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# New Democracy

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## Palestinian am I

*E. Yaghi*

No one can take away from me  
My identity,  
For it is mine.

Palestinian am I.  
I am the river that flows  
Through my land.  
I am the mountain  
Noble and magnificent  
Rising up out of chaos and destruction.

I greet the morning sun  
That shines down on my fertile valleys  
And parches my barren desert.

I am the red poppy and yellow daffodil  
That grow upon my bloodstained hills.  
I am the battle cry of freedom  
That echoes through my corridors  
And every fibre of my being.

Palestinian am I.  
I am the proud owner of  
Orange orchards and lemon blossoms  
And honey bees, wild and free.

*(Continued on inside back cover)*

## *From the Editor's Desk*

The worsening economic crisis has compelled the government to take the desperate step of approaching a consortium of private banks for a massive development loan. The loan means that future generations will have to toil to merely pay back the capital and interest of the new loan on top of the already heavy burden of loan piled up by successive governments.

The opposition UNP has threatened the banks that they will not be bound by the terms of the loan if it is returned to power. But the record of the UNP in making this country a debtor nation and letting foreign companies take control over its assets surpasses that of any of its rivals so that the UNP has no right to take the moral high ground on plunging the country deeper into debt.

The worsening economic crisis is felt by the people in all walks of life except for a handful of wealthy individuals making huge profits and corrupt officials and politicians awarding themselves higher and higher salaries and allowances while denying a fair increase in the wages earned by people in various sectors.

There is anger among plantation workers about the way they have been deceived by a conspiracy involving the Hill Country trade union leaders and the Employers Federation. Even the last strike organised by the plantation workers in defiance of the trade union leadership was betrayed by the Hill Country trade union and parliamentary political leadership. With the soaring cost of living that has risen by 20% last year the unsatisfactory wage structure agreed upon by the unions and the Employers Federation means that the workers are being pushed to the verge of abject poverty and starvation. The trade union leadership is certain to play its usual double game of showing a militant face to the workers and a conciliatory one to the employers with whom it will eventually compromise on their terms.

A section of the state employees that has seldom taken strike action has been the teachers. The teachers have been so angered by the government's delaying tactics and failure to meet its commitments that

they resorted to a one-day strike in September. But the leaders of the participating trade unions have been taken to court and have been severely reprimanded.

The strikes are signs of the rising tide of anger against the government's failure to control inflation, regulate the prices of essential goods including food and fuel, and provide a decent living wage to state and private sector employees. The use of the courts of law to inhibit trade union action may provide temporary reprieve to a failing government, but will not solve the problem of an ailing economy.

Many tend to blame corruption and maladministration, which are no doubt serious problems today, for the economic ills of the country. But what is not realised is that it is the war costing many tens of millions of rupees per day that is responsible for the immediate economic problems and stands in the way of economic recovery. It has already ruined the North East to an extent that any form of economic recovery could take decades. The consequences of a full blown war, the prospect of which cannot be ruled out under the circumstances, are frightening for the region and for the country as a whole.

The dangers to the country from continuing liberal economic policy and adherence to the programme of globalisation are great, and the reason why imperialism, despite nominal disapproval of the Sri Lankan government's record on human rights, continues with its tacit support for the government's policy of undeclared war is that amid protests against foreign meddling by its spokespersons, the government is loyally implementing the imperialist programme of globalisation.

The challenge facing the working class struggle for fair wages is that it needs to identify the policies of successive governments that are the underlying causes of their economic burdens, and integrate economic and other fair demands with a call for an end to the war and a just and negotiated solution of the national question, and an end to the wrong economic and foreign policies of submission to imperialism and hegemony. The working class and its leaders should be particularly mindful of their struggles being hijacked by NGOs, funded directly or indirectly by imperialism to deprive them of their political essence and class content.

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# The Hill Country Tamil Nationality The Struggle for Survival

E Thambiah

*National Organiser, New Democratic Party*

The Hill Country Tamil nationality based on the plantation workers still does not have its own housing, land or even an address. Hearing this would infuriate the reactionary trade unionists and parliamentary politicians. The educated sections of the community get even more furious. But none of them will make the slightest effort to secure them for the people. However, they would use the workers in ways that serve their ends.

The leaders of the Hill Country Tamils join hands with successive governments that have been ruling the country to secure ministerial appointments and provide support to the government of the day in return for due rewards. They seem to act with the intention of passing on this tradition as their legacy to their next generation.

The British brought agricultural labour from India to establish plantations. What are called their houses or 'line rooms' are what were built for them at the time. They were followed by twin huts and later houses built on 2 perches of land by the workers and 'pigeon-hole' multi-storey flats within the premises of the plantations. They do not in any way belong to the workers. The worker does not even own the plot of land for a home garden.

Contrary to the claims by Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists, the plantation workers have not encroached upon even the smallest plot of land belonging to the Sinhala population. The plantations were set up by clearing forests in the central highlands. It is the profit from the produce of these plantations that remains the basis of the Sri Lankan economy. But the plantation workers responsible for it still do not have

a fair wage. They do not have adequate access to education, health and transport services, water supply or electricity.

Above all, it is of fundamental importance to plantation workers that they secure their right to land and housing. Despite a history of 200 years in the plantations, they do not have the necessary savings to buy houses for themselves. Their wages are inadequate for that.

Government plans to distribute land free to poor peasants and set up colonies with free housing schemes do not include the plantation workers. Nor are there housing schemes specific to them. They are still treated like aliens.

Following the take over by the state of plantations owned by British companies in the 1970s, many plantations were wound up and transformed into entirely Sinhala villages. The plantation workers who lived there were driven away. No alternatives were offered for their housing or employment.

Sinhala colonies were set up in several plantations, and that led to a reduction in employment opportunities for the plantation workers. Colonisation, mismanagement, fraud and corruption led to the wrecking of the plantations as well as that of the economy. The plantation workers were also subject to oppressive attacks from the colonies. This led to an insecure situation.

Against this background, the plantations were given out on lease to private companies in 1991. Companies which had leases for longer than 50 years have been imposing very strict working conditions on the plantation workers. Wage schemes that were implemented according to recommendations of the Wages Commission were abandoned; and a collective agreement including a wage structure renewable once every two years was introduced in its place. Besides, the responsibility for housing, maintenance and hygiene were entrusted a body called the Plantations Trust Organisation. Money is extracted monthly from workers for newly built houses and multi-storey flats. Payments will continue to be made for a period of 15 years. But the deeds for the houses will not be issued to the workers.

Plantation companies are taking legal action to repossess houses in the plantations from those not employed in the plantation and against those who have modified or renovated their houses. Consequently many plantation workers have been dismissed from work.

What emerges from the above is that the plantation workers do not have the right to ownership of houses or land. As a result they do not have a place of permanent residence. The place of permanent residence of a member of a family of plantation workers, who is not employed in the plantation, poses a problem. The plantation management and the *Grama Sevakas* of the region refuse to certify that the plantation where one lives is one's place of residence, and one is denied registration as a resident or as a voter. This is their plight even after six or seven generations in this country.

That the plantation workers have a right to land and to the ownership of housing in the plantations is a basic human right that is essential for their living. Besides, it will be only if they are owned by the workers that their descendents could establish their permanent residence and address. It is only when these are established that their residences could be made a settlement and there will be means to ensure that they have schools, hospitals, post offices, streets, water and electricity as in the case of towns and villages.

According to a cabinet decision in 2002, 20 perches of land should be provided to a plantation worker's family for the purpose of building a house. That decision has not been implemented to date; nor has it been rescinded.

Every plantation in the hill country has a considerable extent of land that is not cultivated. Such land could be granted to the plantation workers to build houses and to cultivate. That will not significantly affect production in the plantation. On that basis too they should be assured of housing and land. It is only through that assurance that regions for them could be assured to provide a basis for their identity as a nationality.

Without their own houses or land or colonisation schemes, the plantation workers have been vulnerable to chauvinistic colonisation, communal attacks and oppression. The climate of insecurity has forced plantation workers out of Kurunegala, Galle, Kalutara and Ratnapura districts. The districts of Kandy, Matale and Badulla pose many difficulties. It is only the Nuwara Eliya District that offers some security. There too the plantation workers do not possess their own houses or land. As a result, there too their future seems uncertain.

There is a need for political resolutions and actions to secure for the plantation workers their own houses and land. No honest moves have been made in that direction. In the 1990s the UNP and the PA governments played the charade that the plantation workers would be made the owners of the line rooms where resided. Some documents claimed to be deeds for the houses were distributed among the plantation workers. Those were seasonal election pledges. Organisations such as the CWC and the Hill Country People's Front which were party to that charade deceived the people. It was found that the distribution of the documents was a farce. The parliamentary political and trade union organisations in the hill country have to date not acknowledged that it was a shameful affair.

What is clear from the foregoing is that the chauvinistic capitalist governments will not take any political decision or steps to provide land or housing to the plantation workers. The opportunistic leadership of the hill country is unlikely to take the necessary steps to secure land and housing for the plantation workers.

Therefore, to secure land and housing for the plantation workers the Hill Country Tamils should reject the traditional trade union and parliamentary politics. At the same time it is essential that they mobilise along the path of mass political struggle.

*(Translation of article in Puthiya Poomi, August 2007)*

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# Nation State and Anti-Imperialist Struggle

Deshabakthan

## Diminishing the Role of the State

The main role of the state, whether bourgeois or socialist, is to defend the existing social order, ensure social stability, and manage changes in society in ways that safeguard and advance the interests of the dominant or ruling class or classes. What is decisive is the class that is in control of the state apparatus, and how the state plays its role is determined by the way class struggle manifests itself.

The bourgeois welfare state that we have seen in its various forms is not the product of goodwill of the ruling exploiting classes; and every measure of social welfare in capitalist society is either the direct or indirect consequence of struggle of the oppressed classes. The transformation of capitalism into imperialism, the rise and dominance of finance capital, and globalisation and mobility of capital, accompanied by the rise of neo-liberalism as a political force since the 1980's, have undermined the role of the state as the main source of social security and welfare in advanced capitalist countries. Consequences for the Third World have been harsher, and the state has been compelled to abandon social responsibility under imperialist pressure so that not only the meagre social security provided by the state but also services like education, health, public transport, water supply and other essential services for which the state took responsibility have been allowed to erode gradually and even cut down or abandoned in one sweep.

The vision of governments in the Third World on the question of social welfare was guided by their ideology as well as by global trends. Many Third World countries, following independence, had populist

regimes and in countries with 'democratic elections' even governments dominated by the feudal-capitalist class, but recognised the need to provide some degree of social security and ensure essentials services in at least parts of the country, if not universally, to hold on to power. The importance that education and public health received depended on economic resources as well as the recognition of the need for a sufficiently literate and able-bodied work force.

Abandoning of social responsibilities by the state in the Third World in the past three decades has occurred under pressure from international funding agencies, in recent times in the name of reforms and restructuring, and from sections of the emergent capitalist classes, especially those having close ties with global capital. One major victim of the socio-economic policies of the Third World as a whole, with a few exceptions like Cuba throughout its post liberation period and more recently and very remarkably Venezuela, has been the egalitarian principle in education and health.

This may lead one to think that the concepts of globalisation, free market and market forces, liberalisation etc. are designed to minimise the role of the state in running the affairs of countries and allow the 'natural forces' of human enterprise and competition combined with the free flow of capital determine how the needs of the society are to be fulfilled. Governments in the Third World may intervene in ways that encourage foreign investment and create employment opportunities but it is not for the state to intervene with the consequences of underdevelopment or unemployment, especially by way of subsidies or poverty alleviation.

The role of the state in infrastructural development is also diminished for lack of financial resources which is partly a consequence of reduced levels of taxation from the business sector, while concessions to foreign investors in the form of tax holidays and services at subsidised prices continue.

The state is also under pressure to exempt foreign investors by special legislation, as in the case of Industrial Processing Zones and Free Trade Zones, from obligations to safeguard the basic rights of workers. Workers in many foreign enterprises in IPZs and FTZs are denied not only their trade union rights but also their fundamental and human rights to varying degrees.

It is true that the role of the state as a provider of social security, or the 'nanny state' in neo-liberal parlance, is under attack across the world. But the extent to which the neo-liberals have been successful varies from country to country. Education and public health have suffered serious setbacks and, in the capitalist West, popular protests, electoral considerations and pressure through various organisations including political parties have helped to reverse the trend that started in the 1980s with the UK. The campaign against globalisation in the West along with its central demands calling for an end to the unequal treatment of the Third World has on its agenda the defence of social welfare in the West from imperialist predatory greed.

The situation in the Third World is less happy. The national bourgeois classes that took power in these countries following the tidal wave of anti-colonial upsurge in the last century soon found that they could not stand up to imperialism without allowing radical changes in the social structure. A string of deals between the pseudo-left parties and the bourgeois political parties weakened the national struggles and led to compromises with imperialism that have rendered the economies increasingly dependent on the imperialists and the plight of the countries far worse than under direct colonial rule.

Borrowing from foreign governments and lending agencies and international banks has led to a situation where the economy of the borrower nation is directed by external pressures with debt servicing as a main item on the economic agenda. The money lenders in turn insist on 'restructuring' of state institutions and reforms that take money away from social services to meet other obligations including reduced levels of taxation.

The state in the Third World has in most instances failed in its role as the defender of social security and provider of essential services. Neo-liberals and other advocates of globalisation still insist that the problems faced by the Third World countries are as a result of failing to carry through thoroughly the prescribed programmes of economic liberalisation, privatisation, economic reforms and restructuring.

In economic issues, the neo-liberals prescription for the world is 'minimum' government or even no government, so that the 'market forces' decide everything and the multi-national corporations rule the world.

## Enhancing the Role of the State

While the state is required to reduce its role as the provider for the needy and the socially handicapped and guarantor of essential services to the people as a whole, the role of the state as the champion of the cause of the ruling classes and as the defender of the status quo within and outside national boundaries is accepted without question, but subject to what the status quo that is being defended is and whose interests that the state is serving.

The police in nearly all countries use increasingly more of force to defend law and order. Exceptions are when repressive states are overthrown to be replaced by popular democratic governments. Police excesses have met with popular protests and public use of force has been challenged legally, but the role of the police as the most visible arm of state repression continues. The visibility of armed policemen, not military police, in many countries is an indication of the changes that have taken place in the way the state presents itself to the population.

Insurgency, communal unrest and terrorism are common pretexts for prolonged public display of armed police. The image of the policeman as the people-friendly defender of law and order, despite corruption within the police establishment and the use of excessive force against suspects in detention, is changing. Police violence is increasingly explicit and physical abuse of detainees is not only routine, but considered normal police behaviour. While there are differences in the way police brutality occurs in the advanced capitalist countries and the Third World and in the way the public responds to it, the shift towards openly violent police behaviour is almost universal.

The media and the entertainment industry also, with tacit approval of the ruling classes, glorify violence by the police and the armed forces, and continued media exposure conditions the people to a form of passive acceptance and even approval, when adequately frightened about threat from terrorists and criminals to their lives and property.

It is interesting that the neo-liberal advocates of free enterprise, market forces and 'zero government' want the state to play a stronger role in controlling unarmed social protest, mass upheaval or revolt. Often it is the state that is first to use violence, but the ruling classes

are loud to denounce even the smallest act of violence in response to the attack.

In the decades since the Second World War, there have been relatively few wars between countries and, where the armed forces have been put to use, they have attacked the people of the country more than any external enemy, if one were to exclude participation in wars waged in the name of the UN and more recently the NATO. A most remarkable exception, however, would be the US, thanks to its record as the biggest warring nation in recent history and the ability of the US to make a threat to its national security from the meekest of nations located far from its borders.

We should be clear that not only the neo-liberals but the entire spectrum of bourgeois political parties, and their left-of-centre counterparts with a vested interest in the bourgeois state endorse the role of the police and the armed forces in maintaining the existing social order. They dare not denounce state violence against forces that seek to change society in any significant way.

States have been denounced as repressive by the imperialists under two kinds of situation. In one the state pursues interests that run counter to imperialist interests. Cuba and Venezuela are most disliked because they defend the interests of the people of the country as well as the whole of Latin America. The Iranian state continues to be repressive in several ways, but the resentment concerns Iran's standing in the way of US expansion in Asia. There are other states that are reluctantly denounced as repressive although state repression is well known to be brutal and has been exposed too thoroughly to conceal. In cases like Israel, Turkey and now Ethiopia, among other such US allies, there is very little said in the mainstream media in the West about the cruelty perpetrated by the state on its subjects, let alone the proxy wars fought to serve US interests.

The fact that the state machinery is a device for class oppression is now better understood than at the time when Lenin sought to dispel illusions about the state in his 'State and Revolution', and the imperialists do not bother to conceal it.

In many countries the role of the state has been diminished not only in sectors such as health, education, public transport and other infrastructural services but also to reduce the number of people on the

payroll of the state by privatising the administration of state prisons and transforming government departments into agencies. If the aim was to reduce the burden on the 'tax payer' and allow greater play for the market forces, from where is the need for the state to spend an increasingly large proportion of the GDP on the police and the armed forces? Much of this has been achieved against a background of the weakening of the left movement internationally since the late 1970s, particularly the weakening of the Soviet Union in the early 1980s and its collapse in 1991, and the systematic undermining of the trade union movement.

Imperialism has not only beefed up its armed forces but also continued to create pretexts for its neo-colonies and client states to expand theirs. Part of the expansion in arms has to do with the growth of the arms industry as an important and influential component of the economy of major capitalist countries as well as that of a thriving commercial sector in arms trade.

The neo-liberals who want less government do not want the market forces and the multi-national corporations to undertake the responsibility of defending with arms the right to private ownership and control of the means of production and the means for cartels to exercise monopoly over production and distribution. Big companies and corporations, in fact, have their private security organisations, private armies and mercenaries on their payroll to deal with local opposition.

But when it comes to defending the status quo and their right to expand they want the state to take greater responsibility, and they want the tax payer to contribute more to the war machine. Thus the role of the state that is reinforced is its function as a machine for class oppression and for the defence and advancement of imperialist expansion. But the state plays this role using other pretexts such as defending freedom and democracy, defending human rights, making the world a safer place or defending the American way of life, as we have heard frequently in recent years.

## **NGOs as Imperialist Proxy**

What has taken place over the past few decades is the confirmation of the role of the state in preserving the existing social order in the

name of the constitution and law and eventually by the use of force as necessary. What has for decades been taken for granted to be the duty of the state towards the people, especially social welfare and essential services, are curtailed even to the extent of rejection. This marks the end of the road for the bourgeois welfare state. Failure of the state to address social concerns, especially when the well being and survival of a large number is at stake, could lead to social crisis and social upheaval. The state intervenes minimally to avert major tragedy, and intervention in the Third World is increasingly by charitable non-government organisations (NGO).

NGOs are generally funded directly or indirectly by imperialist interests, and governments of major capitalist countries have a big say in the way the funds are used. There are charities backed by powerful religious establishments and ones with considerable public contribution. Whatever their agenda, they are not free to act according to their 'conscience' if their actions are in conflict with the interests of the state.

Funding through NGOs is conditional and is provided with specific purposes in mind, and among the important effects of NGO activities within communities are that the beneficiaries tend to rely on handouts from NGO charities rather than demand what is rightfully theirs from the state, and that they lose faith in mass mobilisation and mass political action. Depoliticising the masses is an important part of the NGO agenda and NGO funding also serves as a corrupting influence on social activists and intellectuals who would otherwise have been politically alert and active. Several progressive and politically left intellectuals and social activists disheartened by the setbacks suffered by the left movement in the last quarter of the century have been bought over by NGOs, and are now active campaigners against the organised left.

NGOs have systematically exploited the void created by the failure of Third World states to provide essential services to make themselves a substitute for the state as a source of social welfare, especially in the event of natural disasters as well as man-made calamities. Given the discriminatory approach of governments and the deterioration of human rights in many Third World countries, where the state is also a party to ethnic and other social conflicts, it is inevitable that affected sections seek support from other sources. Imperialism, which on the one hand encourages and even induces such conflicts to destabilise Third World

governments with the aim of bringing them under its control on the other hand intervenes in the name of providing humanitarian aid. The attitude of imperialism to lasting solutions based on the principles of equality and social justice has always been negative. There is a common tendency to impose a solution as well as to manage its implementation directly or through an imperialist agency.

The NGOs play a valuable role in the carrot and stick approach of imperialism through downsizing the role of the state to make the population dependent on NGOs whose 'assistance' could be withdrawn at will without the need to face political consequences as in the case of elected governments.

NGOs have played a political role in bringing down left-of-centre and anti-imperialist governments in Eastern Europe and countries belonging to the former Soviet Union in the pretext of promoting democracy. In countries facing political and economic crises in the wake of imperialist invasion in the name of the UN or NATO or plainly the US and a docile ally like the UK (as in the case of Iraq), NGO intervention takes the form of 'humanitarian intervention'.

There is no doubt that the NGOs, alongside multinational corporations, are major beneficiaries of imperialism, and their intervention by way of diminishing the role of the state undermines democracy. Interestingly, not only left-of-centre political parties but also several militant left parties in the capitalist West as well as in the Third World that are bitterly hostile of the imperialist agenda of privatisation of state-run health and social service sectors are accommodative towards NGOs playing the role of the private sector in taking away the responsibility from the state.

An important area of NGO political activity concerns human rights issues. There is generous NGO funding for human rights work, like the release of political prisoners, illegally detained or 'disappeared' individuals, and in taking up the cause of politically harassed journalists and other individuals whose life and work are under threat by oppressive regimes. However, one precondition for NGO support for humanitarian causes is that political aspects of the problems are not given any significance and that only issues of human and fundamental rights are emphasised.



The role of the NGOs has been neatly summarised in the mock examination paper in “NGOs and Imperialism”, a searching analysis by the Canadian author Yves Engler dated 2<sup>nd</sup> September in the *Znet* web magazine. To anyone with the faintest idea of the way NGOs operate, and honest and intelligent enough to recognise the interests that the NGOs represent, the questions hardly require answers.

### Foreign Affairs 501 Take Home Exam

Any individual working for an aid organization is required to pass this exam and a B+ or higher must be achieved to attain "left wing" status.

Please write 500 words answering each of three of the following questions.

- 1) *Do people really feel better when their elected government is destroyed by democracy promotion rather than subversion?*
- 2) *Should it be called "aid" or "aiding and abetting" when you give a country weapons of mass destruction?*
- 3) *Why is it called a non-governmental organization (NGO) when it gets most of its funding from governments?*
- 4) *Why do progressive people, who think privatized medical and social welfare services are a right wing plot in their own wealthy countries, donate money to organizations that replace government-run services in poor countries?*
- 5) *Are some major Western non-governmental organizations really just an arm of imperialism?*

Bonus marks will be awarded if you answer all five.

## Neo-Colonialism and the State

While the state in imperialist countries plays the role of the global policeman, not very different from that during the colonial era, but more effectively and with greater force, at home it reserves its brutal might for special occasions such as mass agitations and mass political mobilisation which threaten 'peace', and law and order. With the cooperation of the mass media over which it has effective control, mostly voluntary because of the vested interests of the media moguls and secured under duress when necessary, control of public opinion is most effective except during times of crisis. Public opinion is by and large conditioned by the media to accept the state's view of certain

sections, like seeing certain ethnic groups and political groupings as a threat not just to the state but to peace and national security, so that the state could selectively target individual activists and groups who may influence public opinion in ways hostile to ruling class and imperialist interests.

A good illustration of the ability of the state to manipulate public opinion comprises the invasion of Iraq by the US with the support of the UK ignoring strong public opinion hostile to the invasion, within each country as well as internationally. However, once the war machine was set in motion, opposition to war was confined to a politically alert minority, while even the sections of the media that were once strong opponents of the war became subdued for patriotic, national security and other such considerations. It is only the failure, humiliation and the heavy price extracted by the war in terms of loss of life and escalating costs that brings home the reality.

Imperialism uses nationalism along with notions of patriotism and national interest to ensure support for its acts of aggression; and constructs imaginary threats from 'potential enemies' that are effectively propagated by a loyal media. Fear plays a major role in bullying the population into submission. Thus neo-colonialism, like old colonialism, puts to use 'national pride' and 'patriotism' as well as fear and contempt towards the foreigner, based on racial, religious, cultural and other prejudices in its pursuit of global hegemony. Neo-liberal ideology which is the driving force behind the aggressively militaristic foreign policy of the US also demands curtailment of state expenditure on social welfare and essential services to ensure bigger profits for the corporations. State subsidies are not altogether eliminated, but mainly serve the wealthier sections of the society. Consequences are tragic for the low-waged workers, the unemployed and other marginalised sections of the population as evident from the callous neglect by the American state during the natural disasters of 2006.

Consequences of the neo-liberal agenda are worse for the Third World. With the NGOs hijacking the role of the state as provider of social welfare while subverting mass politics and political opposition through their advocacy of apolitical protests and humanitarian pleas, the attention of the state in the neo-colony is focussed on its essential role of defending the interests of the ruling classes, which in the era of neo-colonialism comprise the dominant feudal/capitalist classes and

more importantly their imperialist masters. The inevitable weakening of the national economy of Third World countries means that the state becomes fully subservient to imperialism and, in the interest of its own survival, acts at the behest of imperialism to defend imperialism against any anti-imperialist challenge. Imperialism in turn supports the state in its repressive role in the name of ensuring stable government, defending democracy and freedom, and of course fighting terrorism.

Thus the role of the state in the neo-colonies of the Third World is essentially the same as that of the colonial state, except for the absence of a colonial administration with the police and armed forces under its control. Imperialism is thus spared the wrath of a population that is dissatisfied with the government, at least until the emergence of a strong anti-imperialist movement. Even then the immediate conflict is between the state in the Third World country and the critics of the government. Imperialist intervention occurs only when the state in a Third World country fails to deliver the goods for imperialism. Where the failure is as a result of weakness on the part of the state in the neo-colony, imperialism intervenes on behalf of the state, providing direct or indirect support as necessary. If in the end the government is likely to fall, imperialism acts to ensure that the successor will be as pliable as its predecessor, as in the case of Pakistan today.

If a newly formed government acts in defiance of imperialism, imperialism intervenes in a variety of ways at the most opportune moment. Often pressure is brought on the government to conform to the imperialist agenda, as in the case of various centre-left governments that were elected to power recently in South America or as in the case of Haiti where Jean-Bertrand Aristide was compelled to accept certain preconditions even before he was allowed to form the government; otherwise steps are taken to subvert the government by 'democratic' means and where necessary militarily using reactionary elements in armed forces as was the case in Chile where imperialism succeeded or Venezuela where it failed. Direct imperialist intervention is used as a last resort and carried out in the name of defending democracy, fighting terrorism or eliminating a threat to the US.

Imperialism leaves few options before the masses anywhere. Political mobilisation of the mass resistance and prolonged struggle in various forms including armed struggle become inevitable. It is here that the NGOs are most useful to imperialism.

NGOs play no small a role in inhibiting mass political struggles firstly by depoliticising the problems facing the masses. Discreditable conduct of parliamentary political parties, especially that of the opportunist left, is taken advantage of to discredit politics of all kind. Apolitical struggles are encouraged with the use of the concept of 'civil society', not in the sense in which Antonio Gramsci first used it but meaning an apolitical and passive section of the population devoid of class consciousness. The aim here is to exclude political work of any kind in dealing with the problems of the masses.

There are a whole host of NGOs targeting potential mass leaders, including trade unionists and left political leaders frustrated by their failure to make political headway, elitist feminists, and vacillating intellectuals. In Sri Lanka, several NGOs using funds made available by or with the blessings of imperialist governments, took advantage of the setback suffered by the left movement in 1977 and the repressive political climate, especially following the pogrom of 1983, to make inroads into sections of the population with a revolutionary potential. Their activities in the name of humanitarian assistance, social welfare, women's and children's rights among others went on unhindered by successive reactionary governments. Although religious conversion to Evangelical Christianity by some NGOs drew protests from Buddhist organisations, the NGOs were able to as they pleased with access to adequate funding from foreign sources channelled through international NGOs (INGOs). A large number of formerly progressive and militant intellectuals, creative writers and artists have sold out to the NGOs to the extent that they claim that the only way of advancing intellectual pursuits, art and literature is through NGO support.

## **Liberation Struggles in the Era of Globalisation**

Class, gender, caste and national oppression remain important forms of social oppression. Opposition to liberation struggles takes a variety of forms. The state resorts to violence when democratic political methods of overcoming mass struggles fail. The state seeks to preempt the transformation of mass protests and agitation into mass uprisings and mass struggle for political power. It is commonly the state that resorts to violence or provokes violence in dealing with mass struggles. Inevitability of violence in any struggle arises not because of

an inherently violent nature of the oppressed classes but because of the inherently violent nature of the oppressor and the state apparatus.

The state, being political, cannot proscribe political activity at will without undermining public confidence in the 'democratic political process.' Thus, when it proscribes political parties, mass organisations or mass struggles in anticipation of a threat to the class interests that it represents, it uses pretexts such as combating terrorism, defending democracy and saving the nation.

Any form of struggle against oppression which lacks a working class perspective and anti-imperialism as essential ingredients could be used by imperialism to its advantage, only to be abandoned when the purpose is served. Several national liberation movements have suffered the illusion that it is beneficial to have imperialism on their side and have paid a heavy price for it. But imperialism takes a cynically opportunistic view of nationalist and ethnocentric movements in the Third World.

Where the aggravation of internal contradictions among nationalities or sections of the population based on ethnicity, religion or region could serve imperialist interests, they are transformed into major conflicts that may even escalate into civil war leading to the destabilisation of the state. Imperialism could on the other hand side with an oppressive state, like Israel or Turkey, against a defiant nationality.

It could also readily switch sides as in Ethiopia where it supported the oppression of Eritrean and other nationalities until the dictator Selassie was overthrown in 1976 after which the US supported secessionist struggles to destabilise the Mengitsu regime. Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia in 1993 following its successful armed struggle and the defeat of the Mengitsu government in 1991. Since then Ethiopia is a US ally sharing an enmity towards Eritrea. The US condones the oppression of Ethiopian minority nationalities, while Ethiopia is a willing partner fighting a proxy war for the US in neighbouring Somalia. Similar patterns have been witnessed in the former Yugoslavia and more recently in Iraq.

The 'divide and rule' strategy of British colonialism has been fine-tuned by US imperialism to pit one Third World Country against another

to subvert, destabilise and control them. But such strategies fail to work when the opponents of imperialism realise the need for greater unity.

NGOs represent a wide variety of soft tools used by imperialism in undermining anti-imperialist movements and states. They play different roles in different contexts. Some NGOs, while claiming to be apolitical, provide financial and tactical support to pro-Western groups in countries with anti-imperialist regimes as in several countries of the former Soviet Union. In the Third World, many NGOs are active in depoliticising social issues so that the relationship between different forms of social oppression is obscured. NGO activity among intellectuals includes promotion of postmodernist thinking to prescribe fragmentation and isolation of struggles; apolitical and elitist feminism; and Dalitist movements that reject class and class struggle. Several deserters of the left movement, posing as left intellectuals who reject left political parties, are now beneficiaries of NGO largesse and are active on the ideological front to undermine solidarity among the oppressed and a united struggle against imperialism.

NGOs also use their access to substantial funds from foreign sources to bait desperate leftists whose mass political bases are eroding because of their failure to do be in touch with the masses and reluctance to mass political work. A veteran Trotskyite, former militant and leader of the Ceylon Mercantile Union has become so deeply involved with INGOs that he lays down a precondition that participants in meetings and mass demonstrations organised by him do not talk politics. More recently, leaders of two rival Trotskyite factions, the United Socialist Party and the Nava Sama Samaja Party (also known as the Left Front) that have been actively involved in campaigns against abuse of human rights by the Sri Lankan state, following the spate of kidnappings in Colombo, chose to deal with the arbitrary arrest of left political activists as a humanitarian problem rather than as a political issue. It seems that the NGO supporting their campaign for human rights has succeeded in separating class struggle and the politics of state oppression from the violation of human rights by the state.

Treating the violation of human and fundamental rights as humanitarian issues, suits oppressive regimes since the political basis for the violations remains concealed and uncontested while the call for justice is confined to legal technicalities or transformed into a plea for compassion. As a result, people are denied the right to know the class

interests in play behind the threats, killings and kidnappings and, more importantly, denied the opportunity to mobilise against such violations and act to prevent their recurrence.

It is out of desperation that the state metes out illegal forms of punishment to those whom it sees as a threat to the interests of the ruling classes and the existing social order. The correct response of the struggle for liberation would be to bring the issues into the open, inform the public, and extend the scope of the struggle.

The recent report on Sri Lanka by Human Rights Watch, a human rights INGO based in the US, dealt at length with the violation of human rights by the state and various armed groups, but failed to identify national oppression as the underlying issue. Its prescriptions concerned 'good behaviour' by the warring parties but carefully ignored the need for a just solution to the problem, let alone the right of a nationality to self determination. This is no different from the approach of NGOs to the problems in the North-East of the country. They see only humanitarian problems, which cannot be averted without addressing the fundamental issue of national oppression.

It has also been argued by advocates of globalisation and champions of the humanitarian agenda as well as some well-meaning but ill-informed centre-left commentators that nationalism has no place in the modern world and the nation state has become more or less irrelevant because of the increasing interdependence of communities across the globe. But the fact remains that there is nationalism in the form of chauvinism and there is national oppression. Nationalism of the kind that seeks to overcome oppression is an inevitable consequence of chauvinism, and cannot be put on par with the nationalism of the oppressor.

Even if all forms of ethnic and national identity are imagined, they exist in the thinking of people and dominate the psyche of communities as a whole. It is true that they divide people, and lead to conflict and oppression. The case for a rational and universal approach to the problems of mankind is strong. But nationalism and ethnocentrism cannot be wished away. They are best dealt with by acknowledging nationality and ethnicity as aspects of identity that deserve respectful treatment based on equality of different forms of identity.

Calls for the abandoning of liberation struggles against national oppression will only worsen oppression and strengthen the hands of imperialism. What is needed is the integration of the national liberation struggles with the anti-imperialist struggle in Third World countries, and the inclusion of all other just struggles against oppression based on ethnicity, caste, gender and other forms of identity in the anti-imperialist programme. The rise and revival of the left in South America owes much to the role played by the indigenous people, and for its success will require a greater role by a people who have been cruelly exploited, denied their basic rights and remained marginalised for five centuries.

National liberation struggles need to be clear in their perspective that imperialism is under no condition their friend, and in most instances a collaborator with the oppressive state, and that wherever imperialism has sided with an oppressed nationality it is only in the short term and once state power changes hands to supporters of the imperialist agenda, the oppressed nationality and its struggle will be betrayed. Thus a national liberation struggle needs to seek and establish alliances with anti-imperialist forces internationally as well as within the nationality in whose name chauvinistic states oppress minority nationalities.

Parroting formulae of the colonial era about the progressive nature of the national bourgeoisie will not do. The role of the Third World bourgeoisie has to be continuously assessed in the context of the nature of its relationship to imperialism and its willingness to resist imperialist domination. This approach applies to the leadership of national liberation movements as well, and compromises with imperialism need to be strongly resisted.



# Notes on the Economy

## Gnanaharan

### The Central Bank Report and Economic Development

The Governor of the Central Bank is appointed by the state. From time to time, he expresses views in ways that make the statistics published about the economic development of the country reflect the achievements of the government. Usually economic development is assessed on the basis of the growth of the agricultural, industrial and service sectors. In recent times it may be observed that the growth in the service sector is seen as the development in telecommunications.

As for the industry, those involved in the garments industry inform that last year alone several hundred garment factories have been shut down. Further, all which were in the control of the state in the industrial sector have been handed over to the private sector; and that has been of no benefit to the country, the people or the workers.

The agricultural sector has suffered major setbacks in the past several years. The Central Bank Report says that last year, the agriculture sector showed a 1% growth. Coconut production has been badly affected. As a result of the war, thousands of coconut trees in the North-East have been destroyed. Today the price of a coconut in Colombo is between 20 and 25 rupees.

Coconut oil manufacturers have been adversely affected by the trade agreement made with India in a way favourable to India. Traders survive by importing cooking oil from other sources. Those who import substitutes for coconut campaign that coconut oil will lead to a rise in cholesterol levels to dissuade people from using coconut oil. It is also said that this is part of a campaign by multi-national companies.

Experts claim that the value of tea exports has risen. But the inflation rate for the Sri Lankan Rupee is estimated at around 20%. The exchange rate for a weakening US Dollar has risen from 99 to 111 rupees during the past several months. This is an indication of the decline in the value of the Rupee.

Although the government claims that it is providing a subsidy for fertiliser in order to boost agriculture, the subsidies have not duly reached the cultivators. Officials and corrupt well-to-do middlemen are minting money through the distribution of fertiliser. The cultivators are facing a crisis owing to their inability to properly warehouse the paddy harvest. Although a retail price of Rs 16.50 per kilogramme has been set for paddy, the cultivators are unable to receive payments at that rate since the government does not purchase paddy from the cultivators in a proper manner.

As a result, indebted cultivators are forced to sell the paddy at a loss at 10, 12 and 13 rupees to private traders. Many cultivators, unable to repay their loans taken for the cultivation, have resorted to committing suicide. But the market price for a kilogramme of rice is 40 to 50 rupees. The huge profit goes to private businessmen. It is no secret that in the North Western and North Central Provinces MPs from the government as well as the opposition and government ministers are the owners of rice mills.

While the government makes much propaganda about granting fertiliser subsidies, the cultivators are leading a life of misery. The price of the kerosene oil used by them increases every month. The only reason given for the increase in the price of kerosene is the increase in the world market price for petroleum. Of the common fuels, petrol, diesel and kerosene, kerosene is the fuel used exclusively by the ordinary, poor masses.

The government, while refusing a fuel subsidy for the ordinary masses, provides diesel at subsidised prices to the Ceylon Electricity Board. Diesel sold at 67 rupees per litre to the public is sold at 57 rupees to the Electricity Board. Minister Fowzie has bluntly refused to sell diesel to the public at the same price as to the Electricity Board. The Electricity Board is supplying electricity worth many million rupees to the armed forces and state establishments on credit and is in a financial crisis as a result. This is the cause for the crisis in the Electricity Board. But, when raising the price of electricity to the public,

the Electricity Board claims that the rise is because it is running at a loss, and does not reveal the cause of the loss.

Similarly the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation too is unable to recover payments for sale on credit and is in turn borrowing from banks at high interest rates. But point to the world market when increasing the prices for petrol, diesel and kerosene. Payment due for fuel supply to the armed forces is said to be several million rupees. All these plus the cost of corruption are extracted from the people. Even the banks that lend money to these organisations are in crisis. The root cause for these problems is the war which costs several tens of million rupees per day. The Mahinda Chinthanaya government is shifting the burden of the cost of the war on to the people.

The World Bank and developed countries are exerting pressure on Third World governments to terminate subsidies in underdeveloped countries. However the US, EU and Japan grant huge subsidies to their farmers. Grants are made to dairy farms on the basis of heads of cattle. The annual agricultural subsidy in the US runs at 300 trillion dollars.

It is only an honest government that is has the welfare of the people in heart that will act in the interest of the vast majority. But this government acting in the interest of foreign monopoly capitalists will do nothing for the workers and peasants. Until the masses rise up in revolt, it is inevitable that the people and the country will continue to suffer and face worsening economic difficulties and crises of life.

*[Translation of article in Tamil from Puthiya Poomi, July 2007]*

## **Sixty Years after the Open Economy: Where does the Country Stand**

It is thirty years since the open economic policy was announced in 1977. The person who was at the forefront of its implementation was the late President JR Jayawardane. A capitalist reactionary in every respect including his chauvinism, he was a loyalist of the US. Once he achieved in 1977 his long-awaited position of holding state power, he implemented all the reactionary policies that he had ready and prepared. To help him in his efforts he had a five sixth majority in parliament, and he was also a cunning capitalist leader who had in

anticipation obtained undated letters of resignation from each UNP parliamentarian at the time of nomination of candidates for the general election.

He opened wide the doors of the country to foreign imports and privatisation. That was called the liberalised open economic policy. In the past thirty years, has the country progressed through the practice of this open economic policy? Did the people prosper? The flag of open economic policy was hoisted claiming that it will transform this country into another Singapore. It was under that flag that the UNP for seventeen years, the PA under the leadership of Chandrika Kumaratunga for eleven years and the present Mahinda Chinthanaya government for one and a half years been ruling this country.

But the state of the economy of the country is getting progressively worse. Even the minimal national economic policies carried forward by the coalition government led by Sirima Bandaranayake with the parliamentary left parties as partners during 1970-77 had been repudiated with the arrival of the Jayawardane government in 1977. All import restrictions that applied till then were removed in favour of liberalised imports.

As a result of the liberalised imports, local production in both the industrial and agricultural sectors were ruined, and eventually destroyed. The production of paddy and other subsidiary crops progressing towards self-sufficiency fell and faced ruin, and the cultivators were reduced to destitution. Small industries were choked to death by foreign imports. The larger industries and factories were sold to foreign companies on the pretext of losses, corruption, and maladministration. Through this privatisation was accelerated.

Also, free trade zones were set up, multinational companies brought in and freely allowed to exploit Sri Lankan labour at low wages. It was claimed that employment opportunities would increase, the standard of living would rise and the economy would prosper as a result of the liberalised open economic policy. It was hoped that the foreign currency reserves will increase. But what kind of life has the 30 years long open economy given us? Have poverty and unemployment got worse or better? In 1977 December one US Dollar could be purchased for Rs 16.13 and in 2007 July it costs Rs 111.72. This goes to show that the value of our currency has fallen. Unofficial statistics indicate that the rate of inflation of the Rupee is 20%, but the Central Bank provides

statistics that there is 7.4% annual economic growth and that inflation is under control.

Further, the liberalised open economy has transformed the import of foreign goods into a consumer culture. Soft drinks like Coca Cola and Pepsi and fast food packets have not only spread across cities but also spread to the remotest villages.

The use of wheat flour, introduced by foreigners and the cause for the abandoning of traditional foods, has now reached the entire population and its price is now on the rise. While rice sells at between 40 and 48 rupees per kilogramme the price of wheat is between 51 and 60 rupees. Keeping prices low until usage becomes widespread and raising the price when the demand increases is the way capitalism operates.

The prices of all imported items continue to rise. Neither the government nor the ministers could control the rising prices. The ministers are in their posts merely to announce that the increase in prices is due to the increase in world market prices.

What is this world market that they refer to? Who is in charge of it? Who controls it? What is the relationship between them and the local comprador capitalists? The multinational corporations and capitalist robber barons are the keepers of the world market. Through globalisation the world market guided by imperialist monopoly capital thrusts upon us privatised, liberalised economy. The countries that have accepted it are becoming its victims and the ruling class forces are hailing it.

Such is the liberalised open economic policy practiced in Sri Lanka, and the people of Sri Lanka are experiencing its adverse consequences. Big capitalists and investors in the import sector, those profiting from the service sector, senior officials who are the agents of globalisation, intellectuals and senior officials serving as planners, and stock market speculators are making big gains through it. It is they who have said in the opinion poll conducted by the Colombo-based Sunday Times that the country is benefiting from the open economic policy.

Had the workers, peasants and other toiling masses, and state and private sector employees been asked, the opinion poll would have gone against the open economy. That is because they know that the decline

in agricultural and industrial production, the rise in cost of living and the stagnation of wages are due to this liberal economics.

If a properly planned national economic policy was implemented in this small country blessed with natural and human resources it would not be facing the current sorry state today. But instead, a chauvinistic war was extended with the implicit guidance of imperialism to lead to the ruin of what was left of the remaining sectors of the economy. Today 3.5% of the gross national product is spent on the chauvinistic war. Talk about development and prosperity by the government is mere eyewash.

The open economic policy that was smuggled in behind the scenario of the war provides the base for plunder by imperialist multinational companies. It is in the name of the very same war that the interests of the open economy are defended. This situation will not change whether Mahinda Rajapaksha remains or Ranil Wickramasinghe replaces him.

The only alternative is to build up strong-willed people's movements opposed to the war and to globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation and to carry forward struggles on a broad basis. The struggles of our people should go hand in hand with the struggles carried forward by the people of the world against globalisation at various levels.

*[Translation of article in Tamil from Puthiya Poomi, August 2007]*

# War and Development

## Shanmugam

The country is heading towards wreck and ruin in every way. It is not the consequence of recent policies but the combined effect of the gravely wrong economic policies that have been followed over the past thirty years and the war efforts. The people innocently hoping that with every change of government the continuing trends will be brought to a halt only to be deceived is something that we have always seen in the capitalist parliamentary system.

It is as part of that historical sequence that the present government and the President with the banner of 'Mahinda Chinthanaya' came to power. Going by past experience, one could expect that 'Mahinda Chinthanaya' will achieve nothing. Some were furious to hear farsighted observers predict that whoever came to power there would be more and more destruction. Some others challenged the observers to wait until things happened. Yet others argued that one needs to wait and see since Mahinda Rajapaksha's family background was different from that of his predecessors.

It is now a year and a half since 'Mahinda Chinthanaya' came to power. But what is the situation in the country? During this period the war machine has been increasingly activated. War expenditure including recurrent and capital expenditure is in tens of billion rupees annually. Funds and other resources that need to be spent for the economic development of the country are being consumed by the barrels of cannons at the battle fronts. The total internal and external debt for the country stands close to a staggering 40 billion US dollars, and to continue to feed the war the government has sought a further credit of 56 billion US dollars from a consortium of foreign banks led by the HSBC.

Several hundred garment factories and local companies have folded up. Many thousand workers who were employed there are helpless. Owing to lack of security and the failure to make the expected profit many foreign investors are relocating to other countries.

The domestic industrial and agricultural production sectors are facing serious wreckage and losses, and almost all the economic sectors identified with the national economy are totally defunct. Instructions and advice from the World Bank and the IMF have been carried out. All what was prescribed with respect to the liberal economic policy and its practices have been carried out by Presidents Jayawaradane, Premadasa, Kumaratunga and Rajapaksha.

Nearly 80% of the proposals for privatisation put forward by the World Bank and the IMF have been fulfilled. Education, health, electricity, rail transport, postal services, water and state banks remain the only sectors that have escaped the clutches of privatisation. There are moves behind the scenes to capture them. Although the government of today is willing to hand them over, there is reluctance due to the fear of strong protests from the workers and trade unions as well as the public.

Besides, it is as important to note the fact that this government as well as those before it, which nurtured and intensified the war and spent many billions of rupees for it, have not given economic development the same priority or the necessary investment. Initiatives in the agricultural sector between 1970 and 1977 aimed at self-sufficiency have since 1977 been drowned by liberalised imports since 1977.

The production of rice and other subsidiary food crops was allowed to be destroyed. Similarly, industries that developed in the towns and the villages collapsed as a result of foreign imports. Today the country has been reduced to a state where it looks for foreign imports for everything. The country has been transformed into a market for multinational companies with widespread consumer culture to support it.

Under the conditions, claims about development for industrial and agricultural production are mere fiction. Extension of the airport, development a new international airport, extension of the harbour, developing a new harbour, construction of a super highway, motorway development, construction of five-star hotels and such activities are shown as development tasks. But they are not for the development of the country or its people. They merely constitute the groundwork for the expansion of liberal economy and privatisation under the programme of imperialist globalisation.



The Governor of the Central Bank recently drew attention to them and claimed that the universal presence of mobile telephones and luxury goods are signs of economic growth and development. Sadly, the Governor of the Central Bank does not know the life of suffering of the workers, peasants and other working people who constitute the vast majority. The contrast between the fat salary earned by him and his life of luxury, and the plight of the average person is like that between the mountain peak and the depth of the valley.

In the economic development statistics published by the same Governor, show a growth rate of 7.4% excluding the North East. The exclusion of the North East is admission of the fact that the economic base there are in a state of destruction as a result of the war. Besides, the economic development of the country cannot be measured in terms of statistical figures alone. It needs to be assessed in terms of the improvement in living conditions and the cost of living. When viewed in that manner, the impact of war on the economy will become much clearer.

The exchange rate for the rupee is deteriorating rapidly. If it costs 113.11 rupees to buy a US dollar, one can see by how much the rupee has depreciated. The rate of inflation has touched 20% so that the prices of goods continue to rise steadily.

The ruling classes will not put an end to the war or the practices of liberalisation and privatisation just because they are the cause of the decline of the economy of the country. The wealthy ruling classes live their life of luxury by exploiting and robbing the people.

At the same time, they claim that they are pursuing the war to defend the independence and sovereignty of the country by eradicating LTTE terror and resisting the division of the country. The war is used to deceive the Sinhala people in particular.

There is no development in the agenda of the government. What are there are plans for the war which will subject the whole country to destruction and make the country and its people prey to the forces of foreign imperialism. There can be no change in prospect until the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people recognise the immediate and long-term dangers.

There can be no salvation for the Sinhala people as long as they believe that the Sinhala Buddhist ruling class elite is their saviour. On the contrary, there is a need to create conditions where they defeat through struggle these reactionary forces, recognise Sri Lanka as an entity comprising several ethnic groups and nationalities. A mass force of the people needs to be built up for the purpose.

War and development are not compatible things that could be carried forward simultaneously. Hence, the war should be stopped and brought to an end and instead plans should be developed to make the country advance towards development and prosperity. Without that, there is no way to prevent the country from suffering disaster upon disaster.

*[Translation of article in Tamil from Puthiya Poomi, September 2007]*

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## ***NDP Diary***

### ***NDP Statement to the Media***

## **29<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Statement of the NDP**

***3<sup>rd</sup> July 2007***

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary and Comrade E Thambiah, National Organiser of the New Democratic Party, issued the following statement to mark the 29<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Party.

As long as the ruling classes persist in their faith and orientation that the national question could be resolved through war, there can be neither salvation nor prosperity for this country. Until proposals for a political solution are put forward for a just political solution, consensus is reached through negotiations, and implementation is done with sincerity, Sri Lanka will be a scene of bloodshed, loss of human life and economic decline. This has been demonstrated by the experiences of the blood soaked history of the past three decades.

Hence the Party urges the government that it should put an end to its approach of interpreting the national question as a terrorist problem and intensifying the war in order to deflect the attention of the people of the country from the grave issues faced by them. At the same time meaningful steps to reach a political solution should be taken in practice rather than in mere words.

Those who believed that the election of Mahinda Rajapaksha as President with his Mahinda Chinthanaya programme will lead to changes that will lead to prosperity, peace with honour and peaceful life for the country and the people see their belief getting shattered. In the past one and a half years, murders, the destruction of life and property, kidnappings and mass scale displacement of people have reached new peaks in the North East.

At the same time, economic growth is seen only in the statistics, while in reality the prices of all goods including essentials have soared. The exchange rate for the rupee has fallen and inflation has reached 20%. The price of fuel and the charges for services are being raised to levels

unbearable to the people. At the same time, while the wages of government and private sector employees have not been raised, the number of government ministers has been increased to a hundred and ten and that of advisors to thirty five; and fat allowances are paid to them with the people's money. Meanwhile, corruption, fraud, human rights violations and anti-democratic acts are rampant.

The standard of living of the workers, peasants and other toiling people is spiralling downwards. The number of people below the poverty line is rising by the month. The plantation workers, the lowest wage earners in the country, are being pushed into poverty and starvation.

The national economy and agricultural and industrial development under it have been made defunct. The Mahinda Chinthanaya government too, like successive governments before it had welcomed and implemented the programme of globalisation, and is carrying it forward without protest. As a result all manner of goods are made available through liberalised imports and sold at high prices.

War and globalisation are walking hand in hand. In the name of combating terrorism, there is a boost to arms sales, and people in high places are earning many millions. All such anti-people actions are being hidden behind the integrity and sovereignty of the country. The people are being cheated.

Further, the war has offered golden opportunities to foreign forces. On the one side, the US, the Western World and Japan, are furthering their economic, military and political interests behind the scenario of war. On the other side, India, to assert itself as a regional power, is seeking to strengthen its grip of dominance over Sri Lanka.

Thus, the adverse consequences of the war and the lack of a political solution point to a major disaster awaiting the country and the people. Foreign forces are getting ready to implement schemes that would further divide the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people and lead to further bloodshed. The ruling classes and the forces in power are serving as their tools.

This perilous political situation cannot be altered by the UNP or the JVP that contributed to the Mahinda Chinthanaya. Nothing will change through the two rival political parties taking turns to rule in the parliament. The Party emphasises that what is needed instead is that a

third force that reflects the aspirations of the people should come forward as a force of mass struggle.

*SK Senthivel*  
General Secretary  
New Democratic Party

*E Thambiah*  
National Organiser  
New Democratic Party

### ***NDP Statement on the Arrest of Jose Maria Sison***

## **NDP Demands the Immediate Release of Comrade Jose Maria Sison**

*30<sup>th</sup> August 2007*

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party regarding the arrest of Comrade Jose Maria Sison by the Netherlands Police.

Comrade Jose Maria Sison, Senior Advisor to the National Democratic Front of the Philippines was arrested by the Netherlands Police at his home in Utrecht. At the same time the office of the National Democratic Front was cordoned and searched and documentation and computers removed from the office. The fascist act of the Netherlands Police has been conducted as planned by a joint conspiracy of the rulers of the US and the Philippines. The New Democratic Party strongly denounces the arrest of Comrade Jose Maria Sison and the excesses against the office of the National Democratic Front, and demands the immediate release of Comrade Sison.

Comrade Sison left the Philippines to live in the Netherlands and strengthened the struggle of the New People's Army led by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). He also served as Senior Advisor to the National Democratic Front, which is a broad united front of that struggle. Through that Comrade Sison gave voice to the aspirations and demands of the people of the Philippines and was most important among those who guided the struggle led by the CPP.

The European Court of First Instance had recently freed him of false charges laid against him and rejected the fascist moves by the US-backed Netherlands authorities. He has now been arrested and held in custody on trumped up charges. There are plans to arrest him and hand him over to the authorities in the US or in the Philippines.

Hence we demand that Comrade Sison who has been arrested and held in detention as a result of the US-Arroyo ruling conspiracy be released forthwith. The New Democratic Party expresses its fraternal solidarity with the Communist Party of the Philippines and all other movements calling for his instant release.

*SK Senthivel*  
General Secretary, New Democratic Party.

### ***NDP Statement to the Media***

## **Demands for Higher Wages and Ending the War**

**14<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party.

The government while extracting higher taxes from all the people is also mercilessly raising the prices of essential goods and services. At the same time, in the process of pursuing the war, many millions of rupees are spent to feed the cannons. Meantime, the MPs, the enhanced number of ministers, and officials in high position in the state apparatus enjoy fat wages to live a life of luxurious comfort. Under these conditions, it is entirely fair that the state and private sector employees, including the plantation workers, put forward demands for an increase in wages for themselves. It is an inevitable necessity today to launch trade union action for the purpose. Hence the New Democratic Party gives its fullest support and cooperation for the trade union struggles launched by trade unions in the state and the private sector to secure their demands for a fair rise in wages.

The new government is approaching its completion of two years in power. But none of the problems faced by the country or the people have been addressed in a fair manner or solved in any way. In particular, the day-to-day life of workers, peasants and other toiling masses is facing a rapid downfall. The people are pushed to a situation in which they are unable to cope with the prices of goods and services, and the cost of living rising by the day. The plantation workers who receive the lowest daily wages in the country are being pushed towards starvation. Amid this, the attention of the Sinhalese is being deflected by pointing to the war. Along with that are the grave violations of human rights in the form of the daily occurrences of murder, kidnapping and disappearing of people in the North-East.

Time has come for the working Sinhalese people who constitute the vast majority to think and act on these matters. The Party wishes to draw attention to the direction in which the country and the day-to-day life of the people are being dragged behind the theatre of war.

Thus, the Party calls upon all trade unions to link their demands for higher wages in the state and private sectors with the demand to put an end to the cruel war, which has led to the increase in cost of living and to obstructions to a fair increase in wages, and thereby find a political solution through negotiations to the national question.

*SK Senthivel*  
General Secretary, New Democratic Party.

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## Appeal for Support

The New Democratic Party publishes the Tamil monthly journal *Puthiya Poomi* and the English quarterly New Democracy which play a valuable role in upholding democratic values and defending the interests of the oppressed sections of the population independently of ethnic, religious or any other such identity.

*Puthiya Poomi* and New Democracy are unique among publications in Sri Lanka by way of their high journalistic standards, quality of content and coverage of issues that remain unaddressed by the mainstream media and publications of political parties representing the interests of the exploiting classes.

Besides the increase in the cost of printing, the postal rates have recently been increased drastically. For the publication of the journals the party relies on financial support from some of its supporters and well wishers, who are themselves struggling against the rising cost of living. The Party neither uses NGO funding, nor has rich patrons. Thus, it has become necessary for the party to seek a broader base for financial support.

The Party appeals to readers and well wishers to contribute to the Publications Fund of the Party by adding to the annual subscription, by making a donation, or by sponsoring the publication of part or whole of an issue of either journal.

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**47, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, CCSM Complex, Colombo 11, Sri Lanka.**



## Two poems by Jose Maria Sison

### IN THE DARK DEPTHS

The enemy wants to bury us  
In the dark depths of prison  
But shining gold is mined  
From the dark depths of the earth  
And the radiant pearl is dived  
From the dark depths of the sea.  
We suffer but we endure  
And draw up gold and pearl  
From depths of character  
Formed so long in struggle.

*10 April 1978*

### THE COMING OF THE RAIN

Gathered by the oppressive heat  
Heavy clouds darken all beneath  
But thunder and lightning proclaim  
A new season of growth in the rain.  
The wide wind and deepening stream  
Race from the mountain to bring  
The message in a more intimate way,  
The coming of the rain to the plains.  
The trees raise their arms to the sky  
And dance in a movement so sprightly.  
The bushes raise and blend their voices  
With the trees in song and laughter.  
The wind sweeps away the fallen leaves  
And fans the spark on the stubbly field.  
The flames leap and whet the thirst  
Of the earth so eager for the water thrusts.

*15 June 1978*

## *Book Reviews*

### **Consoling Wounded Chauvinism**

***Sri Lanka, the LTTE and the British Parliament*, Ravindra Fernando, Vijitha Yapa Publications, Colombo 4, 2007, pp. 192, Rs 390/-**

The declared purpose of the book was to find, analyse and publish speeches by British parliamentarians in the context of the misunderstandings about the debate relating to Sri Lanka in the British House of Commons on 2.5.2007. The bulk of the book is reproduction of extracts from the proceedings of the Commons in the form of a reportage with notes added to selectively assign political identities such as a person opposed to the anti-terrorism laws (Simon Hughes), representing a constituency with a large Tamil community (Sadiq Khan), chair of first ever all party Tamil group (Keith Vaz) etc. Such identities are not used for others, especially those with very right wing views. Despite quoting directly from the main source, the source has not been formally acknowledged by the author using an experienced publisher.

The second shorter 24-page section of the book titled 'the Sri Lankan Reaction' has 6 pages of an assortment of comments by Sri Lankan politicians and 18 pages of text comprising a statement by the President of the 'Sri Lanka United National association of Canada'.

The explanatory notes tend to be one-sided with important aspects left out like, for example, why the LTTE walked out of the talks in 2003, and more seriously in footnote 7 attempting to whitewash the involvement of the state and chauvinist guilt in the Anti-Tami pogrom of 1983. In all the explanatory notes serve more as padding rather than as concise comments that would enlighten the less informed reader.

The book is poorly written, considering the author's academic standing, and its actual purpose seems to deviate from the declared title and seems to be more one of consoling Sinhala Chauvinists angered by the debate, despite its likely futility in helping to solve the

national question, while doing little to overcome chauvinist prejudices and propaganda.

SJS-

## Standing up to State Oppression

**Iran Awakening, Shirin Ebadi, Random House, London, 2006, pp. 312 + xvi, £ 7.99**

Shirin Ebadi was the winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2003 for her work in human rights in Iran. Not surprisingly she is a strong critic of the clerics in control of Iran and fails to acknowledge the nature of the role of the US in the region, including its use of Saddam Hussein to bring down the Iranian regime through a disastrous war. Hers is a well-to-do middle class perspective, her notions of democracy are based on bourgeois democratic values, and she does not seem to recognise class or class struggle. The work as stated by her has no political analysis. She cannot thus explain how an oppressive Islamist regime still enjoys mass support or why more secular organisations failed to stand up to the Islamist politics of Khomeini and his successors.

Nevertheless there is much to admire in her: her courage in staying on in Iran as a dissident, her faith in the compatibility between Islam and democracy (in my view genuine people's democracy although she has in mind bourgeois democracy), her views on a dignified place for women amid a tendency to interpret Islam in ways hostile to women.

This well written and highly readable book is an autobiographic account which deals with the state of human rights in Iran since the Islamic revolution. Ebadi is modest in her claims to her various acts of bravery. The book also shows other aspects of Iranian society, including male chauvinism among the more enlightened sections, let alone religious extremists.

It also illustrates how easy it is for a state machinery which served the repressive dictatorial regime of the Shah to be adapted to serve the forces that overthrew the Shah in the name of Islam, and identifies how the extended arms of the state can terrorise potential threats to the ruling elite by acting outside the law but with the protection of those

responsible for the implementation of the law. Some of the accounts are chilling, but on the other hand need not be so to us, or at least to those who know threats, killings and kidnappings as everyday events. Given below are two samples.

Only after the bus driver abandoned the moving coach for a second time did Fareshteh Sari realize that he was trying to kill them. Around twenty Iranian novelists and poets were travelling to Armenia for a literary conference, and they had chartered a passenger bus to drive them through the winding mountains of northern Iran....

At about two in the morning, with most of the writers dozing in their seats, the driver stopped the bus at the side of the road and hopped out. One of the writers up front noticed that the hand brake had not been pulled, and he called out the driver, assuming that he'd gotten sleepy and needed a quick break. The driver boarded the bus, started it back up, and pulled on to the road.... A sharp acceleration jolted most of the writers awake. They watched in terror as the bus hurtled toward a cliff edge. As it neared the precipice, the driver flung his door open and jumped out. A writer up front hurtled himself into the drivers seat and jammed the brakes, pulling the bus to a screeching stop.... One by one the writers filed out.

They gathered in shock on the dirt on the side of the Heyren Pass and stared at one another mutely. Not long after, a security officer arrived and drove them to a small town on the lush green plain near the Caspian Sea for interrogation. The interrogator warned them to discuss the event with no one, then allowed them to return to Tehran.... Two days before Fareshteh had left for Armenia, another friend, the poet Simin Behbahani, had told me that a dinner she'd attended at the home of a German diplomat had been raided, and that she and two other writers had been detained overnight. The previous fall, a translator in Isfahan had been killed, his body left lying in the street. Another writer, Ghafar Hosseini, died of a suspicious heart attack in his home two months later. (pp128-129)

The ruling establishment's tolerance for the press's freedom did not last long. A liberalised press opened up space for political dissent, and the hard-line clerics feared that criticism would be the beginning of their undoing.... On the morning of July 7, 1999, the hard-liner judiciary ordered the popular independent newspaper *Salaam* shut. The newspaper and its editor were charged with violating national security. (p.148)

-SJS-

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## ***Sri Lankan Events***

### **Fallout of the Human Rights Watch Report**

The report of the US-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) of August 2007 highlighting the violation of human rights by the Sri Lankan government has angered many on the side of the government as it has strongly criticized the government, the armed forces and Tamil militants receiving support from the government for serious violations of human rights. Despite the declaration in the introductory paragraphs that the HRW had in the past denounced the LTTE for its various violations and that it holds the LTTE also responsible for the state of affair, several government spokespersons denounced the report as biased. The government is keen to destroy the credibility of the report before it is used in various international government forums dealing with 'aid' and other such issues.

The UNP leadership was as expected happy with the report as were most Tamil MPs from the North East. But neither they nor the critics of the report seem to take note of what could be the real intention of the report, namely making a case for having UN observers in the country. The report has, without adequately justifying the need for the presence of UN forces, proposed it as necessary action that should be emphasized by 'donor countries' and accepted by the government. The visit of the UN human rights official Holmes in the wake of the report could not have been purely coincidental.

### **Starting School on a Bad Footing**

The guidelines sent out by the Department of Education on admissions to the first year in school has created a major controversy where the Supreme Court too has got involved on the question of education policy rather than in the interpretation of the relevant aspects of the law. The proposals, comprising revisions to the admission procedure and coming against a background of exposure some time ago of scandalous

corruption involving heads of schools in school admissions, rather than clean up the procedure sought to add rules that would favour the children of intellectual and professional elite in admission to good schools. This and other changes to restrictions on the proximity of the child's home to the school, concessions for the children of old students etc. have angered various sections of the upper middle classes.

The UNP leader accused the government of denying opportunities to poorer section of the student population, forgetting that it was the UNP that made possible a new class of private schools dubbed 'International Schools' and systematically ran down the quality of free education in keeping with the prescriptions of the IMF and other lending agencies.

What is forgotten is that the controversy concerns a mere 345 'good' schools out well over 9500 schools in the country. The 'good' schools are themselves overcrowded and overpopulated with some school populations on par with universities in the country. The debate on school admissions does not in the least concern the poor facilities and lack of resources of an overwhelming majority of schools to which the labouring classes are compelled to send their children. It does not concern the lack of state investment in school education, because the privileged classes have the means to ensure that their children go to privileged schools that are assured of resources including old student networks. The debate now involving the ministry, the political parties and the judiciary is really about which section of the privileged classes has priority in school admissions.

## **The Return of the Runaway**

Arumugan Thondaman, leader of the CWC, now has a problem with controlling his flock. Having joined the government merely to make himself and fellow MPs ministers of little significance in a burgeoning cabinet with a record membership of 110, he had to eat humble pie before the increasingly assertive members of the ruling family. He resigned in a huff apparently in protest at bad treatment of one of his party men, who was also a minister. But being a 'realist' he rejoined in a matter of weeks, much to the despair of the Leader of the Opposition.

While the unprincipled politics of the leaders of the Hill Country Tamil and Muslim MPs, who get elected on promises of defending the

interests of their communities but soon compromise all principles on the offer of cabinet posts, has for long hurt the interests of the two oppressed nationalities, there is also suspicion that advisors from a neighbouring country have been instrumental in deciding the moves by MPs and politicians belonging to certain political parties.

## Corruption Unlimited

Corruption in the purchase of arms and military hardware has been the talking point of many commentators. A recent report on the purchase of MIG fighters landed reporter Iqbal Atthas, a regular writer to the Sunday Times in trouble. Atthas has been a supporter of the government's 'war against terrorism' and had enjoyed access to military sources. The recent revelations by Atthas are the tip of an iceberg. Reports of corruption involving a whole range of major personalities have been reported in sections of the media, but little has been achieved.

The purchase of a luxury car by a leading member of the JHU and its resale to a businessman, with substantial evidence in support of the transaction, embarrassed the lay spokespersons of the JHU. But the charges have been denied and the clergyman who bought the car claimed that it was for his dog. The import of an Aston Martin luxury sports car allegedly for a son of the President too remains a controversy with a spate of denials, and mystery surrounding the import of the vehicle.

Meantime, some leaders of the JVP have started paying compliments to the leader of the UNP for his 'clean' conduct. Whether this new realisation has anything to do with a future alliance of strange bedfellows is anybody's guess. However, that cannot happen without a split in the JVP.

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## *International Events*

### **Nepal: Putting Peace in Peril**

The Maoists quit the interim government on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> September after issuing the Seven Party Coalition (SPA) two days' time to reach a deal with Prime Minister Koirala on the abolition of the monarchy. It was broadly accepted in principle that the monarchy would be abolished but, under external pressure, the SPA and the Indian-influenced interim premier Koirala, sought to beat a retreat and buy time to weaken the resolve of the people against the monarchy.

Against the background of the rise in violence earlier this year in the Terai region of Nepal, instigated by right wing 'pro-Hindu' Indian elements, the Maoists had expressed fear that the King and his supporters were trying to sabotage the election. The Maoist ministers submitted their resignation to Koirala as soon as the meeting of top leaders of four major ruling allies ended in deadlock. The Maoists cited that the failure to lead the government according to the eight-party common minimum programme (CMP) and lack of a credible environment for Constituent Assembly polls on November 22 as the reason for quitting. The Maoists pledged to adhere to the ceasefire but launch street protests to ensure that the election is held on time, and launched a massive rally in the capital on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> to announce their campaign.

### **Pakistan: American Brokered Shady Deals**

In August President Musharraf, suffered severe humiliation in the hands of the legal profession and the judiciary amid a rapid decline in domestic support and international credibility. Also in August, Pakistani and US officials were embroiled in an angry row following a US intelligence report claiming that al-Qa'eda had begun regrouping near



Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. Relations between the US and Pakistan already soured by the closer ties between the US and India were further soured by the refusal of a US counter-terror official to rule out military strikes in Pakistan.

Meantime, US imperialism, unwilling to sacrifice Musharraf, its loyal ally in its 'War against Terror' especially in Afghanistan, brokered a deal between him and the desperate former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto whereby the latter will support his bid for another term as President as part of her bid to become Prime Minister again. Not surprisingly, former Prime Minister Nawaz Shariff, deposed by Musharraf in a coup, was refused entry to Pakistan and forced to return at the airport in early September, while Benazir is likely to be let in without hindrance.

While the outcome of the forthcoming elections and whether Musharraf would succeed in his bid to stay on as President are anybody's guess, neither is likely to make a difference to the people. The rulers of Pakistan comprise a tiny elite group which owns or controls much of the wealth of the country and the leaders of the armed forces that dominate the state on their behalf.

What is significant is that Pakistan is now witnessing increasingly bolder mass protests against the government. But it remains to be seen whether the wave of protests will lead to meaningful change.

## **India: The Nuclear Rope**

The 123 nuclear deal between the US and India has come under strong criticism from various quarters within India and outside. While the reasons vary, the objections need to be seen in the context of the motives of the ruling establishments in signing the deal. To the US it is part of a larger game plan including its role in capping India's strategic programme, gaining access to India's growing defence market and, more importantly, making India a strategic Asian partner to serve America's global ambitions.

Although the deal was supposed to benefit India, pressure to sign it by a specific deadline was from the US, compared with 7-year long discussions in the case of Japan. Also the 123 agreement with India, unlike that with China in 1985, fails to stipulate that the two sides should observe the principle of international law by which neither party

could invoke a domestic law to justify failure to fulfil obligations under the treaty.

Objections from sections of the Indian scientific community are based on the position that India has very little to gain from the treaty. The opposition BJP and its allies are protesting on the grounds that the Indian side did not bargain for a better deal. All such objections overlook the political implications for India, nationally, regionally and internationally. They fail to tell the public that the Indian government, to achieve its limited hegemonic goals, is seeking to make India a client state of the US.

The China bogey too has been invoked in defence of the treaty by advocates of the deal, despite the fast improving relations between the two countries in the past two decades. In fact, the Chinese government has, if at all, responded favourably to the deal, although sections of the Chinese media have, knowing US intentions, warned against long term implications for stability in the region.

It is also true that that a US-India alliance is attractive to the Indian rulers because of the unprecedented military superiority of the US. An additional factor is the increasing inclination towards identifying with US hegemony among the Indian elite and considerable sections of the urban middle classes, who constitute a small but influential part of the population, owing to growing ties with the US at various levels, including the presence of a sizeable well to do Indian community there. This approach although short-sighted is likely to influence the rulers of India for some time to come.

The biggest embarrassment faces the two big parliamentary left parties, the CPI and CPI(M). Having kept quiet for too long without activating informed public opinion against the treaty, they have entered the scene rather late and close to the stage when the deal has been made and is due to be signed. Their credibility, especially that of the CPI(M), has been shaken by the conduct of the CPI(M)-led government in suppressing protests by peasants in Nandigram and Singur against land grab. Whether the two parties are willing to risk the toppling of the Congress-led government is uncertain, but it is most likely that they will use the pretext of keeping the Hindu fundamentalist BJP out to save the government and themselves until it is time for the next election.

What needs to be made clear to the Indian people is that India's rulers in their ambition to achieve their goal of regional hegemony are willing to undermine the interests of the people of India and reduce India into a vassal of the US.

This course cannot be reversed by changing the government in Delhi but by transferring power to the oppressed masses of India. It is a long and tedious process, but the prospects are getting brighter.

## **The Netherlands: Doing Arroyo's Dirty Work**

In its statement of 14<sup>th</sup> September 2007 applauding the release of Comrade Jose Maria Sison the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) noted that the ruling of the Hague District Court, dismissing the charges against Comrade Sison as unfounded, is a victory for the Filipino people and their revolutionary forces, a big slap on the face of the US-Arroyo regime, and a stinging blow against the fascist machinations of its National Security Council.

The Dutch police arrested Comrade Sison living in the Netherlands on 28<sup>th</sup> August, based on the charge that that he incited the killing of Romulo Kintanar and Arturo Tabara in 2003 and 2004, respectively, in the Philippines. It is significant that his arrest occurred shortly after the judgment issued in Luxembourg on 11<sup>th</sup> July by the European Court of First Instance (ECFI) annulling the decision of the Council of the European Union (EU) blacklisting Prof. Sison as a "terrorist".

CPP spokesperson Gregorio 'Ka Roger' Rosal stated: "The Philippine, Dutch and US governments united to gang up on Ka Joema [Comrade Sison]. However, the web of lies that they tried to weave against Ka Joema were so utterly depraved and incredulous that it failed to convince the Dutch judges." He also denounced the Dutch government and police authorities for violations of Sison's fundamental rights as well as the rights of other NDFP personnel in Utrecht and Abcoude whose homes were brutally broken into. Their computers, office equipment and files, including important peace documents and personal effects were seized without accounting by the Dutch police.

Rosal, who called on the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) to carry out an investigation into the August 28 arrest of Sison and the raids against the National Democratic Front of the

Philippines (NDFP) office and residences of NDFP personnel and refugees in the Netherlands and censure the Dutch police for violations of human rights, also warned that the danger has not totally passed as the Dutch police and prosecution plan to appeal their case, and US-Arroyo regime is set to keep up with its malevolent designs against Sison and the NDFP peace panel and personnel in the Netherlands to further attack the national democratic movement and other militant critics of the Arroyo regime in the Philippines.

Several anti-imperialist political parties and organisations across the globe had protested the arrest of Sisson and demanded his immediate release in mass demonstrations, statements to the media, and statements of solidarity; but it is important that they keep vigil against further sinister moves by the Dutch authorities on the instigation of the US and its corrupt client regime in the Philippines.

In another development, former President Joseph Estrada was convicted of charges of plunder by the Arroyo regime that is guilty of far heavier and numerous crimes. The CPP in its statement of 15<sup>th</sup> September pointed out that "in convicting Estrada, Gloria Arroyo has succeeded only in heightening the people's desire to punish her innumerable crimes of plunder and murder, and put an end to her regime and the entire rotten system of government in the country.... In convicting Estrada, Arroyo's aim is to counteract and forestall the continuing challenge of the Estrada camp questioning the legitimacy of her regime and pushing for its overthrow.... Arroyo now wants to put away Estrada for good, deprive him of his assets and prevent him from further supporting the opposition and the widespread clamour to put an end to her rule.... In doing so, however, Arroyo is succeeding only in burning all possible bridges of reconciliation between rival reactionary camps, driving deeper the political wedge between the ruling regime and the reactionary opposition.

## **Bolivia: "They want to kill this Indian"**

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez during his weekly television program Aló Presidente warned of a plan financed by the US to derail the democratically elected government of Bolivia, including a plan to

assassinate Morales. Chavez held responsible George Bush, President of the US for the consequences, and warned that "if US imperialism attacked the people, using their lackeys in Venezuela and Bolivia, they can be sure that we're not going to wait with our arms crossed".

Chavez's comments, made in the company of President Evo Morales, came at the time when up to 100,000 people from Bolivia's campesino and indigenous movements converged on Sucre for a Social Summit in Defence of the Constituent Assembly, following a week of violent riots organised by right wing opposition groups in Sucre. The riots were aimed at disrupting the process of constitutional reform to provide a framework for the social inclusion of the long-marginalized indigenous majority of Bolivia; and the rioters demanded that the executive and legislative powers of government be transferred from the Bolivian capital La Paz to Sucre. Their repeated attempts to shut down the Constituent Assembly had already led to a one-month recess.

Chavez rejected US officials' denial of his charge that the US is seeking to overthrow him and other leftist governments in the region and claimed that Morales had documentary evidence of US interference and intention to destabilize his government.

Chavez's claims are supported by a report by the US-Venezuelan human rights lawyer Eva Golinger pointing out that the US was funding opposition groups in both Venezuela and Bolivia. Golinger has revealed that the USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), opened in Bolivia in 2004 has contracted the American company Casals & Associates Inc. to manage US\$13.3 million granted to 379 organizations, political parties, and projects in Bolivia. She also points out that their efforts are concentrated on combating and influencing the Constituent Assembly, and 'promoting separatism in the regions rich in natural resources, such as Santa Cruz and Cochabamba'.

The use of NGOs and reactionary political parties to overthrow 'unfriendly' governments is not new, and has been used in Europe. It is now being applied to South America. Such activities serve to narrow the options before Morales to between seeking mass support to implement the programmes for social justice with greater vigour and compromising with reactionary forces. The former seems to be the course that Morales is opting for and, unlike in the 1970s, the popular mood in South America favours it.

## Venezuela: Getting Bolder

Encouraged by the growing strength of the newly-founded PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) the government of Hugo Chavez has taken yet another bold step towards consolidating the “Bolivarian Revolution”. Proposed reforms to the national constitution, according to President Chavez, have the intention of constructing a new Bolivarian democracy comprise greater power to the people and participation from them, as well as a change in the organizational structure of the country.

The constitutional reform would make communities, communes, and cities the basic units into which the national territory would be divided. According to Chavez, organized communities would be the primary nucleus of the government, with each community making a communal council, and the association of several communal councils a commune. These communes would represent the "territorial social cell." This commune, joined to other neighbouring communes, would make up the basic territorial unit. The reforms also make provision for the creation of federal districts and territories in previously abandoned spaces to take advantage of their natural resources for ecologically friendly development.

While it is important to support and encourage the progressive steps taken by the Chavez government to empower and politicise the masses and to make the masses a formidable force in defending Venezuela against imperialism, there is need for caution among the international left, democratic and progressive forces against overlooking the vulnerability of the government to attacks from within. Venezuela is still not a socialist country and the defeated reactionary classes are still strong and control a considerable part of the economy. Thus the struggle is far from over.

While it is wrong to denounce Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution, irrespective of one’s reservations about the revolutionary agenda, it is even more dangerous to idealise the revolution and not be mindful of the pitfalls. What will be correct is to give unqualified support for the anti-imperialist stance that Chavez represents and keep all criticism constructive.

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*(Continued from inside front cover)*

I am the Palestinian  
David child wielding a single stone  
Against the Israeli Goliath.  
I am not afraid,  
For truth is with me and God is on my side.

If I die,  
A choir of angels will honour me  
And later, my parents will grasp my outstretched hand  
And join me in Heaven.

I am the tears of  
Mothers weeping for their dead sons.  
I am the footsteps of ancient prophets  
Who foretold of doom and destruction  
To those who torture and oppress me.

My brethren are the doves, hummingbirds and seagulls  
That fly unhindered above my sea.  
I am Palestinian,  
Therefore, I am.

No one can take my identity  
Away from me,  
Not tanks or guns or bombs  
Meant to desecrate me and kill me.  
My country lives in me.

I am the cry of liberty.  
No matter what they take from me,  
They can't take away my identity  
Or my dignity.  
Palestinian am I.

## Motherland

*Lal Singh Dil*

Does love have any reason to be?  
Does the fragrance of flowers have any roots?  
Truth may, or may not have an intent  
But falsity is not without one

It is not because of your azure skies  
Nor because of the blue waters  
Even if these were deep gray  
Like the colour of my old mom's hair  
Even then I would have loved you

These treasure trove of riches  
Are not meant for me  
Surely not.

Love has no reason to be  
Falsity is not without intent

The snakes that slither  
Around the treasure trove of your riches  
Sing paeans  
And proclaim you  
"The Golden Bird"\*

\* The reference is to ancient India termed as a "Golden Bird" because of its perceived riches.

***[Lal Singh Dil, a major figure in modern Punjabi poetry, died at the age of 63 years on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2007. A Dalit hailing from Punjab, he was a Marxist Leninist once closely associated with the Naxalbari struggle.]***

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