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*Poetry: Devorah Major, Tilakaratna Silva*

# Calling the dead

*Devorah Major*

I start to read the names and ages  
Abed whose name means worship  
was a year younger than my son  
and the forgiving Samih  
perhaps his one year old child  
the baby of seven of the Jarad family  
who died together on a Friday  
day of prayer as a tank  
bombarded their home  
Amjad most glorious one  
was as old as my grandson  
did he too have a smile  
that lit the musty crevices  
of a jaded cynic's heart  
he died on a day of play  
with his teen aged brothers  
probably holding him close  
telling him not to fear  
as they stifled their own trembling  
and death screeched through their home  
the names are like bird songs  
as i read them out loud  
Salam of peace  
Zeinab the fragrant plant  
Alaa exalted and full of faith  
Ranim at eighteen months  
her name is itself  
a musical tone  
maybe found in the lullaby her  
father sang as he rocked her in his arms  
that night when they died together  
my tears flow salt full and bitter

*(Continued on inside back cover)*

## *Editorial*

The outcome of elections to the Uva Provincial Council suggests that the 'victorious war against terrorism' has passed its sell by date in the South. While the UNP and the JVP have recovered much of their respective vote banks that they forfeited to the UPFA in the wake of war victory, they still have some way to go before they can defeat the government in any forthcoming election. The fortunes of the Democratic Party of the former army commander Sarath Fonseka have receded faster than they advanced in elections held six months ago to the Western and North Western Provincial Councils. That was to be expected since the party had nothing significant to offer the electorate in political terms, and its earlier modest success was mainly due to frustration among UNP and JVP supporters. Although part of the decline in support for the government was because the pro-government swing in the wake of the military victory was not sustainable for long, the message of the results of Uva is that support for the government is fading owing to failing economic performance, harder living conditions, rising crime and visible corruption.

The electoral setback to the ruling party was against a background of extensive abuse of state resources during the elections and indifference of the Commissioner of Elections towards breach of election laws by the ruling party including violence directed at its rivals which continued even after the results were announced. It is not certain that the abuse of state resources by the government had a negative impact on the voters, but the signs are that the government is unlikely to secure a majority if a general election is held in the near future even with abuse of state resources on the recent scale.

Thus the eyes of all political parties are on the presidential election, which is likely to be held early next year. The ruling clan knows that holding a general election before the presidential election risks defeat.

Also, holding the presidential election as early as possible will deny the main opposition parties time to build on their recent electoral recovery.

Former Chief Justice Sarath N Silva recently declared that, since the incumbent was elected before the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment which waived the restriction on the number of terms of the President, he is ineligible to contest for a third term; and the UNP and the JVP have joined the chorus. But they know as anyone should that in the event of a legal challenge to the incumbent's contesting for a third term, the final decision will rest with the now even more politicized Supreme Court. In case of doubt, the government still has the required majority to further amend the constitution. Thus the question of legality is hardly an issue except by way of causing some embarrassment to President Rajapaksa.

A positive outcome of the Uva elections is that it has sealed the fate of the much speculated "common presidential candidate" who would fight the election on the single issue of ridding the country of its executive presidency. Even if a common candidate who is acceptable to the major political parties is identified, a credible manifesto based on the central issue is evolved and a campaign strategy is put in place, the success of the candidate requires persuading a majority that getting rid of the executive presidency will heal the ailments of the country. Prospects for that approach have always been poor since the people have seen Presidents who got elected by pledging the removal of the executive presidency only consolidated and abused presidential power more than their predecessors.

Even if a genuine individual is elected and acts to curtail the powers of the President, one cannot wish away the powerful anti-democratic forces that have developed under thirty six years of presidential rule and have severely damaged democratic institutions. Thus authoritarian rule will at best change hands but not be eliminated. The threat of military rule backed by ethno-religious fascism is real, and will be strong in the climate of chaos following the fall of a once mighty incumbent. Succession by a common candidate without a political base will tempt those who have enjoyed power for long to strike hard at every aspect of democracy.

Some imagine that hope for democracy lies in electing a person other than Mahinda Rajapaksa, which in effect means electing the UNP candidate. There are some parties and persons of the left who suffer the illusion that the UNP (or at least its leader Ranil Wickremasinghe) is democratic. That suggests political amnesia, but is more probably the result of desperation arising from a loss of revolutionary direction.

In the present situation, the presidential election offers an opportunity for the genuine left, democratic and progressive forces of the country to take the democratic message to the public. The election campaign can be used to explain to the people the threats faced by democracy on various fronts. It can also be used to explain to the people the need to address the national question as an essential step towards national reconciliation as well as the way to unite the people to fight for their social, political and economic rights.

In the past, left party candidates have contested presidential elections, at times to settle scores among themselves and on other occasions to boost their political fortunes. The reality is that the left has not gained from such exercises. While the correct position is that whoever wins the presidency, the country, the people and democracy will be the losers. That message along with an agenda for political awareness and future political action should be taken to the people. That is best achieved through putting forward a common candidate based on a common minimum programme.

It cannot be a matter of choosing a charismatic figure and designing the programme to suit his/her potential. It should be a matter of genuine left, democratic and progressive forces of all nationalities coming together to agree on issues that need to be addressed urgently, agreeing on a common message to the people and drafting a manifesto based on agreed principles. Who the candidate will be is of secondary or even tertiary importance, since the purpose of contesting is to reach out to the people to prepare them for a broad based mass political struggle.

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# The Current Sri Lankan Situation

*Article based on the Political Statement of the Fourth Plenary Meeting of the Fifth All Sri Lanka Congress of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, 29 & 30 August 2014, drafted by comrades SK Senthivel, General Secretary and V Mahendran, National Organizer)*

## **The Overall Situation**

Since last year, there have been no changes or developments in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres of the country that are favourable or beneficial to the country and the people. The policies of liberalization, privatization and globalization that have been brutally implemented over the past three-and-a-half decades continue to be carried forward. We witnessed the granting of all manner of opportunities and facilities for foreign capital and investors. The constitution, the executive president, the parliament and the armed forces are playing their fullest roles in realizing them. Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brothers are exercising absolute authority as a modern fascist dictatorship to lead and direct these policies along the path taken by their predecessors. They are at the same time using Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism as their appropriate tool.

That Sri Lanka is a neo-colonial country has already been pointed out some years ago. Under neo-colonialism, class contradiction remains the fundamental contradiction, and embraces contradictions and oppression in the spheres of class, caste, race, caste, gender. The spheres of operation and the background to each of these aspects have been identified. Specifically, the vast majority of the country comprising workers, peasants, fisher folk, and state and private sector employees constituting

90% of the population are on the one side, with 75% of the population living in rural areas.

Of those in employment, 11% are in agriculture, 30% are in the industry and 58% are in the service sector. Their combined income has declined from 49% to 23% of the total, while that of those in the higher income bracket in urban areas has risen to 48%. The comprador bourgeoisie, big bourgeoisie, the prosperous, the ruling classes, high level civil officers and senior military officers, who comprise 10% of the population, have made the wealth of the country theirs to possess 38% of the total. Meanwhile, 90% of the population suffer poverty, shortages and unavailability of essentials.

This situation is an expression of class disparity and locally developing class contradictions. Thus the toiling masses transcend the boundaries of race, language, religion and region within the country to come within the category of class contradiction. But the people have been divided based on race, language, religion and region in order that they do not recognize that truth and unite as a class. The conspiracy of divide-and-rule continues to function. Workers, peasants, fisher folk, and state and private sector employees are prevented in numerous ways from recognizing that they are exploited on a class basis and oppressed through class politics. This is carried out in different ways by foreign imperialist forces, local comprador bourgeoisie and Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists.

### **The State of the Economy**

The fierce grip of neoliberal economics has imposed economic crises and severe burdens of livelihood on the people. The prices of essential food items and regular consumer goods rise by the day. Besides that, tariffs for water, electricity, telephone and transport have been raised. People are taxed heavily, directly and indirectly. As a result, the cost of living is rising while the standard of living is falling. Trade unions have estimated that a family of four needs over fifty thousand rupees per month. The government is turning a deaf ear to demands for wage increases to match that need. In the last budget, government servants were granted a wage

increase of Rs. 1500 only which the private sector employees were denied. Workers and other employees expect a fair wage rise in the next budget. It should be noted that sixty five percent of wage earners are in the private sector. Wage negotiations with the Employers Federation are due in 2015 for six hundred thousand plantation workers. It is certain that the leadership of the dominant plantation trade unions in the plantations will as usual deceive the plantation workers.

Statistics show that 45% of the people of the country live below the poverty line. That means that 45% of the people earn less than two US Dollars per day, the income level defining the poverty line internationally.

Amid such economic pressure, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, poor sanitation and lack of educational opportunity are growing into grave social issues and problems of livelihood among workers, peasants, fisher folk and toiling masses. Social welfare rights that the people enjoyed in the spheres of education and health are being withdrawn through the promotion of privatization. Only 1.8% of the GNP has been allocated for education and 3.5% for health. In all fields, the importance of social welfare and wellbeing of the people has been set aside and opportunity given to the private sector comprising foreign and local companies for gross exploitation and profit making. Workers and other employees are already squeezed dry within and outside the free trade zones.

The ferocious fangs of the neo-colonial economy have bitten into and shredded to the point of extinction all local production and self-reliant economy that had sprouted in the country. Today, the manufacturing economy is struggling to survive. All small industries have been destroyed. Their place has been filled by the import of goods. Agriculture is on the fringe of abandonment as a result of planned neglect and import of foreign agricultural products. Whatever remains is being ruined by imported fertilizer, pesticides and seeds and other imports from foreign companies.

Beyond these, drought, severe rain and strong winds caused by climate change have bankrupted the peasants, who have been further pauperized



by the banks through their agricultural loans and by usurious lenders. As a result, many peasants have been driven to suicide. A recent move by the government to pass a new Seed Act that would further oppress the peasants was abandoned in the face of severe opposition. But the government has not given up on its intent to implement the Act in the interest of trans-national companies. Thus the peasantry remain an abandoned lot by the government at every level.

### **The Plight of the Toiling Masses**

Living conditions for the tea and rubber plantation workers in the Hill Country continue to be miserable. Very low wages continue to be paid. The major trade unions continue to collude with the rulers and the owners of the plantations. They subtly deceive the local leaders and workers in the estates. Besides, a fundamental issue that faces the Hill Country plantation workers is that even as their existence in the country nears two hundred years, they do not own a plot of land or a house. The injustice of the denial of such human and fundamental rights persists. The political and trade union leadership, the government and estate owners do not care about the miserable living conditions of the Hill Country plantation workers in twenty two plantation companies, state plantation corporations and small private plantations. Nothing exists beyond the interest to gather votes during elections. The Hill Country plantation workers, who are exploited and oppressed as a class and as a nationality, are neglected and marginalized implicitly and explicitly. The identity of the Hill Country Tamils as a nationality is denied by such means, and acknowledgment of their distinct characteristics is rejected.

Many thousand workers and other employees serve in the garment sector producing made-garments for export, in factories within the Free Trade Zones and outside. Many women work there for low wages and live in lodgings lacking in facilities. They are made to work long hours and are severely exploited by foreign and local companies. The many thousands who serve in other companies in the Free Trade Zones also suffer severe exploitation. Meanwhile the government is inviting further foreign

investment. It is advertised in likely investor capitalist countries that investors would benefit from very low wages and high output.

Foreign and local companies are thus exploiting the toil of the workers and plundering the resources of the country. These companies harm the natural environment. The pollution of ground water in Weliveriya is expressive evidence. When the people struggled against it, the regime responded with repression using the armed forces and killed three. Such environmental pollution occurs all over the country. Another example is the pollution of nearly one hundred wells by waste oil near the electric power station of the Ceylon Electricity board in Chunnakam in the north.

While Workers and other employees are subjected to class exploitation and political repression, the many thousands of youth working in the information technology sector suffer new forms of exploitation. While modern information technology is identified with advance of human development, imperialism uses it to serve its greed for profit and global hegemony. This matter deserves examination in greater detail.

A view of the above matters as a whole and in detail will expose the horror of neoliberal economics and the venomous nature of globalization that seeks to implement it in various ways. The quest for profit finding expression in the form of markets, profit and more profit is fed into society from bottom to top. Human values including humanitarianism are sacrificed to it. Globalization encourages seeking money, seeking more money and personal pursuit of money. The hub of this globalization which generates such poison and destruction is located in the US and the West. All such matters should be understood and clarified from the Marxist Leninist perspective of class struggle.

It is on that basis that class contradiction becomes the fundamental contradiction under the neo-colonial neoliberal economic structure of the country, and there is the need to proceed along the path of class struggle. In affirmation of this position, we witness that not only workers and other employees and toiling masses but also students being involved in various struggles.

## **The National Question as Main Contradiction**

Seeds of contradiction had been sown among the nationalities even before Westminster style of parliamentary government was established in the country. The contradictions initiated by the colonial rulers were nurtured by the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist ruling class. In order to secure state power, conceal exploitation and proceed hand in hand with foreign imperialism, it built the national contradiction which lay at the bottom level into the main contradiction, which was subsequently thrust forward as ethnic violence, conflict and war.

The respective stands of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism and Tamil narrow nationalism have played major roles in the course of events that made national oppression become the national question. Indian regional hegemony and US and Western imperialist forces undeniably played major roles behind the scenes. The reality today is that the country cannot have a peaceful or prosperous future without a just solution to the national question. Thus the national question is now the main contradiction deflecting attention from class exploitation and oppression, and demands urgent resolution. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party (NDMLP), after a thorough analysis, has called for a solution within a united Sri Lanka in the form of autonomy based on the principle of the right to self determination.

The national question is not reducible to a Sinhala-Tamil contradiction. It concerns the oppressed Tamil, Muslim, Hill Country Tamil nationalities as well as national minority communities including the Burghers, Malays and the Attho (Veddah). Hence the NDMLP has in clear detail explained why the political solution needs to be based on the right of nationalities to self determination.

## **Approaching the National Question**

The Tamil nationalists have always been conservative and reactionary in their stand. Even after the devastation by war, they view the Sinhala

toiling masses as enemies and chauvinists while they preserve class ties with their Sinhala elite counterparts. They constantly appeal with loyal devotion to the US and Western imperialists and Indian regional hegemonic forces to secure something for them. They believe that foreign intervention will bring about the political solution that they seek. This is not only a matter of pinning their hopes on foreign hegemonic powers but also one of seeking short term political gain by antagonizing the Sinhalese people and making permanent the ethnic divide.

The US and the West are pressing with the UNHRC resolutions and international inquiry based on them to serve their needs. There will be no benefit for the Tamil people or to the resolution of the national question from an inquiry designed to help the US and the West to exert pressure on the Rajapaksa regime and bring it to their feet or to remove it from power. Meanwhile the regime is using the inquiry as a means to stabilize and prolong the rule of the Rajapaksa brothers. It uses its resistance to the inquiry to project an anti-imperialist image. Claiming that the Tamil people would secure fairness, justice and a political solution through such an international inquiry is a worthless effort to deceive the Tamil people. Besides, all the steps taken by the Tamil nationalists thus far have been obsolete replays. They have no use for past experience or lessons from the past, and they are unwilling to put forward any form of self criticism.

All past policies and positions adopted on the Tamil side have failed because they were based on an ethno-linguistic conservative domineering outlook. Thus, it is only a mass line with a friendly approach that can join hands with the oppressed toiling Sinhala masses that could be the remaining correct stand. One cannot expect such an alternative stand from the conservative domineering Tamil political leadership. Hence there is a need for a progressive Tamil nationalist section to enter the political scene so that the genuine left, democratic and progressive forces of the country could advance in friendship and unity with it. Only such a progressive Tamil nationalist section can develop a common programme for a broad mass struggle to solve the national question.

The national question of the neo-colonial era is unlike that in the colonial era. Awareness of how national contradictions have become imperialist tools in the neo-colonial era is essential for their resolution. It will thereby be possible to prevent nationalism from feeding modern day fascism, and Marxist Leninists and democrats need to act with caution. The aforesaid danger makes the national question particularly important today; and it is necessary to view the national question not merely as an issue between nations but based on the right to self determination of all nationalities. In the current context, those who uphold Marxism Leninism and other leftist and democratic forces should think in terms of enlarging the concept of self determination to ensure the fundamental rights of all minority communities. The national question cannot be confined to the right to self determination. That democracy, class hierarchy, continuation of casteism, gender-based oppression of women and denial of social justice come within the national question should receive particular attention.

### **Economic Crisis and Fascist Threat**

Meanwhile massive sums have been borrowed from foreign countries in the name of infrastructural development. Credit constituted 78.3% of the GNP in 2013. The people of the country are liable for the repayment of capital with interest. Today each Sri Lankan owes three hundred and fifty thousand rupees as debt to local and foreign lenders. The construction of super highways, bridges, highways, airports and harbours using massive credit investment is not to serve the needs of the people or to develop a manufacturing economy. It is to serve the needs of the neo-colonial economic needs of globalization. Likewise, urban development, super highways, buildings, ornate structures, seven star hotels, modern shopping complexes and casino complexes are for developing the tourist sector. The rich become richer through them while the less wealthy and the poor move down towards further poverty. Such developments make happy the US and Western forces of imperialist globalization.

The executive presidential system is becoming increasingly dictatorial and taking a fascist path. The regime of the Rajapaksa brothers is actively

planning for its next period of government. On the one hand, everything faces militarization, with militarization occurring in various aspects of civil society. An observation by an Indian delegate at the recent defence seminar organized by the Sri Lankan army deserves attention. He noted that it is dangerous to militarize civil society or to make civil the military. This danger has already begun to grow. What exists as a nominal democracy is being shredded and trampled upon by the ruling side. Rights to speech, writing and congregation, and the independence of the media have come under surveillance and control by the state. From time to time the state forces unleash repression on them. All democratic practices are being eliminated in the name of defence.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act is still enforced in strength. More than ten investigative organs of the state operate in the name of security. All of them are bodies that scent opposition to government among the people. Political prisoners are still detained and tortured in prisons and detention camps. Those released after rehabilitation are re-arrested. The inquiry into missing persons is a sham. Such are the happenings in post-war Sri Lanka. The introduction of the electronic identity card as part of this process has been debated in parliament. It is a dangerous scheme with military objectives. That is why it is to be carried out as a scheme of the Ministry of Defence rather than of the Department of Registration of Persons. It must be stopped because it comprises a violation of basic human rights. The above said moves are not only attempts to prevent the upsurge of mass opposition in the future but are also steps towards a fascist peak.

At this stage, it is important to look at the rise of modern fascism in the country. Fascism originated in Europe, and its class interests, support base and ideology were recognized in Europe in the period preceding the Second World War. There is fresh need to study how fascism is operating in the current political climate in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. One should take into account how imperialism and conservatism penetrate the public domain through religious fundamentalism and chauvinism in the modern fascism witnessed in the above countries. It is

important to thus recognize and define the modern fascism facing us in various contexts.

The fascism carried forward today by Sinhala Buddhist fundamentalist religious forces in the South is something essential to the Rajapaksa regime which protects the interests of chauvinist comprador capitalists and imperialists, and is therefore embraced by the government. It is as a result that there has been no judicial inquiry against Bodu Bala Sena despite its involvement in violence against Muslims and mosques. Although the Bodu Bala Sena was instrumental in the incidents of violence in Aluthgama, it has been protected.

### **Challenges to Democracy**

The preceding trends comprise planned attempts to sustain the rule of the Rajapaksa brothers. Aspects of democracy are knocked down one after another. The capitalist system of justice based on rule of law has been crippled by executive power, by the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment in particular, and brought under control of a fascist dictatorship.

Bribery and corruption ride high. The Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) annually submits reports on irregularities and corruption in state organizations. But no one named in the reports is known to have been punished. Narcotics including heroin and cannabis are freely on sale. Their use has proliferated to the point of the country being called “dope land”. Murder and robbery are commonplace, and subjecting women and girls to sexual violence and rape is a daily event.

There is constant sermonizing about Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity and the cultural values arising from them. But the religions have failed to arrest surging social crime, social decadence and anti-people activities. The reason is that all the cultures of virtue are reluctant to resist imperialism and the toxic culture spread under its scheme of globalization. The failure of the Mahanayakas (heads of the Buddhist chapters) to stop the recent motor racing event in the vicinity of the Dalada Maligawa

(Temple of the Tooth), said to be a place sacred to Sinhala Buddhism, suggests prevalence of the culture of globalization over Buddhist culture.

Likewise, temples and festivals in the North are now fully commercialised and many millions of rupees from the Tamil diaspora are dumped into them. Tamil nationalists who boast of Tamil culture, its antiquity and tradition do not view these matters with social interest. Religious faith and devotion is the personal right of every individual. But to transform it into superstition and to commercialize it is unacceptable. The toxic culture of globalization encourages the commercialization of temples and festivals. Temples, festivals and archaic rituals are used well to prevent people from noticing the economic and political problems that surround and suffocate them and to keep them distracted.

Caste ideology too is functional with new dimensions among Tamils. Well after the effective elimination of untouchability, caste ideology has intensified at various levels and is ardently practiced in an internalized way. There is need for extensive debate and dialogue on the subject. Caste based thinking plays a decisive role whenever decision is due in any issue. This is noticeable in the North-East, the North in particular.

Oppression of women is socially important. Domination of women is practiced from cradle to cemetery in the name of antiquity, tradition, customs and rituals, and cannot be over simplified and reduced to male chauvinist practice. The enduring sources of conservative ideologies including male chauvinism need to be identified. There is need, especially among women, for social awareness and broad based activity. A social view and a scientific social outlook are essential in this respect. Hence there is pressing need in our social context, especially the Tamil context, to discuss extensively and act boldly on matters of domination over women and the way for liberation from it.

Five years since the end of the war, the people who suffered destruction and losses, especially women, children and the elderly, remain abandoned and live in misery. The chauvinistic militarist government has no interest in these matters. People displaced by war are unable to return to their own



areas. Meanwhile, with army occupation assured, armed forces are actively seizing lands and houses owned by the people. The chauvinistic rulers seem to be implementing their programme in the North-East based on a long term plan.

### **The Search for a Solution**

Thus neo-colonialism, neoliberal economics, chauvinistic military repression, narrow national politics through identity politics and cultural degeneration owing to the influence of globalization among others continue to aggravate the crises and problems in society. They should be explained and exposed to the people in the economic, political and social spheres. The people should be made confident and courageous to stand up to issues. It can be sensed that the environment for a revolutionary mass uprising does not exist today. But that is not forever.

The struggles launched by workers, students and the public here and there are positive signs for the future. Denial of democracy, human rights violations, national oppression, repression of workers and peasants, modern fascist initiatives, executive presidential rule in monarchical style and the constitution that enables it cannot be forever. When the people recognize deception, fraud and oppression, they will rise and advance in mass revolutionary upsurge. Such has been the course of history. It is the historical obligation of Marxist Leninists to pave the way for such a historic uprising and to mobilize along the revolutionary path. It is their historical obligation to carry out that responsibility through ideology and practice. At the same time, Marxist Leninists should be ever prepared to join hands with all sincere left, democratic and progressive forces of the country.

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# The Post-War National Question and the Sri Lankan Left

(Part 3)

*Imayavaramban*

## 5. Post-war Developments

### *5.1 The post-war scenario among Sinhala nationalists*

As prospects faded for cessation of hostilities and it was clear that the government would fight the war to the bitter end, there was hope among many Sinhalese and a sizeable section of the Tamils that in the likely event of the defeat of the LTTE, the government will act to resolve the national question, partly since the government claimed that the revived war was a humanitarian campaign to relieve the Tamils from the clutches of LTTE terror. Others had doubts based on the ruthlessness with which the war was being pursued in the North and their awareness of the reliance of the government on chauvinism for electoral success and the chauvinist pressures that the government had allowed itself to be subjected to.

The end of the war led to a sense of relief among the Sinhalese, who mostly saw the war as one against terrorism which intentionally hurt innocent Sinhalese civilians even far away from the battle zone. War victory was thus a matter to celebrate, but the post-war public mood was not hostile to the Tamils, although there were chauvinists who acted in ways to rub it into the Tamils that they have been subdued. The government besides encouraging such insensitivity also sought to use to the fullest the military victory to build its electoral base.

The President claimed all glory to his personal leadership, thereby denying a share any other claimants. His utterances in the weeks following the end of war were ominous. He declared that Sri Lanka was one nation and there were no minorities, and that there were only patriots and traitors. That alone was clear indication that he had no intention to address the national question based on accepting Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic entity and would use the war victory to keep political rivals at bay. This also meant that the national question would be kept simmering, by giving the impression that the Sinhala race was on the one hand victorious but still under siege from the remnants of the LTTE and their supporters. The government, despite periodic mass protests, is still able to deflect the attention of the Sinhala public from the shameless abuse of power, unprecedented scale of corruption, a rapidly declining economy and other pressing issues.

International pressure, aimed not at resolving the national question but persuading the government to adopt a more pro-West foreign policy, have not yielded tangible results even on issues of human rights violations and war crimes. In fact, the government has thus far used such pressure to its advantage by accusing the West of yielding to pressure from the Tamil diaspora, while submitting to imperialist pressure on matters of structural reform, privatization and open economy, amid mouthing anti-imperialist slogans to appease its electorate. India, caught between its desire for economic and hegemonic dominance in Sri Lanka and mollifying strong anti Sri Lanka sentiments in Tamilnadu, has failed to persuade the Sri Lankan government to seriously seek a solution to the national question. Meantime, conditions have worsened for the minority nationalities with no prospect of a solution for the national question or meaningful rehabilitation of the victims of war.

The Mahinda Chintana government has been more callous towards the national question than any of its predecessors. While the war was in progress, it shelved recommendations for the solution of the national question by a government appointed committee headed by a cabinet

minister, Tissa Witharana of the LSSP. It has since been talking about parliamentary select committees to address the national question while creating conditions that made it difficult for the main opposition party as well as the TNA to participate.

In the face of persistent pressure from the West, whose efforts to adopt a UNHRC resolution calling for an international inquiry into war crimes and human rights violations in Sri Lanka were frustrated in 2010, the government in 2010 set up the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), seemingly in the fashion of the reconciliation efforts of the ANC in South Africa, but designed to deter international criticism and to soften if not avert a UNHRC resolution critical of Sri Lanka. While even the LLRC recommendations, which fall far short of the aspirations of the Tamil people, have not been implemented, the government threatened to weaken if not revoke the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. This was somewhat expected since the government had, in its efforts to blunt international pressure on war related issues, created or strengthened existing forces that were hostile to addressing the national question in any way that seemed conciliatory towards the Tamils or other minorities; and in the processes these chauvinistic forces had become an influential part of the support base of the government.

The net result was that the US succeeded in mobilising sufficient support to pass resolutions critical of Sri Lanka at the UNHCR in 2012 and 2013 and forced an even stronger resolution in 2014. The waste of national resources at huge cost to the economy in holding the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in November 2013 backfired. Rather than winning political support for Sri Lanka, the event proved to be a fiasco with India not sending its Prime Minister for internal political reasons and to make matters worse the British Prime Minister using the occasion to strongly criticize Sri Lanka's human rights record. Sri Lanka's handling of foreign media personnel, especially Channel-4, in this period did not help much either.

The already divided and disorganized UNP, further weakened by the surge in support for the government since the war, suffered even deeper internal divisions with sections seeking an explicitly chauvinist agenda to recapture its voter base. For its revival, it seems to count on pressure from the West on the economic front to weaken the government. Its only political move, besides steps to end the internal crisis, has been to form a loose alliance of opposition parties for the restoration of democracy and challenge abuse of power.

The JHU which consistently supported the war, unlike the UNP which negotiated peace and was rather late to support the resumed war, claimed a share of the credit for its role. But that was denied, and it has adopted a different and more cynical strategy for its bid for share in power. It has since moved close to Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the Defence Secretary to pursue a neo-fascist Sinhala Buddhist agenda in collaboration with Sinhala Buddhist militant organizations targeting Muslims. There has been a rise in the incidence of attacks on mosques and Muslim businesses and systematic vilification of Islam and Muslims by numerous hate groups. Support for such activities from the state is evident from the reluctance of the police and the judicial system to deal with the attackers.

The JVP, despite its unqualified support for the war and opposition to devolution, has earned little mileage with its chauvinist line. On the contrary, frustration with the fall in support for the JVP since its joining the Mahinda Chintana government has led to a split and the formation of the Frontline Socialist Party (FLSP), which seems less assertive than the JVP in its chauvinist utterances, but struggling with the inherited approach to the national question.

The FSP, seemingly more conciliatory towards the Tamils and seeking to secure a support base among Tamils has been wooing leftist Tamil nationalist groups among the Tamil diaspora such as the New Democratic People's Front based in Europe. But it has yet to recognize Tamils as a nationality with a right to some degree of autonomy, let alone self determination. The use of new fangled terminology such as "national

citizens" to avoid recognition of nationalities did not pay dividends and there appears to be a fresh debate within the FSP on defining itself as a Marxist party and adopting a more sound approach to the national question. If the FSP will seriously pursue its efforts for dialogue with the genuine left and conduct internal debates that will transform it into a genuine left party, then there is prospect for it to be a serious anti-imperialist and left force. However, it is too premature to say how successfully the genuinely left forces within the FSP will overcome the residues of JVP ideology.

There are, nevertheless, issues common to all opponents of the government. The concentration of power in the hands of a few comprising mainly members of the family of the President, threats to the independence of the media and of the judiciary, the rising level of corruption, abuse of privilege and power, particularly in elections, and the rise in state sponsored crime are among issues that pose a threat to an already fragile democracy troubled by growing Sinhala Buddhist neo-fascist tendencies.

Yet, neither UNP nor JVP has demonstrated the potential to mobilize the masses to address even issues that affected them directly, despite sections of the population rising in mass protest against police brutality and other such issues. The UNP has of late formed a loose alliance with the TNA and some left groupings including two of the Trotskyite organizations to restore democratic rights. But what is lacking is a comprehensive working plan and, given the track record of the UNP and the ideological diversity of the allies, the partnership could eventually limit itself to electoral objectives.

### *5.2 The post-war Tamil nationalist perspective*

Not all Tamil nationalists who abandoned the call for secession and sided with the government since the early 1990's could remain close to the government, especially after the formation of the Mahinda Chinthana government in 2005. There had been splits even in the ranks of the Eelam

People's Democratic Party (EPDP), the ex-militant group which has been a partner in government since 1994. The government has influence among the Tamils through its allies in the North and East and, now, some ex-LTTE personalities whose had been rehabilitated at surprising speed.

Tamil nationalist organizations, mainly the moderate Federal Party and main factions of the TELO and EPRLF, who accommodated with the LTTE for political expediency and formed the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) in October 2001 quickly dissociated themselves with the LTTE following its defeat in 2009. The TNA has allowed itself to be dictated to by India which has been exerting pressure on it to negotiate with the Sri Lankan government, which has shown minimal interest in addressing the grievances of the Tamils. The TNA is also counting on support from the "International Community", despite betrayals of the past, to exert pressure on the government to offer a solution that will address at least some of the more pressing issues while failing to politically organize the Tamil people to struggle for its rights while demanding their loyal support during every election.

Splits have occurred in Tamil political alliances in the past, some based on personal rivalries others on political differences, but none leading to a credible alternative, despite a split in 2010 leading to the formation of a faction called the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF), whose main differences with the TNA is that it calls for a solution to the national question that accepts the right of the Tamil nation to secede and that it is less submissive to India and is influenced by some pro-West sections of the diaspora.

Political rifts among the Tamil nationalists has widened rather than narrowed as many would have expected following the overwhelming support that the Tamil public of the North gave the TNA in the elections to the Northern Provincial Council (NPC) in September 2013. Quarrels among the partners of the TNA about nominations for election spilt into the open following appointments for posts in the Provincial Council. What is often forgotten by the quarrelling partners is that the Provincial

Councils lack autonomy and political power and even the significant powers that they had over police and land alienation have been denied to them by the centre and some of the power that they had over handling development funds too had been taken away by legislation in 2013. Yet the limited resources and authority of the NPC could be put to some good use to help the worst victims of war if the NPC would act with a sense of purpose.

The petty nature of the squabbles within the TNA has, on the other hand, emboldened the chauvinists who were briefly stunned by the almost unanimous rejection of the government by the Tamils of the north. The discredited EPDP and other marginalized factions supportive of the government are attempting to regroup themselves as a rival to the TNA.

The above is not to say that the Tamil nationalist leadership is unaware of the gravity of the problems facing the Tamil nationality including the worsening of national oppression, and the denial of democratic rights and of the rights to livelihood and normal life in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. They are equally aware of the worsening of the national oppression of the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils as well as the worsening of living conditions and the general political climate affecting the Sinhalese as well. But there seems to be a persistent inability to address questions of class, caste and gender oppression or to share the concerns of other oppressed people that stand in the way to link the national question with other broader issues. Also, the TNA has also been encouraged by the fallout from the CHOGM, including the British Premier's invitation to the Chief Minister of the NPC to Downing Street, and fresh signals from India supportive of the government of the NPC to assert its political line of calling on the International Community to intervene on behalf of the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Although the Tamil diaspora has had considerable influence on the course of the struggle led by the LTTE, its understanding of the situation in Sri Lanka, for long conditioned by illusions of the invincibility of the LTTE, still continues to be out of touch with reality. It is also confounded



by the overwhelming support for the TNA in the NPC elections which, although a clear rejection of the government and its allies, is not an endorsement of a separatist agenda. Illusions of Tamil Eelam as well as foreign intervention on behalf of the Tamils still persist and are promoted by a section of the leadership among the diaspora with harmful implications for the resolution of the national question in Sri Lanka, partly since the government and Sinhala Buddhist extremists point to such tendencies as threats to Sri Lanka's integrity and partly since they only support the isolationist tendencies among the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

### *5.3 The prospects for the left*

The national question is still the main contradiction in Sri Lanka without whose resolution, at least in part, it is impossible to effectively address other more fundamental issues. The left is aware that the issues of economy, social justice, democracy, human and fundamental rights, and law and order are inexorably linked with the national question. There are strong differences between left parties in their approach to the problem as well as to possible solutions.

The parliamentary left leadership, having compromised its erstwhile principled stand on the national question, has also been party to several anti-democratic acts of legislation by the Mahinda Chinthana regime. While it has spoken up against chauvinism at every important turn, its objections have been ineffective with President Rajapaksa who has always sided with the chauvinists where it mattered. Even in 2013, the LSSP, CP and the DLF strongly opposed moves, by not only the JHU and allied extremist organizations but also the SLFP, to rescind or to dilute the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. They were spared the misery of yet another about face, not by their political firmness but by external pressures on the government to at least defer moves that were detrimental to the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The rise of the chauvinist right within the government as well as nationally has further isolated the left parties within the government and denied them a say even in day to day issues, let alone government policy. But they have yet to realize that they are facing political extinction, unless they act fast to

salvage their residual credibility as successors to a left tradition by breaking with the government and thereby the fetters of opportunist alliance with a Sinhala chauvinist partner.

The Marxist Leninist NDMLP and the CPC-M and the Trotskyite NSSP (a.k.a. Left Front), USP and the SEP, and several other smaller groups and factions have not compromised on their positions on the national question even after the end of the war. They have consistently alerted the public to the fascist threat posed by the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist forces with backing from sections of the state apparatus.

They also agree that the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime cannot be trusted to solve the national question or to defend the sovereignty of the country or its economy from predatory foreign powers. Differences exist among them regarding their recognition of Muslims and Hill Country Tamils as nationalities on an equal footing with the Tamils. But they agree on the right of the Tamil people to self determination and also are strong advocates of devolution of power. There are, however, serious differences in their approaches to dealing with the threat to democracy under the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime.

The NDMLP and the CPC-M urge mass mobilization of the Tamil people to deal with the national question and the linking of the struggle of the Tamils for their national rights with other aspects of national oppression and the broader issues concerning human and fundamental rights and the economy that affect the entire people. They argue the case for a broad united front, based on a common minimum programme that will address these issues, without compromising the rights of nationalities.

Among Trotskyites, the SEP has been most sectarian and reluctant to form an alliance with other left parties, let alone potentially progressive forces. The NSSP and the USP appear to have made it their priority to defeat the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime and are in a loose alliance with the reactionary UNP, the TNA and other smaller parties on a platform for the defence of democratic rights. Knowing the UNP as a pro-imperialist chauvinist force with a dictatorial record stretching 17 years (1977-1994),

the two left parties should have been sufficiently alerted by the UNP's moves to find common cause with the JHU against the government.

The left is the only political force that has the potential to understand the national question in its correct perspective. It is the only force that can understand and explain the respective roles of global and local reaction in promoting and sustaining identity based conflicts, especially national and religious conflicts in the Third World. But it has to overcome organizational weaknesses relating to sectarianism and individualism and ideological weaknesses relating to opportunism, dogmatism and adventurism. There is need for sincere soul searching by each left political party and serious criticism and self criticism in order that the left can realize its true potential in addressing the national question in the context of modern imperialism and neo-colonialism.

## **6. Closure**

### ***6.1 The left: failings and prospects***

While the decline in influence of the left since the mid-1960s can be ascribed to a major section of the left opting for the parliamentary path and forming alliances with what seemed a centre-left or a national bourgeois capitalist party, and the consequent failure to adequately address the just grievances of the minority nationalities which also meant that the left began to lose the support of sections of minorities among whom it once had significant support. Understanding the national question mainly in terms of language and interpreting contradictions in terms of Tamil-Sinhala differences indicates failure to appreciate other dimensions to the national question and implications for a just and lasting solution. There is clearly a need to address the question in terms of more than two nationalities and resolving it based on the true spirit of the principle of the right to self determination, and accepting the right to secession where it is feasible and a nationality desires it.

Marxist Leninist and Trotskyite parties have come to grips with these realities to a considerable degree, but have yet to organize themselves as

broad based mass organizations that could address the national question in ways that will be broadly acceptable to all nationalities.

Sectarianism and opportunism have been shortcomings that the left could ill afford especially since the rise of nationalism but still continue to ail the left. It is important that the parliamentary left realizes that its close alliance with the SLFP, which is no more anti-imperialist or progressive the way it was until the 1980s, has cost it dearly in popular support and credibility as a left force. Yet it has a mass base, however weak, that could be rallied and built upon in collaboration with other progressive forces. But the CP, LSSP and the DLF have to undergo serious soul searching and rectification in order that they completely break with the Rajapaksa regime, rather than issue empty threats that collapse when it comes to the crunch.

Marxist Leninist and Trotskyite parties should know by now that they cannot on their own, individually or collectively, deliver on their declared immediate political goals, be it the New Democracy of the Marxist Leninists or the socialist revolution of the Trotskyites. They need alliances with common goals and short term programmes.

The Marxist Leninist NDMLP and CPC-M theoretically endorse the principle of the united front and have a fair track record of goal oriented alliances, as in the case of the struggle of 1966-72 against caste discrimination in the North, averting capture of the initiative by reactionary forces to serve their agenda. But they have yet to wean the oppressed Tamil nationality from the reactionary leadership, and there is work to be done among the Muslims and the Hill Country Tamils, currently led mainly by leaders with no vision except their own self advancement.

Although the NSSP, USP and the SEP have repeatedly warned the parliamentary left against SLFP-led alliances, the NSSP and, to a less extent, the USP have erred in seeking alliances with politically dangerous allies. The SEP, on the other hand, badly needs to overcome its sectarian ways to accept reality that the path to socialism primarily requires

winning over the majority and a step-by-step strategy with short and long term objectives.

The left is now better placed than ever before to unite the people across ethnic and religious boundaries, since the chauvinist Mahinda Chinthana regime has become highly oppressive and unashamedly corrupt and crude in its abuse of power at every level, and war victory has begun to lose its charm in the face of rising economic problems and state oppression. Amid growing popular resentment of the government, the UNP alliance and the JVP have little credibility as meaningful alternatives and that is a strong point for the government. The fair performance of the newly formed Democratic Party (DP) in Provincial Council elections is rather an expression of disappointment in the major rivals than a faith in the DP as a political alternative, which it certainly is not.

The FLSP which broke from the JVP needs to offer more in ideological and political terms than criticizing the JVP for its failed strategy. If it misses the opportunity to emerge as genuinely left and secular force through analysing in historical terms what went wrong with the JVP, it risks ending up as a mirror image of the JVP.

Thus it is the left that has the potential to address the various problems that face the country ranging from the economic issues to the national question, all of which require clearly pro-people and anti-imperialist stands which the UNP, the SLFP and all manner of pro-capitalist alliances are incapable of taking. It is doubtful that the JVP will free itself of its chauvinism, while the decision facing the FSLP is whether it intends to live up to its name and be part of the left movement.

## ***6.2 Addressing self determination and devolution of power***

While the right of nationalities to self determination offers the only basis for the resolution of the national question, the question of self determination has to be addressed sensitively, taking into account the immediate reality that the term has been equated to secession since even concepts like federalism have always been viewed as steps towards

secession. Thus a common minimum programme may need to be restrained to maximum autonomy and devolution of power based on the recognition of traditional homelands of the minority nationalities, so that some degree of trust and elimination of fear is achieved before advancing to a long term solution based on the principle of self determination.

The UNP and the SLFP have, at various times when in power, offered systems of autonomy and devolution of power as solutions to the national question, even before the escalation of the national conflict into war. Thus they have no moral grounds to object to solutions based on autonomy. It is therefore, the JHU and other Sinhala Buddhist outfits and the JVP and the FLSP that have to be seriously challenged in this respect.

It is not possible for a left alliance of any form to challenge chauvinism and reaction without developing short and medium term programmes for a broad based mass organization to address the various issues that face the people as a whole and the minority nationalities and ethnic and religious groups. This requires a good understanding of not only the issues but also the links between them so that the people realize that the resolution of each issue that affects them also requires the resolution of other issues that may not be explicitly related to it.

The formation of a broad-based alliance requires an inclusive approach and the ability to unite on a common programme despite fundamental differences. Thus, any group of Tamil nationalists who are progressive, anti-imperialist in spirit and free of foreign control is a potential ally. Equally, Sinhala nationalists who recognize the right of minority nationalities to their identity and territory and are open to the idea of devolution of power are also potential allies. Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalists should be encouraged to find common cause with other oppressed people of the country. The most urgent task for the left is overcoming the barriers of mistrust between the nationalities that have built over decades of narrow nationalist politics, national oppression and war.

The left thus has a responsibility to demand a credible inquiry into all human rights violations and war crimes so that the culprits among all parties to the conflict are identified and exposed, and punished as necessary. It has to be impressed upon the people as a whole that such an approach will help to eliminate foreign pressure and meddling in the internal affairs of the country and pave the way for better understanding between the nationalities.

A substantial section of the war affected population in the North and East is still denied its right to livelihood and, in many cases, the right to return to its home territory. The presence of the armed forces in large numbers occupying large tracts of land lawfully belonging to civilians as well as implementing unlawful land settlements by Sinhalese in ways that affect demographic patterns are matters of urgent concern to the Tamil and Muslim people in the North and East. The left needs to challenge injustices carried out in the name of national security and through it explain to the people the divisive role played by the armed forces acting at the instigation of chauvinist forces in the government.

In essence, it is through the recovery of the moral high ground that the left stood some decades ago that it could reassert itself as the sole unifying force. It is commendable that the Marxist Leninist and Trotskyite parties have dared to take a stand on these issues and join hands with even the Tamil nationalists in struggles against acts of injustice. But what matters is to transform principled stands into an effective political platform.

### ***6.3 Prospects for the future***

The left has to learn from eight decades of electoral politics, especially the last five decades of coalition strategies that it used to become partner in power. The parliamentary path to socialism has been illusory. It should be noted that the special conditions obtaining in South America where left or centre-left anti-imperialist alliances have succeeded electorally to implement effective social welfare measures when social welfare is on the wane in leading capitalist democracies, do not carry the promise of a

socialist future. While Latin America has valuable lessons for the anti imperialist struggles, conditions obtaining in South Asia are vastly different from those in South America.

The Sri Lankan situation like that in much of Asia will need a combination of strategies that reduces reliance on electoral politics with a strong tendency for domination by majoritarian and ethno-centric politics. Revival of mass democratic institutions including trade unions and other popular organizations are essential to the left for its return as a political fighting force.

The deteriorating economy and the ominous threat to democracy in Sri Lanka will eventually pose two stark choices before the people. It is either national salvation led by left, progressive and democratic forces or fascism led by forces of chauvinism and militarist oppression. Thus the Sri Lankan left has to appreciate the gravity of the situation and act responsibly, not merely to reassert itself but also to salvage the country from impending disaster.

It is also crucial for the Tamil nationalists to historically re-evaluate their relationship with the left and that with the Sinhala capitalist parties and decide on the kind of alliance that can best serve the interests of the Tamils as well as other oppressed nationalities.

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# Imperialism Today: Issues of Interpretation

*Deshabakthan*

## **On understanding imperialism**

The transformation of capitalism into imperialism was inevitable in the course of development of capitalism. Nearly a century ago Lenin correctly recognized it as the highest state of capitalism; and, starting with the October Revolution, every revolutionary struggle against capitalist rule benefitted from the insights provided by Lenin into imperialism. The success of anti-colonial struggles too owed much to the Leninist understanding of imperialism.

The development of imperialism, more than that of capitalism, was neither uniform nor linear. Imperialism to maintain control over the global economy kept renewing its strategies. The colonial system, which once served imperialism well, had collapsed by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. But imperialism was quick to find an alternative in neo-colonialism. The crisis of neo-colonialism led to the imperialist scheme of globalization. These and other developments including the emergence of neo-liberalism were consequences of the continuing crisis of capitalism. Thus some features of imperialism are bound to differ significantly in detail from those associated with imperialism in the colonial era.

As in the case of many social phenomena in a process of development and change, a rigid definition of imperialism is neither possible nor desirable, and any definition is useful only to the extent that it helps us to

understand a phenomenon. Using definitions in rigidly restrictive ways to interpret events is counterproductive. Hence it is desirable to clearly understand imperialism in terms of its salient features and develop definitions in an inclusive fashion to accommodate likely developments.

The five features of imperialism as set out by Lenin are: (1) the concentration of production and capital to a level that it gave rise to monopolies which dominate economic life; (2) merging of bank capital with industrial capital leading to the emergence of finance capital controlled by a financial oligarchy; (3) export of capital gaining primacy over the export of commodities; (4) formation of international monopolist capitalist cartels seeking to share the world among themselves; and (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers.

Imperialism may thus be understood as the stage of capitalism where a small number of monopolies and finance capital establishments dominate the economy, the export of capital acquires precedence over export of goods, and international cartels effectively carve up the world among themselves through the agency of capitalist powers.

### **Imperialism today**

Today's globalized imperialist system is more complex than what existed half a century ago. Among its new features is the continuing growth of finance capital alongside the emergence of giant monopolies as entities free of control by banks, with finance drawing heavily on private savings and public funds, directly and indirectly. Speculation having become a major driving force of finance capital has compounded the vulnerability of the system. Developments in information and communication technology have made the transfer of capital increasingly faster and easier. As a result, economies of countries have become vulnerable to manipulation by big investors as well as speculators. Alongside the rapid and unrestricted flow of capital across national borders, there has over the past several decades been a large scale transfer of labour across national borders, driven by economic need, political instability, wars and civil wars. The economic backwardness of less developed countries has besides opening their natural resources and labour to neo-colonial plunder has also subjected

the countries to a process of imperialist re-colonization through control over natural resources including water and agricultural land. Meanwhile market fundamentalism has become the driving ideology of the economic and political systems of nearly all capitalist countries at the expense of public interest and democratic institutions. Along with it, the social role of the state has diminished, with multinational corporations and international financial markets subverting the sovereignty of the state.

Developments in monopoly capitalism have, while preserving its essential nature, have made it even more ruthless so that the five features identified by Lenin are just as valid in the era of imperialist globalization. The state in the neo-colonial powers as well as in the neo-colonies is the agency through which the monopoly capitalist agenda is thrust on the population. The US, which became the strongest capitalist economy in the interim between the two world wars, before long, is politically the most influential state and militarily the most powerful in history. The 'socialist bloc' of countries that emerged in the wake of the Second World War posed a strong socialist challenge to imperialism and was a factor that shaped the US-dominated military, political and economic imperialist global alliances. Imperialist alliances do not mean the elimination of imperialist rivalries, but confrontation has been subdued unlike up to the 1940s so that wars are unlikely in the near future among imperialist powers. Imperialist states differed in their addressing of the 'communist threat', colonial hangovers, and anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. Resentment of US hegemony persists. The European bid to be an economic power on par with the US and free of political domination by the US through the founding of the European Economic Community leading to the European Union is yet to succeed. Imperialists have nevertheless been together in resisting left ideology, especially in the neo-colonies.

### **Setbacks to the anti-imperialist cause**

The change in political direction of the Soviet Union since Khrushchev's rise to power of in the 1950's led to splits in the international communist movement and in the socialist camp in the early 1960s. Restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union was accompanied by the call for 'peaceful coexistence' between socialist and imperialist systems and unprovoked

hostility towards Albania and China which upheld revolutionary struggle. It had a negative impact on the international left movement, and hurt anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles. Khrushchev's fall from power did not lead to a change in course of the Soviet Union; and the Cold War declared by imperialism against the socialist bloc went on to become big power rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union for global influence until the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991.

Restoration of capitalism in China, initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 was as determined as that in the Soviet Union, but more gradual and was carried out in the name of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics". While many left analysts including Robert Weil (*Red Cat, White Cat: China and the Contradictions of Market Socialism*, Monthly Review Press, 1996) Martin Hart-Landsberg and Paul Burkett (*China and Socialism: Market Reforms and Class Struggle*, Monthly Review Press, 2005) have been clear about the restoration of capitalism in China, Samir Amin ("China 2013" in Monthly Review, March 2013 and "Popular Movements Toward Socialism: Their Unity and Diversity" in Monthly Review, June 2014) and Goldstein (<http://www.workers.org/articles/2013/06/13/marxism-and-the-social-character-of-china/>) are among those who think that China still has strong socialist characteristics and cannot be called capitalist. Internationally, a vast majority of Marxist Leninist parties and organizations believe that China is state capitalist in collaboration with a growing capitalist sector and is not a force that resists the imperialist world order. There is, however, much disagreement about China's place in the global imperialist system.

The reality is that, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century all socialist countries except North Korea and Cuba had submitted to the capitalist economic system. However, the end of the imperialist Cold War with "communist countries" did not lead to the elimination of the various military alliances put in place by imperialism. These alliances are still functional and real wars of aggression have been launched in the pretext of combating Islamic fundamentalist terror, in fact a creation of US imperialism.

The project of imperialist globalization initiated in the 1980s met with failure in South America and has led to a rapid decline in US influence in Latin America and the Caribbean. The financial crisis that struck the US — which was already in a deepening debt crisis — in 2008 soon grew into a

global economic crisis now threatening the survival of the European Union as an economic entity. The political crises of the US and EU have been compounded by the never ending military adventures that started in Afghanistan and now threatening conflict with Russia over Ukraine.

Without a strong anti-imperialist international organization or a progressive, let alone socialist, alliance to resist imperialism, struggles against imperialist subversion and aggression have become that much the harder. That the people will win wherever they dare has been demonstrated most recently in Gaza, but the lack of working class based international organizations for anti-imperialist solidarity has meant high prices to pay for any significant victory.

In this context, it is important for the left, the Marxist Leninist left especially, to be able to tell friend from foe and to mobilize the masses nationally on international issues concerning imperialist intrigue and aggression. Russia and China are two important countries in this context. The attitude that the Marxist Leninists should take towards them in deciding international policy of a left movement has been a matter of debate and the question whether they are imperialist countries is at the root of the disagreements.

That issue needs to be clarified to enable Marxist Leninists to find common ground in addressing crucial international issues.

### **Are there new imperialist powers?**

Capitalism in Russia and China took routes vastly different from that in the imperialist countries led by the US and that in the neo-colonies, including India, Brazil and South Africa which are striving to become regional powers. Subversion of socialism led to the present capitalist systems in Russia and China. Capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union since the 1960s took the Soviet Union along a path that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The elite within the Communist Party and their cronies usurped the wealth that was under state capitalist control. Capitalism in post Soviet Russia became synonymous with crime and corruption. Economic conditions worsened under the pro-US regime of Yeltsin. Russia has restored a degree of state control of the economy, but not in the direction of a planned or socialist economy.

The Soviet Union under Brezhnev was called “social imperialism” by Marxist Leninists based on its economic domination and manipulation, stationing of troops in the countries of the socialist bloc, and invasion of countries and waging war. Many Marxist Leninist communist parties placed the Soviet Union on par with US imperialism and on occasion considered it to be a worse threat than US imperialism. There were, nevertheless, serious differences between the capitalism and imperialistic conduct of the Soviet Union and that of the US and its allies.

It is true that the bid for global hegemony placed the Soviet Union on par with the US, and, admittedly, it was a more serious threat than the US to some countries. While, out of necessity, it played an anti-imperialist role in several countries, it knowingly betrayed mass liberation struggles as in East Timor and used its position as a supporter of liberation struggles to buy influence or even seek political domination as in Southern Africa. While its intervention in Angola, although driven by hegemonic ambition, became defensible in the context of military intervention by the apartheid regime of South Africa, backed by US imperialism, its role in Ethiopia was totally opportunist. Its intervention in Afghanistan, besides bringing disaster to Afghanistan, contributed to the unravelling of the Soviet Union. Yet, for reasons good or bad, people and governments in many countries saw it as an ally in defending their interests against US imperialism.

There was good reason to call the Soviet Union a social imperialism based on its exploitation and domination of its allies, its military threats to and military intervention in some countries, and betrayal of revolutionary struggles. Its rivalry with the US for hegemony was important too. But it was unwise, except in specific contexts, to put it on par with the US or say that it was the bigger of the two threats. The Soviet Union, despite its military might and arms race with the US, had limitations to its growth as an imperialist economic power and its capitalist system was inadequate for the purpose. While the Soviet Union competed directly or through proxies for regional hegemony and spheres of influence, its potential to create or capture markets for commodities was weak and relied on state-to-state deals. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia became much weaker militarily and economically than it was before the collapse. It still needs to rebuild its economy and is trying to build alliances. Its

current conduct in international affairs is largely defensive and not designed to conquer territory or markets.

The Cultural Revolution was launched in China to avert the risk of capitalist restoration. But eventually the “bourgeoisie within the Communist Party” prevailed. A new capitalist class emerged from among the ranks of the party elite. The socialist system has been systematically undermined since 1978, although the state still owns most of the major economic ventures. Social welfare including free education and free health care has declined but not fully abandoned so that China still manages economic crises and natural disasters far better than the US. But there are issues such as rural poverty, rising unemployment, low wages, industrial accidents and denial of labour rights that are characteristic of highly exploitative capitalism. China is, undoubtedly, close to becoming the world’s biggest economy with a dominant capitalist content.

Prolonged survival of a country under capitalism requires that it either assimilates with an existing imperialist group or becomes an imperialist power in its own right. Some argue that China still has strong socialist features and cannot therefore be called capitalist or imperialist. Such arguments miss the direction in which China is heading. Except in the unlikely event of China returning to socialism or the crash of the Chinese capitalist economy, capitalist China will become an imperialist power. Some believe that China is already one.

Looking at the five criteria set out by Lenin, firstly, the monopolies that dominate economic life in China did not emerge from the concentration of production and capital but represent a subversion of a socialist economy.

Secondly, finance capital in China is in a process of development with banking assets still predominantly state owned, although private banking is set to expand.

Thirdly, it cannot be said that China’s export of capital takes primacy over commodity export. Unlike imperialist countries which rely heavily on the financial sector, China strongly depends on commodity export, despite its growing investment abroad in a variety of development projects; and the bulk of the trade surplus from commodity exports has gone into US

Treasury Bonds. Notably, because most of China's growth was driven by its fast growing internal market, the economy withstood the impact of the global economic crisis that started in 2008. Also, China is still a target of foreign direct investment from which foreign capitalists including multi-nationals reap huge super-profits by exploiting China's cheap resources and labour. As things stand, Chinese capital has yet to reach the stage where it needs to export capital to sustain growth. But that could change.

Fourthly, China is some way away from integrating itself with imperialist cartels that carve up the world among themselves. While China has stakes in the IMF, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, these institutions are dominated by the US and its allies and China is planning to establish an investment bank on its own initiative, in addition to the one to be established within the framework of BRICS. The long term implications of such moves designed to escape US hegemony in global financial institutions are yet to be seen.

Finally, on the question of territorial division of the whole world among capitalist powers, China's record is cleaner than that of the US, Japan, and the imperialist powers of Europe. While even Australia and India have been aggressors and meddlers in the internal affairs of countries, China, which was forced into a war with India in 1962 and border skirmishes with the Soviet Union in 1968, has not sought to occupy or annex territory for which it had no historical claim. While the claims themselves can be disputed, the Chinese approach, even under severe provocation, has been to seek a negotiated solution. Also China is the only global power without a military base or troops stationed in its name on foreign soil. Some insist that China is developing a string of naval bases in the Indian Ocean. The truth is that China is not building naval bases but acting to secure commercial harbour access in the event of disruption of its shipping by a US naval blockade on some pretext. The claim that Chinese has military expansionist objectives in the Indian Ocean is mischievous. However, if ever China seeks to establish military bases in another country, that move should be opposed unconditionally.



As for Russia, as pointed out earlier, the Soviet Union was, at worst, social imperialist. But the fall of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Collapse of the Soviet Union left Russia as a military power without an economic base to assert itself as an imperialist power. The G-7 group of imperialist powers took Russia into their fold in 1998 to rename itself G-8. But Russia, always seen as an 'outsider', was suspended from the group in March 2014 on the pretext of its role in the Crimean crisis. The Russian economy depends heavily on the export of primary goods (mostly fossil fuel and minerals) and its export of capital lags behind several small capitalist countries. Although Russia's economy is large, its inherent weaknesses deny it the status of an imperialist economic power; and it is Russia's military strength, a remnant of the military might of the Soviet Union that poses a challenge to the US while the reliance of most of Europe on Russian fuel gives Russia a strategic advantage against US imperialist bullying. Thus Russia is at most a fallen social imperialist power with imperialist potential and ambition.

It will therefore be appropriate to view Russia and China as potential imperialist powers and place India and Brazil among capitalist countries with imperialist aspirations.

### **Dealing with potential imperialist powers**

Russia and China, and for that matter India and Brazil and to a less extent South Africa, are potentially imperialist. The danger in declaring Russia and China as imperialist powers is that it risks putting them on par with the imperialist alliance led by the US. There are some who call India an imperialist power. Their purpose seems to be justifying their naming China as imperialist without appearing to be partial.

The Indian capitalist elite, who see themselves as successors to the British Raj, have cherished imperialist dreams and seek hegemony in South Asia. But India had to rely on support from the Soviet Union to assert itself and since the decline of the Soviet Union the Indian elite have turned towards the US. The once protective Indian economy is now open

to neo-colonial plunder, and India's inability to resolve its differences with Pakistan and its imagined 'Chinese threat' are taken advantage of by US imperialism to tempt India to become part of its project to encircle China.

The conduct of powerful states towards weaker states has to be viewed in context. The danger in branding any given country as imperialist or not (or not yet) imperialist at will is that one is also tempted to use the label as the prime criterion on which positions are taken on international issues.

Many Marxist Leninists are genuinely disappointed and angered by the betrayal of socialism in Russia and China. They are correct to assert that the regimes in Russia and China are reactionary, capitalist and unreliable in resisting imperialism. Some insist on the basis of certain Leninist criteria that Russia and China are imperialist. There are yet others who go a step further to include India in the list of imperialist powers, based on Indian expansionist activities in South Asia. Such extrapolation is dangerous since we can end up with an endlessly long list of imperialist powers including half the Third World.

What is important to Marxist Leninists is that they correctly grasp the main contradiction and set their sight on the main enemy.

US imperialism has been the main enemy of the people of the world for nearly seven decades, and it still is, while quickening its steps towards its grave. It has lost much of its global economic clout and political influence. But militarily it is still the most powerful global power. Out of desperation to rescue lost influence and regain economic pre-eminence, it is resorting to military adventure everywhere. Although its Asian and North African military adventures have been a disaster and its calculations in Ukraine have gone awry, it still wants to maintain a strong military presence. Iran is still a likely target of US-led military adventure, and not the only one.

The US in response to loss of influence in South America has strengthened its bases in Colombia, its only client in South America. Its military expansion in Africa and intervention in western Africa through the agency of France are in essence acts of recolonization.

The reality of the moment is that the US and its NATO allies comprise the only functioning global war machine and that US imperialism with support from its imperialist allies in Europe is systematically subverting states that defy or could defy its command. Thus safeguards are necessary about the recognition of any capitalist state as an imperialist power against the danger of mechanically arriving at positions on conflicts between two countries identified as imperialist.

We need to ask ourselves whether we should stand aside and relish the prospect of two imperialist powers destroying each other. Attempts by the US imperialism and the EU (although reluctantly) to isolate Russia are unacceptable. US military expansion in Africa is particularly unacceptable since it is not only about containing China but about recolonizing the continent. Attempts to encircle China cannot be encouraged. There is need to mobilize Indian mass opinion against the country being used to serve the global agenda of US imperialism.

Besides those who see Russia and China as potential imperialist powers, those who consider them to be already imperialist need to distinguish between an aggressive war-mongering US imperialism and weaker capitalist powers targeted by it. We need clear guidelines by which the principal enemy is identified at a given historic juncture. A good example is how the Vietnamese communists chose wisely in favour of France against Japan when the latter invaded their country. This was in direct contrast with a section of the Indian liberation movement siding with Japan (and later Germany) against Britain.

Neither China nor Russia is a friend of the revolution or an ally of the oppressed in the anti-imperialist cause. But that cannot be the sole criterion deciding the Marxist Leninist stand on international issues.

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## **High Living on Borrowed Money**

Responsible observers of economic affairs of the country have consistently warned about the “euphoria of borrowing”. Nimal Sanderatne writing in the Sunday Times of 29<sup>th</sup> July 2012 observed: “The latest exuberance was seen with the Central Bank being able to borrow US 1 billion in the international capital market. Soon on the heels of this ‘achievement’, we boasted of having obtained the fifth and final tranche of about US\$ 415 million of the Stand-by Arrangement (SBA) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Both these are considered not only achievements but an indication that the economy is doing well and that the international community is having confidence in the Sri Lankan economy. Nothing can be further from the truth.”

The attitude of two main political parties towards foreign loans has been as characterized above, and the mainstream media endorses it. Thus, the sense of thrill when the Prime Minister of Japan, visiting in early September 2014, offered a huge development loan was not surprising. The visit of the President of China later that month came with an even larger loan offer for development projects, and there was general endorsement of the ‘generosity’ of China, but for reservations in certain quarters about Chinese intentions to dominate Sri Lanka, the terms of credit, and the purpose for which the loan is to be used.

There is legitimate concern about the procedure followed by the Sri Lankan government in securing development loans and the award of contracts. But there is more importantly a political angle to some of the objections. There is a pro-West section of the Sri Lankan media and within the UNP whose resentment is that China is the lender. Interestingly no serious concern was expressed by these quarters when only two weeks

earlier Japan offered a massive loan package. Objections to the Sri Lankan government's seeking loans from commercial banks since the election of Mahinda Rajapaksa as President in 2005 have faded away, and commercial and non-concessionary borrowings now seem the norm so that commercial and non-concessionary borrowings by the government which was 4% of the foreign borrowings rose to 50% by 2013. One explanation is that since Sri Lanka graduated to a lower middle income country in 2010, it is not entitled to concessionary rates from international lending institutions. But the fact is that the tendency towards commercial and non-concessionary borrowings had started five years earlier, suggesting that the flawed development policy based on foreign 'aid' and foreign credit is firmly entrenched among policy makers. Given the rise of consumer culture in the country under imperialist globalization and the consequent decline in savings, the financing of development projects using local sources will be increasingly difficult. Thus commercial and non-concessionary borrowings will further increase to make commercial and non-concessionary borrowings constitute the dominant part of the growing foreign debt burden on the country.

It is flattering to think that the recent high profile visits by the Japanese Prime Minister and the Chinese President imply growing global importance of the country. In any event, the outcomes of the visits in the context of shifting regional alliances do not promise future prosperity or political stability. Chinese and Japanese businesses will, however, use these developments to enhance their business interests.

Conditions favouring the rise in Chinese economic influence were created by the US imperialist handling of Sri Lanka from 2005 and especially since the end of the war in 2009. But to threaten, as some pro-Western observers do, that if the trend persists, Sri Lanka will come under Chinese control is to stir panic. The renewed interest of Japan, whose economy is still in trouble, has much to do with the growing animosity towards China, encouraged by the US for its hegemonic ambitions in East Asia. But the people of Sri Lanka should awaken to the fact that the

country is being sleep-walked by the rulers into a debt trap, irrespectively of who the lenders are.

It is not a matter of where the money is borrowed from but a matter of whether the money should have been borrowed at all, based on the potential benefit of the loan to the interests of the country. The benefit of the Hambantota harbour remains debatable while the signs are that the Mattala airport will be an economic and environmental disaster. The Nelum Pokuna Theatre that was completed two years ago and the proposed Lotus Tower, which will be the tallest building in South Asia, are more in line with the “development vision” of the ruling Rajapaksa clan and are unlikely to bring much economic benefit, unless Colombo becomes the intended tourist paradise furnished with the proposed Crown Resorts of casino mogul James Packer among other dens of vice.

Sri Lankan advocates of globalized economy have no objection to the infrastructural development projects. That the government spends huge sums on super highways instead of on agricultural and industrial development, does not trouble those who imagine a future in tourism and service industries. Some even cynically dismiss concerns about the potential impact of casinos on social norms and religious values, arguing that the gambling industry has been actively revived since the 1980s, and that luxury hotels have their own in-house casinos featuring free drinks, food and floorshows as added attraction. What this means is that the regime of the Rajapaksa clan is propelling the country in the direction in which the UNP under Jayawardane sought to, with even greater vigour.

Apart from pressure from the IMF and the World Bank concerning the direction in which the economy should move to serve the imperialist goal of globalization, the political party in power is driven by its short sighted goals of winning elections and holding on to power for as long as possible. It helps them to push ‘visible development’ that has immediate political appeal, regardless of long term social and economic implications. Also the loans need to be paid back with interest, and that means taxes which will effectively rob the beneficiaries of development economics of their gains.

The debt payment cycle will recur for generations, as our experience is that that the end of one debt only marks the beginning of another. Debt is also a growing social disorder encouraged by banks, businesses and credit card companies, and drives consumerism at the expense of thrift and social interest.

Statistics for economic growth are in part illusory as they do not truly represent the production of industrial or agricultural goods. The failure of the national economy was not accidental, and was achieved through the policy of privatization, economic liberalization and unrestricted foreign imports initiated in 1978 by the UNP regime. The situation today is that labour has become the principal export of Sri Lanka, with around two million people (about 17% of the total labour force) working abroad, denying the local industry the labour force that it needs for its sustenance. Remittance income is by far the highest foreign exchange earner for Sri Lanka, providing 33% of the foreign exchange. Remittance income is 8% of Sri Lanka's GDP, gained from Sri Lanka's work force abroad. The social implications of overseas employment to the families and communities are well known and successive governments have cynically encouraged this export of labour as they badly need it to deal with the problem of balance of payments, which is aggravated by foreign borrowing with no significant benefit to the economy.

Sri Lanka's external debt is close to 80%, far exceeding that for other South Asian countries. The tendency for the Central Bank of Sri Lanka to mislead the public about the vulnerability of the economy was criticized by WA Wijewardena, former Deputy Governor, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, in his comment in Daily FT (<http://www.ft.lk/2014/05/26/sri-lankas-external-debt-sustainability-complacency-based-on-incomplete-analysis-may-be-the-worst-enemy/>). Wijewardena draws attention to the mishandling of data relating to the country's indebtedness by the Central Bank's Public Debt Department: "The indicators used in the Central Bank Press Release are incomplete, erroneous and confusing. The numbers used are significantly different from what has been reported in its own Annual Report. When

the indicators are reworked by using those numbers, the results are different from what the press release had sought to convey to the public. The reworked numbers do not allow the country's external debt managers to be complacent. Most indicators indicate that the country is at the threshold of high external debt vulnerability. That is an ominous red light and that red light has to be taken seriously."

Thus the growing external debt, the open economic policy that allows free flow of capital, and an economic policy emphasizing manufacture for selective export markets and the service sector, make the economy highly vulnerable to international financial crises.

The Sri Lankan ruling class has long since lost direction in its economic policies. Escalation of the national question into state repression and then war has helped successive governments to divert public attention from the economic crisis and the denial of democratic and human rights.

The economy is now guided by the line laid down by the IMF and the World Bank. The government undertakes economic development as defined directed by imperialism to the detriment of the country and people, and proudly declares that the IMF endorses its economic performance, which only means that the IMF is pleased that loan repayment is according to schedule and that the government tries hard to follow IMF guidelines on restructuring and curtailing public spending.

It is right to object to the government's choice and handling of certain foreign funded projects, including unacceptable methods of funding and irregular procedures based on political exigency and private gain of persons in key places. But it should be remembered that the notion of development pursued by successive governments since 1978 is fundamentally flawed. Thus criticism of the implementation of a flawed economic policy is inadequate, and the policies guided by imperialist globalization that underlie the erroneous path to development and drive the country to ruin should be rejected.

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# End of a Daydream

The website *lankanewsweb.net* on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2013 posted a story that several intellectuals and political party leaders had reportedly requested the Ven. Maduluwawe Sobitha Thero to come forward and contest as the common candidate at the next presidential election with the abolition of the executive presidency and formulation of a new constitution as the election issue, and that he will be named as the next common candidate. The story also added that several heads of the civil society (meaning NGO bosses in the Sri Lankan context) planned to meet with party leaders of the UNP, JVP and Democratic Party to discuss how they can support Ven. Sobitha Thero at the next presidential election.

The campaign to enlist Sobitha Thero as common candidate gathered momentum, after his interview to the Tamil newspaper 'Thinakkural' of 6<sup>th</sup> February 2014, where he made two significant statements, one on his intention of serving as President of Sri Lanka for six months during which time the executive presidential system will be dismantled and the other his consent to an international inquiry into war crimes. Also, he was agreeable to any common candidate provided that the person will step down after six months in the post.

Sobitha Thero's Movement for a Just Society inaugurated its campaign to abolish the executive presidency on 24 July. The event attracted many professionals — academics and lawyers especially — and other public figures including leaders of the UNP, the Democratic Party and the Tamil National Alliance and members of most political parties including the parliamentary left. A Road Map comprising the draft text of the relevant constitutional amendment and the strategy to implement it was put forward and discussed. There was no acrimony, but there was no outcome either. Although the project was thus stillborn, it caused some anxiety for the ruling clan, who were not happy about the prospect of a united opposition, but not for long.

Prospective bidders for the role of common candidate included among others the former President Chandrika Kumaratunga, and discussions invariably drifted into debates about the most suitable candidate rather than a programme of action that did not merely hinge on defeating Mahinda Rajapaksa at the polls. Thus even if the fielding of a common candidate was accepted by all major players, the prevailing deep distrust among the parties and personalities would have been a serious stumbling block in agreeing on a common candidate to contest the presidential election based on the single issue of eliminating the executive presidency.

The JVP although agreeable to the idea initially soon began to retreat to avert risking its prospects to become an alternative to the ruling UPFA and the UNP by joining a grand alliance. The final retreat came in the wake of the results of the elections to the Uva Provincial Council, where the JVP made a small but significant electoral recovery.

The UNP whose fortunes were still slow to return in the provincial council elections held in March 2014 maintained an interest, as did the Democratic Party led by former Army General Sarath Fonseka which performed better than the JVP in the elections to the North Western Provincial Council in September 2013 and Western Provincial Council in March 2014. With the reassuring results of the elections to the Uva Provincial Council the UNP has now decided to field its leader Ranil Wickramasinghe as candidate in the next presidential Election.

The abject performance of the Democratic Party in Uva is likely to badly hurt its future electoral performance, since in earlier elections the party capitalized on the mood of frustration among once likely voters for the UNP and the JVP. The Democratic Party has no political alternative to offer, and the image of Sarath Fonseka as the military commander who led the armed forces to victory will be even less effective in vote gathering than the fast declining influence of the image of Mahinda Rajapaksa as the conqueror of the LTTE and rescuer of the country from terrorism.

The point to remember is that even if the leading opposition parties and the assemblage of political NGOs had agreed on a common candidate,

consensus on other important issues would have been hard to achieve. Thus the single-issue election campaign for the common candidate would be half hearted and unconvincing to the electorate because the common candidate will have nothing more to offer than the abolition of executive presidency. The success of any single-issue candidate requires the vast majority to recognize that the issue is more important than all others and its resolution will assure the resolution of other important issues. Such assurance is not possible without a common political programme and it is unlikely that the public would rally round the common candidate, although some intellectuals and political analysts of various persuasions are still attracted to the idea of a common candidate as the cure for the crisis of democracy in Sri Lanka.

Undoubtedly the executive presidency is at the core of the political tragedy of the country and its elimination is essential to the resolution of the political and economic crises faced by the country. But the task of abolishing the executive presidency cannot be achieved solely through an electoral process and without addressing other serious coexisting threats to democracy.

Thirty six years of the executive presidential system has inflicted severe damage to the parliamentary democratic system and to democratic institutions in the public sphere which were built through decades of struggle by the masses, especially the working class. Every aspect of the state has been thoroughly politicized to serve the interests of a ruling clique. Corruption and politically patronized crime thrive unchecked. The war against the LTTE has been used to effectively subvert freedom of the media and curtail the right to free speech and congregation and enhance the role of the security forces in society.

Today the armed forces are playing an unduly large and adverse role in the civil administration of the country. It is that context that Chandrika Kumaratunga recently warned of the possibility of a military take over. What is particularly dangerous is that fascism in the form of ethno-religious fundamentalism has entered the fray and is growing steadily

with encouragement and support from key sections of the state. Thus the prospect of a section of the armed forces joining ethno-religious fascists to seize power cannot be ruled out.

Advocates of the single issue common candidate challenge to the Rajapaksa regime assume that all will be well once their candidate is in power and gets down to dismantling the executive presidency as pledged. It will be well to remember that elected governments with strong popular mandates for a clearly stated political programme have been subverted by reactionaries in Third World countries with a more sound parliamentary democracy than what prevails in Sri Lanka.

Thus the need of the moment is to make the public aware of the current political and economic crises and the growing threat to democracy. Thus, unseating the incumbent without a clear democratic political programme to fill the political vacuum that will follow and mobilizing mass support for that programme is to invite tragedy.

The outcome of the election to the Uva Provincial Council has obliterated the already fading prospects of a common presidential candidate. The UNP is now more confident of its electoral prospects, although it is doubtful that the UNP candidate will defeat the incumbent at the forthcoming presidential election whenever it may be held. But the need to eliminate the executive presidential system remains. The end of the daydream of a common candidate is a good thing as it will awaken those who are genuinely concerned for democracy and social justice in the country to the objective reality.

The task that should have preceded the search and for campaign for a common candidate has not lost its importance. It is therefore necessary that the left, democratic and progressive forces unite and get down to serious mass political work to restore democracy and the rule of law in the country than indulge in idle intellectual exercises.

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# **The Current International Situation: A Revolutionary Overview**

*(Article based on the Political Statement of the Fourth Plenary Meeting of the Fifth All Sri Lanka Congress of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, 29 & 30 August 2014, drafted by comrades SK Senthivel, General Secretary and V Mahendran, National Organizer)*

As true internationalists, Marxist Leninists are fully aware of the mutual significance of national and international issues. Thus a revolutionary understanding of the current international situation based on Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought is essential for Marxist Leninists to determine their positions on national and international affairs.

As people and countries of the world are still in the imperialist era, it is necessary for us to be clear and far sighted about imperialism. It is well to remember the four basic contradictions of the world as declared by Lenin, namely:

The contradiction between the socialist and capitalist systems;

The contradiction between capital and labour;

The contradiction between oppressed peoples and nations on the one hand against imperialism on the other;

The contradiction among imperialist and capitalist countries.

It should be noted that Marxist Leninists are discussing internationally the prospect of adding to the above four the contradiction between imperialism and nature.

The ruling classes and policy makers of the US and other imperialist powers of the West are adopting an imperialist stand whose current programme is 'globalization', under which, neoliberal economics has gripped the whole world. The expansion of capital, plunder of resources of countries, exploitation and extraction of profit are now being carried out through it. To facilitate the process, imperialism is adopting all means including war in its programme. Thus US imperialism remains the main enemy of the people of the world.

While nothing has changed fundamentally in the past few years, global trends that developed in the first decade of the century have intensified. Although the US has failed to fulfil its intentions in Iraq and Afghanistan, it has continued to wage wars of aggression on its own and with the support of European countries. The ferocity of US intervention is most visible in North Africa and the Middle East. As predicted by Marxist Leninists, the victories of the popular uprisings referred to as the "Arab Spring" were soon subverted. The US came to a compromise with the Islamic rule that lasted briefly in Egypt to make cooperation possible between the Egyptian army and the government. Not long after, the army overthrew the government. Now there is a military dictatorial government which is more even more cooperative with the US and Israel than Mubarak who was in power earlier. The Egyptian regime has degenerated to the level where it even justifies the Israeli genocide in progress in Gaza.

Although the US was unable to place in power a dictatorial regime of its desire in Tunisia owing to the existence of a strong left tendency there, it has been able to preserve a moderate Islamist regime that is willing to compromise with the West.

The people's struggle to overthrow the dictatorial regime in Yemen merely brought to power yet another dictator who was acceptable to the US and Saudi Arabia. The people's uprising in Bahrain was cruelly suppressed with the help of Saudi Arabian troops.

To cap it all, the West toppled the regime in Libya. Although the Gaddafi regime was overthrown, the West has thus far been unable to

establish a stable regime in Libya. The weapons issued to fight Gaddafi are being used by Islamist terrorists in North African countries neighbouring Libya. The ongoing armed rebellion in the north of Mali is particularly important in this respect.

What the US has achieved so far has been the toppling of potentially hostile regimes and ensuring the continuation of regimes supportive of it wherever such regimes existed before. The plan of the US to stage a regime change in Syria inspired by the regime change in Libya has not succeeded. Instead, the Islamist terrorist organization Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) nurtured by Saudi Arabia, besides destroying its rivals in Syria to dominate a part of Syria, went on to penetrate Iraq and capture a large part of Iraq by the middle of this year. The terrorism and religious fanatical murders of the ISIS apart, the declaration by its leader that he was the Caliph of the entire Islamic world has created a new complication. The US is using the pretext of the ISIS creating trouble for the regime in Iraq and to the Kurdish autonomous state established in northern Iraq with support from the US to enable the return of its troops to Iraq.

The US needs to ensure its presence in the Gulf of Persia. Hence, the US wants its troops to stay on in Iraq until there is a pro-US regime change in Iran. Also, given its failure to change the regime in Syria, the US is unwilling to annihilate the ISIS. Thus, the current interest of the US is to maintain the Middle East as an eternal battlefield.

The US grip on Latin America has loosened very much. Hence the US is intensifying its regime change efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although it has succeeded in Haiti and Honduras, it has been unable to establish regimes with popular support there. The recent change of government in El Salvador through the electoral process is not to the liking of imperialism. US efforts, since the death of Hugo Chavez, to topple the Venezuelan government manifested themselves as civil commotion. Although the efforts have failed, subversive activities of the US in Latin America and the Caribbean are unlikely to cease.

The main concern of the US is about the re-emergence of Russia as a military power and the emergence of China as an economic power because they comprise severe challenges to its global domination. The US, which has become a major debtor country, is soon due to lose its position as the most powerful economy of the world. Its global domination cannot continue to rely on its political influence. Thus it has to rely heavily on its military might. It is as a result that the US has put forward its defence programme for the region and seeks to strengthen it.

Moves by the US in Europe and Asia should be seen in the light of the US plan to isolate and weaken China and Russia before they get stronger. At the same time, since the US and European countries have lost their manufacturing bases owing to outsourcing of industrial production to countries with cheap labour, they depend heavily on products from Third World Countries. China's recent industrial growth thus developed based on an export economy. Consequently, China depends increasingly on African and South American countries for raw materials, and therefore takes great interest in direct and indirect investment in the countries of Africa and South America. The possible reason why the Chinese approach seems more attractive than that of the West is that China does not interfere in the internal affairs of countries. As a result, the rising influence of China in sub-Saharan African countries hinders the hegemonic ambitions of the US. Therefore the US is now targeting countries which preserve good relations with China. The US is acting to establish AFRICOM, the military outfit of the US for Africa, on African soil. Over the past few years France interfered militarily in the Ivory Coast, the Central African Republic and Mali. As these were former colonies of France, it was convenient to dispatch French troops there. But this trend is really part of the Africa programme of the US. In Asia, the US which once zealously stirred internal conflicts in China is now scheming to draw China into war by using China's disputes with its neighbours over maritime borders.

The US acted in breach of its pledges to Russia following the break-up of the Soviet Union to draw into the NATO, the US-led military alliance in



Europe, not only the former Warsaw Pact allies of the Soviet Union but also former member states of the Soviet Union. It was in the context of US efforts to draw Georgia into the NATO that there was military confrontation between Russia and Georgia. This year, there was a US inspired coup in Ukraine. The consequent internal crisis in Ukraine and secessionist moves in the South and East of the country are pushing Europe towards a war crisis. Imposition of fresh sanctions against Russia by the US and the European Union amid fresh evidence on the shooting down of the Malaysian civilian aircraft pointing to the possibility of the Ukrainian regime being the culprit has to be seen as an attempt to draw Russia into confrontation.

The haste of US imperialism in targeting China and Russia has another important reason as well. The West has yet to recover from the economic crisis that began in 2008. The people in European countries are bitter about the transfer of the burdens of the crisis of capitalism to the people. In Greece and Spain, new left tendencies that reject the old revisionist left are growing stronger. At the same time fascism and racist tendencies are on the rise in response to the economic crisis. Public disaffection in Europe, which has led to successive changes of government in each country, has not emerged as a strong revolutionary force of resistance. In short, it is widely felt that capitalism has aggravated the economic crisis in European countries and the impotence of reformist parties is recognized, but the desire for a meaningful alternative has not developed sufficiently among the people. Nevertheless Marxist Leninists in those countries are actively pursuing their revolutionary goal.

There is need for caution about rejecting and harshly criticizing the Cuban and North Korean states, which could be called socialist, for their various shortcomings. We should not forget that these states have been the subject of all manner of international pressure from the US and its allies, and that conspiracies to subvert them continue. We should in addition be alert to the systematic distortion of information about them by the powerful global news media. Thus, explaining to the people the purpose

of the attacks on these countries by the West and opposing such attacks is important to international proletarian solidarity.

It is not possible to win socialism through the parliamentary system of government or electoral politics. However, US imperialism is seeking to topple governments with left tendencies on the pretext of saving democracy. While many Latin American countries are rid of direct US hegemony, they are not in a position to avert US intervention. There is no strong revolutionary movement operating outside the parliamentary system in any Latin American country other than Colombia. Hence it is important that we assess elected governments with left identity based on criteria such as how far they carry forward anti-imperialist politics, how far they seek to free themselves from the effects of globalization, how far they go towards defending the interests of the toiling masses and oppressed people, and how hard they try to protect national resources from foreign and local forces of big capital.

While the need of countries to rely on foreign investment and export of primary resources to free themselves from economic backwardness is acceptable, continued reliance on export of primary resources and foreign investment is unacceptable. Hence, economic policies should be assessed based on how the proceeds of export of resources are used. In this respect, while the practice in Venezuela can be supported, the policies of Ecuador and Bolivia can only be critically endorsed. The aim of the criticism should be to urge freedom from the clutches of imperialism. But it is correct to criticize regimes, like the one in Brazil, that push their countries further into the trap of globalization and to encourage progressive forces to work against their economic policies.

The region of the world whose resources are plundered most severely is sub-Saharan Africa. The secessionist war and the ongoing civil war in South Sudan and the civil war that went on in Congo for two decades and is not fully settled are wars induced to serve the interests of the West. While it is said that Islamist extremism is the cause of internal crises in the north and north west of Africa, in most instances, Islamist extremism and

extremist organizations came into being with the backing of the US, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Subsequently, they turned against the US. Also, the US, despite claims of being at war with Islamic fundamentalism, in many instances has Islamic fundamentalism as its ally and instrument.

Over the past few decades, we have seen contradictions among nationalities and ethnic communities being developed into civil war. Besides its being a planned activity of imperialism, we also see the local chauvinistic capitalists seeking to profit from it. Of late, differences between religions and between religious sects have assumed the form of severe conflict and cruel repression. Subjecting of the Muslim minority to Buddhist violence in Myanmar, which is “advancing towards democracy” with the blessings of the US, is another instance where identity politics serves the interests of imperialism and local reaction.

The victory of the People’s War led by the Maoists of Nepal was the most important of the victories secured by people’s armed liberation movements since the end of the last century. But owing to opportunistic trends within their party, the Maoists suffered setbacks. Indian hegemonic intervention had an important part in splitting the Maoists. Nevertheless, the experiences of Nepal are important reminders that the people cannot be liberated through the parliamentary path. Neither the parliamentary left of Nepal nor the Nepal Congress can solve the problems of Nepal. The many NGOs created with Western funding are working hard to depoliticize the people. Hence, Nepal can be liberated only through the Maoists rectifying their mistakes and making a fresh start from where they left. It is welcome that a section of the Maoists are undertaking a self critical approach.

To sum up, imperialist globalization has messed up and rattled the economies of countries. Consequently, internal contradictions of countries have sharpened. Where contradictions have not been handled from a proletarian perspective, they have developed into conflicts among nationalities, religions and various social groups. There is risk of their further aggravation. Identity politics is being intensely promoted through

NGOs. Its dangers have been seen through experience in Sri Lanka. Identity politics has been implemented in ways designed to obstruct people from uniting as a class and retard the politics of class struggle. It is part of a planned imperialist programme.

In the current neo-colonial environment, Marxist Leninists should approach imperialism and its characteristics with a concrete analytical outlook; and analyse the global trends and situation based on objective reality. They need to be clear about the way imperialism functions in the neo-colonial era. Here, besides the correctness or otherwise of identifying certain countries as imperialist, it is essential to appreciate the implications of the positions that we may arrive at based on such identification.

The US, the capitalist countries of Europe and Japan comprise an imperialist alliance and seek to divide the world among them. Attempts to make Russia a junior partner have failed. China is not a socialist country now. Although a capitalist country, its conduct differs from that of Western imperialist countries in key respects. Notably, Chinese capitalism lacks the key imperialist feature of being a part of monopolist syndicates. Also, the methods that China has used to expand trade and the nature of Chinese capital lack the historical characteristics of imperialism. Besides, the volume of foreign capital entering China exceeds China's foreign investment, i.e. the extent to which foreign capital exploits Chinese labour exceeds the extent to which Chinese capital exploits labour outside its national boundaries. Thus the use formulae such as export of capital alone to call a country imperialist could make Singapore and Saudi Arabia imperialist countries.

China is a fast growing capitalist country. It relies on other countries for its raw materials. It cannot remain static, and if it does not return to socialism, the chances are that it will in due course become imperialist. Thus, in today's situation it is appropriate to treat not only China but also India and Russia and several other countries to be capitalist countries that could develop into imperialist countries. But to say that they are already imperialist does not seem correct.

Even otherwise, if they could be called imperialist by some definition, there is a need to consider fundamental differences and contradictions between them and the imperialist countries led by the US. It cannot be a Marxist Leninist position to ignore all such considerations and declare that all imperialists are alike and that there is no need to consider the contradictions among them.

Against a background of pressures from the West and the financial crisis of global capital, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa established the BRICS in 2008 for economic cooperation. Recently BRICS established an international financial institution, which may at present be seen as a shield against the global economic crisis and domination by the US, and not a new imperialist alliance, since three of its members are close to the US. Russia and China joined three former Soviet republics in Asia to found the Shanghai 5, which has expanded since 2001 to become the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation which now includes most of Asia either as members or observers or countries with links. Asian defence is important among its aims. While activities of military, economic, cultural cooperation are undertaken, there is little prospect of the alliance developing into a military alliance. Those who seek to portray such alliances as imperialist hegemonic organizations intentionally avoid reference to the imperialist activities which made them necessary, and we should be alert about it.

None of the acts of aggression by the US is on a socialist state. But we cannot be indifferent to it. We cannot step aside and claim that US intervention in Ukraine concerns rivalry between the imperialist powers of US and Russia. That will strengthen US imperialism. Equally, we cannot ignore a possible cold war that the US would wage on China. Thus we need to decide our position on international issues on the basis that US imperialism is the main enemy of the people of the world.

Regarding the Middle East, we need to be clear about what is going on in Palestinian Gaza. The barbarian attack on Gaza by Israel was launched with advice and support from the US in its background. The meaning of

the series of regime changes by the US should be understood. It should at least be understood that the US and its allies fundamentally differ from any other capitalist country.

The US which invaded Iraq has ruined that country and is keeping it as a killing field. The situation in Afghanistan is similar. Unable to achieve regime change in Syria by direct aggression, the US seeks to topple the regime through paid agents, using Syria's internal contradictions.

Hence it is important for the people of Sri Lanka to oppose the US, the main enemy of the people of the world, and its allies. At the same time, the agenda of India, the regional hegemonic power, to bring South Asian countries including Sri Lanka under its control deserves attention. India has been a strategic partner of the US. A tendency for even closer ties is discernible with the coming to power of Narendra Modi.

There is underlying rivalry between policy makers of the US and India on who is to dominate over Sri Lanka. Hence US imperialism, its Western imperialist allies and the Indian expansionist power aim to keep Sri Lanka within their respective spheres of influence. Modi and the BJP will not deviate from their regional hegemonic position. The reality therefore is that will they will take decisions based on their regional interests in all matters pertaining to Sri Lanka, including the national question.

Thus it is important to uphold anti-imperialism at all levels. In this respect, Marxist Leninists should join hands with other left, democratic and progressive forces. Their bounden anti-imperialist duty is to be integral with internationalist revolutionary parties and forces. Their anti-imperialist programme should be extended and carried forward as an international obligation.

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## Lessons of Gaza

### **Drivers of Destruction**

Between 7<sup>th</sup> July and 26<sup>th</sup> August 2014, Israel, fully backed by the US, conducted another genocidal attack on the people of Gaza, far exceeding in brutality and destruction its earlier missions of murder. Insensitive to world opinion, it killed more than 2000 Palestinians, wounded more than 10,000 and displaced close to 300,000 from their homes. The victims were mostly civilians, including many children. The immense infrastructural damage included the obliteration of Gaza's only electric power plant and wrecking of nearly all water supply and sewage treatment facilities.

Yet, Zionist Israel, one of the most powerful military machines, once again failed to bomb the people of Gaza into submission. Its long-standing policy of apartheid, ethnic cleansing, occupation and territorial expansion failed despite full complicity of the US in the brutal control and subjugation of a captive indigenous population. Israel, the largest recipient of US military aid (after Afghanistan where the US is still at war), in addition to its annual \$3 billion promptly received a further \$500 million to replenish weapons that were "used up" against the almost defenceless Gaza and another \$500 million towards the Iron Dome missile defence system. (Source: [http://nepajac.org/UNAC\\_081914.html](http://nepajac.org/UNAC_081914.html))

That the US has been complicit in every act of evil by Israel is no secret and the US has been a shamelessly consistent defender of Israel in the UN in the face of numerous resolutions adopted against Israeli violations. But what is worse is the hypocrisy of the mainstream media including those with "moderate" and "liberal" labels. But for the occasional comment by commentators with a conscience, the thrust of the media narrative varies between blaming both Hamas and Israel, and denouncing Hamas for provoking Israel to exercise its "right to defend itself" against terror.

No account is taken of the lasting damage suffered by the survivors or the feelings of the Palestinians. Mustafa Barghouti, Palestinian MP and member of the PLO's Central Council addressing Palestine Solidarity Campaign activists in London said that "After slaughtering thousands of people and destroying thousands of homes and to speak about reconstruction and to immediately allow Israeli companies to make a profit from this is also an insult to humanity". He also noted that what happened in Gaza and before that in the West Bank are war crimes and crimes against humanity and the massacres against a civilian population would not have occurred if so many Western world leaders hadn't been complicit. Referring to the scale of damage inflicted and weaponry used, he suggested that Gaza was used as a testing ground for Israeli weapons; and he could be right. (See <http://www.palestinecampaign.org/moving-powerful-mustafa-barghoutis-speech-destruction-gaza/#sthash.V3tjlUY0.dpuf>).

Gideon Levy writing in the Israeli daily Haaretz ([www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com)), cited in <http://socioecohistory.wordpress.com/2014/07/16/israels-real-purpose-in-gaza-operation-to-kill-arabs-mass-murder-inc>, is closer to the political reality: "The goal of Operation Protective Edge is to restore the calm; the means: killing civilians. The slogan of the Mafia has become official Israeli policy. Israel sincerely believes that if it kills hundreds of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, quiet will reign. It is pointless to destroy the weapons stores of Hamas, which has already proved capable of rearmament. Bringing down the Hamas government is an unrealistic (and illegitimate) goal, one that Israel does not want: It is aware that the alternative could be much worse. That leaves only one possible purpose for the military operation: death to Arabs, accompanied by the cheering of the masses."

The central truth that hurts the Zionists most is that Israel has failed in its mission. Its attack has made the Palestinians more resolute in their resistance and Hamas more popular in Gaza and in the West Bank. That does not mean that Israel will not strike again, and in fact Israel has already started gathering excuses for violating the fragile ceasefire.



## **Impediments to Justice**

The Palestinian cause has much support across the world. Yet protests against Israeli impudence have been systematically weakened by cunning distortion of the Palestinian question into an issue of survival of Israel. The media in the West have played a cynical role in bringing about this shift of perspective. The media makes an effort to appear 'objective' only when genocide and destruction are too immense to ignore, but offer their routine excuses for Israeli misconduct. Leading media such as the BBC, CNN and Sky avoided showing Israel's use of weapons prohibited under international law. The public was correctly informed of Israeli crimes by activists through private communication and social media, against heavy odds, with the media dominated by Zionists and campaigners for Israel.

Israel suffered a setback in the 1970s when the global anti-imperialist mood was so strong that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) won observer status in the UN. But the PLO leadership, the Fatah especially, squandered its political edge by relying on reactionary Arab regimes for funding and letting corruption grow unchecked within the ranks of the PLO. It was the First Palestinian Intifada (1987-93) against violations by Israel that revived the Palestinian struggle. The PLO took advantage of the Intifada, really a result of mass frustration at the impotence of the PLO, to negotiate with a desperate Israel, only to play into the hands of the US and Israel to make a deal with Israel. The PLO gained little in exchange for 'recognizing the state of Israel'. Israel allowing Arafat and his supporters to return to the occupied territory, and the powerless Palestinian National Authority established following the Oslo Accord of 1993 was a sham.

The Palestinian Authority, under the control of Israel, is headed by the discredited President Mahmoud Abbas, who is totally subservient to the US and Israeli regimes. The US resented the electoral success of the Hamas in 2006, and Abbas obliged by dismissing the Hamas-led government of unity and aggravating the conflict between the Fatah and Hamas.

Sustained attempts at reconciliation between the Fatah and Hamas led to an agreement signed in Gaza City on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2014, about which Israel

has openly expressed resentment. Thus the Israeli attack needs to be seen in this context as well. Abbas is suspected of undermining the Fatah and Hamas reconciliation in his pursuit of fruitless negotiations with Israel. His recent sabotage of the Palestinian application for membership in the International Criminal Court (ICC), amid the devastating Israeli bombing of Gaza is another instance of acting to please his Israeli partners. Israel is concerned about the initiation of a war crimes case and is acting fast to avert one by setting up its own investigations into the campaign on Gaza, and Abbas has given a helping hand. Significantly Hamas had agreed be party to a Palestinian declaration to join the ICC, incurring the risk of coming under a war crimes action itself for its rocket fire from Gaza. (Source: <http://www.intifada-palestine.com/>).

However, a comment in the Guardian on the performance of the ICC, citing the book "Rough Justice: The International Criminal Court in a World of Power Politics" (Oxford University Press, 2014) by David Bosco (<http://www.theguardian.com/law/2014/aug/18/hague-court-western-pressure-gaza-inquiry>) is revealing. It is clear that pressure from the US, UK, France and Israel on Abbas and that of US on the ICC have played a role in insulating Israel from being investigated.

The regime changes implemented by the US in the Middle East and the US mischief aided by Saudi Arabia to promote Sunni fundamentalism and to create a Sunni-Shia rift are major setbacks to the Palestinian struggle. The rift designed to undermine the Islamist regime in Shia majority Iran has deepened divisions in Iraqi society and weakened the post-Saddam Shia majority government. The support that the Palestinian struggle enjoyed in the Arab world has suffered further since the subversion of the "Arab Spring" of 2012. It is however creditable that the predominantly Sunni Palestinian people did not yet fall prey to the US conspiracy.

### **Hopes for the Future**

The ceasefire in Gaza is both a humiliation of Israel and a victory of the people of Gaza. Israel may attack again and pursue its policy of expansion

in the West Bank. But the people Palestine have clearly demonstrated that they cannot be subdued by Israeli violence however severe. But that alone is inadequate to recover the losses of the Palestinians. There is need to build on this success.

The resistance in Gaza against Israel succeeded because of mass solidarity and support. Thus Palestinian unity is of prime importance for the future. Sectarianism of any kind will weaken the Palestinian cause. The people of Palestine are aware of this and have been overwhelming in their support for reconciliation between the Fatah and Hamas. The fact that Israel resents it and actively seeks to drive a wedge between the two sides is in itself good reason for further pursuit of reconciliation. Deep differences exist among the various political actors in Palestine and mutual suspicion is strong between the leaders of the Fatah and Hamas. These cannot be wished away. Any reconciliation, if limited to power sharing between Fatah and Hamas, will only encourage anti-democratic forces within the two organizations. All organizations should realize that the essential unity is that of the oppressed Palestinian people, and that reconciliation should transcend issues between the main rivals to aim to unite the masses against the common enemy, namely Israel backed by US imperialism in the immediate context.

The essential requirements for lasting unity and success of the Palestinian struggle are anti-imperialism, mass political line based on broad based unity and mass struggle.

The betrayal of the Palestinian people by reactionary Arab regimes is not surprising. Despite the treachery of the regimes the masses not only in Arab countries but all over the world have not failed to express their solidarity with the Palestinian people in their moment of need. That sense of international solidarity transcends nationalism and is not only a ray of hope for Palestine but also for the global anti-imperialist struggle.

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# *NDMLP Diary*

## *NDMLP Statement to the Media*

*14<sup>th</sup> September 2014*

### **Statement Marking the 36<sup>th</sup> Year of the NDMLP**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party made the following statement marking the 36<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Party at the concluding session of the Fourth Plenary Meeting of the Fifth All Sri Lanka Congress of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party on 30 August 2014. The session was chaired by Comrade V Mahendran, National Organizer of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party.

There will be no solution to the national question or to the economic crises and problems faced by the workers, peasants and other toiling masses as long as the present political structure and the executive presidential system are in practice. Also, nothing will be achieved by changing the executive president. Only through changing the constitution to be one for the working population and the nationalities can the executive presidential system be eliminated. It cannot be done through elections. Today executive power is put into effect as fascism. Political awakening among the people and mobilization for mass struggle are necessary to resist it. Democratic forces and left and progressive organizations should unite to give leadership to it.

In the current situation in the country, we find the economic problems to be related to the fundamental contradiction while the national question is the main contradiction. As a result, the workers, peasants and other toiling masses are facing severe crises and problems. The present rulers

have no plans to find solutions for them. At the same time, the regime of the Rajapaksa brothers will not find a solution to the national problem that concerns the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamils as well as other national minorities.

Even after the passage of five years since the end of war, there is no good intention on the part of the government of the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists. Sinhala Buddhist fundamentalists and religious fanatics are expressing more and more of their evil thoughts and intentions. All of them seem to be oppressors of nationalities.

The neo-liberal economic policy carried forward in the country and the acts of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist oppression are implemented in an interlinked manner and according to plan by the regime of the Rajapaksa brothers. Severe repression is used in the process. Executive power strikes down democracy, human rights and the freedoms of speech, writing and congregation. Law and order and the rule of law have been made ridiculous. The stationing of troops continues in the North. Land and settlements of people are in the grip of the army, as for example in Valikamam North in the north and Sampur in the East. Because the Northern Provincial Council is not under supporters of the government, it has been denied even the minor rights that other provincial councils have been allowed. Damages and losses due to war have not been recovered, and the government is not much interested in the matter. Everything is measured using chauvinistic criteria.

Under the conditions, the Tamil parties remain incapable of building up the ability to confront the regime of the Rajapaksa brothers and its terrible chauvinistic activities through uniting a broad section of forces and advancing in mass struggle. The reason is that they remain incapable of developing new policies or programmes based on past experience. Their principal targets are parliamentary seats and posts in the provincial and local councils. They use Tamil nationalism as their tool, but are unwilling to move it away from conservative ideology and thought and transform it into a progressive Tamil nationalism. Their journey, once

again, hand in hand with conservative thought, racial sentiment, racialism and racial fixation. They do not have the policies to make allies of the toiling Sinhalese masses and democratic, progressive and leftist forces. Tamil nationalist conservative thought has been a hindrance to distinguishing between Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists and the ordinary oppressed Sinhalese people.

At the same time the Tamil parties live in hope that the rulers of India, US and the West will secure a just solution to the national question. There is no record that oppressed people in any part of the world have won true liberation by depending on such international hegemonic forces. Neither the international inquiry nor the 'international community' will bring about a solution to the national question. Hence politically awakening the people and carrying broad-based mass struggles can be the only alternative political path and journey for the people. The -Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party is working with the aim to mobilise left, democratic and progressive forces to that end.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary

### ***NDMLP Statement to the Media***

*4<sup>th</sup> September 2014*

### **Tribute to Comrade Bala Tampoe**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following message of condolence on behalf of the Politburo of the Party in connection with the departure of Comrade Bala Tampoe.

The passing away of veteran left trade unionist Comrade Bala Tampoe would be observed with sorrowful salutations by the working class. The tremendous service that Comrade Tampoe has rendered to the working

class and to the left trade union movement in the 1940's will have a permanent place in history.

The rights and privileges that today's workers and other employees enjoy in Sri Lanka were won during the last century through uncompromising debate in trade union negotiations and strikes. The contributions of Comrade Tampoe will be remembered forever along with those of left trade unionist leaders who worked with dedication to secure those rights and privileges. He made a wholesome contribution to important island wide struggles such as the General Strike of 1947 and the Hartal of 1953. As the leader of the Ceylon Mercantile Union he dedicated his abilities honestly to the trade union movement and the working class to put forward demands on behalf of the workers and other employees and win them through a variety of trade union actions. While we may differ with him on his political views, we cannot dispute that he served the trade union movement and the working class honestly and with dedication. The Party pays its profound tribute to Comrade Bala Tampoe, the veteran left trade union leader and campaigner.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary

### ***NDMLP Statement to the Media***

*10<sup>th</sup> August 2014*

### **Violence against Tamil Undergraduates**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party in connection with the vicious acts of violence against Tamil undergraduates of the University of Sabaragamuwa.

It is believed that ethno-religious fundamentalist fascist groups have been behind the acts of racist threat, attack and arrest against Tamil undergraduates of the University of Sabaragamuwa.

It was such groups that had earlier disrupted and halted the meeting for families of the disappeared at the Centre for Society and Religion in Maradana (Colombo). What is evident is that such fundamentalist fascist groups, besides having patronage at high levels of the government, also enjoy the support of the police. The growth of such ethno-religious fundamentalist fascist groups in the country is a newly emergent danger. The Party is of the view that the need has arisen for the entire people and the democratic and left forces to act with unity and far sight against these forces.

These ethno-religious fundamentalist fascist groups have during the past two years been actively targeting the Muslims and mosques in this country. The unleashing of a killing spree and arson in Aluthgama was a high point of those activities. On none of these occasions had the government taken impartial and firm action against the fascist gangs and thugs. At the same time, planned activities by the police have been covered up. It is as a sequel to these events that racist posters were put up against Tamil Students in the University of Sabaragamuwa. That was followed by attacks on a Tamil student by unknown persons and then the arrest and detention by the police of another Tamil student. Threat continues that further attacks and arrests will take place.

The fascist groups have launched the University of Sabaragamuwa incident on a trial basis with the motive of inciting racism and provoking communal clashes in universities. It is evident that it is for the purpose of continuing in power that persons in responsible positions have allowed the ethno-religious fundamentalist fascist gangs and thugs to act freely and as they wished.

The steps being taken by democratic and left political parties and the Inter University Students Federation are to be welcomed and should reach all the Tamil, Muslim, Hill Country Tamil and especially Sinhalese people.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary



*NDMLP Statement to the Media*

3<sup>rd</sup> August 2014

**Revolutionary Red Salute of the New-Democratic  
Marxist-Leninist Party to the Resolute Communist  
Comrade K Thangavadivel on his Departure**

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party paid the following tribute to the late Comrade K Thangavadivel.

Comrade K Thangavadivel passed away on 29.07.2014 at the age of eighty three. He accepted Marxism during his youth and accordingly joined the communist movement in the North.

Besides being angry about social inequality and the caste based untouchability arising from it, he had the revolutionary urge to smash them. As a result, he was a social activist and placed himself at the forefront of mobilizing the youth and the people along the path for social liberation.

From 1964, when he was in the Revolutionary Communist Party led by Comrade Sanmugathan, Comrade Thangavadivel actively joined hands with leading comrades such as Comrades M Karthigesan, Dr SV Seenivasagam, KA Subramaniam and K Daniel. During that period the 1966 October 21 uprising based on the declaration "Let the caste system be smashed! Let social justice surge!" was initiated by the Revolutionary Communist Party.

"The Mass Campaign against Untouchability" was initiated amid the revolutionary struggles born of that uprising. Comrade Thangavadivel joined comrades including SCN Nagaratnam, K Daniel, KA Subramaniam, Dr SV Seenivasagam, Mann N Mutthiah, S Ganesan, M Sinniah and K Krishnapillai in the leadership committee of the Campaign and functioned with force.

An art exhibition exposing the ills of the caste system and untouchability was held during the Second Congress of the Campaign in 1969. It is memorable that Comrade Thangavadivel, besides making his contribution to the success of the art exhibition, provided guidance for contributions by others. The shock waves that the art exhibition generated in Jaffna and Colombo against caste based untouchability deserve mention here.

Comrade Thangavadivel lived with confidence and courage and to the best of his ability as a social activist, a sportsman, a communist, a good teacher, a friend of the rural folk, an artist, a singer, a good head of family and a liberation fighter for social change. At the root of it all, he was one who firmly followed Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought to the very end.

It was most remarkable of Comrade Thangavadivel that he remained unswervingly firm in his communist stand even in the face of severe challenges posed by the surging waves of militant struggle guided by wrong policies in the name of Tamil nationalism.

The departure of Comrade Thangavadivel is thus a sad loss for all the people and the communist movement.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party dips its red flag in revolutionary red salute to him and expresses its deepest sympathies to his wife, children and family.

*The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party*  
*3<sup>rd</sup> August 2014*

*(Continued from inside front cover)*

but i know there is no  
purpose in my distant despair  
these names tell a story  
the story of my family  
i go up and down the list  
trying to find some solace  
some small victory  
In all the mayhem  
but all i can find is tears  
and howls and fury  
I try to piece together the families  
is she a sister or wife  
is he uncle or father  
is she grandmother or aunt  
they had certainly prayed that last day  
but was there too a moment of laughter  
in the face of the wrenching barbarism  
did they proudly raise their voices  
in song tell each other stories  
of glory and victory  
did they find courage  
nobility  
quiet  
in the rubble made  
of their homes their schools  
their temples  
their hospitals  
their corner of a country  
their rich full lives  
does it even matter  
that a half a world away  
is a woman who loved them  
and voices their names  
as she honors their  
struggle and cries for their loss

*[This poem on the killing of children in Gaza is by Devorah Major, San Francisco's third poet laureate and has been adopted with thanks from <http://thenextfront.com/>]*

*Poem by  
Tilakaratna Silva*

*Misery – poverty – malnutrition – crimes  
unrest of the young – unemployment – question of  
slums  
international conflicts – economic depression –  
emigration  
these and many other jaws of degeneration are agape.  
To ward off all these disasters  
bearing in mind determination like an Indrakhila\*  
thinking of the era of man's walking on the moon  
without wasting time on deciphering palm leaf  
manuscripts  
discerning clearly the future way through sage's eyes  
let's march forward united.*

*Part of poem cited in "The Revolutionary Vision in Sinhala  
Poetry" by CP Meddegama, the Sri Lanka Journal of the  
Humanities, vol. v , no. 1 & 2 , 1979, pp. 54-73  
(<http://www.dlib.pdn.ac.lk/archive/handle/123456789/2593>)*

*\*Indrakhila: A pillar planted firmly in the ground*

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