

Theoretical organ of the New Democratic Party

New Democracy

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From the Editor's Desk

We are glad to be able to partly compensate for the delay in producing the last issue by bringing out this issue within two months of the last issue.

This issue, in addition to its regular features, carries three important articles on pressing Sri Lankan issues. The text of the address by Comrade Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDP to mark the 26th anniversary of the Party, assesses the current political situation and reiterates the principled position of the party on the major issues.

It is followed by an analysis of issues of nationalism. This is in response to the call by the LTTE leadership to reinforce nationalism, in the wake of the recent split in the LTTE and the subsequent conflict. The article calls for the correct recognition and handling of contradictions internal and external to the Tamil people's struggle for a just resolution of the national question on the basis of self-determination.

The article on the proposed Sedhu Samudram canal is perhaps the first serious comment on the long-term implications of the project to be published in this country since the announcement of the project. It draws attention to issues that the major political parties have yet to address.

There is also a comment on the utterances by two politburo members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) during their recent visits to this country. The position of the CPI(M) on issues central to Marxism Leninism have been a cause for concern for some time and will be discussed in greater length in the near future.

This issue also carries a tribute to the late Comrade KA Subramaniam, founder General Secretary of the NDP whose 15th death anniversary falls on November 26th.

The NDP is deeply saddened by the untimely death of comrade S Navaratnam, Member of the Politburo of the NDP, who joined the communist movement in 1965. (See back cover). He was a steadfast Marxist Leninist activist and relentless fighter for the people throughout his 39 years of political life.

Sri Lankan Events

Indian meddling in Sri Lankan affairs is to gain official sanction through the signing of a formal agreement on defence. There are a few points that cause concern to Sri Lanka as they assert Indian hegemony over Sri Lankan defence, especially the one that gives exclusive rights to India facilities in the Palali airbase. But they may not take long to iron out, since the Sri Lankan government and the main opposition party are only too keen to bring the country under the Indian military umbrella.

There is also fresh resentment among the armed forces, especially the navy, about the implications of the proposed Sedhu Samudram canal for the country's defence. These have been linked with concerns about environmental, marine resource and commercial matters. (Also see the article in this issue of ND on the subject). The Sri Lankan diplomatic mission in India has been faulted by the media for not alerting the government in time about the proposed project, although the fact that such a project proposal existed was common knowledge, at least in Tamilnadu, for well over a decade, and has been frequently talked about during the past several years. What is strange is that the Tamil nationalists have shown little concern about the matter although the biggest blow will be to the people of the north and northwest of the country, where the predominant majority is the Tamil nationality.

Indian manipulation of Karuna is now in the open. Since his political and military debacle in the East, Karuna has formed a political party which shortly after merged it with the ENDLF, until now a defunct party, created under Indian pressure during its military occupation in 1987-89. Karuna, who was initially presented as a voice of Batticaloa Tamil regionalism has now linked up with a group of individuals, predominantly from the North and fully under Indian control. Encouragement for Karuna also comes from the EPDP, whose base in the north has virtually eroded since the MoU between the LTTE and the government nearly three years ago, and indirectly from the UPFA government through the armed forces whose involvement in attacks on the LTTE cadres in the East is strongly denied by the army and the government.

The government also finds it convenient to have the EPDP and Karuna object to the role of ceasefire monitoring mission and to Norwegian

involvement in the peace negotiations, in view of the spate of alleged killings by the LTTE of persons associated with them. Journalists and intellectuals sympathetic to the LTTE also have been killed. No one claims responsibility for any of the killings and the tendency is to deny any involvement. The implications of the killings for the peace process are negative and the NDP has consistently denounced each killing, unlike the government and its allies as well as the LTTE and the Tamil parliamentarians, who are selective in their criticism.

While the government is using every trick in the book to delay resumption of the peace negotiations, the UNP, true to its cynical approach, is complaining about the failure of the government to get the peace process going and at the same time strengthening its ties with Sinhala Buddhist extremists. Tilak Karunaratne, a founder member of both the rabidly chauvinistic Sihala Urumaya and its successor the Hela Urumaya, has recently joined the UNP, without being asked to abandon his earlier stand against the peace process.

The CWC has now become partner in the UPFA government and the government has a secure majority in parliament and the CWC leaders the ministerial posts that they crave after. Animosity between the JVP and the SLFP has begun to surface and the alliance may not last very long, with the economy in tatters and prices of essentials rising out of control, partly due to the rise in oil prices. The inability of the UPFA to fulfil its election pledges will make it difficult for the partners to face the polls in the near future. The UPFA is facing a dilemma, since holding on to power until the presidential elections due next year could only lead to further erosion of support for the government, and losing the presidential election could spell political disaster.

The UNP has not hidden its joy at the plight of the government. Its protest marches against price increases are even more cynical than its position on the national question. The people could not have forgotten how prices soared during UNP rule only a year ago.

The old left has lost its last shred of credibility since the JVP became the main partner with the SLFP in the alliance. The genuine left in the south has yet to get its act together and come up with an extra-parliamentary programme of mass agitation and action for a lasting peace, a just resolution of the national question based on the principle of self determination for nationalities, and saving the country and its economy from imperialist and hegemonic domination.

International Events

Venezuela: Cause to Celebrate

The people of Venezuela have spoken loud and clear that they endorse the patriotic and progressive policies of Hugo Chavez. Attempts by the reactionaries, spurred on by the US imperialists, to overthrow the Chavez government have failed yet again. The failure of the reactionaries to topple the government by staging a strike in the oil industry made them furious and they tried the democratic weapon of the referendum, a device that Chavez himself introduced, to topple him.

This is a victory that has brought joy and inspiration to the masses struggling against imperialism all over the world, and in Latin America in particular. The current global situation certainly helped Chavez. One should, however, not forget that the US will not stop at anything to dispose of leaders who place the interests of the people above that of the imperialists.

The policy of land reform and extension of social welfare to the countryside will certainly strengthen Chavez in the long run and create a political climate in which the US and its lackeys will find it difficult to govern the country even if they get rid of the popularly elected government by underhand means.

EU Decision on Sison: a Victory for Reason

Following the declaration by the US in the year 2000 that the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army were terrorist organisations, the European Union came under pressure to impose a ban on these organisations. The EU obliged and, as a consequence, Professor Maria Sison, leader of the CPP since 1968 until 1986 and a founder leader of the National Democratic Front, was subject to harassment in the Netherlands where he had been resident since 1987 after leaving his country in 1986, following imprisonment from 1977 until 1986 and torture by the armed forces and the 'disappearing' of his brother by the armed forces. He has since 1986 been active in the international affairs of the CPP and the NDF, which has its secretariat in the Netherlands.

Following the ban on the CPP and declaration of Sison as a “terrorist”, the Dutch government placed him under constant surveillance, denied his social security entitlements, and froze his bank account. He was also under threat to be repatriated to be handed over to the oppressive Filipino government.

Perseverant campaign by human rights organisations, Filipino people’s organisations in the Netherlands, and European organisations for solidarity with the people struggle of the Philippines persuaded the EC to yield and remove the name of Sison from the list of terrorists. The ban on the CPP and the NPA remains.

This achievement, although not complete, is a victory for those who speak up for justice in Europe and a slap in the face for US imperialism.

The CPP which has been reorganised after the setbacks suffered in the 1990s has again emerged strong and is leading the struggle for democracy and liberation of the Philippines from US imperialist domination and its subservient client in power.

Iraq: People Resist the Forces of Occupation

Resistance to US forces of occupation is growing stronger by the day. The deceptive move to give the impression that the US has handed over power to an Iraqi interim government has been exposed as a lie. US presence has not decreased and US attacks on civilians in the name of fighting armed resistance has earned it more enemies, while not deterring the fighters against the occupiers. The US stands thoroughly isolated on the question of Iraq, with only the British government as its staunch ally among a handful of international supporters.

George Bush, in his desperate effort to show to the American voters that a democratic election will be staged early next year in Iraq, is trying hard to overcome armed resistance to the forces of occupation and the puppet regime, but to no avail. Plans to move British troops close to Baghdad are not likely to make things any better. In fact, attacks by the resistance have significantly increased since the announcement that the British troops will be moved there.

26TH ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS

by
COMRADE SK SETHIVEL

(The following is the translation of the text of the message from Comrade SK Senthivel, read out at the 26th Anniversary celebration of the founding of the New Democratic Party, held at the Town Hall, Hatton on 15th August 2004.)

Comrades and Friends!

On the occasion of this meeting to mark the completion of 26 years since the founding of the New Democratic Party, I convey to you, on this day of 15th August 2004, revolutionary greetings and joy on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party and on my behalf.

The 25th anniversary of the Party was held very successfully in Jaffna, the capital of the northern region. Today it gives us joy to hold the 26th anniversary in Hatton, the capital city of the hill country. It is painful that I am unable to be with you on this occasion of revolutionary joy, owing to poor health resulting from a road accident. I trust that you will accept my address communicated to you in writing.

Comrades and Friends!

Significantly, the policies, positions, development and experience of the Party as they developed over a period of a quarter of a century on the basis of Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought were explained in my address at the 25th anniversary last year. Many of the matters that were then pointed out seem applicable to the objective reality of today. The current situation also indicates clearly that certain issues, which were pointed out then as potentially dangerous, have taken a hazardous course of development.

The only significant change during the past one year is that the United People's freedom Alliance has come to power in place of the United National Front. This has removed the tug-of-war that existed

between the parliamentary government and the executive presidency. The rest of the problems continue as before. No policy alternatives or solutions have been put forward for the severe problems faced by the country and the people. Only plans with electoral success have been put forward in a superficial fashion.

Although it is four months since the new government took office, it is struggling unsuccessfully to fulfil its election promises. In particular, we witness the pathetic situation where it is unable to control the cost of living and is imposing more and more price increases on the people. Having increased fuel prices and fares, the government is seeking to divert the attention of the people by acts of deception.

A situation wholesomely favourable to finding a solution through negotiation for the national question, which is the most pressing problem facing the country, does not exist. Although the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed by the former government and the LTTE and the ceasefire agreement that accompanied it still hold, they are at serious risk of rupture at any moment.

The UPFA government unable to take any firm decision on the matter of starting negotiations with the LTTE and amid its vacillation is seen to be backtracking from it. President Chandrika Kumaratunga seems intimidated by forces of chauvinism and the JVP, the principal ally of her party. Since, as a result, she seems to be showing different faces at different times, she is viewed as an unreliable person by the political forces and people who desire peace and a political solution.

The LTTE has already put forward its proposals for an interim self-governing authority (ISGA), leaving no room for question about where from the talks should take off. Any honest government that wants a solution to the national question could proceed with detailed negotiations with that as the starting point and carry forward the journey towards peace in a spirit of understanding and accommodation. But, inasmuch as the last government procrastinated on various pretexts, this government is also doing the same on other pretexts.

Meantime, the chauvinistic stand of the JVP, a partner in the UPFA government, in opposing a negotiated settlement, vacillation by the President, continuing purchase of arms by the armed forces, continuing serial killings, bomb blasts, and shooting incidents in the conflict between the LTTE and the Karuna faction are warning signals of a situation in which the MoU and the ceasefire will be discarded to make way for war.

An examination of the above will show that neither the leadership of the UNP nor that of the SLFP, each with a feudal-capitalist lineage, has learnt any worthwhile lesson from the bloody events of a quarter century of cruel war. This continuing attitude of the chauvinistic ruling classes that lacks far sight and stands in opposition to objective conditions will only drag Sri Lanka further along the path of destruction.

It is undeniable that the chauvinistic ruling class position adopted, explicitly and implicitly, by the UNP, the SLFP, the JVP and the Hela Urumaya is standing in the way to a just solution to the national question. The ordinary Sinhala working people are being distracted and deceived by their chauvinistic slogans. Until the peasants, workers and other working people who comprise the overwhelming majority of the Sinhala nationality call into question and reject the chauvinism of the dominant ruling class leadership with a feudal-capitalist lineage, there can be neither salvation nor prosperity for the country as a whole. It is essential to criticise the chauvinistic position of the JVP, donning a leftist mask. The present leadership of the JVP is one that believes that it could come to power by making itself the vanguard of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and acting the role played by the SLFP in the 1950s. The chauvinistic propaganda of the JVP and the Hela Urumaya is cunningly stirring up feelings hostile to the peace process and paving the way for the institutionalisation of chauvinistic ideology.

It is true that honest leftist, democratic and progressive forces among the Sinhalese are acting in appreciation of this objective reality. However, the JVP, with its false leftist image and support from foreign forces, is acting to prevent and disrupt the growth of such

forces. It is unfortunate that people are deluded by its leftist appearance. At the same time, we could see that NGOs, operating with massive funding from foreign sources that manipulate them, have temporarily succeeded in undermining leftist, democratic and progressive forces. The errors committed by the parliamentary left and their current role stand in the way of the development of a genuine left.

US imperialism and Indian regional hegemonism have played a major part in creating and cultivating such an environment in a planned way and in collaboration with forces of local reaction. It is possible to know the truth by examining closely the complex development of the national question during the past quarter of a century and the conditions under which it was transformed into a chauvinistic war of oppression. It is important today to recognise the historic course where liberalisation and privatisation have been carried out behind the curtain of war, as part of the agenda of imperialist globalisation under the leadership of US imperialism. Having fulfilled their ulterior motives, the very same forces of imperialism are playing the anthem of peace in recognition of the fact that they need pace for their agenda of globalisation strike root in the battle-worn North East and in the Hill Country so that the whole country could be re-colonised.

It is becoming abundantly clear now that the national question of this country and the chauvinistic oppression responsible for it are only a platform and a tool for these imperialist and regional hegemonic forces to fulfil their ulterior motives, and that their interests do not concern the welfare of the oppressed Tamil nationality or of any other nationality or restoring the forfeited rights of any nationality. The recent spate of rapid response actions of the US and India in Sri Lankan affairs have brought this to light and exposed the truth. Anyone who seeks to understand this in an honest way will realise that these forces cannot be relied upon in the struggle of nationalities for self-determination.

The blatant acts of aggression and massacre carried out by the American imperialists in Afghanistan and Iraq have projected the true

image of its imperialist decadence to the world. If anyone were to imagine that such an America would help a Third World Country like ours or lend support to the struggle of the Tamil people for self-determination, there cannot be greater political ignorance or folly than that.

Foreign multinational companies and other private sector companies are intent on squeezing to pulp the toiling masses of this country comprising the workers, peasants and other working people. Companies are implementing low wages, long hours, retrenchment, insecurity of employment, and denial of democratic trade union rights that had been won in the past. This is practiced across the country by companies in the plantation sector to those based in urban areas. When workers speak up for their rights police brutality is unleashed upon them. An example of this is the retrenchment of 500 workers at the Bata shoe factory and the subsequent struggle. What is noteworthy is that Mahinda Rajapaksha, who, during the earlier PA regime, proposed the “Worker’s Charter” to safeguard the rights of the workers and was compelled to abandon it under pressure from multinational companies, is now the Prime Minister. Is the JVP, masquerading as a left party, prepared to implement the same charter through the Prime Minister? The truth is that the government of today is not ready to do it.

Thus the government of today does not present a progressive face in any way. It continues to be a government that uses state power to protect the interests and needs of the wealthy group of feudal-capitalist lineage, while submitting to the commands of the World Bank and the IMF that carry forward the agenda of globalisation. It is not even a government like the United Front government of 1970-77. It seems to be an anti-people government displaying a false face which it calls a human face.

Thus the local chauvinistic ruling class and imperialism have teamed together to create battle formations aimed to bring the entire people of Sri Lanka under the yoke of neo-colonialism. To conceal this from the eyes of the workers, peasants and other working people, rather than find a solution to the national question, they carry this out

through war and through peace efforts. The war and the ceasefire do not serve the interests of the people but those of the ruling classes

Comrades and Friends!

Under the circumstances, the Party has the duty to remain firm in its revolutionary stand, unite with honest left, democratic and progressive forces, and build up broad mass movements and struggles from the most basis levels. The historical duty and need has arisen now to return to where the left and democratic forces started in the 1930's to carry forward honest activities of the communist movement, taking into account the new conditions that prevail among the people at grassroots level, and to the exclusion of parliamentary opportunism.

It should be admitted that in the current situation the forces of Marxism Leninism and the leftists are weak. But that is temporary. That should be no cause for losing heart or for disillusionment. We have in us the dialectical materialist world outlook that Marxism has taught us and the will power based on it. The Party has the unassailable faith that, as long as there remains a single Marxist Leninist, that individual will be capable of building afresh a powerful Marxist Leninist movement and initiate a mighty great mass movement.

We are committed to play an active role in carrying forward the historic duty of uniting the broad working masses and oppressed nationalities and carry forward mass struggles against the chauvinistic ruling class of feudal-capitalist lineage and the forces of imperialism and regional hegemony with which it is allied. Capitalist and imperialist ideologies and thoughts associated with them are being put into use to deflect this and to damage and destroy the faith in Marxism Leninism. They are being introduced among the people like sweet-coated poison. It is necessary to combat by word and deed these evils that are being carried forward through liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation, since the agenda of globalisation is being implemented in conjunction with advances in information technology and in other fields of science and technology. Economic inducements to charm and distract the people and steps to promote

consumer culture are being actively undertaken. The young generation is being easily deceived by this. Rather than seek the truth and understand reality, there is a tendency to accept things without analysis. The consequent social crises are now rampant, and manifest themselves as economic crises and social decay. That is precisely why we Marxist Leninists shall, in the current international situation riddled with crises and challenges, advance by building up the Party further, and cherishing in word and deed the revolutionary traditions of communists. We will act in a spirit of dedication and sacrifice, and link hands with all honest left, democratic and progressive forces, international communist movements and anti-imperialist forces in that journey.

On the occasion of its 26th anniversary, the New Democratic Party declares again with renewed courage that it will continue to act with determination and confidence in its position based on Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought.

Long live Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought!

Long live the New Democratic Party!

Let us carry forward revolutionary mass struggles!

REINFORCING NATIONHOOD

by

IMAYAVARAMBAN

(This article was written in response to the call of the LTTE to reinforce nationalism in the context of recent developments in the North East and the stalemate in the peace process. What seems to be intended by the LTTE in its call to reinforce nationalism is to strengthen Tamil national unity under its leadership. The article deals with broader issues concerning unity.)

On Reinforcing Nationhood

When a nation, a nationality or even a community is oppressed as social group, it is inevitable that it struggles against oppression on the basis of its identity. To deny the right to this struggle is none other than to support social oppression. It is because Marxist Leninists accept this basis for struggle that they have supported not merely liberation struggles of countries subject to colonial rule but also the liberation struggles of every oppressed nationality and social group.

The struggle of the Afro Americans against racial oppression surged forward in the 1960s. The statement of Mao Zedong expressing unqualified support for the struggle was one that distinguished the Marxist Leninists from revisionists. Similarly, Marxist Leninists have not merely expressed support but provided leadership in struggles against caste oppression and untouchability.

What we need to understand from the foregoing is that Marxist Leninists do not adopt a rigid view on issues such as nationhood and nationalism. We should be clear that they have drawn careful distinction between the oppressing nation and nationality on the one hand and the oppressed nation and nationality on the other.

Tamil nationalism is not something that has been there at all times. Even when it has been in existence, it has not had the same identity. Several social, economic and historical factors have contributed to the development of the Tamil identity into a Tamil national identity.

We could easily recognise major differences between the Tamil national identity of today and those that are said to have preceded it.

The call for national upsurge on the basis of a Ceylonese identity originated from among the Tamils of the northern region. The call for national independence for the country as a political demand came from the left movement of this country. Those who spoke then on behalf of the Sinhala community or the Tamil community did not have the entire Sinhala community or the Tamil community in mind. The leaders who then spoke on behalf of an entire people while acting on the basis of differences in class, caste and region really represented the interests of the well to do social groups.

What had been emphasised as Tamil identity for long had primarily been the identity of the Tamil Saivaite and Christian Vellala caste living in the Jaffna peninsula. The leaders who projected this identity gave no thought to joining hands with the Tamils who lived in large concentrations in other parts of the island. They had no real need to think in those terms. That did not, however, make an identity based on language altogether meaningless or meaningful in itself.

In Sri Lanka, the Federal Party (officially, Ilankaith Tamil Arasukk Katci) was the first to propose the concept of 'Tamil speaking people' as a Tamil national identity. It could have had a political need and justification for it. The Federal Party, in principle, included the Hill Country Tamils and the Muslims in the Tamil nationality comprising Tamil speaking people. But did it give serious thought to the differing social needs and political differences concerning cultural, regional, caste and regional distinctions that may exist with that all-embracing identity? Certainly not.

The Federal Party spoke of a federal state comprising what were then the Northern and Eastern Provinces. But its policies and demands did not accommodate the fact that the Hill country Tamils, the vast majority of the Muslims, and a sizeable section of the Tamils, then known as 'Ceylon Tamils', lived outside the two provinces. There was, however, a common interest in the demand to make Tamil also an official language of the state. But, within the ten years that followed the passing of the Official Language Act in 1956, the Tamil

people realised that the Federal Party failed to assess correctly the significance of the question of official language for it to be presented as the most fundamental issue to the 'Tamil speaking people'.

When, in 1976, the Tamil United Liberation Front put forward the demand for a separate state of Tamil Eelam, it could not include the Hill Country Tamils as part of that nation. After quarter of a century of liberation struggle, we find the Muslims standing outside the Tamil national identity. This need not be forever. Nevertheless, it may be said that today Tamil is spoken by three groups of people with distinct national identities. While each group faces a wide range of social and political situations, there is much need for the three groups to struggle individually as well as collectively.

A situation has arisen today where it is seen necessary to emphasise the concept of strengthening Tamil nationhood. It was widely accepted after the violence of July 1983 that the Tamil nationality for its survival had to struggle on the basis of its national identity. There is no simple explanation as to why Tamil nationhood has become weakened so that there is a need to reinforce it now. However, the objective reality before us is that the Tamil people need to stand united and struggle against national oppression.

As far as the call to reinforce Tamil nationhood is for the purpose of reinforcing the liberation struggle against national oppression, it is correct and should be welcome. To reinforce Tamil nationhood for that purpose, contradictions that divide the Tamil nationality need to be handled correctly. Handling contradictions correctly does not, however, mean that they need to be resolved completely.

What is intended here as the correct handling of contradictions within the Tamil nationality is ensuring that friendly contradictions do not develop into hostile contradictions. That does not mean that one can afford to neglect the contradictions or to pretend that there are no contradictions among the Tamil people.

The major contradictions among the Tamils include class, caste and gender. Besides these, there are regional, religious and other such contradictions. The first three explicitly concern a hierarchy of power as well as oppression. While regional and religious differences may

involve notions of superiority of one group over another, they really manifest as means to other ends and as tools that serve self-interest rather than as pre-determined hierarchical relationships. Thus there is the need to distinguish between contradictions that involve oppression and contradictions that do not. There is always a difference between steps taken to resolve contradictions that involve oppression and steps taken to resolve contradictions that do not involve oppression. When handled incorrectly, a contradiction that does not involve oppression and therefore could be resolved easily may develop into a hostile contradiction. We need to be very alert about this.

Reinforcing Tamil nationhood should not have the aim of weakening the nationhood and national identity of other nationalities. Its aim should concern purposes such as reinforcing the existence, survival and endurance of the Tamil nationality and developing its unique characteristics in a creative way. It is not possible to reinforce nationhood without reinforcing national identity. Thus it is necessary to creatively develop aspects of cultural identity relating to the existence of the Tamil nationality. For this identity to remain strong, it cannot be based on thoughts and practices that should be discarded with passage of time. On the other hand, to blindly accept things that are thrust from outside on the people in the name of growth, development and progress will not reinforce national identity.

Hostility towards alien communities is unnecessary. It is true that the Tamil nationality is oppressed. When we refer to the Sinhala nationality as the oppressor nationality, we should bear in mind that the reference is to oppression carried out by the dominant ruling class in the name of the Sinhala nationality.

When we talk of American imperialism, could we mean that American people considered individually or as a society are imperialists? There the term, imperialism applies only to the dominant ruling class and its machinery of oppression and exploitation. Since the Tamil national identity is an identity concerning liberation, the strategy for the liberation struggle of the

Tamil nationality should be to identify and to isolate the forces that are hostile to the liberation struggle.

Thus, reinforcing Tamil nationhood is on the one hand about identifying and handling correctly the contradictions internal to the Tamil national identity and on the other about handling correctly contradictions external to it.

It is only when questions concerning contradictions are understood correctly that answers could be found for questions concerning correct handling of contradictions. We will explore in the sections that follow the questions that concern Tamil national identity and its social structure and how they could be handled correctly to reinforce Tamil nationhood in a way that is beneficial to the Tamil people.

What are the Internal Contradictions of the Tamil Nationality?

The Tamil nationalism of today has deviated from the identity of “Tamil speaking people” to assume that of the “Tamils of the North East”. Muslim nationalism grew in strength as a result of attempts to impose the Tamil national identity on the Muslims and unwillingness to distinguish their needs from those of the Tamils. It is not correct to say that the strengthening of Muslim nationalism was entirely as a result of the wrong approach of the Tamil nationalist leadership. The hostile contradictions that were induced by Sinhala chauvinists are recent. The parliamentary opportunism of the Muslim leadership of the Eastern Province is as old as that of the Tamil leadership. However, since at present the Muslims do not fall into the category identified as the “Tamils”, contradictions between the Tamils and the Muslims has to be seen as an external contradiction.

Since the Hill Country Tamils stand apart from the Tamils of the North East geographically as well as historically, there are difficulties in creating a common national identity. The unwillingness of the Tamil nationalist leadership that once represented the Jaffna upper caste elite to recognise the Hill Country Tamils as part of the ‘Ceylon Tamil’ community and therefore made matters worse was not

surprising. Their Jaffna-centric outlook, in any case, was uncaring and contemptuous towards the vast majority of the Tamils, on the basis of caste and region. The caste structure of Jaffna contributed to the relationship between the Hill Country Tamils and Jaffna Tamil officials and teachers being hierarchical and based on exploitation. Although the Federal Party founded in 1948 adopted a correct stand regarding the Hill Country Tamils, it failed to take the necessary steps to implement it. The leadership of the Hill Country Tamils took advantage of the backwardness of the community to serve its own interests through trade unions and politics of brokerage.

It suited the leadership of the Hill Country Tamils to encourage conflict between people from Hill Country and Jaffna. The middle class and the petit bourgeois intellectuals among the Hill Country Tamils seek to achieve personal advancement by cultivating the conflict on regional lines. This trend has grown in strength in the past two to three decades. Meanwhile, the inaction of the leadership of the community against chauvinist oppression has led to affinity for the LTTE among a section of the youth. However, the fact remains that the Tamil liberation movements counted the Hill Country Tamils among the Tamil nationality more as a matter of political convenience rather than on the basis of a clear understanding of the reality. Also, irrespective of whatever change may occur in the attitude of the middle class of the Hill Country Tamils, reality of the mode of existence of the Hill Country Tamils will not permit them to be part of the Tamil national identity of today.

A large section of the Tamil people living in regions outside the North East have been resident in these regions for a considerably long time. Of them, some communities have as a whole changed their ethnic identity, under various circumstances. This has happened on a large scale along the coastal region of the North Western Province and in the northern part of the Western Province. Although an overwhelming majority of the Tamils who moved to the South for a livelihood still preserve their linguistic identity, it is long since many of them lost contact with their native villages. Among the rest, for many, contact with the native village only concerns property that they may still own there and nominal ties of kinship.

Although Tamil nationalists declare the North Western Province as part of Tamil Eelam, it is unlikely that the lost Tamil identity of the Tamils there would be restored in the near future. It is doubtful whether those who still preserve their Tamil identity would like to be included in the Tamil National identity of the North East.

Today's Tamil national identity could include only the Tamils who consider the North East as their homeland, irrespective of whether they reside there or are unable to do so because of the war and other pressures. Of the displaced Tamils, those still living in Sri Lanka and in exile in India would, by and large, be part of this national identity. The objective living conditions of those living in exile in other countries will not allow them to be part of the Tamil nationality, despite their strong emotional ties with the Tamil national identity. However, as long as they consider themselves to be part of the Sri Lankan Tamil nationality, they have every right to that national identity.

For the Tamil identity to include the Tamil people living outside the North East, that identity should be reinforced, and the contradictions that weaken it should be resolved. In particular, it is necessary to strengthen the identity of the people who in effect comprise the Tamil nationality, namely the Tamils living in the North East and those who are, despite being displaced from there, clear in their minds about their Tamil national identity. To reinforce the identity, it is necessary to handle correctly the contradictions that divide the people who belong to the Tamil nationality. It is also necessary to determine the right basis for the identity.

Aspects such as Tamil culture, tradition and language are emphasised in different ways. The correct answer to the question, "What kind of Tamil cultural identity?" will depend on the extent to which the identity will unite the Tamil people. Several questions arise about tradition: Is tradition mere conservatism? Is it some form of an imaginary culture that is claimed to be pure? Is it something that changes with time? Questions also arise about the relationship between tradition and social justice. In the question of language, there are contradictions between the view that considers the Tamil

language as something pure and the view that treats it as part of the life of the people.

These matters also bring to our attention the questions of casteism and male domination. Beyond these are class, regionalism and religion, which involve important contradictions that deserve our attention. Some argue that to speak of such things is to weaken Tamil nationhood. They are able to pretend that there are no caste differences among Tamils; that a situation which gave rise to women fighters has made male domination irrelevant; that there is no room for class struggle today; that regionalism is mere fabrication by a few; and that there is no hostility among religions. The objective reality is otherwise.

There is also a tendency to justify the caste system and male domination in the name of tradition. Some, while acknowledging the existence of all or some of the above contradictions, claim that emphasising them in the context of a liberation struggle will weaken that struggle. They include in the term 'emphasising' efforts to resolve crises that arise from particular contradictions.

Firstly, let us deal with the question as to whether the any of the above contradictions exist among the Tamil people. Caste identity exists. It cannot be eliminated by legislation. In the course of a fundamental social change, caste distinctions may fade with time. However, as long as there is an economic basis for caste distinctions, they cannot be eliminated. These differences in identity that divide the Tamil people are not mere differences in identity. There is still the practice of untouchability, which asserts social inequality at birth. There are still many temples that the oppressed castes are refused entry, public facilities that they are debarred from using, and public places where they are discriminated against. Evidence has been produced for the continuing practice of caste discrimination in certain schools.

Although women carry weapons and the LTTE has laid down some important rules against disrespectful treatment of women, the dowry system still exists. There is one code of morality for men and another for women. The conduct of a majority of the women is still governed

by conservative concepts of chastity and femininity. Women continue to be addressed in a humiliating fashion and insulted on the basis of gender. Above all, the view of woman as an object that serves the needs of the man and a reproductive tool has worsened under the current conditions of globalisation.

Classes are unavoidable where there is private ownership of wealth. The war is an important reason why the capitalist mode of production has not established itself in a big way in the North East. What could be called big capitalist ventures are predominantly state owned or foreign owned. Although the Tamil national bourgeoisie is economically not advanced, the relationship between the capitalist and the worker is based on exploitation, and contradictions relating to issues such as wages, working hours and workers' welfare are inevitable. An important reason why such contradictions are not as widespread as in the South is that capitalist production and the economy are in a backward condition. There are, however, contradictions in the agricultural sector between land owners and agricultural labour. Many of the economic contradictions could be resolved through negotiation. But, at the same time, foreign capital is infiltrating by taking advantage of the weakness of the national bourgeoisie. When foreign capital takes advantage of the cessation of hostilities to establish itself, the contradiction is, on the one hand, against capitalist exploitation and, on the other, in opposition to imperialism and regional hegemony.

Under the present economic conditions, commercial activities are playing a more important role than manufacture. The contradiction between the people and the commercial capitalist class that is making massive profits in the process of supplying the essential need of the people is today an important social contradiction.

That there is no more regionalism among Tamils is a tale that has been related ever since the electoral success of the Federal Party in the Eastern Province. Many issue that encouraged regionalism are no more. Yet, certain middle class interests need the survival of regionalism. Some are able to use regionalism to their advantage in enhancing their opportunities to accumulate wealth and in the race for

posts and positions. The recent activities of the Karuna group have shown that understandable suspicions based on contradictions of the past and entirely subjective opinions could be stirred up very easily. These contradictions are not the creations of the Karuna group. Instead, since certain contradictions that did not sharpen significantly during the struggle for liberation did not receive much attention, the Karuna group was able to exaggerate them when the opportunity arose. Today, Tamils from Batticaloa and Amaparai districts who live outside that region can be seen to express strong regional sentiments.

Although religion is not a hegemonic contradiction today, there are activities that seek to resurrect Hindu-Christian conflict. In particular, forces in India are nurturing Hindu fanaticism. The local Hindu elite is making common cause with Sinhala Buddhism to isolate Muslims and Christians. On the other hand, several new charismatic Christian organisations are actively pursuing religious conversion, and much of this is supported by American funding with ulterior political motives.

Thus, serious contradictions are functioning within the Tamil national identity, and they need not necessarily be hostile contradictions in the immediate context. However, while emphasising that they could be resolved without hostility, it is necessary to warn that failure to handle the contradictions correctly could transform them into hostile contradictions.

A contradiction with features such as social hierarchy, exploitation, denial of rights, and domination has room for hostility. To pretend that such contradictions do not exist or to insist that they should be ignored will only help to make them hostile. Such pretences will weaken the unity of the nationality to a degree that matches, if not exceeds, the degree to which hierarchical differences relating to the contradictions are justified.

Thus, the question before us is how such contradictions could be handled correctly. It is necessary for us to subject to scrutiny some of the ideas put forward with the aim of reinforcing nationhood.

How to Handle the Internal Contradictions of the Tamil Nationality?

Reinforcing Tamil nationhood means to handle correctly the internal contradictions of the Tamil nationality. Hence the question of the basis on which Tamil nationalism should be reinforced assumes primacy. That basis will be determined by the most dominant of the prevailing tendencies within the Tamil nationality.

There has for long been a traditionalist tendency within Tamil nationalism. Although arguments have been put forward to link Tamil nationalism with the Tamil Saivaite revivalist, Arumuga Navalar, Tamil nationalism developed its political identity only from early last century. One part which concerned the interests of the Saivaite (Hindu)-Christian Vellala caste elite and emphasised tradition and the caste system evolved from the time of Ponnambalam Ramanathan and followed under the leadership of GG Ponnambalam and SJV Chelvanayakam. The other part evolved through the Jaffna Youth Congress, which emphasised matters such as anti-imperialism and social reform, alongside Lankan nationalism and left ideology.

Although the first of these two trends arrived at the demand for a separate state of Tamil Eelam in 1976, its true intention was to come to a deal with the Sinhala chauvinistic comprador capitalist class and share power with it under the patronage of imperialism. The latter trend saw Tamil national identity as an aspect of a Lankan national identity. Although the parliamentary political degeneration of the old left pushed it towards compromise with Sinhala chauvinists who deny the basic rights of the Tamil nationality, the Marxist Leninists, who followed the genuine development of that tendency, looked at the national question on the basis of the principle of self-determination and emphasised the path of struggle against all forms of oppression.

It is not coincidental that the Tamil nationalist parliamentary political parties always accommodate traditionalism and conduct themselves in ways amenable to imperialism and regional hegemony. They are driven by certain class interests and social outlooks. While there are

contradictions between Tamil nationalist parties because of parliamentary election rivalries, in practice, they have refused to deviate from their conservative tendency. Since I have dealt with this matter extensively in my earlier essays, it will be sufficient here to deal only with the traditionalist approach related to this conservative tendency.

In the last analysis, the tendency to openly endorse the caste system, the tendency to deny the existence of caste contradictions, and the tendency to deny the need to deal with the problem as at present are tendencies that oppose the struggle against caste oppression. They use the liberation struggle of the Tamil nationality as a pretext to continue caste oppression.

The conservative approach to caste has as its corollary the oppression of women in the name of culture. However, the conservative elements do not object to women from economically backward communities carrying arms since that helps them to prevent their own children from carrying arms and also since it ensures their own safety. The day the national question is resolved, they would like the women to return to their traditional roles in cookery and childcare.

However much the traditionalists may emphasise tradition and culture, one could see that they are reluctant to oppose imperialism and globalisation. It will be useful to note here that the conduct of feudal landlord class was very similar during the colonial era.

It is wrong to talk of casteism in a context where it does not exist. Can it be wrong to talk of something that is there before us? We should not forget that, if there is no room in the liberation of the Tamil nationality for liberation from caste oppression, there is no need for the oppressed castes to participate in that struggle.

Tamils of the oppressed castes are oppressed as a nationality and as a caste. Their struggle for liberation cannot be for one to the exclusion of the other. It is only because there are those who demand that there should be no discussion of casteism that some who claim to be 'Dalitists' are able to argue that there is no need for national liberation as long as casteism exists. Thus the demand that there

should be no struggle against casteism inevitably leads to caste hostility and therefore weakens Tamil nationhood.

What is needed here is an end to social injustices based on caste. Can people of the oppressed castes trust anyone who refuses that? What do those who practice caste oppression expect from national liberation? What is their contribution to the liberation struggle? The answers to these questions will enable one to determine what reinforces Tamil nationhood.

Caste contradictions could be handled as friendly contradictions. The struggles of the 1960s against casteism did not emphasise caste hostility. They had considerable support from members of the so-called 'high castes'. In the process of the struggle, the hostile aspect of that contradiction assumed the form of a handful of casteist fanatics against the vast majority of the people who were opposed to casteism. The liberation struggle of today, which very much requires the participation of the members of the oppressed castes, could only strengthen itself and the unity of the Tamil nationality by being firm on the question of casteism. When it hesitates to do so, it identifies itself with the minority of oppressors and thus weaken the struggle and unity.

The conservative approach to women's rights as well as the tendency to use feminism to oppose national liberation struggles deserve attention.

In a way reminiscent of certain 'Dalitists' who emphasise caste contradictions to reject other liberation struggles, the activities of upper middle class feminists in the name of women's liberation hinder all liberation struggles including that of women. While criticising their activities, to allow the historical injustices to women to continue can only harm the unity of the Tamil nationality.

Today, women are playing important roles in a variety of liberation struggles in Palestine, various parts of India and in Nepal. Even in Sri Lanka, without women's participation, the liberation struggle of the Tamil nationality would have suffered major setbacks. And why should questions of culture and concern for femininity that do not

arise when women wear uniforms and fight as equals to men arise in other contexts?

The attitude of considering women as inferior to men can be cured only through a long period of education. Nevertheless, all forms of violence against women, including sexual violence, should be made criminal offences that are severely punishable. In particular, acts of domestic violence should not be dismissed as internal matters. Extreme positions could be counterproductive in this context. Thus, counselling, discussion and warning could comprise initial measures, with continuation of violence punished severely. The codes for chastity and good conduct are not alike for man and women. In this matter, traditional and biased values that are inculcated in people from childhood should be reviewed and moral values based on social welfare and gender equality should be emphasised.

In the fields of education and employment in this country, there is at least nominal equality of opportunity for men and women. There is, however, discrimination in wages. More importantly, subjecting of women to sexist insults and sexual abuse, besides their harassment and excessive exploitation as a gender and as individuals, is on the rise as a result of globalisation.

There is an increase in need for women to be in employment. But there is no matching decrease in their domestic workload. Male chauvinist ideology and especially conservative thought play an important role in this matter. National liberation movements cannot be indifferent towards this.

There is little connection between the feminist concerns of the upper middle class women and the struggle of working class women for their rights. However, traditionalists and other reactionaries use the feminism of the Sri Lankan women elite as an excuse to dismiss lightly the issues of women's rights. There is no need for women's liberation to await national liberation or elimination of the caste system or the arrival of socialism. While women's liberation in its fullest sense is possible only when other forms of social liberation have been achieved, it is necessary to give wholehearted support to efforts to win women's rights through social reform. It is the

experience of Sri Lanka and many other countries that the more the working class women are liberated the more the national liberation struggle is strengthened. It is absurd to argue that deferring the struggles for women's rights will strengthen national identity and the struggle for national liberation.

Class struggle does not step aside during national liberation struggles. However, when the contradiction between the imperialists and the national bourgeoisie sharpens, a need arises for the working class to cooperate with the national bourgeoisie. Today, the national bourgeoisie are too weak to stand up to imperialism. Hence, the position of the working class with respect to the national bourgeoisie depends on whether the national bourgeoisie are acting in the national interest. It is not possible to permit severe exploitation and the denial of the fundamental rights of the working class in the pretext of the liberation struggle or the unity of the nationality. To ask the working class to allow it will on the one hand weaken their faith in the liberation struggle and on the other permit the vacillating national bourgeoisie to enrich themselves without making any sacrifice.

Since the national liberation struggle is a struggle for social justice, to demand that other struggles for social justice should be abandoned will only weaken the forces of struggle and benefit opportunist elements.

Unlike the contradictions discussed above, contradictions relating to religious and regional identity are not based exploitation and hegemony. They could, nevertheless, be exploited by the oppressing classes to serve their hegemonic ends.

Besides equality among religions and freedom of worship, each individual should be free to embrace and to give up any religion, by choice, and to belong to a religion or not to belong to any religion at all. Religious freedom cannot be interpreted as the freedom for some to deceive people or to accumulate wealth or to stir up communal conflict in the name of religion.

To challenge acts of deception and the propagation of superstition in the name of religion should be encouraged as a fundamental right and as a social responsibility. Some religious organisations are acting

against the liberation struggle of the Tamil nationality as well as the sovereignty of Sri Lanka to serve the interests of the powers of regional hegemony and global domination. Challenging their activities and exposing them to the people will strengthen the liberation struggle.

Regionalism is the ideology of dominant ruling classes. In a society with a weak capitalist economy, that has not freed itself entirely from feudal ideology, regionalism is a useful tool in the hands of a middle class itching to advance itself. Anyone could use regionalism to isolate competitors in education, employment, politics or business. It is possible to stir up regional sentiments to advance the interests of an individual or a group. This undoubtedly will weaken the liberation struggle.

Regionalism could be made stronger by merely denouncing it or taking severe steps against it. It could be defeated by openly discussing the genuine grievances and by encouraging relationship between sections of society on an equal basis. Now, Batticaloa regionalism is used to weaken the liberation struggle of the Tamil nationality. Chauvinists are very active in this. The use of violence to resolve a fundamentally friendly contradiction, however justifiable it may be, could help to transform that contradiction into a hostile contradiction. Thus, level-headed and patient handling of hostile aspects as they emerge is necessary to clear misunderstandings among the people and to unite them.

What are the Major External Contradictions?

All contradictions that concern the Tamil nationality that are not internal to it are external contradictions. Of the external contradictions, the more important ones, in the context of the struggle for liberation, concern the relationship of the people of Tamil nationality with people of other nationalities within the traditional homeland of the Tamils and elsewhere in Sri Lanka, with Tamil people living in other countries who do not belong to the Tamil nationality of Sri Lanka, with people of other nationalities of the international community, with national and other liberation

movements, with the Sri Lankan ruling classes and the state representing their interests, with imperialism in general and American imperialism in particular, with forces of Indian hegemony, and with other vested foreign interests.

Several of the above contradictions are fundamentally friendly and need to be dealt with as such. There, the need to emphasise common interests is stronger than that to emphasise differences. Also, when dealing with the differences, they should be treated with a spirit of accommodation rather than confrontation.

In the case of fundamentally hostile contradictions, accommodation has just one meaning, namely that the oppressed accommodates the oppressor. Such accommodation is often the product of necessity and circumstances and, from the point of view of the oppressed, it is, at best, tactical.

Since the approaches to the two kinds of contradiction are fundamentally different, correct recognition is most essential to take the right decisions about their handling.

The contradictions between the Tamil people as a nationality with any other group of people with a different national or ethnic identity are essentially friendly. Contradictions concerning forces of oppression, exploitation and domination whose interests are directly in conflict with those of the Tamil people are essentially hostile. There is no way in which such contradictions can be resolved in a friendly manner until the conditions for oppression, exploitation and dominance are removed, or ameliorated through struggle.

An important consequence of the above is that one should distinguish between the oppressor and the people in whose name oppression is carried out. Another important consequence is that all the oppressed nationalities of the world, and especially their liberation movements, are potential allies of the Tamil people, and every victory of an oppressed group of people against the forces of oppression benefits directly or indirectly every other oppressed group through weakening the forces of oppression and inspiring the people to struggle.

How to Handle the External Contradictions Correctly

The people living in the North East belong mainly to three nationalities, although the Hill Country Tamils and ethnic groups such as the Burghers and the indigenous people (the Attho) are also there in significant numbers. The Tamils, Muslims, a small section of the Sinhalese and the smaller ethnic groups have a long historical association with the region and have been resident there for many generations. A large part of the Sinhala population was settled in the region, the East in particular, by the chauvinistic UNP governments under the early colonisation schemes starting around the end of direct colonial rule and later during different stages of the Mahaweli scheme. Besides them, there are settlers who have been deliberately brought in for political reasons by chauvinistic mischief-makers. The armed forces have played a significant role in such settlements.

It is true that the purpose of settlement of Sinhalese in large numbers under various pretexts was to alter the ethnic identity of the region and disrupt the geographic contiguity of the region with a predominantly Tamil identity. However, a sizeable section of the Sinhalese in the region is one whose ancestors have been in the region for as long as those of most Tamils; and a large proportion of the Sinhalese have settled in the region several decades ago and accepted the North East as their home.

With nationalistic rather than class politics dominating the country as a whole and given the chauvinistic nature of the major political parties among the Sinhalese, fear and suspicion of the Tamils as well as of the Muslims on the one hand and chauvinistic ideology on the other dominate the political scene among the Sinhalese in the North East. They are affected by the war far more than the Sinhalese in the South and therefore crave peace. But chauvinistic propaganda and the perceived threat of subjugation if not expulsion by a Tamil nationalist regime condition the thinking of a majority of the Sinhalese. Thus they see the armed forces of the state as their natural allies. Although it is not easy to put to rest such fears, neither the Tamil nor the Muslim nationalist leadership has done much to rectify the situation.

Winning over the Sinhalese to the side of Tamil national liberation is not a realistic proposition under conditions of armed conflict in the North East. It is, however, possible to neutralise a large majority by demonstrating in practice that the struggle for Tamil liberation poses no threat to their existence, and in fact could be much to their benefit in the medium and long run.

The attitude of the Tamils towards the Sinhalese in the South has been conditioned objectively by the reality of chauvinistic oppression and the subjectively by the way Tamil nationalism chose to present the national question. It is important to distinguish between the feudal-capitalist elite class of chauvinistic oppressors and the broad masses of Sinhalese, who have been conditioned by reactionary elements to see the Tamil people as a hostile people and their struggle as terrorism.

A major contributory reason for the lack of progress in the peace process is that the feudal-capitalist leadership of the UNP and the SLFP and the chauvinistic petit-bourgeois parties including the JVP have a vested interest in preserving the hold of chauvinistic ideology over the Sinhala electorate. The realities of war have impressed upon the Sinhala masses the need for peace, but the not yet the fact that a lasting peace requires a just and lasting solution based on the equality of all nationalities and the right of each to self-determination. It makes no sense to expect the beneficiaries of chauvinist politics, including the parliamentary left, to take the initiative in the matter.

Effective strategies for securing the understanding, if not support, of the Sinhala masses demand a considerable shift in political approach of the forces of Tamil liberation. It is important for the liberation struggle to highlight the difference between the forces of chauvinism and the Sinhala masses who are really its victims. As long as parliamentary political interests hold sway in Tamil national politics, the prospects for mutual understanding with other nationalities will be poor. Thus, winning over a substantial section of Sinhalese would involve mass political work that would unite the people on issues of class oppression so that the ruling chauvinistic elite will be isolated from the vast majority of the people. Support from genuine left and

progressive political forces among the Sinhalese at the national as well as the North East regional level is essential to achieve this.

Various factors have contributed to the souring of relationship between the Tamil and Muslim nationalities in the country and in the North East in particular. Ponnambalam Ramanathan's appeal to the British government to take a softer view of the Sinhala chauvinists punished by the colonial rule for their role in anti-Muslim riots of 1915, had an adverse effect on Tamil-Muslim relationship within the feudal-capitalist class. There was, however, no hostility between the two communities until after the war of national oppression by the state against the Tamils.

The call by the Federal Party for a federal state for the Tamil speaking people of Lanka nominally included the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils alongside the Tamils of the North East within a linguistic national identity. But the failure of the leadership to recognise, let alone accommodate, the concrete conditions of existence of the Muslims as a community had negative effects. Electoral opportunism of the Federal Party encouraged the emergence of opportunist politicians from among the Muslims of the East. The need of the parliamentary politician to secure his power base led to divisions based on ethnicity rather than crucial social issues.

The Tamil nationalists by and large liked to pretend that the linguistic national identity defined by them was automatically inclusive of all Tamil speaking people, although the Muslims has both explicitly and implicitly asserted their separate identity. The call for a separate Tamil state in 1976, while it took for granted the support of Muslims resident in the North East, like the earlier call for a federal state, failed to address the interests of the Muslims in the North East or in the country as a whole. The fact that the Muslims were subject to chauvinistic discrimination and oppression and were themselves victims of planned colonisation encouraged many Muslims not merely to support the Tamil liberation movements but even to join some of them, although not in very large numbers.

Anti-democratic tendencies within the Tamil liberation movements that led to a high-handed approach in the political work among Tamil

people operated with the same degree of insensitivity in dealings with the Muslims. This led to contradictions initially with sections of the Muslims who had little interest in the Tamil liberation struggle. And the extension of the intolerance to dissent among Tamils to the Muslim community led to disaffection among people who were at least potentially sympathetic. Meantime, opportunistic elements among the Muslims collaborated with forces of chauvinistic mischief in the formation of Muslim home guards, who were armed by the state mainly to attack Tamil militants and their sympathisers.

The contradiction between the Muslims and Tamils was badly mishandled by every Tamil nationalist movement of significance in the 1980s, and the problems were compounded by the involvement of the 'Indian Peace Keeping Forces' between 1987 and 1989. Seeing the Muslim as the enemy was second nature to some of the Indian soldiers and attacks against Muslims by the Tamil militants had their blessings if not active support.

Mass murders of Muslims were and still are justified by several on the basis of involvement of Muslim home guards in mass murders and killings of Tamils. What has been tragic is that, while Tamil liberation movements readily point an accusing finger at a rival movement for a crime against Muslims, none of them has taken steps to improve the relationship between the communities.

Contradictions between the Tamils and the Muslims and fears within the Muslim community about Tamil nationalist intentions were exploited by a new breed of Muslim leaders who took up the cause of Muslim nationalism. They appealed to genuine concerns of the Muslims, especially in the Batticaloa and Amaparai districts in the East, but in reality they used their political strength to bargain for posts in government. Anti-Muslim prejudices also led to the LTTE's historic error of driving the Muslims out of the North in 1990.

Despite efforts by the LTTE and a section of the Muslim leadership to resolve some of the important contradictions, the matter has not been handled in a way that would bring the Tamil and the Muslim nationalities together. Splits in the main Muslim nationalist party, the SLMC, encouraged rival leaders to take positions that ranged from

open hostility towards the Tamils to positions that were unhelpful to a negotiated settlement of the national question. The anti-Tamil posture of rival Muslim factions was motivated as much by parliamentary opportunism as was the anti-Muslim attitude of Tamil parliamentary politicians of the East.

The main beneficiaries, however, have been those who had a vested interest in using Muslim concerns to weaken the case for an autonomous North East, based on the right of a nationality to self-determination. The Indian ruling class, Sinhala chauvinists and important elements within the armed forces have encouraged and contributed to armed conflicts between Muslims and Tamils across the East, especially after the signing of the MoU between the government and the LTTE.

This contradiction cannot be resolved without recognising the Muslims as a nationality with as much right to self-determination as the Tamils. The call for an autonomous structure for the Muslims has its justification, despite the suspicion that certain Muslim leaders of the East are using this call merely to hamper an early resolution of the national question. As long as the forces of Tamil liberation are seen to be hostile or unsympathetic to the aspirations of the Muslims, the contradiction between the two nationalities will be taken advantage of by the forces of chauvinism, regional hegemony and imperialism to weaken the case for autonomy and self-determination for the Tamils.

The Muslims in the South face a threat to their existence from forces of Sinhala chauvinism, despite pretences to the contrary by their opportunist parliamentary leadership tied to one or the other of the parties of the Sinhala chauvinistic ruling class. The opportunism of the parliamentary political leadership of the Muslims as a whole is standing in the way of unity among the Muslims across the country. Political frustration has helped the emergence of conservative Islamic fundamentalism as an emergent political force and more as a social menace to the Muslim community. This is a trend that will divide the oppressed people and further weaken their struggle for liberation. The Tamil liberation struggle will only strengthen itself by supporting the

Muslims against chauvinistic oppression in the South, and against the unholy alliance of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism and a section of the reactionary Hindu elite against other religious minorities.

There has been no open hostility towards the Tamil liberation struggle from the leadership of the Hill Country Tamils, although, despite pretences to supporting the struggle, the leadership has always made deals with chauvinist political forces to keep them in power in exchange for cabinet posts that have only benefited the leaders and their cronies. The leadership also encourages regionalism among the emergent middle class among the Hill Country Tamils so as to insulate them from progressive thought from outside striking root among the plantation workers who constitute the predominant majority of that nationality. The Tamil nationalists of the North East are aware of the duplicity of the leadership, but rarely dare to criticise except where the interests of their class allies are threatened, as in the case of the recent switch in loyalty of the Ceylon Workers' Congress from the UNP to the UPFA government.

Significant involvement of the Hill Country Tamils in the struggle of the Tamils of the North East is out of the question. It is, however, possible to weaken and isolate today's opportunist leadership of the Hill Country Tamils by encouraging Tamils to actively support the struggle of the Hill Country Tamils for fair wages and basic rights in the plantation sector and against chauvinist oppression ranging from blatant communal violence to the proposed Upper Kotmale project. It is only the emergence of a powerful mass movement from among the plantation workers and not individualist adventurism that can help the just struggles of all oppressed people of the country.

Frustration at the lack of unqualified support for the struggle from sections of Tamils living outside the North East has prompted some Tamil nationalists to go so far as to abuse those who moved out of the region as traitors. A similar attitude has prevailed among supporters of rival movements within the Tamil Diaspora, especially in Europe, Australia and North America. Tamil liberation organisations did not come through a tradition of democratic mass struggle. Consequently, commandism has prevailed over dialogue

and debate. The net effect has been the isolation and alienation of sections of the community that would otherwise have been neutral if not friendly. These sections have become the feeding ground for forces that are hostile not merely to the LTTE but to a just and lasting solution to the national question. This situation needs to be rectified not only in the interest of the struggle of the Tamil people but also in the interest of unity among the oppressed sections of the overseas Tamil communities.

A large proportion of the displaced Tamils now in Tamilnadu are housed in refugee camps with unacceptable living conditions. A smaller section has for practical purposes made Tamilnadu their home, although they have not been granted citizenship or even refugee status. Political events since the Indian military intervention and especially since the assassination of Rajeev Gandhi have created a climate of media and institutional hostility towards the LTTE and indifference towards the plight of the Tamil nationality. The plight of the refugees and their dependence on handouts delivered through handpicked agents of the establishment has denied the refugees their political voice.

Activities of a handful of criminal elements originally encouraged by the Indian establishment to manipulate the Tamil national movements have hurt enthusiasm for the liberation movements. Nevertheless, there is substantial mass sympathy for the struggle of the Tamil nationality, and that needs to be kept alive, despite the fact that the electoral politics of Tamilnadu or any other part of India is not conditioned by events in Sri Lanka. To imagine otherwise would be folly. What needs to be done is to expose how the ruling classes are manipulating the Sri Lankan national question to serve their hegemonic ambitions, so that the Indian masses recognise the true nature of their political leadership, ranging from the opportunist parliamentary left to the neo-fascist BJP, and including the regional parties of Tamilnadu.

What has been largely forgotten by a large number of Tamil nationalists was the support and sympathy that their struggle received from the liberation movements of Palestine, South Africa and

Northern Ireland. To this day, Marxist-Leninist liberation movements across the world are supportive of the struggle of the Tamil people and endorse the principle of the right to self-determination. The response of the Tamil liberation struggle to such support was lacking in many respects and particularly muted in the recent past, especially at a time when the common enemy of the people of the world is actively pursuing war and encouraging Zionist Israel to escalate its war of aggression.

Supporting the just struggle of the masses against foreign aggression and oppression will earn the struggle of the Tamil masses solidarity with the people who struggle for liberation; failure to express support will only isolate the struggle of the Tamil people from other just struggles. The struggles in Palestine and Iraq represent the highest form of mass defiance against US imperialism and deserve unqualified support and there is a need to develop solidarity with the nations such as Cuba and Venezuela that dare to stand up to the imperialists.

Some fear that earning the displeasure of the imperialists or regional hegemonic forces would hurt the struggle of the Tamil people. But the truth is that the imperialism and hegemony act to wear down and disarm any liberation struggle, except when it serves their immediate purposes, after which they would readily abandon the cause that they espoused. One should remember that US imperialism was instrumental in transforming national oppression in Sri Lanka into a war of oppression, in order to facilitate the process of imperialist globalisation in Sri Lanka. It should also be noted that the forces of US imperialism and Indian hegemony are directly and indirectly contributing to building up the military might of the Sri Lankan government even after the declaration of a ceasefire and the signing of the MoU between the government and the LTTE. The intentions of Japan in offering 'developmental aid' as a peace reward too need scrutiny.

Thus, any genuine force of national liberation has no choice but unreserved opposition to imperialism, hegemony and globalisation. Of course, there is a difference between a principled stand and

unwanted provocation. But there is also the risk of tactical silence being interpreted as a nod of approval for the aggressor. It is therefore important that the masses are clear in their minds that their international allies in their liberation struggle are not among forces of imperialism and hegemony but among those who are opposed to such forces. All illusions about imperialism and regional hegemony should be fought off and the manipulation of the liberation struggle by their agencies including the NGOs should be resisted to the fullest.

Reinforcing the Struggle

Reinforcing nationhood is not an end in itself, but a means to strengthen the struggle of the Tamil nationality against national oppression. A correct analysis of the internal and external contradictions leads to the correct recognition of enemies and friends, and the identification of the short- and long-term goals and the appropriate tactical and strategic positions to adopt in the course of the struggle.

The deterioration of the national question into a war was due to collaboration between the chauvinistic ruling classes and imperialist interests, and hence the struggle for liberation cannot extricate itself from struggle against imperialism. The struggle, thus, needs to be carried out on two fronts, one against chauvinistic oppression and the other against imperialist and hegemonic domination.

The lack of progress in the peace process, while it has called into question the intention of the chauvinistic ruling classes and their backers, also draws attention to the danger of war being imposed again on the Tamil people. Even without the breakout of war, the experience of liberation struggles during the last half-century suggests that the struggle of the Tamil nationality would be prolonged.

To struggle does not mean to abandon the peace process and get ready for war. The objective reality demands preparedness for a range of eventualities, while carrying out the struggle on various fronts including the political front and the peace process itself.

The aim of the oppressors is to divide the Tamil people and isolate the struggle for liberation. The aim of the liberation struggle should therefore be to isolate the oppressors and their international backers. This requires an approach that unites the many against the few by identifying issues that unite, at every level, the majority comprising the oppressed masses. The unity of the Tamil nationality for its liberation, through unity with the struggle of other nationalities for liberation, both as oppressed nationalities and as oppressed classes, finds a means of expression of solidarity with the struggle of the peoples of the world against imperialist and hegemonic oppression and exploitation. Let us not forget that every genuine national liberation movement has had anti-imperialism at its core, and that every compromise with imperialism has led to the surrender of hard-won freedoms.

A liberation struggle fails its people when it compromises its principles. Thus, it is important that the principle of the right to self-determination should always be upheld. In addition, it is paramount that the right should be extended in its true spirit to every nationality, for the principle of self-determination provides the only means for people of different nationalities to unite voluntarily and on the basis of mutual trust.

Although a liberation struggle may make gains in the short term based on an elite or vanguard group, the prolonged nature of the struggle requires it to be democratic to the point that the masses are not only part of the struggle, but also a driving force, and finally the masters. This is where the concepts of mass line and people's war become important. When understood and applied according to needs of each situation, they have made the liberation struggle a double triumph for the masses, against their immediate oppressors and against their foreign masters.

The strength and success of the liberation struggle will mainly be determined by the extent to which the masses are inspired and motivated. And that requires upholding the principles of self-determination, democracy and unity on the basis of social justice.

THE SEDHU SAMUDRA SCHEME: A SCHEME TO RUIN SRI LANKA

by

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(This article was originally published in Tamil in the October 2004 issue of *Puthiya Poomi*, the monthly journal of the NDP.)

Introduction

We have seen and understood that the imperialist and capitalist countries, by the manner in which accumulate wealth and through their myths about development, caused a major threat to the planet. The depletion of the ozone layer and the proliferation of greenhouse gases, their consequences for global warming, the threat of a rise in sea level as a result of the melting of polar ice, the adverse effects of air and water pollution on all forms of plant and animal life are among the important threats. Under the circumstances in which it has become necessary to carry out bitter struggles to save the earth from these dangerous conditions, two more schemes have been put forward and adopted in the name of development and infrastructural improvements. If the two proposals are implemented, as their immediate consequences, the people of India and Sri Lanka as well as plant and animal life will inevitably face major ill effects. It should be noted that these two ruinous schemes will in the long run create major imbalances in our geographic environment. Hence it is important to take a closer look at the Sedhu Samudra Scheme.

The essence of the Sedhu Samudra Scheme is the construction of a massive canal by dredging the seabed, starting from Thoothukkudi in India past the bay of Mannar through the Palk Strait into the Bay of Bengal to allow the passage of large ocean vessels.

It is understood that the Cabinet of the Indian Government has consented to the construction of this canal of 50 nautical miles length to enable the passage of 3000 tonne heavy ships. The fact that the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will lay the foundation for this canal on 1st January 2005 and that the scheme is expected to be completed by the year 2007 shows the extent of the interest that the Indian government has in carrying out the project.

Shipping companies have asked for the canal to be made 35 meters deep below sea level to enable the passage of large ships. It is understood, however, that the Commission for the Sedhu Samudhra Scheme plans to construct the canal to be 30 metres deep.

The fact that the initial expenditure for the scheme is estimated at fifty billion Indian Rupees gives a hint about the scale of the expectations of the Indian ruling classes and the big capitalists. While the 'Dravidian' parties of Tamilnadu, the ADMK and the MDMK in particular, are vying to claim credit for the expression of consent by the central government, the fisher-folk and environmentalists of Tamilnadu have expressed strong protest about the environmental effects of the scheme. Thus it is clear that the views of the ruling Hindutva capitalist classes and the ordinary masses about the scheme are diametrically opposed.

It should be pointed out here that no official views have so far been expressed by the Government of Sri Lanka or the parliamentary representatives of the people of the North or the LTTE about the geo-environmental, social, political and economic consequences for Sri Lanka, and in particular the Jaffna peninsula, Mannar Island and North Vanni. Minor organisations with environmental concerns and some newspapers have expressed views about the environmental effects of the project. The present writer, drew attention to the effects of the scheme in the political seminar organised by the New

Democratic Party on 11th September 2004 at the at the Jayasinghe Hall of the Dehiwela-Mount Lavinia Municipal Council. The need remains, however, to keep the people of Sri Lanka and India clearly and well informed about the Sedhu Samudhra Scheme with far-reaching implications.

India, which is exercising hegemony over Sri Lankan sovereignty politically, economically, socially and militarily, will do its utmost to implement the scheme. The Sri Lankan government, without the least environmental concerns, would meanwhile concentrate on obtaining whatever possible economic aid from India by supporting the scheme. Since this is a matter that concerns the northern region, as evident from the matters of the Noraicholai coal power plant and the Upper Kotmale hydropower scheme, the government is most likely to exercise interest in blinding the 'terrorists' in both eyes.

Environmental Effects of the Scheme

If the Sedhu Samudhra Scheme were implemented:

- 1 The sand and silt deposits around the Jaffna peninsula, the islands adjoining it, and Mannar will be rapidly drawn away by the fast moving ocean currents. This could lead to the submersion of these regions.
- 2 The region lying north of the line joining Puttalam on the west coast to Mullaitivu on the northeast coast consists of limestone layers of the Miocene period. The construction of a deep canal to the north of this region could cause changes in rock structures as well as the weakening of the limestone layers owing to groundwater pressure due to rain and effects of erosion, leading to settlement on a large scale.
- 3 Pressure variation between surface rain water, small tanks and groundwater and the change in equilibrium will cause water to erode the limestone as it seeps through to the sea.
- 4 It is already known that there is a danger of seawater diffusing into the freshwater resources of the Jaffna peninsula. Under these conditions the construction of the Sedhu Samudhra canal will

cause the water in not only the Jaffna peninsula but also in the Vanni region covering Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, Mannar and Chilaw to turn brackish due to the effects of groundwater flow and the difference in density between seawater and rainwater.

- 5 The red soil and the river soil deposits that formed as a result of thirty million years of natural chemical and biological processes will be eroded and washed to the sea. As a result the fertility of the soil of the Jaffna peninsula and the Vanni will be destroyed.
- 6 The imbalance between rock, earth and water will affect the natural distribution of vegetation and fertility of the soil.
- 7 Similar effects will be also experienced in the southeast of India. The Kaveri valley, Ramanadapuram and Ramesvaram regions will in particular be severely affected.

Bio Environmental Effects of the Scheme

- 1 While the sea that surrounds Jaffna is shallow, the seabed extending from Mannar favours marine bio-diversity. The construction of the canal to the north of this region will alter the structure of the seabed and therefore the marine environment. Consequently the marine resources will get depleted.
- 2 Jellyfish from the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian sea will have further adverse effect on local marine life.
- 3 Since marine vegetation and plankton will also be washed away with the sand and river soil, the formation of corals will be hindered.
- 4 Oil spillage from large vessels as well as vibration will lead to the destruction of micro organisms and small fish.
- 5 As a result of the above, migratory birds such as cranes and seagulls will move elsewhere.

Socio-Economic Effects of the Scheme

- 1 The fisher-folk of Mannar, Jaffna peninsula and adjoining islands will be affected. These people who were once displaced from the region by war will now be displaced for lack of livelihood.
- 2 Since agriculture in the Jaffna peninsula will be affected, the peasants too will become displaced. As a result, public and private sector organisations there will be forced to relocate to the South.
- 3 The Indian fisher-folk who fish for three days in the week in the Mannar sea and the northern sea will, with the help of the Indian navy, be able to fish in these waters until the resources are fully depleted.
- 4 Oil deposits to the north of Mannar and the peninsula would tend to seep into the water. Besides, the Indian navy will use the implementation of the scheme as pretext to establish a permanent naval base in the region, thus causing not merely the people of the north but of the whole of Sri Lanka to face military intervention, border disputes and aggression.

Comment

Marxism and Revisionism*

[Comments on the Comrade P Kandiah Memorial Lecture delivered by Sitaram Yechuri, Member of the Politburo of the Communist Part of India (Marxist) on 8th August 2004]

On 8th August, Sitaram Yechuri, Member of the Politburo of the CPI(M) delivered the Comrade P Kandiah Memorial Lecture in Colombo. The text of the talk delivered in English was distributed to the members of the audience. It is important that a lecture commemorating Comrade Kandiah, who was a pioneer of the left movement in the north of Sri Lanka and the only left candidate to be elected to Parliament from the North East, should befit his stature and political stand. Since the CPI(M) is considered to be the strongest left party in India, there was much expectation about the address by Yechuri.

Although the CPI(M) is a revisionist party, there was expectation that it would possess thinking that is opposed to oppression and hegemony, even among those who were critical of the CPI(M). It should be noted that the CPI(M) has, in policy, not rejected revolution by armed struggle. Thus those who went to hear Yechuri went with expectations.

At the end of his comments on the life of Comrade Kandiah, Yechuri stated that he would be speaking in search of an answer to the question of how the socialist cause could be carried forward in the era of globalisation and, in that context, about the survival of capitalist globalisation, about the lessons of socialism in the 20th Century, seeking to evaluate socialist construction in China, and the tactics to be adapted by communists under prevailing conditions.

His characterisation of globalisation did not go significantly beyond points that even reformists would readily agree. He explained that imperialism is advancing globalisation to heighten its exploitation

and establish its hegemony, and that it would stop at nothing to achieve it. He also emphasised that it is as a result of its weakness that it is keen to enslave the majority of the people of the world and that the choice before humanity is between socialism and barbarianism.

In the context of the need to learn from the history of the struggle for socialism, he sought to analyse briefly the seventy years of socialism in the Soviet Union and contemporary socialism in China. He referred to the sending of a dog and then a man into space among other things as achievements of socialism. From here on, his confused understanding of socialist history became increasingly clear.

He used the observation by Lenin in the context of pre-revolutionary Russia that the first rupture in the imperialist chain would occur at its weakest link, namely Russia, to interpret in a confused way the revolutionary changes that took place in Eastern Europe, following the Second World War. Although he said that, because of an over-estimate of the strength of socialism and an under-estimate of that of capitalism, it was not possible to get the correct perspective of the global trend and that history does not advance along a straight line, he could not say what went wrong in the Soviet Union, where and when.

Khrushchov's name was not mentioned even once. It was difficult to understand his reluctance to point to the change in direction in the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin. Although he pinned the blame for the collapse of the Soviet Union on Gorbachov, he could not explain how people like Guberchov and Yeltsin could come to power or, for that matter, how the relationship between the Soviet Union and American imperialism was transformed from one of peaceful coexistence to submissive coexistence.

While talking of China, he said nothing of the first quarter century after revolution or the period preceding it. He referred to the events of the Chinese Cultural Revolution as political chaos and the policies adopted afterwards as ones with clarity. He did not cite a single

phrase from Mao Zedong, but instead quoted over a page length from Deng Xiaoping to justify the current tendencies in China.

While acknowledging that there is disparity in income, unemployment, corruption and other such problems in China, he expressed faith that the Chinese Communist Party will overcome them. Is Yechuri so innocent that he does not know the direction in which China is heading? The leaders of the CP(M) are no fools. What they say about China is merely an expression of their revisionist line.

Yechuri concluded his talk with the optimistic note that socialism is the future. On the basis of the growth of the anti-globalisation movements and the strengthening of the left parties in Latin America, he expressed confidence that communists could advance in the socialist direction by building a powerful anti-imperialist movement out of opposition to war and opposition to globalisation on a broad basis.

He said very little in his talk. What he avoided saying was much more. He did not want to say how an anti-imperialist would function or how a worldwide movement would face oppression in specific contexts, because his party does not have a clear Marxist stand on national oppression and caste oppression in practice in India. Instead of criticising Indian policy of regional hegemony, it endorses every foreign government that acts in ways that suit India's expansionist designs.

In another meeting, held after the memorial lecture, when commenting on the Sri Lankan national question, he failed to acknowledge the right of the Tamil people to self-determination. This failure was consistent with the essence of his earlier address.

Yechuri's visit was followed by that of another CPI(N) Politburo member, Prakash Katat, who went a step further than Yechuri to say that the principle of self-determination does not apply to Third World countries, despite the fact that even the UN endorses the concept of 'internal' self-determination. This drew strong critical comments from several genuine leftists. Before the visit of the two Politburo members of the CP(M), the only person close to the CPI(M) whose

views on the national question were those of N Ram, an heir to the Brahminist 'Hindu' media empire and Chief Editor of the Hindu. Ram rarely surprises people here after his utterances on Sri Lankan issues in the early 1990s. What is sad is that the CPI(M) leaders are not very different. In fact, the Tamilnadu CPI, although a revisionist party that took its cue from Khrushchov, appears to have a slightly better understanding of the issues in Sri Lanka than its CPI(M) counterpart.

The CPI(M) is not a working class party but a party that runs a trade union business. Its leadership is now in the hands of class collaborationists who are more degenerate than reformists. The CPI(M), which is only interested in parliamentary arithmetic, will not mobilise the masses or carry forward struggles against internal threats faced by India such as Hindutva fascism and the external threat of imperialist globalisation. What could one expect from a party that rolls out the red carpet to foreign capital in the states in which it is in power.

The visits by Yechuri and Karat have only confirmed our concerns about the CPI(M). To portray such individuals as Marxists of any description will only damage one's trust in Marxism. To that end, the revisionists and opportunist have done their job well.

Mohan

[*Translation of a revised version of the original comment published in the October 2004 issue of Puthiya Poomi.]

NDP Diary

NDP Political Seminar

The New Democratic Party organised a seminar to discuss the current political situation in the country. The seminar was conducted in the evening of 11th September 2004 at the Jayasinghe Hall of the Dehiwela-Mount Lavinia Municipal Council.

The Seminar was chaired by S Thevarajah, Attorney-at-Law and Member of the Politburo of the NDP and was addressed by Comrades SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDP, E Thambiah, National Organiser of the NDP, and Comrade Siva Rajendran, Educationist and Senior Lecturer at the Sri Pada College of Education. Their talks are summarised below.

Comrade SK Senthivel

It is now four months since the UPFA government took office. But every evening people take with them to bed their concern and fear about two matters. One is the soaring cost of living rising with each day. The other is the prospect of war breaking out again. It is under these conditions that the government is conducting the economic and political affairs of the country. Without the correct and far-sighted political awareness of these matters and a concurrence of mass struggles to question the handling of the issues, the country faces the prospect of the rapid development of conditions that carry the threat of great dangers and destruction to it.

Under this government, there is not an iota of evidence for the resumption of peace negotiations with the LTTE. While the President constantly assures that she will be negotiating with the LTTE and will under no condition go to war, she has not taken any meaningful step to match her words. The President is in the sad situation of being unable to achieve consensus within the ranks of her own UPFA government about the negotiations. It is under these conditions that an impression is being created that she will be discussing with all the political parties about talking with the LTTE and be setting up a

National Advisory Council on that basis. These are ploys to play for time and not ideas for concrete action. Meanwhile, the UNP wants to give the impression that it is speaking with honesty and sincerity about the negotiations. But what is at the bottom of its heart is not a desire to solve the national question but its interest in using the stalemate in the peace process to return to power. Its entire interest is in the next presidential election, and it is actively involved in manoeuvring and working out strategies to that end.

Similarly, the JVP, a major partner in government, is acting with the long-term objective of capturing state power by eroding the base of the SLFP and emerging as a major political party in the South representing the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist aspirations. It is for that purpose that it is at the forefront of opposing the negotiations and rejecting the proposals of the LTTE for an interim self-governing authority.

When we look closely at these matters, we could see that the major political parties are dealing with the matter of negotiations for a political solution that could free the people from the dangerous climate of impending war related to the national question, which is also the main problem facing the country, as mere manoeuvres in their gamble for political power. Consequently, there is the likelihood that the cruel war that lasted nineteen years could return with even bigger destruction accompanying it. Those who will be affected by it will, as in the past, be the Tamils of the North-East and the Sinhalese. However, the influential and the wealthy, irrespective of their race and religion, will not lose or suffer. Instead they will gain from it in many ways. Forces of foreign domination will join them in gaining from it.

The only way to avoid the danger of war, therefore, is to start negotiations with the LTTE, immediately. After nineteen years of war, the LTTE has put forward proposals for an interim self-governing authority. The Tamil people and all peace-loving people want the starting of peace negotiations on that basis and the setting up of the ISGA through mutual concessions and understanding. The NDP is also emphasising the same. By organising this seminar, the

NDP has initiated action to carry forward, in collaboration with other leftist, democratic and progressive forces, a campaign among the Sinhalese for that purpose.

Comrade E Thambiah

The increase in cost of living today is choking nearly 90% of the population. The endless rise in prices and fares is creating havoc in the process of obtaining the daily needs of food and other essentials. The two capitalist parties have demonstrated that one is as good as the other in increasing the cost of living while in power. What is amusing is that, when in opposition, they condemn the rise in prices, as if they really feel sorry for the people. But their true interest is in coming to power. The people should recognise the causes for the current increase in prices and fares. The real reason is that the two parties submitted to the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO, which persuaded and advised the governments to adopt policies of liberal economy and privatisation. Thus it has become necessary for the entire working people of the country comprising the workers, including the plantation workers, and the peasants to carry out mass struggles demanding the control of prices and the award of increase wages.

Siva Rajendran

Siva Rajendran drew attention to the variety of difficulties faced by the Hill Country plantation workers. He pointed out that the rise in the prices of rice and wheat, which are the staple food items of the people, has pushed them to conditions close to starvation, while the private sector plantation companies and the unions continue to debate whether the wages should go up by two rupees or three. He pointed out that the dominant political leadership is not opening its mouth on the state of ruin of education in the Hill Country.

He also drew attention to the adverse effects that the proposed Sedhu Samudra scheme will have on the economy of Sri Lanka as well as its geography.

Comrade S Panneerselvam delivered the vote of thanks on behalf of the party at the conclusion of well attended seminar.

Press Release of 29th September 2004 Condemning Police Attack on Members of the Human Right Commission

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party made the following observations in his statement to the media:

The incident where senior officials of the Human Rights Commission were assaulted two days ago inside the police station raised the question whether law and order are being implemented on the basis of democratic and human rights in the Jaffna peninsula? If such was the plight of persons with authority and social acceptance, one could imagine the kind of disgrace and suffering that ordinary people would have to face in the police stations in their everyday life. The New Democratic Party deplors this attack and calls upon the President and the Inspector General of Police to treat this matter seriously take the necessary action.

The statement further added that the persons who were abused and attacked by the officer at the Police Station, Jaffna were none other than Ruwan Chandrasekera and his fellow Inquiring Officer of the Human Rights Commission (both senior officers of this organisation that has the authority of a High Court in defending human rights) and the UN Human Rights Advisor, Patrick. The three acted within their powers when they went in course of their duty to the Police Station to inquire about a person who had been arrested. The police, instead of giving a fair reply to the inquiry, acted high-handedly and spoke in a racist manner. This has happened at a time when people are made to believe that there is some change in the practices of the time when law and order and human rights were trampled underfoot in the North. This incident has frightened the people and caused concern about the prospects of complaining about future human rights violations.

Hence the New Democratic Party emphasises that the incident where members of the Human Rights Commission were attacked by the police should be inquired at a higher level and action taken on it.

MARXIST SALUTE TO COMRADE MANIAM

Sillaiyoor Selvarajan

Comrades who have gathered here
To recall in a cascade
Thoughts of a great man called Maniam
His life of bravery, his conduct of humility
His broad outlook based on service,
To pay tribute to that immortalised soul,
Allow me a mere ten minutes to sing of my man.
Yes, I arrogantly referred to him as my man.
I called him my man
For there was such intimate fellowship between us.
Forgive me if I was wrong.
I said so since I was one who shared and lived among friends
In the warmth of his shelter with his wife and children
And comrades who united as one in the policies of struggle.
Forgive me if I was wrong.
Our friendship budded in my schooldays
Then we ran free. We were mere lads
Who parted company
In our adolescence, unaware of the revolutionary sweep,
Not knowing that we will meet again
To merge through struggles for rights that would dominate,
Through arguing the case for the oppressed and
The class struggle of the workers,
In political debate and in battles for cultural thought.
We met again in battlefronts, on the same side.
I met at St Henry's College, Ilavalai
Maniam, the meticulous student

Who preserved silence, with little time for chit chat,
A man of mystery,
An underground fighter who lives on after his death,
A leader who breaks his silence at the head of a mass rally,
A hero who did not sing and swear only to surrender,
A hero who achieved things without compromise.

Poetry stammers to describe that joy.
A silent tribute for Maniam –
The fighter who refused to be silent
And spoke up in struggle for the masses?
A silent tribute in place of a battle cry?
Forgive me, I cannot!
We have been captivated by the communist way
Along the path of Marxism Leninism.
We met. We spoke. We embraced the path
And entered the battlefield on different fronts.
I, in the front of art and literature, and
He, in the field of relentless action in struggle.
Having consumed the poison that
Emerged in the churning of the cement factory struggle
To feed the ambrosia to the folk*
He continued in struggle in the hartal,
In the militant demonstrations for equality in education,
To dedicate his efforts to working class struggles,
To lend his shoulder to the oppressed in caste conflicts,
To lead the way like the flame of the lamp
Amid ideological confusion in the worker's unions,
To identify the issues by scientific analysis
Without losing heat by communal violence,
To work like a tusker and

Struggle with character to the end with relentless militancy,
And to lead a life true to the definition of a martyr.
I am a friend of KA Subramaniam, my man,
The personification of friendship,
The able master of egalitarianism.
Poetry stammers to describe that joy.
I recall the Comrade Maniam
Who identified the principles that prevent filth
From infiltrating art and literature and,
When I among others was tempted,
Stood behind to warn me,
"Hey, Selva, do not be baffled", and show me the way.
Poetry stammers to describe that joy.
As the times of close relationship
Cast their shadows in my mind and soak my thought
Poetry stammers to describe that joy.
For me to sing of the times
When Maniam and I discussed in privacy,
The warm hospitality of his dear wife,
The sweet words of the three tender children,
Sathiyarajan, Sathiyakeerthi and Sathiyamalar,
Calling me "Uncle"
In a tone akin to the comfort of a cool spring,
I have not the words.
Poetry stammers to describe that joy.
The friend of the dispossessed, we have been dispossessed of
you.
Maniam! My Marxist salutations to you!
Farewell Maniam! But
The golden moments of happiness I had with you,
The golden moments in which we shared

With sweet drinks and our majestic confidence in
The desire to make a new world,
They have not gone away.
Your little boys, your little girl, your son-in-law
And so many more whom you had aroused before you went.
Those are golden moments, tender golden moments.
Farewell Maniam! When you return
Your task would have been done.
The thoughts that you had,
The scenes of your great dreams
Would all have been realised.
Farewell my prince! When you return
With the desire for equality,
Communism would have blossomed on earth.
With aching hearts we would await your
Return from leave to see that new world.
Maniam! My Marxist salutations to you.

[This poem in tribute to Comrade KA Subramaniam was read out as funeral oration by the late Sillaiyoor Selvarajan a close friend and a leading Sri Lankan Tamil poet.]

- * Note: Refers to Hindu mythology where the Devas and Asuras churned the celestial ocean of milk with the celestial serpent as rope to extract its ambrosia, and when the serpent spat venom Lord Shiva swallowed it to save all living beings.

Comrade S Navaratnam

28 July 1945 to 8 October 2004

Comrade Navaratnam joined the Marxist Leninist Communist Party in 1965 and was a founder member of the New Democratic Party when it was established as the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (Left) in 1978, and served on its Politburo until his death. Comrade Navaratnam was an unwavering Marxist Leninist dedicated to the cause of communism and a relentless proletarian fighter for the oppressed masses, who made an invaluable contribution to building the Party and defending it through difficult times. The Editorial Board of New Democracy expresses its deepest sympathies to his wife and children and shares its great sorrow with his friends and comrades.

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