

ONCE MORE ON ELECTORAL TACTICS: FOR A PRINCIPLED AND RELEVANT PARTY

The news we have received on 25/07 is that there has been a somersault in the N.S.S.P. strategy in the August 16th General elections. From fielding an independent list in alliance with the Sri Lanka Progressive Front and the Somawansa Amarasinghe leadership of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna in all electoral districts, it appears that we are now contesting only in the Colombo district and extending support to the Peoples Alliance in other parts of the island. The truth of this report and the modalities of the new tactic are not clear as we have not received any statement from the Party. What follows is a personal (and hurriedly written!) contribution to the internal discussion which is not intended to represent the views of the London branch as a whole.

When the London branch drafted its resolution of 26/06 it was barely three days after Parliament had been dissolved and the election date announced and with under three weeks to go before close of nominations. It was unavoidably formulated in ignorance of the debates and discussions on the Central Committee and knowledge of the constraints on and options available to the Party. The news of Vasu's split from the Party and more so his decision to contest on the PA ticket shocked and saddened us. Although our initial resolution was closer to that of the C.C. minority all of us wholeheartedly began campaigning for the Party and defending its stance in public.

THE N.S.S.P. AND THE J.V.P.: WHO IS TAKING WHOM FOR A RIDE?

The issue of greatest controversy has been our alliance with the J.V.P. Quite legitimately we have been asked whether they have publicly apologised for the reign of terror they exercised over the country between 1987-1990 and their own role in the bloodbath of those years. We were asked whether they had changed their racist and chauvinist views on the Up-country Tamils and the Tamil liberation struggle. Why was our Party with its well known position on these issues associating with these disreputable forces? There remains a question mark over the bona fides of Somawansa Amarasinghe himself and his participation in the elections. How is it he was the only Polit-bureau member of the J.V.P. to escape with his life? Did his familial connections with a Premadasa confidante and former U.N.P. Cabinet minister have anything to do with his survival? Why has Amarasinghe refused to allow the convening of a democratic conference of the J.V.P. to evaluate the last ten years and draw a balance sheet of its adventurist and anti-Marxist ideology? Did the U.N.P. enable the J.V.P. to run in this elections only to split the Left vote, deny the P.A. victory and give the Government another term in office? In other words was the J.V.P. taking the N.S.S.P. for a ride?

Not having any details from the Party over its negotiations with these groups nor the National Salvation Alliance manifesto, our response was as follows: Our party too lost many valued comrades to the J.V.P. including the father of one of our London comrades. Comrade Bahu almost lost his life to them. We have not forgotten the past when the N.S.S.P. was slandered by the J.V.P. as being behind the P.R.R.A. death squads. However it would be sectarian and destructive in the long term interests of the mass movement to ignore the J.V.P. The J.V.P. represents an anti-capitalist revolutionary force whose vitality, roots and confusions reflect its indigenous race-nation-class characteristics. It cannot be wished away. If it was prepared to join a common front with a Trotskyist party this is a massive step forward for it, which only a few years ago had been gunning us down and seeking to deny us our place in the revolutionary movement. We expressed our confidence in our leadership that they would not have formed an alliance with the J.V.P. without a good reason. All we could say to our critics was "Trust us because we trust our leadership".

AGAINST AN INDEPENDENT LIST BUT FOR CLASS INDEPENDENCE

The earlier decision to field an independent list in opposition to that of the Peoples Alliance stems from a wrong evaluation of the relationship of forces within Sri Lanka and the state of the Left globally. The N.S.S.P./ L.S.S.P./ C.P.S.L. either individually or as a whole do not have the same weight today as the L.S.S.P. had prior to the debacle of 1964. None of us are mass parties which can command even one-third the support of the working class. The Left today can not claim to have the same influence in economic thought, political discourse, cultural and artistic life as the L.S.S.P. had in the 1940's and 1950's. In South Asia the mass communist parties of India and Nepal are social democratic, addicted to Parliamentarism and reformism. In Eastern Europe the former stalinist parties which have returned to power are implementing I.M.F./World Bank austerity measures. They are bankrupt of ideas and in hock to imperialism.

The impact of 17 years of U.N.P. economic policies has weakened the workers movement. The defeat of the 1980 General Strike and the mass sacking of some of the best organisers and activists in trade unions was a blow whose effects we still suffer. The use of Emergency regulations and other repressive legislation has clawed back our rights to free expression, demonstrate, strike etc. The murder of 60 000 youth not only robbed us of their future contribution to society but also brought fear into the ranks of the working class and mass movement. Clearly the working class and Left is too weak to capture power at this stage.

A change in Government i.e. a P.A. administration is within the capacity of the masses and is rightly seen as a step in recovering our energies and our confidence for the fight ahead, against its capitalist policies. Our Party by running against the P.A. would firstly poll a small vote as the masses vote for the party most likely to wrest the seat from the U.N.P. and secondly, would confuse popular sectors into believing that we don't share their hatred of the U.N.P. and intend on splitting the anti-Government vote. In this situation it is absolutely right for us to field revolutionaries in one locality where for example we have a base or where for propagandist reasons we stand against the P.A. candidate (e.g. if s/he is a chauvinist, big capitalist, death squads backer etc.). Here we would stand on a socialist programme based on transitional demands so that instead of adapting to the consciousness of the masses we aim to advance it. This is what we are doing in Colombo district.

NOT CRITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE P.A BUT SUPPORT FOR SOCIALIST CANDIDATES

In other districts our fire would be turned against the U.N.P. principally. The traditional attitude of the Trotskyist movement has been to offer critical support to reformist and centrist workers parties. WE DO NOT USE THIS FORMULA IN RELATION TO CAPITALIST PARTIES EVEN WHEN THEY ARE BOURGEOIS POPULIST LIKE THE S.L.F.P. (This is a self-criticism I would make of the London resolution.) Our literature for example would say "Down With The U.N.P." and call "Vote For The Socialist Candidate". This means we do not specifically endorse a vote for the P.A. or take responsibility for its free market ideology nor as the L.S.S.P. - C.P.S.L. do, are we covering up for the presence of reactionaries like Gamini Fonseka or Chandrika's drift to the right. We support the socialist candidates running on the P.A. list i.e. the L.S.S.P. and C.P.S.L. and individual socialists. These candidates we support critically because they do not share our programme. We are for strengthening the Left within the P.A. (and the progressive elements within the S.L.F.P.) but we would be against the Left taking Governmental responsibility in a P.A. government. In our campaigns we would be targetting the workers, rural masses and youth who vote for the P.A. and convince them of the need for a Left front guarding its class independence as a prelude to a Left government.

A strong left within the P.A. will not be able to reverse the open economy policies and move to a break with capitalism but it would be able to force changes in human rights, on the war and in privatisation which can only benefit the workers movement. By supporting the Left in the P.A. our demand that it should break away from the Popular Front and form a united left front with the N.S.S.P. would be taken more seriously by the base of these parties and convince the J.V.P. layers that we are sincere in our opposition to popular frontism and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

SUPPORT THE E.P.R.L.F. IN THE NORTH-EAST

In the North and East where the E.P.R.L.F. is standing we should call for a vote for them instead of the P.A./S.L.M.C. This is because it is the duty of the revolutionary party in the oppressor state to educate the oppressor nationality on why we support self-determination for the Tamil nation. The P.A. does not have our views on this but the E.P.R.L.F. is closest to us on this question among all the Tamil militant groups. They do have serious weaknesses such as their misplaced faith in the Indian bourgeoisie and other stalinist ideas but unlike PLOTE, TELO, EROS etc. they have held firm opposing the L.T.T.E. but neither participating in the war against the Tamils nor extending support to the U.N.F. They are badly discredited for the forcible conscription of youth into the Tamil National Army in the I.P.K.F. period but at their last conference they apologised for this and made a full self-criticism. We should stand on their platform along with our comrades of the Progressive Muslim Front and urge Sinhala-Tamil-Muslim amity and how national liberation without social liberation will not alter the plight of the Tamil masses. We must strengthen our links with the E.P.R.L.F. and engage in more joint activities. It would be extremely symbolic that a Sinhala majority party like the N.S.S.P. has a genuine understanding of Tamil oppression and the solution to it and we have fraternal relations with a Tamil party like the E.P.R.L.F.

STRENGTHEN THE PARTY. ARM OUR CADRE!

It is not compulsory for us to participate in every bourgeois election and to field candidates for every seat. Of course, we are not infantile leftists who turn our back on the electoral process or adventurists who advocate armed struggle regardless of the context. Instead each election should be approached on the basis of what would be best for the movement as a whole and not simply as a sectarian propagandist exercise. It consumes enormous amounts of money and human resources to contest in these elections and does not yield much.

We need to strengthen the Party by arming our cadre. Armed from the arsenal of Marxism - the writings of Lenin on Parliamentarism, of Trotsky on the United Front and the Popular Front, the lessons of Germany and Spain in the 1920's and 1930's and the history and programme of the Fourth International. We need to recruit and educate more youth, to become a party where every member is a cadre member, where our comrades are identifiably leaders in their union, the womens and mass movement. Our Tamil paper should be resourced so that it becomes a monthly publication. We need to recruit more Tamils and prepare ourselves for when open political work becomes possible in the North-East again. We must deepen our collaboration with our Indian comrades and develop our analysis of a South Asian confederation. We must take the ideas of the Fourth International and the battle for a mass revolutionary international to our cadre and the revolutionary movement. It is through mass campaigns and going on the ideological offensive that we will make a socialist future credible to our people. That is the real struggle and overthrowing the U.N.F. is part of it.

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