

February 2008

# New Democracy

## 28

*Setbacks are Temporary* E Thambiah

*Tri-Continental Marxism:  
Cabral's Contribution* Kyle Gibson

*New Path for the Left* Daya

*Traditions of Betrayal* Mohan

*Poetry:* R Murugaiyan, VT Elangovan,  
Ahmed Shamlu

---

Editorial ? NDP Diary ? Sri Lankan Events ? International Events

## IN THE NAME OF CULTURE

**R Murugaiyan**

We keep on creeping under our burden  
Twenty centuries old  
We have packed up everything in a jute sack  
And heaved the load on our backs.  
Our baggage is full of rags,  
Broken pieces, decayed refuse—  
Rotten, putrid, wasted, worn out—  
We have collected odds and ends  
And carry them on our backs  
Started on a long, long journey  
Along the jungle path,  
Our eyeballs protrude under the heavy load.

We keep on creeping under our burden  
Twenty centuries old  
Those without any luggage  
Stride on empty handed.  
Others—  
Clutching powerful tools  
Strive and struggle  
To ensure a foe-less prosperity;  
Before venturing into outer space  
They insist on creating heavenly splendour  
On this dingy earth.  
To enjoy equally the fruits of labour  
To banish intrigue  
To establish lasting peace is their firm intention.  
Their gait is smoother, easier,  
Their luggage light. They have achieved a lot  
And determined to do more.

*(continued on inside back cover)*

## *From the Editor's Desk*

Violation of human rights and the threat to media freedom have reached new heights in the past several months. Killing, kidnapping, threatening and disappearing of people have secured an existence outside the reach of law. The state is only too often implicated in offences affecting Tamils. The overlap between common crime and political crime makes it hard to tell the difference.

The roots of the problem can be traced to the war of national oppression and the badly neglected national question. Portrayal of the war as one against terrorism, despite its failure to mobilise the Sinhala masses on the side of the war, has instilled enough fear in their minds to enable the government to silence its critics on not only war but also other misdeeds.

Trespasses by a government minister and companions at the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (including the alleged assault on the News Director), on the pretext of objecting to the failure to telecast a talk by the minister, faced unanimous resistance from the employees. The immediate response of the government was to appease the minister and fault the employees for indiscipline. Four weeks after the incident a news producer of the SLRC suffered a knife-attack by thugs. The bad publicity has been, nationally and internationally, an embarrassment for the government. Although the minister has announced his departure from parliament, it seems certain that the culprits in the criminal attacks on the News Director and the journalist will go unpunished, and a witch hunt will take place in the SLRC.

Unlike earlier occasions, where the targets were certain Tamil newspapers and sections of the media that have been critical of the government, and journalists associated with them, the victim this time is a state-run medium, which, especially during the past three years, loyally broadcast crass government propaganda. The climate of intimidation should be seen against a background of denial of access to a website, closure of radio stations, arson attack on a printing press in a locality with tight security, and the impending threat of tough media legislation to cover national security and criminalisation of a wide range of defamatory material.

Alleged attacks on civilians by the government in the pretext of bombing selected military targets in the North and by the LTTE on civilian targets in the South have, besides adding to the misery of the people, helped those who oppose the resolution of the national question, a matter in which the government, determined to secure military success against the LTTE, is at best half-hearted.

There are people who separate the question of war, the national question, human rights, and democratic and media freedom. Unfortunately such segregation is not possible: the issues are closely interwoven, with each inextricably linked with the question of sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the country. The dangerous tendency for chauvinists and Tamil nationalists to call for foreign meddling in one form or another appears to be on the rise. Strangely, opposing parties sometimes plead for meddling by the same foreign power.

While the government puts up a show of defiance against 'international opinion' on the national question and its pursuit of war, it relies on and continues to receive both military and economic support from imperialism. Let alone the UNP, the JVP too, despite the occasional anti-imperialist slogan and utterances critical of foreign interference, has not the courage of conviction to stand up to imperialism. It will not reject imperialism or regional hegemony at the risk of denting its chauvinist vote bank.

Strangely, among Tamil nationalists, including former militants with fickle political beliefs, there is much faith in the ability and intention of the imperialists, also known as the international community, as well as India, despite being fully aware of the role played by these entities, each in its own way and for its own purpose, to undermine the peace process and watch idly as the country slid towards war and people were killed by their thousands and dispossessed by their hundred thousands. Some are naïve enough to believe that the creation of an independent Kosovo by American manipulation is a precedent that will serve to fulfil their dream.

The harsh reality facing the country is that, unless the war is brought to an end and negotiations to solve the national question take place in earnest very soon, the country faces the risk of a dictatorial regime which will brutally suppress all nationalities with the backing of the main imperialist power, alone or in collaboration with the regional hegemonic power.

\*\*\*\*\*

# **In Revolution Setbacks are Temporary**

***Article marking the Cuban National Day and  
Anti-Imperialism Day\*, 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008***

***E Thambiah***

***(Co-ordinator, International People's Solidarity Forum)***

Strong opinion is being cultivated now among the Sinhalese that opposing imperialism in Sri Lanka means preventing foreign countries from pressurising the Sri Lankan Government to grant the rights of the Tamils to resolve the national question. That is presented as opposition to secession, opposition to terrorism and opposition to the right of the Tamils to self-determination.

Consequently, anti-imperialism is presented to the Tamils as opposition to their right to self-determination. This appears to convey the false impression that foreign countries are ready to secure the right of the Tamils to self-determination and that it is anti-imperialism that is standing in the way.

Thus anti-imperialism is interpreted as the denial of the right to self-determination, and self-determination is interpreted as being pro-imperialist. The campaigns carried out by forces of nationalism among the Sinhalese and among the Tamils are making this possible.

Although the forces of the left paid attention to uniting the entire people against British colonialism, the fact that they were at times subject to Sinhala chauvinist domination had led to resentment among Tamils. For example, when the Jaffna Youth Congress organised a successful boycott of

the elections to the State Council following the Donoughmore Reforms in 1931, leftists who pledged that they support that stand chose to contest the elections. Even on the question of the Soulbury constitution, adequate pressure was not mounted to guarantee the rights of the Tamils.

The fact that the English-educated Tamil elite occupied high positions under British rule has been portrayed as the British colonialists favouring the Tamils. But it needs to be noted that the majority of that Tamil elite comprised Christians who had converted to Christianity under British colonial rule. Meanwhile, the anti-imperialism of people like Anagarika Dharmapala was based on Sinhala Buddhist domination. The pro-British stance of the Tamil elite, even after the British gave up direct colonial rule in 1948, further favoured the development of Sri Lankan nationalism as Sinhala nationalism.

The constitution of 1972 was born of this course of development and a continuation of it. The Sinhala nationalist position of total distancing from the British was cultivated as one of taking away from the Tamils “the concessions that the Tamils enjoyed under British rule” and of total rejection of all nationalities other than the Sinhalese.

The constitution introduced in 1978 became one in which Sinhala nationalism denied a place for other nationalities of the country while affirming its pro-imperialist position. The various acts of oppression unleashed against the Tamils were based on that position. Consequently, the Tamil nationalist leadership sought to do better than its Sinhala nationalist counterpart in pleasing imperialism, and sought to rationalise its position.

It is in order that the Sinhalese and the Tamils do not recognise the importance of the right to self-determination of the nationalities within a united Sri Lanka and of a Sri Lanka that stands in defiance of any form of hegemony that the people are being fed with illusions about imperialism by the ruling classes. Thus they hope to retain the Sri Lankan as a client of imperialism. This applied equally to positions taken by forces among Tamils with a ruling class outlook.

By the programme of globalisation, people have been pushed to positions where they are forced to accept decisions made by the imperialists. This is concealed by the pretexts of war and the problems of the global economy.

The national bourgeois forces which took a stand opposing British colonial domination are today kowtowing before international capital. The leftists who should work on the basis of the contradiction between the Sri

Lankan people and imperialism have become defunct. Meantime, the people are facing much sorrow and suffering in the face of the rising cost of living and the cruelty of war.

It is against such a background that the event 'People's Liberation and Cultural Evening' is to be held at the Sangarappillai Auditorium of the Colombo Tamil Sangam to celebrate today the Anti-Imperialism Day and Cuban Liberation Day. This is the fifth occasion on which the People's Organisations for International Solidarity has organised the event.

The experiences of the Cuban national struggle and the experience of socialist construction in Cuba are distinct from those of other countries. Similarly, the current state of awareness among the people of Latin America too has its distinctive features. The people of Cuba, from the time of José Marti, have truly patriotically developed their culture guided by the slogan 'Nation or death'. Their leaders too have been ones who truly love their people and feel answerable to them.

Historically the Cuban people have been blessed to have many great leaders including Fidel Castro and Ché Guevara. Today, following the incapacitation by illness of Fidel, his brother and comrade Raul Castro has accepted the responsibilities of acting for the head of state and leading the Cuban masses amid a variety of challenges.

Many bourgeois analysts predicted that socialist Cuba which was economically dependent on the Soviet Union will fail following the collapse of the Soviet Union. On the contrary, Cuba, based on self-reliance, is standing firm against big powers. Cuba is developing close ties with developing countries and, while providing them with help, it is also receiving their cooperation.

There are no people in Cuba who have not received free education and free health care offered by the state. There is no lack of employment opportunity. Cuban standards in fields such as medicine and scientific research are on par with advanced European countries.

It is important the developing countries emulate the example set by Cuba. Forces that are struggling for liberation should learn from the Cuban revolutionary tradition.

It is because Cuba could become an example and an educational source to other countries and their people that the forces of imperialism are ceaselessly conspiring to topple the Cuban government. It has been reported that the CIA has made numerous attempts to kill Fidel Castro.

Between the times of José Marti and Fidel Castro, Cuba has witnessed many national liberation struggles. The national liberation struggle met with a number of setbacks and defeats until its victory on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1959. History has demonstrated that none of the setbacks and defeats had been forever. History did not only free the imprisoned Fidel Castro, but also Cuba and the Cuban people. Through tireless struggle and through a culture that has accepted struggle as life, the Cuban people today remain unbowed before any.

Let us wish Cuba an eternal place in world history as a lasting example for liberation through freeing itself from the still continuing imperialist conspiracies and as an example for socialist construction.

[\*Approximate translation of an article published in Tamil in *Thinakkural*, 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008.]

\*\*\*\*\*

"(T)he transnational monopolies represent the most perfect synthesis, the more developed expression of monopoly capitalism in this phase of its general crisis," and therefore "they are the international carriers of all the laws that govern the capitalist mode of production in its present imperialistic phase, of all its contradictions, and are the most efficient mechanism for the development and intensification of the process of subordination of labour to capital on the world scale."

*Fidel Castro Ruz*  
*La Crisis económica y social del mundo (the Economic and Social Crisis of the World),*  
*Ediciones del Consejo de Estado, La Habana, 1983, p. 153.*



# **Theory and Praxis:**

## ***Amilcar Cabral's Contributions to Tricontinental Marxism***

**Kyle Gibson**

**Graduate Studies**

**Department of History, University of Manitoba, Canada**

Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 signalled a turning point in, for lack of a better term, first-world – third-world relations. This conflict, for the first time, laid bare the myth of western military invincibility, galvanizing a series of tricontinental resistance movements in subsequent years. From the Third International and Baku Conference to the meetings at Bandung and Havana, the leaders of the myriad decolonization movements who attended these conferences bequeathed a treasure trove of theoretical insights and methods of political organization to future generations engaged in struggles throughout the tricontinental region.<sup>1</sup> As head of the national liberation movement in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde during the 1950s and 1960s, Amilcar Cabral is in many ways the apotheosis of just such a leader. The following will explore the innovative contributions Cabral made to tricontinental Marxism by analyzing the specific historical context from which these insights emerged.

Unlike the self-interested prescriptions emanating from the Soviet Union during the interwar period to those engaged in anti-colonial struggles, the success of the Chinese communists in 1949 proved to be a watershed for the oppressed masses of the tricontinental. Indeed, this event was the first of its kind to manage *both* a national and socialist revolution.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Mao's Chinese Communist Party (CCP) achieved this on the basis of an unorthodox strategy of placing revolutionary primacy on the peasant masses rather than the more traditional focus on

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), see chapter 10.

<sup>2</sup> Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Nation and Revolution* Volume II of *Social Dialectics* (Albany: State University of New York, 1981), 89.

the proletariat. This was to have an enormous impact on the strategies employed by the anti-colonial movements worldwide. In this context, there was room to reformulate classical Marxism-Leninism, stressing the specificities of each particular struggle. Very much a product of his time, Cabral's entire theoretical outlook is a testament to this geopolitical shift.

One of the most significant revisions Cabral made to classical Marxism was his objection to the assertion that class struggle was the driving force of history. For Cabral, accepting the traditional formulation effectively meant that colonized nations failed to have a history prior to western penetration. Instead, as he stated in his "Brief Analysis of the Social Structure in Guinea," "[my] opinion is exactly the contrary ... [I] consider that when imperialism arrived in Guinea it made us leave history – our history."<sup>3</sup> As a result, Cabral argued that it was not class struggle that drove historical development, but rather the *mode of production* – the level of the productive forces and the system of ownership – of each society that is the determining factor.<sup>4</sup> In his words: "The level of the productive forces, the essential determinant of the content and form of class struggle, is the true and permanent motive force of history"; for "[m]an will outlive classes and will continue to produce and to make history, since he can never free himself from the burden of his needs, of hand and brain, which are the basis of the development of productive forces."<sup>5</sup>

This reformulation of classical Marxism led Cabral to proclaim that only by seizing complete control of the productive forces could a formerly colonized country experience true liberation. He believed that this would grant the colonized the "inalienable right of every people to have their own history" by using the productive forces in a way "most appropriate to the liberated people [which] necessarily opens up new prospects for the cultural process of the society in question, by returning to it all its capacity to create progress."<sup>6</sup>

By extension of this line of thinking Cabral postulated that societies progress through three stages, all of which are determined by the level of the forces of production: a primitive form with a low level of productive

---

<sup>3</sup> Amilcar Cabral, "Brief Analysis of the Social Structure in Guinea" in *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts by Amilcar Cabral* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 56.

<sup>4</sup> Amilcar Cabral, "The Weapon of Theory" in *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts by Amilcar Cabral* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 95.

<sup>5</sup> Amilcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 125.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 143.

forces; a more progressive stage characterized by private appropriation of the means of production; and a higher stage in which private means of appropriation is eliminated along with classes and class struggle, and new and unknown forces appear.<sup>7</sup> As a consummate dialectician, Cabral looked for contradictions everywhere as he examined the ethnic groups, races, religions, and social classes of society. Classes and class struggle arise with the development of the productive forces once a certain level of accumulation is attained, so, in Cabral's view, it was the second stage that Marx had described, one indicative of the level of the productive forces in nineteenth century Europe.<sup>8</sup>

It is from these core revisions that the rest of Cabral's thinking unfolds. For example, consider his views on imperialism. Borrowing from Lenin, Cabral recognized that western imperialism was, contrary to the rhetoric of the imperial powers, not an act of benevolence but clearly a solution to the inherent contradictions of capitalist development – for example, an over accumulation crisis. Imperialism was, therefore, not a sign of strength, but rather of weakness. Although often violent and focused upon altering the cultural elements of the colonized peoples in forms such as religion and language, imperial powers were, at bottom, preoccupied with the task of subordinating the productive forces of the underdeveloped countries to the wishes of the developed capitalist countries.<sup>9</sup> Cabral was very much aware, however, that attempts to alter the cultural practices of a colonized people were but a tactic for undermining resistance to foreign economic control.

This emphasis on controlling the productive forces led Cabral to discern between two different forms of imperial control: colonialism (direct domination) and neocolonialism (economic dependency). In light of this distinction, Cabral reformulated the traditional meaning and strategies of national liberation, stating that true liberation required two separate stages of struggle. The first, which many other African nations had already attained a decade prior to Guinea-Bissau, was a *national* revolution – that is, political independence. Cabral had learned vicariously through the previously “successful” revolutions across the continent that achieving political independence, which was supposed to allow each nation to control its own economic affairs, was virtually meaningless without also seizing

---

<sup>7</sup> Cabral, “The Weapon of Theory,” 96-97.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald H. Chilcote, *Amilcar Cabral's Revolutionary Theory and Practice: A Critical Guide* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 1991), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, “Amilcar Cabral and the Theory of the National Liberation Struggle,” in *Latin American Perspectives* 41 (Spring 1984), 44.

control over the productive forces. Cabral recognized that it is often the imperialists who decide to decolonize, choosing to do so either on their own terms or on terms coinciding with their long-term strategic and economic interests.<sup>10</sup> Cabral strongly believed, then, that if colonized countries were to stop struggling after the first stage it would amount to nothing more than a “half revolution,” a political revolution which, as Marx put it, “leaves the pillars of the building standing.”<sup>11</sup> For this reason Cabral argued that the crucial struggle was for a *socialist* revolution – the second stage – where the capitalist structure implanted there by the imperial power is dismantled in favour of socialism.

Although the second stage of the revolution was where true liberation was to be achieved, Cabral noted that gaining political independence, the first stage, not only relieved the colonized of a direct imperial presence in the country but also precipitated a shift in the social relations within the nation to the, *pace* Lenin, *progressive* neocolonial form of imperialism. More precisely, in the first stage of the liberation struggle issues of restructuring the state and economy are overshadowed by the desire to terminate direct colonial rule. Once this is achieved, however, the moral unity that had banded people together into a “nation class” – the broad alliance of all nationalist forces who oppose the colonial state – in the first phase gives way to class struggles.<sup>12</sup> This occurs as a result of the heightened expectations of the population, as individuals’ demands to benefit from the fruits of independence reveal that the petty bourgeoisie – the comprador elites who are working on behalf of the imperial power – are traitors to the revolution and thus need to be overthrown.<sup>13</sup>

There was nothing terribly original about Cabral’s call to overthrow the neocolonial bourgeoisie. The way in which he proposed to accomplish this feat, however, was indeed innovative. Thanks to his training as an agronomist in Portugal, Cabral was able to apply his thorough knowledge of the particular social makeup in Guinea-Bissau that he gained as a result of conducting an extensive agricultural survey for the Forestry Department in the early 1950s. This experience demonstrated how inapplicable the rigid Bolshevik model of revolution prescribed by the Soviet Union really

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 49.

<sup>11</sup> Marx as quoted in *Chilcote, Amilcar Cabral's Revolutionary Theory and Practice*, 49.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Chabal, “The Social and Political Thought of Amilcar Cabral: A Reassessment,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 19, No. 1. (Mar., 1981), 38.

<sup>13</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, 47.

was, especially in light of the peasant-based communist victory in China in 1949. To be sure, it became clear to Cabral that the specific historical context that had given birth to Marx's emphasis on the revolutionary quality of the proletariat was by no means a universal formula for revolution. Cabral knew well that due to the backward nature of Guinea-Bissau's colonial oppressor, Portugal, there had been little in the way of industrial capitalism in the country and therefore only a miniscule proletariat had formed. Consequently, Cabral used his detailed knowledge of the social composition of the Guinean population to reassess each societal class in terms of its revolutionary potential. In order to illustrate Cabral's views on the other segments of society, it is useful to contrast them with the views of another great postcolonial thinker: Frantz Fanon.

With respect to the peasantry, both Fanon and Cabral appreciated that this class was by far the largest force numerically in African societies. And although they both considered the peasantry to be the most conservative, least organized, and most reactionary segment of the population, Fanon, unlike Cabral, felt that due to their "bloodthirsty instincts" for violence they were particularly susceptible to spontaneous revolutionary action as they had "nothing to lose and everything to gain."<sup>14</sup> By contrast, Cabral believed that the peasantry, despite their numerical majority, was a "physical force" rather than a "revolutionary force" due to their lack of political consciousness – that is, they were often unaware, and difficult to convince, that they were being exploited.<sup>15</sup>

Cabral also disagreed with Fanon's view of the revolutionary potential of the *lumpen proletariat*. Fanon had no use for any segment of the proletariat in regards to its revolutionary potential, as he viewed their station in the colonial context to be similar to the bourgeoisie in industrial nations: a privileged class. Cabral, however, was not so quick to write off all segments of this class; that is to say, he differentiated between what he saw as two types of *déclassés lumpen proletariat*. Cabral concurred with Fanon's assessment of the traditional *déclassés* – i.e. prostitutes, criminals, beggars, pimps – from whom he expected nothing. It was the other segment of the *déclassés* – for instance, recent arrivals from rural areas who had not found work – who possessed the potential for revolutionary

---

<sup>14</sup> Blackley, Robert. "Fanon and Cabral: A Contrast in Theories of Revolution for Africa," in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 12, No.2. (June, 1974): 197.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 198.

consciousness, as they could compare their standard of living with that of the colonialists.<sup>16</sup>

Fanon was also contemptuous of the national bourgeoisie, who he viewed as a parasitical class unable to fulfil its revolutionary role as it was, despite the appearance of autonomy, fully under the supervision of the imperial power and therefore was not advancing industry in a way conducive to fomenting revolution. In Fanon's words, the national bourgeoisie is "strung up to defend its immediate interests, ... sees no further than the end of its nose, and reveals itself incapable of simply bringing national unity into being or of building up the nation on a stable and productive basis."<sup>17</sup> In this way, Fanon viewed the pseudo-bourgeoisie in a neocolonial setup as having far too vested an interest in perpetuating its own class advantages to be open to supporting the revolution.

Cabral did share many of Fanon's concerns regarding the domestic bourgeoisie; however, he believed that a more positive outcome could be achieved. In its role as mediator between the imperial power and the masses – a post conferred upon them due to their western education and close association with the colonial regime – the petty-bourgeoisie inhabit an ambivalent position. On the one hand, they are indispensable to the imperial power in allowing exploitation to continue, for which they are accorded special privileges. On the other hand, their goal of becoming increasingly associated with the imperial power would never be granted. As Cabral explains, "They are prisoners of the social and cultural contradictions of their lives. They cannot escape their role as a marginal class."<sup>18</sup> Cabral believed that as the petty-bourgeoisie becomes increasingly aware of the limits of its privileged position the likelihood of this group aligning itself with the revolution increases. It is here that Cabral spots the weakness in the colonial system; for, paradoxically, nationalism is instilled in the very people that the colonial power had collaborated with due to its insistence that assimilation was impossible.<sup>19</sup> It is upon this realization that members of the petty-bourgeoisie must resist the obvious temptation to become more bourgeois; instead, it must return to the masses and completely identify with them.

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 199.

<sup>17</sup> Fanon from *The Wretched of the Earth* as quoted in Blackley, 200.

<sup>18</sup> Cabral from "Identity and Dignity" as quoted in Blackley, 201.

<sup>19</sup> Chabal, "The Social and Political Thought of Amilcar Cabral: A Reassessment," 40.

It is on this point that Cabral departs most decisively with classical Marxist theory. For he offers a rather original solution to the often-avoided question of how a country is to overcome neocolonialism when the petty-bourgeoisie has a vested interest in maintaining its class advantages. Cabral argues that in order to overcome the opportunistic tendencies of the petty-bourgeoisie it is crucial for the members of this class to “strengthen their revolutionary consciousness”; as Cabral put it, it needed to “commit suicide as a class in order to be reborn as revolutionary workers.”<sup>20</sup> Cabral was aware that this process is slow and uneven, but considered its success or failure to be the determining factor in the revolution. Many have viewed Cabral’s notion of class suicide as overly hopeful and unrealistic. It is important to note, however, that Cabral viewed this development as likely to occur not out of some grand gesture of benevolence and self-sacrifice but because it eventually becomes clear to the petty-bourgeoisie that there are limits to their advantageous position *vis-à-vis* the imperial power(s). This realization, according to Cabral, is what renders the likelihood of class suicide to be much greater.

Cabral’s views on class had a direct bearing on his assessment of what culture was and what role it plays in society and the national liberation struggle. By extension of his assertion that the mode of production is the driving force of history, Cabral believed that culture was not relegated to the superstructure as it is in classical Marxism. Instead, he stressed culture’s reciprocal relation with history and the economic life of a society. In his words:

In effect, culture is at all times the more or less conscious resultant of economic and political activities, the more or less dynamic expression of prevailing social relations in society, on the one hand between man (individually and collectively) and nature, and on the other among individuals, social strata or classes. ... Therefore culture, whatever its ideological or idealist expressions, is an essential element of a people’s history. ... Like history – or rather because it is history – culture has a material basis at the level of the forces of production and of the mode of production. It is rooted in the milieu’s material reality where it develops and reflects the organic nature of society.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Cabral, “The Weapon of Theory,” 110.

<sup>21</sup> Cabral as quoted in Chabal, “The Social and Political Thought of Amílcar Cabral: A Reassessment,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 19, No. 1. (Mar., 1981), 52.

This reciprocity between culture and the economic life of society means that because culture is the product of a people's history, national liberation "is necessarily an act of culture" and the liberation movement "the organized political expression of the culture of a people who are undertaking the struggle."<sup>22</sup> Therefore, rather than being simply a product of culture, a liberation struggle is perforce a *determinant* of culture. Due to the significance of culture, Cabral viewed it as natural that imperial and colonial rulers should seek to annihilate the cultural identity of a colonized population. He offers the colonial ideology of *assimilation*, most often associated with the French, as proof of this phenomenon.

As a result of his materialist view of culture, Cabral also rejected the claims of those associated with Pan-Africanism or the *Negritude* movement, which considered African culture unique and somehow superior to others, namely the West. Indeed, Cabral viewed these uncritical views with suspicion, as there were many areas that he thought African customs and culture were retrogressive. Cabral explains:

It was not a coincidence that theories such as *Negritude* or Pan-Africanism were conceived inside cultural centres outside black Africa.... But this "return to the source" is not in itself an act of struggle against foreign domination, and does not necessarily mean a return to traditions. It is not therefore a voluntary action, but rather the only viable response to the concrete and historical necessity which is determined by the irreconcilable contradiction which opposes the colonized society to the colonial power.<sup>23</sup>

It follows, then, that Cabral considered a "re-Africanization of the mind" as only necessary for the petty-bourgeoisie, the group that had strayed furthest from their true culture as a result of their collusion with the colonial power. This idea is an interesting reversal of the usually paternalistic views of the comprador class, who view themselves as culturally superior to the "lower" classes. Distancing himself from Fanon, Cabral believed firmly that the identity possessed by colonized peoples could never be entirely lost, making national liberation not the quest to create a new identity but asserting that it has always existed and is founded upon a dignity that the colonizers could never fully extinguish.

The purpose of this discussion was to highlight how Cabral's innovative and pragmatic approach to revolution contributed greatly to

---

<sup>22</sup> Cabral as quoted in Young, 289.

<sup>23</sup> Cabral as quoted in Chabal, "The Social and Political Thought of Amilcar Cabral: A Reassessment," 53-54.



tricontinental Marxism. Cabral's contributions can be summarized as having provided the following: a concept of imperialist domination, distinguished by direct political domination (colonialism) and economic dependency (neocolonialism); an emphasis on the petty bourgeoisie as the key to the effective transformation of the relations of production and the political conduct of the African revolution; and, a concept of national liberation struggle in a cultural context.<sup>24</sup> More important, however, is what all of this represents. As Cabral made clear in his 1966 address to the Tricontinental Conference in Havana,

Our own reality – however fine and attractive the reality of others may be – can only be transformed by detailed knowledge of it, by our own efforts, by our own sacrifices ... However great the similarity between our various cases and however identical our enemies, *national liberation and social revolution are not exportable commodities.*<sup>25</sup>

This quotation encapsulates Cabral's primary contribution to tricontinental Marxism: a departure from the revolutionary framework theorized by Marx and dogmatically prescribed by orthodox Marxists such as Stalin during the interwar period. Cabral's rigorous analysis of the social structure in Guinea-Bissau precipitated the reformulation of many tenets of Marxism-Leninism, as they clearly did not comply with the realities in West Africa. He adopted Marxism not as an ideology but as a tool, thus allowing him to assess properly the conditions of Guinea-Bissau in the 1950s and 1960s, just as Marx had keenly observed the particular social relations in nineteenth-century Western Europe. Cabral's worldview, however, is in no way a theoretical panacea. In the end, what Cabral offers is more of a methodology – a strategy that judges each case by its particular specificities – than a rigid model for successful tricontinental revolution. The ever-pragmatic Cabral achieved his insights through a "dialectical unity between action and reflection," based on both endogenous and exogenous considerations.<sup>26</sup> Those in the field of postcolonial studies or involved in tricontinental struggles would be wise to read him with great care.

---

<sup>24</sup> Chilcote, *Amilcar Cabral's Revolutionary Theory and Practice: A Critical Guide* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 1991), 35.

<sup>25</sup> Cabral, "The Weapon of Theory," 92. Emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup> Paulo Freire as quoted in Chilcote, *Amilcar Cabral's Revolutionary Theory and Practice*, 14-15.

## Bibliography

Abdel-Malek, Anouar, *Social Dialectics*, 2 vols. Albany: State University of New York, 1981.

Benot, Yves. "Amilcar Cabral and the International Working Class Movement," *Latin American Perspectives* 41 (Spring 1984): 81-96.

Bienen, Henry. "State and Revolution: The Work of Amilcar Cabral," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 15, No. 4. (Dec., 1977): 555-568.

Blackley, Robert. "Fanon and Cabral: A Contrast in Theories of Revolution for Africa," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 12, No.2. (June, 1974): 191-209.

Cabral, Amilcar. *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches by Amilcar Cabral*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973.

-----*Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts by Amilcar Cabral*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970.

-----*Unity and Struggle*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979.

Chabal, Patrick. *Amilcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

-----"The Social and Political Thought of Amilcar Cabral: A Reassessment," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 19, No. 1. (Mar., 1981):31-56.

Chilcote, Ronald H. *Amilcar Cabral's Revolutionary Theory and Practice: A Critical Guide*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 1991.

-----"The Theory and Practice of Amilcar Cabral: Revolutionary Implications for the Third World," *Latin American Perspectives* 41 (Spring 1984): 3-14.

Davidson, Basil. "On Revolutionary Nationalism: The Legacy of Cabral," *Latin American Perspectives* 41 (Spring 1984): 15-42.

Duarte, Dulce Amada. "The Cultural Dimension in the Strategy for National Liberation: The Cultural Bases of the Unification Between Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau," *Latin American Perspectives* 41 (Spring 1984): 55-66.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1968.

Nzongola-Ntalaja. "Amilcar Cabral and the Theory of the National Liberation Struggle," *Latin American Perspectives* 41 (Spring 1984): 43-54.

Young, Robert J.C. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

# **The Left Movement Needs to Traverse a New Path**

**Daya**

There was a time when the left played a substantial role in the politics of Sri Lanka. The media still refers to the Lanka Samasamaja Party and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka as left parties. They have each two members of parliament and hold ministerial positions in the United Peoples Freedom Alliance government. Although they do not directly indulge in chauvinistic utterances, they act in accordance with the Sinhala chauvinistic standpoint. They act to carry out unconditionally the policies of President Mahinda Rajapaksha's government.

Meantime, the Nava Sama Samaja Party and the United Socialist Party are active outside parliament, in the hope of fulfilling their dream of entering parliament. These two parties pay particular attention to placing a Tamil MP on their platforms. Besides, the Democratic Left Front, although without representation in parliament, is collaborating with President Mahinda Rajapaksha's government.

These so-called 'left parties' inside and outside parliament have Trotskyism and revisionism as their basic ideologies. Lacking in a basic agenda, programme of action or an anti-imperialist programme, they continue with parliamentary politics as a career to advance matters that are of benefit to themselves.

## **Anti-UNP Politics?**

In the 1960s and 1970s the LSSP and the CP used the pretext of opposing the UNP to join the SLFP government. It is true that the UNP was the party of the big capitalists that openly endorsed imperialism and that the SLFP, with its national bourgeois characteristics differed from it. Did that mean that the 'leftists' had accepted its leadership and work under it? It was because they did it that they totally lost their left characteristics. Thus they earned the bad name that they were party to the anti-people actions of the SLFP.

After 1994, the differences between the SLFP and the UNP on the economic policy, foreign policy, and the war against the Tamils became narrow. Even under these conditions, the LSSP and the CP, in order to cling on to their parliamentary representation, continue to put forward the long outdated political line of opposing the UNP.

Minister Tissa Vitharana from the LSSP, who chairs the All Party Representative Committee (APRC) convened to seek a political solution for the national question and DEW Gunasekera from the CP, who is Minister of Constitutional Affairs & National Integration, despite much talk about devolution of power, cannot exceed the limits set out by President Mahinda Rajapaksha. They stood idly by as the Mahinda Rajapaksha government persevered with its war efforts during the past year. It seems that these 'leftists' expect the Tamil people also to bow and scrape before chauvinism in the same way that they do.

## **NGO Politics?**

Some 'leftists', who have been unable to enter parliament on the strength of their parliamentary politics, rely on handouts from NGOs and certain individuals for their survival and conduct protest demonstrations and seminars in keeping with programmes submitted for the purpose of securing funding. Those in the Nava Sama Samaja Party and the United Socialist Party could be included in this category.

Vickramabahu Karunaratne, who waxes eloquent about a left political programme, decorates the stage for his programmes with Tamil National Alliance MPs. This is a manifestation of his 25 years' long spectator politics of 'supporting the struggle of the Tamils'. Showing himself as a mere supporter of the Tamils while being not prepared for any struggle

concerning the problems of the Sinhalese is a demonstration of his political disability.

This is a tactic of portraying himself as a brave man to the Tamils and using their patronage to ensure his political survival. This has reduced his plight to one of receiving assistance from NGOs and confining his activities to NGO programmes for financial considerations. He occasionally carries out protests to match the NGO programmes and the funding provided.

In particular, intervention by the N SSP leaders, in the pretext of providing legal assistance to those kept under detention as 'Sinhala Tigers' and providing assistance to the families of the detainees, has led to serious problems and complications for the detainees; and has severely called into question the integrity of the party.

The insincere and competitive activities of the N SSP leaders reveal that they have got involved in this matter for their own gains. They are misguiding the detainees and the members of their families about the judicial process. They are creating confusion by contradicting the reality through their false utterances and make political gain out of the confusion.

Such disgraceful conduct resulting from enticement by NGO funds is also a tactic to keep the detainees and their families under their control. It is also understood that they are involved in fund-raising activities at home and abroad 'to provide financial aid to the families of the detainees and to meet the fees for the lawyers appearing for the detainees'.

They are overly preoccupied with their competitive activities relating to the legal aspects of the 'Sinhala Tigers' far exceed rather than involve themselves in political activities concerning the budget that has heaped untold burdens upon the people. Why are they unwilling to carry out even a single political activity demanding the release of political detainees?

On another front, the trade union organisations under N SSP control have been weakened because the NGO activity of searching for people who have been abducted and gone missing has taken precedence over trade union work.

Siritunga Jayasuriya, the leader of the United Socialist Party is fully preoccupied with the NGO called the Civil Monitoring Committee (CMC) for searching missing persons. An important personality in that NGO is Mano Ganeshan, MP from Colombo District, elected on the UNP list. Siritunga participates along with the latter in meetings addressed by UNP politicians.

Siritunga is also indulging in politics aimed at the parliament and does it through NGO activities, whereas Mano Ganeshan is doing it to ensure his political survival.

The 'anti-war movement' has now become a captive of Kumar Rupasinghe, a major NGO personality. The 'leftists' referred to above register their opposition to the war according to Kumar Rupasinghe's agenda. He too decorates his stage with Tamil MPs and 'left' leaders.

The NGO programmes are conducted in accordance with the wishes and guidance of those providing the funds. Leading personalities who work for the NGOs receive millions as monthly wages and those at lower levels receive wages well in excess of those of government employees. Participants in their programmes are offered luxury food and accommodation and comfortable transport as well as honoraria for participation.

Meanwhile, the left trade union movement that was developed on the basis of voluntary participation of the people is in ruins. NGO funding from abroad has blunted the social concern, left ideology, dedication and sacrifice of the people. A situation in which trade unions functioned healthily by relying on membership subscriptions and public contributions has been transformed into one where they are dependent on handouts from foreign NGOs.

The Socialist Equality Party which preaches loudly about revolution with a 'holier than thou' attitude while denouncing all others is functioning using funds provided by its international headquarters to carry out its 'Internet revolution'.

Thus all 'left' organisations based on Trotskyite ideology seem to be dependent on foreign NGO handouts for their activities. This is the situation not only at the political party level, but also at the trade union level. The left trade union organisations are in a state today where they cannot unite under or work together with even a normal democratic programme.

There are, nevertheless, several left organisations among the Sinhalese that are unlike the organisations referred to above. But they function as small groups, and are without a mass base or mass activities.

## **Alternative Politics**

War damage is on the rise. The cost of living is unbearable to the people. The 'leftists' are not interested even in a dialogue to develop a minimum democratic programme and an alternative political line based on this situation.

It is only the New Democratic Party that has remained unscathed by the above criticisms. It has avoided parliamentarism, trade unionism and dependence on NGOs and refused to surrender to chauvinism and the forces of capitalism to carry forward mass politics on a revolutionary basis amid serious challenges.

The New Democratic Party has always emphasised the importance of the left and democratic forces working together to mobilise the people on a broad basis against the present fascist war-mongering regime. There is a need for discussion of that purpose. To achieve that, the 'leftists' need to free themselves from the clutches of the NGOs. Otherwise, it will be impossible for them to carry forward mass politics.

The New Democratic Party has always emphasised that, to carry forward alternative politics opposed to domination by the two chauvinistic capitalist parties and against chauvinism that is eating away the country, it is essential to have a properly formulated common programme and united action on the part of the left and democratic forces.

\*\*\*\*\*

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

# Traditions of Class Betrayal

***Mohan***

Sri Lanka holds the unique record for the only successful Trotskyite movement in the world. It was made possible by a unique combination of circumstances in which the country found itself under colonial rule. In many colonies and semi-colonies, where capitalism was a colonial implant, the emergent working class movement soon identified itself with the revolutionary left and became a major force in the struggle for national independence or freedom. The working class led by the left adapted itself to changes in the national and international situations and to emerge as a major player in the politics of the post-colonial era.

In Sri Lanka, the trade union movement preceded the left movement by several decades and its leaders included nationalists and social democrats who later became narrow nationalists or even chauvinists. The LSSP founded in 1935, with justifiable claims to being the first mass political party, was manipulated by elitist individuals with Trotskyite leanings who formed a secret faction called the "T" (meaning Trotsky) group. In 1940, they passed a resolution denouncing the Comintern (the Communist International, led by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and expelled leading members who were supportive of the CPSU and the Soviet Union.

The true political nature of this elitist group came to light with the entry of the Soviet Union into the Second World War. They took a vindictively anti-Soviet position as prescribed by Trotsky and his followers in the Fourth International, which not long after fragmented into disruptive petit-bourgeois factions.



With the attitude of the LSSP leadership being, at best, petit-bourgeois it was not surprising that its trade union following had a large proportion of white-collar workers from the state and mercantile sectors. It should be noted that, in 1964, following the first split based on serious ideological differences, the 'revolutionary' faction, LSSP(R) carried with it the Ceylon Mercantile Union, a private sector white collar union, and after the split in 1977, again on ideological grounds, the 'militant' NSSP walked away with the Government Clerical Service Union.

The Communist Party, the product of the expulsion of several leading members from the LSSP, was late to make headway in the trade union movement. But it overcame the handicap to attract manual workers in the manufacturing and plantation sectors, and had the urban working class in Colombo as a major power base.

The splits in both parties in 1964 were based on the question of the road to socialism. The period of the debates coincided with the, albeit brief, duration of the United Left Front, the first such alliance in the island, where even an electoral alliance involving all the left parties was unknown. More importantly, for the first time in the island's history, the bulk of the working class comprising urban and plantation workers united in a campaign for 21 demands, economic and political, ratified by nearly 800 delegates, representing a million workers.

This challenge shook the SLFP government whose popularity was on the wane at the time, and the government sought to deflect it by a deal with a section of the left that would simultaneously split the ULF and arrest the gathering momentum of the worker's campaign. The LSSP obliged, delivering a death blow to the unity of the left and of the working class.

The split in the LSSP which gave birth to LSSP(R) in 1964 was due to the decision of the leadership to join the government of the national bourgeois SLFP. The debate concerned 'class collaboration' rather than the parliamentary road to socialism. The LSSP, which previously rejected a category called 'national bourgeoisie', got round the difficulty at its conference in 1964 by endorsing the categorisation by its theoretician Hector Abhayavardhana that the SLFP was 'petit bourgeois', thereby opening the door to a united front, enabling its leader NM Perera to walk in to become Minister of Finance.

The debate in the CP was also a part of an international debate on the question of 'peaceful' transition (i.e. the parliamentary road) to socialism, which had commenced even before the formation of the ULF. It led to a formal split between the Marxist Leninists and the revisionists in 1964.

Significantly, the Sri Lankan communists were part of a thoroughgoing debate of the issues relating to socialism and revolution. The debate had a lasting impact on the participants as well as their successors. Committed political work and dedicated trade union activity by N Sanmugathan in the Ceylon Trade Union Federation helped the Marxist-Leninists to secure half the rank and file membership of the CP and the bulk of the trade union membership affiliated to the CTUF when they split with the revisionists led by Keuneman and Mendis.

The all too well known Trotskyite contempt for 'class collaboration' did not stop leading members of the Sri Lankan Trotskyite clan from wooing the bourgeoisie to become partners in government. Philip Gunawardena, the 'father of Trotskyism' did it in 1956 when he led the VLSSP into an alliance (named the MEP) with the national bourgeois SLFP, and again in 1965 when he led his party (renamed the MEP) into an alliance with the comprador bourgeois UNP. The LSSP did it in 1964 and once again preceding the general election of 1970, when it consolidated its earlier alliance as the United Front, which included the revisionist CP.

One should remember that the LSSP and the CP took bold and principled stands on issues that affected the interests of minority nationalities, especially the citizenship acts of 1948, '49 and the official language act of 1956; and this approach survived into the early 1960s. The subsequent degradation of the LSSP and the revisionist CP, especially since 1964, was, however, inevitable.

Alliance with the chauvinistic SLFP, with a bigger electoral base than the LSSP and CP put together, also meant the eventual erosion of the trade union as well as the mass political base of the two. The LSSP and the revisionist CP were also conspicuous by their silence in 1964 when the governments of India and Sri Lanka enacted the Sirima-Shastri Pact, whereby the plight of the more than one million disenfranchised Hill Country Tamils was determined without consultation of the people concerned.

The tendency for local leaders and leading members at the national level to defect to the SLFP for political or personal gain grew with the weakening of the parties as political forces. As late as in 1982, Anil Moonesinghe, GEH Perera, Cholomondely Goonewardena and a few other prominent LSSP personalities, sought to mend fences with the SLFP, in view of the tragic consequences that the rupture in 1975 had for the parliamentary left. They split to form the Sri Lanka Sama Samaja Party; campaigned for the SLFP candidate Hector Kobbekaduwa rather than the

LSSP candidate, Colvin R de Silva in the presidential election of 1982; and in 1983 merged the SLSSP with the SLFP.

The LSSP and the CP, which left the SLFP-led UF government in 1976, formed an alliance, the Socialist United Front (SUF) with 'leftists' from the SLFP (regrouped as the People's Democratic Party and led by Nanda Ellawela) to contest the elections of 1977. The split of the UF and the ill-considered move by the LSSP, CP and the group of dissenters from the SLFP to face the polls as the SUF in 1977 led to a major tragedy for the whole country: the UNP won a historic 5/6 majority in parliament which it used to bulldoze legislation that would deliver the country into the hands of imperialism while pushing the country into a war of national oppression.

The LSSP remained bitter towards the SLFP well into the 1980s. With electoral politics reduced to a farce, crowned by a manipulation that extended the life of parliament by a further six years, the prospects for an electoral alliance was weak until in 1989, when a thaw in attitude, arising from political desperation, led to fresh electoral understanding between the SLFP and the United Socialist Alliance (comprising the LSSP, CP and allies). Since 1994, the LSSP and the CP have become virtual appendages of the SLFP, to lose even the semblance of independence that they displayed in earlier years. Now they dare not defy the SLFP even when it takes morally indefensible positions.

The parliamentary left (especially the LSSP) had been bitter towards the Tamil nationality for its rejection of their candidates at the polls as well as about the decision of the main Tamil political party, the Federal Party, to help the UNP to form a coalition government in 1965 June. The FP was a Tamil bourgeois party and its affinity for the UNP was not surprising. But the attitude of the parliamentary left towards the minority nationalities failed to endear it to a large section of the Tamil nationality, which saw the left as an ally of the SLFP, which was in turn seen, although incorrectly, as a bigger enemy than the UNP by the Tamil nationality.

Rather than address the issues that alienated it from the Tamils, the parliamentary left became increasingly indignant towards the Tamils and even vindictive on occasion. Not only did the two parties join in a demonstration in 1966 opposing legislation that would restore some of the language rights of the Tamils, they also went along with the anti-Tamil sloganeering that took place. This attitude persisted even after the overwhelming electoral success of the SLFP-led UF in 1970, with the LSSP and CP as junior partners.

The parliamentary left was at best a silent witness to injustices to the Tamils by the UF government including the discriminatory standardization of university admissions in 1970, which contributed to the rise of Tamil youth militancy as a political force. The explicitly discriminatory constitution of 1972, authored by the LSSP stalwart Colvin R de Silva, as well as the arrogant attitude of the government provided the pretext for the FP, which was by then politically bankrupt, to revitalise itself as the Tamil United Liberation Front in 1976 and contest the elections on a secessionist platform.

The old parliamentary left had lost political direction since around 1964. Although not ideologically chauvinist (unlike the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, with a clearly chauvinist agenda from the outset, that took precedence over whatever left pretences it had), it consistently failed to take a firm stand against national oppression especially when carried out by its partner in power. It has also failed to resist moves such as privatization of state businesses, liberalization of trade and even the signing of military and logistical agreements with the US. Today it takes cover under "LTTE terrorism" to justify its silence in the face of state terror and violation of a wide range of human and fundamental rights, including those of a number of Sinhalese.

It should be emphasised that the record of the parliamentary left since around 1963 is firstly one of treachery to the class that it once claimed to stand for, then to the minority nationalities whose support it solicited, and now to the whole country by being party to the betrayal of the country to imperialism and the regional hegemonic power, by active as well as passive collaboration with a reactionary, chauvinist government.

The decline of the left movement as a whole since the 1960s could be attributed to the opportunism of the parliamentary left and the rise of chauvinism and Tamil nationalism. One cannot ignore failures on the part of the genuine left, especially in matters of an organizational and tactical nature. But what matters is that the section of the left that was outside the parliamentary political arena and used electoral politics only tactically was able to take a principled stand on many issues.

Although the sections of the left that parted company with the parliamentary opportunists took a principled stand on key issues, the Trotskyite dissenters who formed the LSSP(R) failed to live up to expectations. One reason could be that the LSSP(R) lost its working class base after the split, and the trade union that they controlled was a white collar private sector union, the Ceylon Mercantile Union, with strong petit-bourgeois attitudes. Bitterness towards the LSSP too conditioned its

behaviour: the two LSSP(R) MPs thoughtlessly voted against the SLFP-LSSP government in 1964 on a resolution proposed by the UNP, enabling the UNP to come to power in 1965.

The LSSP(R) later became the Revolutionary Workers' Party, and underwent splits. The faction in control of the CMU, calling itself the Revolutionary Marxist Party, and recognized by a Fourth International, found itself in strange political beds including secret deals with the UNP and an open endorsement of the chauvinistic JVP for which it secured recognition by its parent Fourth International. Other fragments of the LSSP(R) have been reduced to organisations only in name, preaching 'sacredly pure' versions of Trotskyism and operating on platforms provided by foreign patrons, while denouncing all and sundry. The best known fragment of this tradition is the 'Healyite' Socialist Equality Party with no significant popular base.

The LSSP underwent a further split at the end of 1977, following its humiliation at the polls in 1977. Although a dissent group existed in the LSSP following the electoral success of the United Front (the SLFP-LSSP-CP coalition) in 1970 and there had been a number of expulsions from the LSSP since 1972, the group, calling itself the 'Vama Samasamaja, left the LSSP in December 1977 to found the Nava Samasamaja Party which continued to split ever after. Loyalties to international Trotskyite sponsors were decisive in the split of 1982 and the formation of the Socialist Worker group; and in the one in 1989 and the formation of the United Socialist Party. Further splits were for a variety of reasons including personalities, and occasionally policy.

Several founder leaders of the NSSP have since abandoned politics, some to become advocates of globalisation, and one to be a Sinhala Buddhist ideologist. The NSSP parliamentarian Vasudeva Nanayakkara, following 'expulsion' from the NSSP realigned himself closer to the LSSP and the 'left' of the SLFP, while retaining his identity as Democratic Left Front. The NSSP tradition, like that of the LSSP, appears to be driven by a desire to secure for the leaders a place in the parliamentary political system; and the more isolated the leaders are from the masses the more obsessed they seem to be with electoral politics.

The UNP government deliberately provoked a strike in the Railway Department in 1980, which developed into a premature general strike, and the government used it as pretext to crack down on the trade union movement. The strike was crushed, nearly 40,000 workers were sacked, and the LSSP trade union base was smashed. The general strike, it should be noted was launched at a time when the left was in disarray, the trade

union movement lacked will and class solidarity, and the SLFP was demoralized. Matters of alliances against a strong enemy and the timing and tactics of struggles continue to dog the Trotskyites.

The Sri Lankan Trotskyite approach to united fronts has fluctuated between abject surrender and opportunist manipulation. The LSSP (along with the revisionist CP) amply demonstrated the former tendency since 1964, with the exceptional spurt of protest in 1975 that blew in their face and later bonded them even more closely with the SLFP.

The approach of the NSSP has consistently been manipulative. NSSP's rejection of the JVP as chauvinist and being at the receiving end of JVP violence in 1988-89 did not prevent it from currying favour with the JVP to secure a parliamentary seat. Despite being let down by the JVP once in the early 1990s, the leader of the NSSP allowed himself to be fooled again in 1999 by the JVP (whose presidential candidate he supported that year, hailing the JVP as a left party).

The JVP used him to destroy the New Left Front, formed in 1998, that breathed in fresh hope for left unity which had suffered a series of disappointments since 1963, since the NLF was a potentially strong challenge to JVP's claim to being the main, although bogus, left party. Having achieved its purpose, the JVP treated the NSSP with the contempt that it deserved.

Subsequent efforts by the NSSP, USP, DLF, LSSP and CP (the last two then out of power briefly) to form an alliance fell apart as soon as parliamentary elections were announced. This shows the extent to which parliamentary politics dominates left thought in this country.

The NSSP and the USP have since degenerated into organizations that depend on handouts from INGOs, and tailor their political activities to suit the programmes approved by their sponsors. This has also meant that they are out of touch with the political reality of the country and address only issues that are of personal and monetary benefit.

Despite seemingly principled pronouncements on the right to self-determination of the Tamil nationality, these and other Trotskyite groups fail to appreciate the complexity of the national question and lack the interest to address the concerns of other oppressed minority nationalities and national minorities. This could be a problem inherent to Trotskyism, since the Trotskyites, even when they were principled and stubborn opponents of the Citizenship and Official Language Acts, did not show a good grasp of the national question.

The approach of the Marxist Leninists, in contrast, has been far more realistic, multi-faceted, comprehensive and keeping class and class struggle in sight, locally as well as internationally, while addressing a range of other contradictions without being blinded by the dominant contradiction.

Left movements across the world have suffered splits during critical moments in history, and the Sri Lankan Marxist Leninists too had split since 1964. Left deviationism and right opportunism do not go away except in the course of revolutionary struggle. But what distinguishes the Marxist Leninists from Trotskyites is their ability to emerge ideologically and politically intact from the crises and splits, and capable of forming broad-based alliances to combat the main enemy at every turn and on specific issues, without compromising their fundamental position.

The failure of the Trotskyites in Sri Lanka has been explained in terms of its 'hybrid nature' by Mandel, leader of a Trotskyite international. He points to the political backwardness of the vast majority of the cadres and to its conduct more akin to a social-democratic party. It would seem that the LSSP failed because it was not truly Trotskyite. But one now begins to wonder if it was the elite class background of the leadership that attracted the LSSP to Trotskyism.

Some of the ideological problems that the LSSP and its successors derive from inadequate attention to the national question: the LSSP never recognized the Tamils as a nationality, whereas the CP did at the outset. Today the NSSP accepts the Tamils as a nationality but hardly extends the national question beyond the Sinhala-Tamil conflict. This is in sharp contrast with the position taken by the Marxist Leninists of the New Democratic Party and other smaller organizations.

Obsession with Stalin has been another problem. Unable to explain the world using Trotskyism, let alone develop a vision to change it, there is a nearly universal tendency to jump any bandwagon, as long as it is not seen to be 'Stalinist'. The loyalty lasts as long as the cause appears to be winning; when confronted with likely failure ready-made theories pop up to explain the failure to be the result of failing to follow the Trotskyite line, and of course to denounce the now loser. Parallels with the Bolshevik revolution and at times the Paris commune are a fetish; and at times go as far as name-calling based on those experiences.

Khrushchev was a great hero until his downfall as was Gorbachev three decades later: their condemnation of Stalin was so meritorious that what they did to the Soviet Union, the international left and national liberation struggles became irrelevant. At one time several Trotskyites

hailed China's Cultural Revolution by invoking a link between the notion of ceaseless revolutionary struggle and 'permanent revolution', a misnomer attributed to Trotsky. Fidel Castro too was a hero for a while, until his loyalty the Soviet Union was too strong to stomach. Salvador Allende was another abandoned hero after overthrow by Pinochet. Now it is time for Hugo Chavez, the Bolivarian Revolution and Socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to be adored.

Even the most thorough study of Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong thought is no guarantee for a correct understanding of specific problems and finding valid solutions for them. It is through practice that any correct position is arrived at. In revolution, learning means learning from past and present revolutionary practice and, above all, from the people. Parroting lessons of history is not learning from history, and dogmatism is the biggest obstacle to learning.

The story of Trotskyism in Sri Lanka has been one of ceaseless swinging between the extremes of ultra-left dogmatism and unprincipled pragmatism. The net result has been losing sight of reality, frustration and, finally, betrayal of the declared cause.

Individuals do not join a left party after they gain a thorough knowledge of Marxism; one's understanding of left politics and Marxism develops through practice, discussion and debate. Opportunist politics in its different forms as we have seen in Sri Lanka has several sources. A lack of thoroughgoing debates concerning the correct political line characterises revisionist politics. Alienation from the masses and aversion for mass politics are other important factors.

Even the most dedicated Marxist Leninist party could fall victim to right opportunist or left extremist errors when it loses touch with the masses and fails to take the masses into their confidence. Big prices have been paid for seemingly minor lapses, and there is a need for constant vigil against erroneous tendencies. Thus the ideological struggle and the struggle about the correct line are not things that are carried out outside a Marxist Leninist party but also within it, as a way of ensuring that the party remains true to its revolutionary cause and to the masses.

\*\*\*\*\*



## ***NDP Diary***

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

## **On Reviving the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to Solve the National Question**

***28<sup>th</sup> January 2008***

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party, issued the following statement on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party regarding the President and the Government of Sri Lanka seeking to adopt suitable aspects of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to find a political solution to the national question.

The contents of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution that came into being in 1987 as a consequence of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 are out-dated, and rejected by the passage of time. Experiences of the past twenty years have shown that the national question that has been transformed into war cannot be resolved using the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. For the President and the Government to claim that adopting aspects of that amendment that are suitable to them will be a first step towards a political solution is as meaningless as pouring water to fill a pot with a hole at the bottom, and constitutes a fraud.

The New Democratic Party emphasizes that rather than make such vain attempts effort should be made to find an acceptable solution that befits the demands of the national question in the context of objective political reality.

The truth and reality that emerge from the thirty years of struggle by the Tamils and the war imposed on them is that a just political solution should be found for the national question. But no sincere initiative has been taken in that direction. None of the chauvinistic capitalist governments or their leaders has come forward to do that. What have gone on are merely acts of deception and pretence. The President's decision claiming to implement the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment is only a continuation of that pattern. It appears that

even that decision is not meant to be implemented fully or wholeheartedly, but only to achieve what suits the chauvinistic ulterior motives.

It is an alternative to deny and reject the aspirations and rights of the Tamil and Muslim people in the North-East, comprising their traditional homeland. The New Democratic Party does not in any way endorse it. The truth is that the President and the Government are intent upon pleasing the extreme chauvinist forces of the South and Indian hegemonic forces seeking regional dominance and to implement nominally and partially the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment with the intention of escalating the war with their support.

*SK Senthivel*

General Secretary, New Democratic Party.

### ***Puthiya Poomi Statement***

## **Demand the Release of Comrade Govindan Kutti**

***January 2008***

The Editorial Board of *Puthiya Poomi* issued the following statement in the January-February issue of *Puthiya Poomi*, the Tamil monthly journal of the New Democratic Party.

Comrade Govindan Kutti (age 65 years), Editor of People's March monthly published from Eranakulam, Kerala was arrested on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2007 and is being held in detention. Comrade Govindan Kutti is a Marxist Leninist who pointed an accusing finger at the old social structure comprising inequality, exploitation and cruel repression, and the Indian ruling classes that safeguard it.

The People's March journal edited by him provided revolutionary education to the people. It directed them to mobilise against injustice and oppression. It exposed the oppression of the millions upon millions of toiling Indian masses by the imperialists together with the Indian ruling classes, and called upon the masses to struggle against them.

It is in fear of this that the Indian ruling classes threw Comrade Govindan Kutti into prison. The Indian 'democratic' rulers who wax eloquent about democracy, freedom of expression and freedom of the media have imprisoned the editor of a journal that speaks up for the people and are treating him cruelly.

When Comrade Govindan Kutti went on hunger strike in protest of his arrest, prison officials tied up his limbs in an attempt to force fed him. When he defied them to continue with his hunger strike they admitted him to hospital. Since then he is held prisoner in the Veyyur Central Jail of Kerala. The bail application submitted on his behalf has been rejected by the High Court.

Human rights organisations and journalists' organisations have strongly condemned his arrest, which is also receiving international condemnation.

*Puthiya Poomi* and its Editorial Board strongly denounce the arrest and detention of Comrade Govindan Kutti, and demand that he be released unconditionally.

## ***International Solidarity People's Forum***

# **Cuba National Day and Anti-Imperialism Day**

***1st January 2008***

The International People's Solidarity Forum organised a Liberation Cultural Evening and Getting Together on 1st January 2008 to celebrate the 49th Cuba National Day and Anti-Imperialism Day.

The events of the cultural evening were revolutionary and in opposition to cultural degeneration caused by imperialist globalisation.

Comrade S Panneerselvam, Member of the Walapane Regional Council and Hill Country Regional Secretary of the New Democratic Party, chaired the event. Special addresses were delivered by Comrade Vasudeva Nanayakara, leader of the Democratic Left Front and the Leader of the Opposition of the Colombo Municipal Council and by Comrade E Thambiah, Central Coordinator of the International People's Solidarity Forum. (See related article in this issue).

"Friends of the Future" organisation staged the programme "Circle of Comradeship" in Sinhala and sang revolutionary songs. T Mruthula recited the poem 'Socialism is the Alternative' and song criticising globalisation, in Tamil. T Prithvi sang the song 'In Revolution, Setbacks are Temporary' in Tamil. T Pradeesh sang the Anthem of International Peace. A poetry forum titled "Why for us?" was held under the chairmanship of Comrade S Panneerselvam.

Persons identified for important contributions to the anti-imperialist cause were honoured with a red shawl and anti-imperialist honours. Comrade Vasudeva Nanayakara was honoured for his contribution to anti-imperialist politics and Comrade Siva Sooriyanarayanamy draped him with the red shawl. Comrade Sunanda Pushpakumara was honoured for his contribution to anti-imperialist art and Comrade S Thevarajah draped him with the red shawl. Comrade GS Manoharan was honoured for his contribution to anti-imperialist media writing and Comrade S Panneerselvam draped him with the red shawl.

Travelling artists led by Comrade Sunanda Pushpakumara sang songs from their programmes. The programme was compéred by Comrades K Thiruchelvam and Kanthi Manamendra. Comrade I Loganathan delivered the vote of thanks; and the programme concluded with a tea party.

### ***Memorial Meeting***

## **Commemoration of Comrade KA Subramaniam**

***15<sup>th</sup> December 2007***

The 18<sup>th</sup> in the series of Comrade KA Subramaniam Memorial Lectures was held at the Ramakrishna Mission Lecture Hall on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2007 to honour the memory of Comrade KA Subramaniam, founder General Secretary of the New Democratic Party.

The meeting organised by the Comrade KA Subramaniam Memorial Committee was chaired by Comrade S Thevarajah who delivered the address from the chair, which was followed by a welcome address by Comrade N Raveendran.

The memorial lecture titled “Two Sides of Globalisation: Horror of War and Cruelty of Poverty” was delivered by Comrade E Thambiah, National Organiser of the New Democratic Party. (The talk published in full in *Puthiya Poomi* Jan-Feb. 2008 is to be reproduced in translation in the forthcoming issue of New Democracy).

\*\*\*\*\*

## 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.

Payments may be made to:

***S Thevarajah, account number 452868***

***Bank of Ceylon, Supermarket Branch***

***Colombo 11, Sri Lanka***

Please mention 'Publications Fund' in the covering note attached to the payment. Address for correspondence:

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

## ***Sri Lankan Events***

### **The road to the burial of the CFA**

On 16<sup>th</sup> January 2008, the war that began to unfold in early 2006 cast aside its tattered mask called the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA). It is widely believed that the move to formally ditch the CFA was due to pressure from the JVP whose support the government needed for the safe passage of its budget. Although the government narrowly won the budget vote after its first reading and there was speculation about some of its recent partners in power as well as its own MPs crossing over, the risk of defeat at the crucial second reading was low. The government knew that the JVP, which voted against the budget at the first reading and threatened to vote against it at the second reading, will not like to defeat the budget if it meant facing the polls and risking its thirty-nine seats (less one defection) in parliament.

The government, nevertheless, took its precautions. Federal Party MP Kanagendiran's forfeiture of his seat owing to prolonged absence was announced just before the second reading. An armed group in the Batticaloa District held to ransom relatives of three MPs of the same party, with a death threat in the event of the MPs taking part in the budget vote. Despite the crossing over of the four remaining Muslim Congress MPs, and one from the SLFP in protest against corruption, the government won the vote comfortably, thanks to abstention by the JVP MPs.

Pompous prediction by the UNP's about defeating the budget and going to the polls proved to be empty talk. The JVP, however, lost credibility in the eyes of the public for abstaining after declaring that the budget was anti-people. Strangely, neither the UNP nor the JVP protested against the massive increase in defence expenditure, which is the main cause for heaping economic burdens on the people.

The FP, rather than register its protest about the unethical means used to keep out three of its MPs, by refusing to take part in the vote and asking other political parties to do the same, unless all MPs were able to vote free of threat, chose to take part in the voting. Had the FP stood firm in its

protest that would have been a test of the will of the UNP and other political parties to uphold democratic principles.

The JVP is said to have demanded from the President, as its pound of flesh, that the CFA be scrapped and the size of the cabinet reduced. The first seems to have been done promptly, since the CFA did not make any material difference to the pursuit of war; but the cabinet reshuffle, for want of a face-saving formula for the far too many ministers, may take time.

## **Personal security for parliamentarians**

The blame for the reduction of Sri Lankan parliamentary democracy to horse trading of the lowest form should be shared by a succession of governments. What happened in the past two years was a logical consequence of a process that began in the late 1970s. Senior members of political parties switch loyalties with greater ease than the proverbial eel between fish and snake. Explanations given by leaders of parties like the CWC, Hill Country People's Front and the Muslim Congress for their somersaults would insult the intelligence of even a halfwit.

The system today thrives on the greed of politicians, which makes it possible to tempt them with positions that bring money and influence, their corruption, which makes them vulnerable to blackmail, and their fear for their lives, which makes them vulnerable to threats. In the carrot and stick regime of governments, withdrawal of personal security is a most effective stick for the government to get politicians into line, in a climate of fear where withdrawal of security is tantamount to death threat.

When elected members of parliament cannot for any reason act according to their political conviction, parliamentary democracy is stripped of the last shred of fabric that covers the nakedness of its bankruptcy

## **Killings and sufferings**

The warring sides claim that their targets are their respective enemies. But the real victims are the ordinary people. The loss of life of ordinary Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims in the quarter century of war far exceeds that of combatants. If displacement, loss of property and loss of livelihood, let alone injury and disablement by war, are added, the suffering of the ordinary people will far exceed the losses suffered by combatants.

The war in its present phase is even wicked than in earlier phases, with the use of deadlier bombs, missiles and anti-personnel devices. Neither the government nor the LTTE could claim that they are not responsible for attacks on civilians, intentionally or otherwise. Both sides are guilty of punishing civilians to avenge military defeats, and the safety of the people has not been a matter of priority.

The country is losing in every way; and the working people and the poor are carrying the burden of war. Yet the government has succeeded in presenting the war as one against terrorism, sidelining a meaningful solution to the national question and in fact aggravating it, and in persuading the Sinhala public that a military victory over the LTTE, and by implication that a military solution to the national question, is possible. The LTTE, given its authoritarian style of work, has not adopted the line of mass struggle and continues to rely more on arms.

The risk of foreign meddling is growing and we know the price of peace imposed by foreign interests. It is time for the left, progressive and democratic forces among the Sinhalese to take the initiative to revive the peace movement that once brought temporary sanity to this country.

## **Media-based NGO mass movement?**

Some multi-national corporations have bigger budgets than medium-size countries and manpower greater than that of many a government. At home, we have an NGO magnate trying to build a “mass movement” called *Prayathna* by regular media advertisement. This media-based “mass movement” seems to have far bigger financial resources than any genuine mass movement in this country ever. Recently, several newspapers carried half-page ads wishing the NGO magnate a happy birthday.

Is this the kind of activity for which INGO funding is intended? Such funds enable local agents of the INGOs to buy people, including some yet to be discredited left leaders whose bankruptcy has made them political orphans dependent on NGO handouts. Meantime, a few other local NGOs too are increasingly involved in politics, promoting the agenda of foreign political interests, and seeking to sponsor candidates at elections.

Knowing the role of NGOs in undermining social stability that has come to light in many Third World countries and some of the former Soviet Union, it is important that the people are warned about dubious NGO activities.

\*\*\*\*\*



## **Water for Thirst**

### ***VT Elangovan***

The noon's sun is blazing bright  
Some muted hearts are burning hot  
There is water aplenty within the well  
But hands itch, unable to fetch

The village has but just a few wells  
Water to drink lies therein  
They prevent folks from drawing it  
See, who are the miserable ones

It is enough of a life of moan and groan  
It is enough of a life of hiding away  
Unite in strength like a rope well spun  
Join in battle to win salvation

Strike to destroy the system of caste  
Swear to secure equality for all  
People unite to end this folly  
Of men denying the rights of men

*[Written in 1978;  
Translated from Karumpanaikal, anthology of VT Elangovan]*

## ***International Events***

### **Indonesia: Death of a Mass Murderer**

The notorious Indonesian dictator Suharto, who seized power in a military coup in 1966 that massacred at least 500,000 communists and other political dissidents, and arrested, tortured and detained without trial for decades hundreds of thousand others, died on 26 January. He was also responsible for the invading and annexing East Timor and forcing 200,000 East Timorese to die in civil war and famine. His 32-year regime, marked by severe repression, systematic violation of human rights, and massive corruption and loot was ended in 1998 by a students' and people's movement.

From his ascent to power to his overthrow, and even after, Suharto was an imperialist favourite. Like Pinochet of Chile, he pleaded age and illness to live his last years in comfort. The US hails him as a historic leader who led the country to remarkable economic development, and President Yudhuyono says that although he made 'mistakes' his service to Indonesia was exemplary.

There is no doubt that Suharto served imperialism and its agents well by submitting to the IMF and World Bank and enabling his cronies to become billionaires by annihilating communists and looting the country. Imperialism is sorry for the passing away of a role model ruler, and the rest of the world that he escaped punishment for his horrendous crimes against humanity.

### **Confronting US Imperialism in Somalia**

UN reports say that the worst catastrophe in Africa is not that in Kenya or Darfur but that in Somalia. Fifteen years since the US invasion of 1993, which ended in a humiliating defeat for the US forces, Somalia has more refugees than any other country. Unlike in 1993, US Army helicopters do not hover over Mogadishu and US tanks do not patrol the streets; but the US is back in Somalia. The US forces carry out attacks inside the country; CIA agents operate in Mogadishu while unmanned aircraft circle the city to gather intelligence; Somalis at home and in neighbouring Kenya are interrogated by US officials. The US and the Ethiopian forces of occupation, expectably, have warlords with criminal records as allies.

To the US, control over Somalia is access to massive untapped oil reserves and uranium deposits, control over a strategic location where the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea converge, ability to monitor ships passing through the Suez Canal, and advantage of proximity to the Middle East and Sudan to launch military strikes against perceived Islamist targets. Plans already exist to make the strategic city of Berbera the base of the newly launched Africom (Africa Command) of the US. It is in this context that the illegal Christmas 2006 invasion of Somalia by Ethiopian forces with the direct support of American air power should be seen. It is part of US militarist agenda to complete unfinished business from 1993.

The people of Somalia have a proud history of resisting imperialism. In 1960, they defeated European colonizers to win national independence. However, in the early 1980s the US gained foothold in Somalia by propping up militarily and financially the dictator Mohammed Said Barre, and used it to destabilize the region. The overthrow of Barre by the Somali people was followed by anarchy, with the country torn apart between warlords. Order returned with the Union of Islamic Courts gaining power. During its brief period in power it restored peace and security in much of southern Somalia. The Somali people rallied to defeat US imperialism in 1993, and resisted US-backed efforts up to 2006 using warlords to topple the UIC regime. It was then that the Ethiopians were summoned, to place in power a puppet war-lord regime. Somali resistance against the ongoing occupation will not stop short of stamping out the remaining vestiges of imperialism. The Somali Diaspora too is stepping up resistance to US imperialism, through peace rallies in the US and Canada.

Ethiopia, which waged a proxy war for the US, has had to commit more forces to control the occupied land. But the Ethiopian "surge" begun in October 2007 failed to deliver. Meantime, the insurgency in Mogadishu has grown and keeps growing, and trouble is brewing in Ethiopia for the US-backed "Christian" regime presiding over a Muslim-Christian population. If the war in Somalia does not end soon, with Ethiopia pulling out gracefully, implications for Ethiopia could be civil war as well as war with Eritrea, which is supportive of the liberation struggle of the Somali people.

## **India: The Continuing Shame of Gujarat**

Despite factional splits in the ranks of the BJP in Gujarat and the indictment of Narendra Modi, on the eve of the polls, for his regime's role in the Gujarat genocide and custodial killings, Modi comfortably won his third term as Chief Minister. The defeat of the Congress is the result of the

failure of the United Progressive Alliance government at the centre to deal with the politics of communal hatred and neo-liberal dispossession of the rural and urban poor, the tribal people and Muslims. The performance of the left was poor. The CPI(M) and the CPI failed to make an impact although, encouragingly, the CPI (ML) Liberation, which entered the scene only three years ago, made headway in regions where it led the struggles of the tribal poor against dispossession of land and resources.

The victory of the Hindutva fascist BJP, seen against a background of growing communal violence across India, threatens peace in not just Gujarat but the whole country. During 2007, anti-Muslim riots that led to death or serious injury of Muslims, sometimes on several occasions, in cities in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Kashmir, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamilnadu involved the BJP and allied organizations. The violence, although based on trivial issues and insignificant compared to the organized violence of several years ago in Bombay and Gujarat, cannot be ignored. Orissa meantime has become notorious for anti-Christian violence, again involving the same forces of communal intolerance. Now, anti-northerner hatred, sponsored by the Shiv Sena and its breakaway rival Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, has revived of Maharashtra's reputation for ethnic and religious intolerance.

While communal forces aggressively exploit religion and ethnicity for political ends, most political parties through their silence are consenting to their continuation. If such dangerous trends are not challenged through mass politics, they will further divide India for the benefit of the exploiting classes and the vultures of imperialist globalisation.

The dismal failure of the Congress to combat communal fascism led by the BJP should be interpreted as a call for a credible left movement that can confront the communal forces by mobilising the poor and the dispossessed. That task should transcend electoral political considerations.

## **Nepal: Constitutional Assembly Elections**

Events running up to the Constituent Assembly (CA) election, scheduled for 10<sup>th</sup> April, have altered the political line-up in Nepal. The Central Committee of the CPN-Maoist, confident of overwhelming success at the elections, announced the initiation of the process to unify the party with CPN-United, decision to seek unification with the CPN-Marxist, and the possibility of an electoral alliance with other parties to make a seven-party alliance.

The Nepali Congress, led by Koirala and known to be controlled by the powers in New Delhi, is vacillating on the question of the future of the royalty, at the risk of being isolated at the elections. On 4<sup>th</sup> February, the disgraced King Gyanendra, speaking to Japanese media, expressed displeasure over the decision of the parliament to abolish the monarchy, claiming that it was not the majority view of the people and that only the Nepali people had the right to decide the fate of the monarchy.

Dr Baburam Bhattarai, senior leader of the CPN-Maoist, charged that royalists and foreign forces are being hurdles to a smooth election, and warned that if the election is postponed, that could lay the ground for emergence of a dictator, and called for unity among nationalists, democrats and patriots to save the country from disintegration and foreign interference, as witnessed in the Terai region in the early months of 2007, where ethnic conflict was stirred between oppressed nationalities.

## **Pakistan: Killing Democracy**

Benazir Bhutto's assassination plunged Pakistan into crisis. While people simmered with rage, the Musharraf regime falsely claimed that it was an accident. Bush, not missing his chance to justify his 'war on terror', rushed to declare that the assassination was by 'extremists'. The Musharraf regime echoed it with the claim of evidence of an al-Qaeda plot to kill Benazir.

The global media has anointed Benazir as a 'martyr for democracy', while the cowardly and condemnable killing united her sharpest critics in denouncing her death. But let that not fool us into seeing in her death a heroic sacrifice for the cause of democracy. Her return to Pakistan was part of a US-brokered deal. In return for reprieve from corruption charges, she, with a democratic Prime Ministerial façade, was to bail out the Musharraf regime besieged by a growing pro-democracy movement. Bush's fairytale that 'evil Islamic terrorists' targeted her because she represented the values of the enlightened West will not find buyers inside Pakistan or elsewhere. Instead it is becoming clear that it was her part in a US-scripted drama that put her life on the line, and many in Pakistan believe that the military-intelligence establishment of Pakistan was behind the assassination.

Benazir was no icon of democracy. Her role was to legitimise a US-approved dictatorship for Pakistan. The democracy that she and the Pakistan Peoples Party practiced had feudal and dynastic features characteristic of many South Asian political parties. The tradition

continues and her young son has inherited the party leadership, while her husband remains executor of the estate.

The assassination was, no doubt, a blow to the original US plan. But the US will capitalise on the situation following the humiliating defeat of Musharraf, which can make him a liability. The US strategic design to send troops into the Pashtun territories claiming that they are a 'safe haven' for the al-Qaeda will go ahead, with covert or overt support from India, its new ally, irrespectively of whoever is president or prime minister of Pakistan. And the outcome of the US elections will make no essential difference to the US plans to use Pakistan as a base for its 'war on terror'.

The democracy that the people of Pakistan are striving for is something more meaningful and enduring, and can be achieved only when the US leaves Pakistan to itself and its stooges in the armed forces step aside.

## **Palestine: All Glory to the People of Gaza**

Although Israel and its imperialist backers claim that Hamas militants blew up parts of the fence, part steel sheet and part concrete, dividing Egypt from the Gaza Strip on 23<sup>rd</sup> January to end the sealing off of Gaza since last summer, what is ignored is the mass participation in the event. The people played an active role in bringing down the fence and in an act of mass defiance of Israel, which wants Gaza isolated, and of Egypt, which sealed the border to keep them out. Having failed in their mission, officials from the two countries consoled themselves that what happened was not all bad. The forced opening is a political victory for Hamas and an embarrassment for Palestinian President Abbas, now seen as a partner with Israel and the United States who was complicit in the closing of Gaza.

Abbas, having failed the Palestinians of Gaza, by not being firm against the blockade and not acting to bring in relief when it mattered, is now desperate to wrest control of Gaza from Hamas, hardly realising that the victory of the masses in Gaza is already undermining his position in the West Bank. What the future holds for Palestine depends on whether Hamas and patriotic sections of the PLO who resent the shady deals between the PLO leadership and the unholy US-Israel-Egypt trinity, and other progressive political forces could unite the masses of Palestine against their Israeli oppressors and the imperialist master behind Israel.

\*\*\*\*\*

*(continued from inside front cover)*

But we,  
Have no mind to pause,  
Put down the load  
Relax  
Refresh ourselves  
And then proceed.

Nor are we wise enough  
To unpack the sack  
Throw out the trash,  
All the unwanted stuff,  
Pick up only precious pearls and gems  
For the rest of the way.

Bored, dejected  
We creep along.  
While other citizens of the world  
Compress their luggage into minipacks,  
Work wonders with their bare hands,  
Reap success after success,  
Exercise critical acumen,  
Craftsmanship, technical excellence,  
We, poor lot,  
A god-forsaken people  
Keep on creeping—  
Never stop.

We are not smart enough  
To throw out the unwanted,  
Preserve our pearls and gems  
Our heavy burden  
Is twenty centuries old!

In the name of culture we carry  
A burden twenty centuries old

*(Translation by author of Tamil original circa 1960)*

## **In this Cul-de-Sac** **Ahmad Shamlu**

To make sure  
You have not said:  
"I love you,"  
They smell your breath.

They even smell your heart  
Trying times are these, my darling.

They flog love  
Tied to the post of the cul-de-sac  
We must hide love in the closet.

In this serpentine maze  
This crooked cold corner  
They feed the fire  
With poems and songs

Thinking, too, is risky.  
Those who, late at night, knock on the door,  
Are there to kill the lamp.  
We must hide the light in the closet.

Then there are the butchers  
Stationed at all cross-roads,  
Armed with a block and a bloody cleaver.  
Trying times these are, my darling.

Surgically,  
They plant smiles on lips,  
And songs in the mouths.  
We must hide joy in the closet.

On lilies and lilacs,  
They roast the canaries.  
Trying times these are, my darling.

Drunk with victory, the Devil,  
Celebrates our wake.  
We must hide God in the closet.

*This poem by the well known Iranian poet was translated by Irai Bashiri*

Published by E Thambiah of 47, 3rd Floor, CCSM Complex, Colombo 11  
Phone: 011 2435117; Fax: 011 2473757; E-mail: newdemocraticparty@hotmail.com

Website: www.ndpsl.org

Printed at the Gowri Printers, Colombo 13