the people subject to caste oppression from other oppressed masses but also divided these oppressed communities on the basis of caste. What is particularly worrying is that the campaigners for many just causes fail to see the relationship between their struggle and other just struggles and more fundamental issues. This is an area in which post-modernism has been put to maximum use to divide the forces that should be united.

Rejection of imperialist values cannot be the rejection of the issues that human experience in the West has brought to the fore. Often it is the forces of reaction that take such apparently 'patriotic' stands on such matters. One may note that the forces of *Hindutva* in India that continue to justify their acts of vandalism in the name of religious and cultural values are also the very forces that are compromising and colluding with the imperialists to accelerate the process of globalisation through their 'open economic policy' and 'liberalisation'.

The question of culture is a political question. The definition of culture and cultural identity is political. Imperialism imposes its ideology on South Asia through imposing its cul-

ture on South Asia at the expense of regional cultures. The response to such cultural aggression cannot, again, be anything but political. What remains to be resolved is the question of whose politics it is to be. The national bourgeoisie has failed to stand up to imperialism and the parliamentary left which compromised with the capitalist classes has failed to come up with answers. Their failure has enabled the forces of communalism and religious fanaticism to surge forward. But the bankruptcy of these forces is being exposed rapidly. Genuine progressive forces should act now before more damage is inflicted on the pride and the cultural identity of the people of South Asia by communalism and imperialism.

The present crisis places certain choices before the artist. I know not an artist without an ideology, and all art has besides a cultural identity an ideological identity. Rejection of political ideology in art has so far been only the rejection of a certain kind of ideology and no more. Acceptance and expression of an ideology in art can and needs to have a flexible approach. If anything can unite the people of South Asia today, it is the fact that they are the victims of imperialist exploitation and plunder on an unprecedented scale. Their struggle against cultural obliteration by imperialism is a force that unites them, and this unity will be reinforced by respecting the diversity of South Asian cultures and supporting the efforts of each socio-ethnic group to develop its culture in a way that strengthens its identity and individuality.

No culture has flourished in isolation. Mankind has advanced by sharing experiences. Familiarity with the experiences and cultural values of different peoples benefits us when we apply our knowledge scientifically to our social reality. Drawing on other resources is not something that can be done mechanically or in isolation from social practice. Any art form that inspires the masses can become part of their culture. Sri Lankan culture has, for instance, enriched itself by accepting even art

forms associated with the colonialists. On the other hand, we know of attempts to 'fuse' different cultural elements into new art forms, which undoubtedly were interesting and commercially successful 'experiments', but failed to inspire the masses.

We need to redefine our cultural identities in terms of social reality and with a vision for the future. It will be arrogant for an individual or group of individuals to prescribe an identity for an entire people. But each of us, individually and collectively, have the right and the duty to contribute to the development of our cultural identity. More importantly, we need to recognise that the masses are the real makers of history and consider the value of our respective roles in that context.

In Conclusion

As artists and critics we need to learn from the masses and work with them to inspire and motivate them to realise their potential as a political force that can the overturn the present unjust world order. This is a matter for a much longer and detailed discussion and I wish to conclude this paper on the optimistic note that in the long run it is the people who will win in their struggle against all oppressors and all forms of oppression.

[This is a revised and slightly extended version of a paper read by the author at the SAARC Conference of Writers, New Delhi, April 2000.]*

"A Communist must never be opinionated or domineering, thinking that he is good in everything while others are good in nothing; he must never shut himself up in his little room, or brag and boast and lord it over others."

Mao Zedong

Speech at the Assembly of Representatives of the Shensi Kansu-Ningsia Border Region, 21.11.1941, Selected Works, Vol. III

THE SEARCH FOR A HINDU IDENTITY

by **Imayavaramban**

Introduction

There can be a variety of responses to chauvinist oppression. Narrow nationalism, religious sectarianism and other parochial approaches are often inevitable consequences of oppression of social groups on the basis of ethnic identity. The likelihood of such responses is greatest in the absence of a progressive fighting force that can stand up to chauvinism. Oppression also produces compromises and collaborators whose motivations vary.

There are situations where even the most rabid nationalists and religious extremists want to present themselves as forces of moderation and tolerance. Tokenism is one way in which they achieve this. The Conservative Party of Great Britain is still a white racist party, but it has among its MPs and other public personalities members of the Afro-Asian black communities. The Republican Party of the USA was even considering the nomination of a former American Black military officer as a candidate at the last presidential election. Even the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) of India has not only made alliances with political parties representing communities subject to caste oppression, but also display among their leaders members of such communities and even the Muslim community.

If we turn to Sri Lanka, during the period between 1967 and 1970 when the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) was hostile to the Hill Country Tamils and maligned them as agents of 'Indian expansionism', there were individuals and groups from among the Hill Country Tamil community who joined hands with the JVP. The UNP government had in its cabinet and parliamentary group members of the Tamil community when in 1983 it unleashed unprecedented violence against that community. Such individuals and political groups have continued to lend support to governments with chauvinist agendas. Whatever the motives and intentions of those who join these chauvinist organisations, their presence does not change the reality. The tactics of chauvinism may change from time to time but the agenda remains.

Although Sinhala Buddhist nationalism inspired Tamil nationalism early in the twentieth century, it was not until 1956 that Tamil nationalism asserted itself as a major political force based on a linguistic national identity. The conflict between Tamil identity and Hindu identity continued to exist within the Tamil community, especially that of the north of the country, and, as in the case of Sinhala identity, which also had strong elements of Sinhala Buddhism seeking to dominate it, the Tamil national identity was for some time dominated by Tamil-Saivaite thinking. It should on the other hand be noted that, while Tamil-Saivaite revival in the north of the country, like its Buddhist counterpart in the south, was a response to Christian domination and religious conversion, the historical circumstances under which it evolved ensured that, despite its strong contribution to Tamil identity in its period and long after, it was not the source of a militant Tamil nationalism, such as the one we have witnessed during the past three decades or so.

In fact, the Tamil-Saivaite identity was in many ways the Saiva Vellala caste identity. Given its class nature, the Vellala caste that comprised the majority of the elite of the North made

compromises with the Christian Vellala elite amid hostility and long-standing rivalry arising from the advantages that Christian converts had secured for themselves during the colonial era. The threat posed by Sinhala Buddhist nationalism to the minority groups of the country was underestimated by the Tamil elite even at the time of the Sinhala-Muslim conflict in 1915. Although the rise of chauvinism within the national bourgeois led to the formation of a Tamil political party in the north and to the emergence of an Indian oriented leadership among the Hill Country Tamils, the Tamil elite of the North and the East thought in terms of political deals with their Sinhalese counterparts. Planned colonisation in what were predominantly Tamil and Muslim areas and the disenfranchisement of the Hill Country Tamils were carried out by the UNP government in which at least a section of the Tamil elite participated.

Thus it is clear that the Tamil elite as a class was then as it is now not averse to compromising the interests of their nationality or large sections of it for personal or sectarian considerations. Chauvinistic schemes to undermine the status of the national minorities have been recognised and protested against, albeit on a limited scale, and it was only when the two major Sinhala national bourgeois parties declared their plans to make Sinhala the sole official language of the country that linguistic national identity emerged as a serious political force. The Federal Party (FP) sought to become the voice of the entire Tamil speaking people of this country, comprising the Tamils, Muslims and the Hill Country Tamils and succeeded in bringing a large section of the Tamil electorate of the North and the East and even securing significant support from among the Muslims of the North and the East. The language issue was by and large irrelevant as far as the Hill Country Tamils were concerned since they were predominantly plantation workers who were deprived of educational and white-collar employment opportunities and, more importantly, citizenship and franchise.

The failure of the FP to address the issues concerning the Muslims and the Hill Country Tamils were several. In particular, it failed to take into account that the majority of the Muslims, almost entirely Tamil speaking, and the Hill country Tamils lived among the Sinhalese in the South. It became, however, the main party of the Tamils of the North and East following its resounding electoral success of 1956. The rivalry between the FP and the more conservative and almost entirely Jaffna-based Tamil Congress (TC), which it defeated convincingly in 1956, manifested itself in several ways. The TC conservatives increasingly asserted the Hindu identity and drew frequent attention to the fact that the FP was led by a Christian. Although political developments in the country went in favour of the FP, the assertion of the Hindu identity harmed Tamil nationalist interests. For instance, the FP supported the Tamil University Movement's plans in the 1950's and 60's to set up a Tamil University in Trincomalee in the Eastern Province. The rival demand for a Hindu University in Jaffna by the Hindu elite, backed by the TC, only helped to wreck the campaign for a Tamil University.

Hindu identity failed, however, to be a strong political force among the Tamils for a variety of reasons. Sinhala Buddhist politics in the South was perceived by the Tamil masses as a threat to their linguistic identity, and the TC had already been discredited among the Tamils as a party that failed the Tamils on the language issue. The activities of left movement had in that period raised the political consciousness of the masses of the North and consequently the militancy of the people of the oppressed castes. Thus the Tamil nationalist leadership sought to appear to be secular, despite its deep distrust of the Muslims.

The militant struggle of the Tamil masses subject to caste oppression in the North, led by the Marxist Leninists, dealt a severe blow to Saiva Vellala caste oppression there. But the forces of reaction and religious bigotry were not to be outdone

easily. Those who found their way into the leadership of the FP, which became the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) later, were restrained in their public utterances by electoral considerations as well as the reality of Sinhala chauvinism. The chasm that existed between the Tamil and the Muslim leadership continued to widen until the acts of provocation and discrimination by the UNP against the Tamils and the Muslims of the North and East following its massive electoral success in 1977.

The militant Tamil nationalist movements attracted a significant number of Muslims in the period up to around 1987 or so. Attempts to sow discord between the Tamils and Muslims by the UNP government had a limited success since around 1985, but the acts of violence against the Muslims by various Tamil nationalist movements, which were carried out with even greater intensity following the arrival of the 'Indian Peace Keeping Force' (IPKF) in 1987, led to the total isolation of the Tamil nationalist struggle from the Muslims. The extent to which the IPKF contributed consciously to the conflict between the Tamils and the Muslims is unclear. But the involvement of Hindu fundamentalist elements operating through the organs of the Indian state apparatus cannot be ruled out.

Hindu fanatics in India have maintained contacts with Hindu religious organisations in this country and have sought to impose their limited vision of the world on their allies in Sri Lanka. Vehement anti-Muslim and only marginally less anti-Christian sentiments are the hallmark of the Hindutva movement in India. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), one of the driving forces behind the BJP, now in power in India, had established contacts in Sri Lanka by the late 1970's through contacts with the relatively more tolerant 'Hindu' organisations here.

The strength of Tamil nationalism in the period up to the late 1980's was too strong for the Hindu elite to emphasise

the Hindu identity at the expense of a secular Tamil identity. The political climate following 1987 was more favourable for the advocates of a Hindu identity. Several Hindu organisations with their headquarters in Colombo made their appearance as community and welfare organisations. Fund raising for religious activities and the renovation of temples were among their main interests, and local community organisations in the North and East were quick to follow suit. While many of these organisations did not have a political line, let alone any political vision, there were a few with a political agenda. There were two important aspects to this agenda, one concerned the transformation of the Tamil Hindu identity into an aspect of the 'Greater Hindu' identity as suggested, for example, by the name VHP. The other concerned finding common cause with the Sinhala Buddhism. In both cases, the Muslims and Christians were seen as the agents of alien culture who indulged in religious conversion with the main purpose of reducing the Hindus and the Buddhists to a minority in their own land.

They made alliances with religious chauvinists in Sri Lanka and in India, and carefully distanced themselves from the struggle in the North and East, by claiming to be apolitical. But no opportunity was missed by some of these organisations to ask for intervention by India, now ruled by the BJP, the parliamentary arm of Hindutva. (Even otherwise, it is well known that the Indian state apparatus is under the control of the high caste Hindu elite and inviting Indian intervention under any circumstances will in effect be an invitation to the forces of that elite).

Thus one cannot view the eagerness of the Indian government and its representatives in Sri Lanka to propagate the Brahminist Hindu Religion in Sri Lanka in isolation from the Hindu elitist agenda for regional hegemony in South Asia. Temples for various deities are being built in different parts of the country with direct and indirect support from the Indian

establishment. Indian diplomats are actively involved in the promotion of 'Hindu values' as perceived by the Hindu elite.

It should be remembered that, on the cultural side, 'Hindu' identity has for long stood in conflict with Tamil identity in Sri Lanka and in Tamil Nadu, India. Tamil nationalism has been associated with a populist and to some extent progressive demand for the increased use of Tamil in matters of religion. Services in Saivaite Hindu temples has for a long time been conducted in Sanskrit much to the resentment of Tamil nationalists. The Hindu caste system prescribes that only a Brahmin shall be a priest in a 'proper' Hindu temple. Given the well known affinity for Sanskrit among the Brahmins, of course with some notable exceptions, Sanskrit has continued to dominate Saivaite rituals for well over a millennium. Although the Tamil nationalist movement in Tamil Nadu has succeeded in a limited way in reversing the situation in favour of Tamil, Sanskrit still remains to be dislodged from its dominant position. In Sri Lanka too, where the Brahmin caste is not the dominant social group among Tamils, the domination of Sanskrit has continued and in the past two decades there is in fact a greater tendency towards Sanskritisation in matters of religion and ritual. This is encouraged by various Hindu religious cults, each comprising followers of one or another of several saffron-clad god men of India or their local imitators.

Some of those who are eager to promote the Hindu identity, or replace Tamil identity with a Hindu identity may be suffering under the illusion that the Hindu identity allows them to be affiliated with a major force or a majority of some kind in the South Asian region. It will be useful for them to remember that Indian involvement and domination is most resented in this region by none other than the people of Nepal, a land locked Hindu state bordering India, irrespective of their political affiliation. This only illustrates that social identities have little meaning outside class interests.

The emphasis on religion has helped on the one hand to de-politicise some major issues and on the other to make deals with forces of fascism such as the Sinhala Veera Vidhana Movement. Organisations like the Veera Vidhana and some Sinhala Buddhist organisations that are expected to constitute the proposed Sinhala Urumaya Party choose to present themselves as a humanitarian and tolerant forces to the minority ethnic groups of the country. They claim that their only enemy is the LTTE and their main goal the salvation of Sri Lanka from terrorism. Similar sweet words have been uttered by fascists in Europe, and any minority group or organisation that thinks that it can make deals with forces of communalism and chauvinism needs to take a good look at the history of Europe between World Wars I and II.

Some progressives among the Sinhalese think that the Sinhala Veera Vidhana, Jathika Chinthanaya and other such organisations are a threat to the Tamils and Muslims only. They do not recognise the potentially, if not already, fascist nature of these organisations. Not enough is being done politically by the progressive forces of this country, especially among the Sinhalese, to combat these forces of vicious communalism. These forces are being systematically encouraged by the media, especially by a large section of the 'independent' news media controlled by forces of pro-imperialist reaction. Some 'progressives' are even happy to leave the job of improving harmony between the various socio-ethnic groups to NGOs.

Nothing could be worse than the abandoning of politics in matters of such urgency. It is important to understand religious identity in political terms and deal with it accordingly. There is a strong need for a secular political agenda for the leftist, patriotic and other progressive forces of this country to combat the nefarious schemes of mischievous religious organisations to cause confusion and divide the oppressed masses.

FROM THE PRESS RELEASE OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

16 February 2000

The Sixth Budget of the PA Government presented in the Parliament by the President of the Republic is only a programme to carry forward the war effort at full steam and to welcome with open arms further foreign capital investment in this country and to complete the programme of privatisation to transform the country into a total neo-colony. Heavy burdens have been placed directly and indirectly on the people. This is no more than yet another anti-people budget.

S.K. Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDP commented as above in his statement to the press on the budget.

The statement further said that the presentation of the budget in the Parliament by the President appearing in person does not alter the reality of the executive presidency. In fact the executive power has been further reinforced. The budget speech has also been used as the first campaign address for the forthcoming parliamentary elections. The essence of the speech has no remedy on offer for the rapidly deteriorating economy or for the sorrows of life experienced by the people. The budget has only demonstrated that the PA government is following in the footsteps of the UNP government before it.

The increase in price of diesel, kerosene and cooking gas that preceded the budget imposed on the people a suffocat-

ing increase in the prices of all goods. No relief has been offered in that connection. The announcement of a commission for wage increases is only an eyewash and in essence an act of procrastination. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the Defence Levy that are a daily burden on the people have been extended to all major sectors of the economy. The announcement of an allocation of five million rupees for the development of the North, a separate programme for the East and financial allocation for infrastructure development of the Hill Country is mere deception. This is only a move to sweeten and please the MPs of the concerned areas so that they may continue their support for this government.

This budget has imposed huge increases in the prices of goods in addition to a heavy burden on the life of the people of the North and East who have been dispossessed by the war. Similarly, the daily life of the plantation workers who receive a daily wage of Rs. 96.00 has been made more miserable. The budget that has expressed concern about the markets, management and productivity of the companies in the plantation sector has not shown any interest in the wage increases and welfare of the workers who toil hard in that sector. The government is unwilling to put pressure on the companies that are dodging the review of wage increases. Again, nothing has been said about the men and women workers in the various multinational companies operating in this country. These matters only demonstrate the impotence and anti-people attitude of a government that has bowed to the pressure of the World Bank and the IMF and mortgaged the country to foreign capital.

Thus this budget is a budget with assurances for the continuation of the war, and security for multi-national corporations, privatisation and the local elite. Therefore there is no doubt that it is an anti-people budget which is hostile to the workers, peasants and other toiling masses who constitute the vast majority of the country's population.

COMMENTS ON GLOBAL EVENTS

A NEW PHASE IN INDIAN EXPANSIONISM?

The Indian ruling classes have nurtured grand designs about becoming a regional super power. They depended very much on Soviet support in the 1960's, 70's and the early-mid 80's to achieve their ambitions and, even before the collapse of the USSR, they were quick to mend fences with US imperialism.

The nuclear power programme of the Indian government, its belligerent attitude towards its neighbour, Pakistan and its continued meddling in the affairs of its neighbours are not matters that can be viewed lightly by the people of South Asia. India played a key role in the creation of Bangladesh, not for the sake of the people of that land but to weaken Pakistan. It brazenly annexed Sikkim and is still refusing to consider the desire for self-determination of the people of Kashmir.

Its concern for the Tamil people in Sri Lanka was not out of humanitarian considerations. The Indian state used the national question in Sri Lanka to undermine the sovereignty of Sri Lanka and was hasty to intervene militarily in 1987. Like all aggressors, the Indian ruling classes did not learn from their adventure. They are simply waiting for another opportunity. Since the Tamil Trojan horse failed them, they have found other Trojan horses, including Sinhala chauvinists like the Sinhala Veera Vidhana. The very Sinhala nationalists who, not long ago, objected to the arrival of Indian forces in Sri Lanka are the ones who want armed intervention by India most.

The Indian ruling classes have not placed their expansionist eggs in one basket, and have been actively cultivating a 'Hindu' elite in Sri Lanka through various means. The role of the forces of Indian Hindutva in whipping up anti-Muslim and anti-Christian sentiments among Tamil Hindus is well known since the 1970's.

India is attempting to use its presence in the SAARC to lord it over its smaller neighbours. It went behind the back of SAARC to set up a trade agreement with Sri Lanka, much to the disadvantage of Sri Lanka, so that it could monopolise trade in Sri Lanka. The economic and political weakness of Sri Lanka, arising mainly out of the negative policies of successive Sri Lankan governments on the national question, foreign policy and trade, has made the government increasingly dependent on the mercy of its big neighbour.

India is not fully revealing its hand yet on the Sri Lankan national question, and the signs are that it will be slow to intervene militarily, but the likelihood of Indian infiltration through the peace process, if there is one in the foreseeable future, is high. The forces of Indian great nation chauvinism are active not only in the Hindutva organisations and the Congress, but also among some of the so-called communists. It is the responsibility of the masses of India as much as that of the masses of the rest of South Asia to combat Indian expansionism

THE THIRD WORLD: TOWARDS GREATER SOLIDARITY

The Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was held in Cartagena, Colombia from 8 to 10 April. The deliberations which focused on issues of peace, disarmament and development inevitably confronted the question of globalisation and the morality of 'humanitarian intervention' by the West.

India which played a prominent role in the NAM in the past found itself out of step with the rest by harping on terrorism and authoritarian rule, indicating preoccupation with Kashmir, while the other states were more concerned with the real issue of imperialist menace and globalisation.

The G-77 Summit in Havana, Cuba from 11 to 15 April was on an even more positive note of defiance against imperialism, and was more up-beat than the recent summits of G-7 comprising the seven leading capitalist countries. The G-77, initially comprising 77 Third World countries which came together in 1977 against super-power domination of the world, has now swelled to include 133 countries, and after almost a decade of weariness following the setbacks suffered by the Third World countries in the wake of the collapse of the USSR, has found its voice once again. The pronouncements of Fiedel Castro, the President of the host country on globalisation were most revealing and well received by the delegates. Castro's position on globalisation and imperialism were echoed by many important leaders of the Third World, including Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa.

There was, however, a negative side to the event. India was not represented by its Prime Minister in a session that included many heads of state or their deputies. Even the Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh who attended the NAM Summit failed to turn up at the G-77 Summit, and India was represented by Murli Manohar Joshi, Minister of Human Resource Development. Whether the Indian government does not appreciate the importance of Third World solidarity or is deliberately underplaying its role could be a matter for speculation. But India is bound to be the loser in the end if this attitude persists. It was also significant that, in contrast to the early years of G-77, the contribution of the Chinese delegate was overshadowed by that of many smaller nations, particularly Cuba and South Africa.

These events that took place in the wake of the rising hostility to the World Bank and the IMF and the WTO in the West can gain further significance in the months to come. The proposal for 'South-South' co-operation and the demand for a greater role for the 'South' in global economic development are potentially powerful platforms for the anti-imperialist struggle in the new century.

A revolutionary is always a learner, always going to school. Society is a factory, and the whole of society is a school, too.

Rewi Alley

*Travels in China, New World Press,
Beijing, 1973, p.547*

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"Marx not only takes the most precise account of the inevitability of inequality of men, but he also takes into account the fact that the mere conversion of the means of production into the common property of the whole society (commonly called socialism) does not remove the defects of distribution and the inequality of 'bourgeois right' which continues to dominate as long as products are divided 'according to work'."

V. I. Lenin

*The State and Revolution,
August-September 1917*

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One of the greatest evils and misfortunes left to us by the old capitalist society is the complete divorce of books from practical life; for we have had books in which everything was described in the best possible manner, yet these books in the majority of cases were most disgusting and hypocritical lies that described capitalist society falsely.

V. I. Lenin

*Tasks of the Youth Leagues,
02 October 1920*

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The oppressed peoples and nations must not pin their hopes on the "sensibleness" of imperialism and its lackeys. They will only triumph by strengthening their unity and persevering in their struggle. This is what the people of southern Vietnam are doing.

Mao Zedong

*Statement in support of Afro-Americans
in their struggle against racial discrimination,
08 August 1963*

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To overthrow a political power, it is always necessary first of all to create public opinion, to work in the ideological sphere. This is true for the revolutionary class as well as for the counter-revolutionary class.

Mao Zedong

*at the 10th Plenary Session of the
8th Central Committee of the
Communist Party of China, 1962*

*Here in the tiny forest Hamlet
set like a gem amongst
green hills, came a thousand
fighters in revolutionary
struggle, led by the ever
undefeated in spirit Mao Tsetung
to whom it was just one more
opportunity to learn, sum up,
organise better, change what
was left of an army too close
to feudal forms, to one that
to grow purely for and be
of the people; now at old sites
boy rebels of a new generation
stand with spears
on guard, taking their task
most seriously*

Rewi Alley

Travels in China,
New World Press, Beijing, 1973, pp. 321-322