

Theoretical organ of the New Democratic Party

New Democracy

June 2006

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Hands Off

Take your hands off! Beware our ire!
Do not feed logs to the raging fire:
How can you on board a ship stay,
And antagonize the ocean's sway?
Our revolt blasts, thud after thud,
Though you filled your ears with mud.
Although our wrath is like white heat,
The flesh of others we never eat;
Nor do we know the taste of crime,
Nor pillage towns, time after time:
We do not burn anybody' s scriptures,
Nor impose selective, racist strictures.
We do not live on threats and blackmail,
Yet our people's will shall prevail!

My Noble Patriotism

Slowly, humbly and very calmly,
I draw the thin thread of light
From the savage darkness of the night.
I nourish the dreams, fresh and lovely,
Near the source of the pouring waterfall;
Wiping the tears of my friends, one and all,
With a bandage of fragrant daffodils.
I plant bowers on the barren foothills.
From the burning sands of the wilderness
I build for the homeless a decent abode;
And bring justice to the wronged, and happiness.
Should I stumble along the hazardous road,
My noble patriotism would raise me again
To continue the fight for freedom, which goes not in vain

From the Editor's Desk

The wicked attack on a public transport vehicle in Kebethigollawa in the Anuradhapura District on 15th June 2006 that killed 69 and injured many more has been roundly condemned by all. The government promptly assumed that the LTTE was the culprit, and wasted no time in launching air, sea and land-based bombing attacks on LTTE-held areas. In a situation where the LTTE has, besides denying involvement, unreservedly condemned the attack on the bus, it seemed that the government and the armed forces were merely waiting for an opportunity to get at the LTTE.

The knee-jerk reaction of the armed forces to the Kebethigollawa massacre has been a series of bombing attacks on several LTTE targets in the North East, culminating in the clash at sea with the LTTE near Mannar, with major losses to the government, followed by retaliatory attack by the armed forces on civilians and a hand-grenade attack on a church.

Hasty response by the government forces in the past few months to alleged LTTE attacks has resulted in death and injury to hundreds of civilians. The armed forces have responded to each incident of attack with the killing of innocent people. Recently, the 'targeted bombing' of an LTTE base in Sampur in the Trincomalee District in response to the attempt on the life of Army Commander Sarath Fonseka by a suicide bomber led to a large number of civilian casualties and to the displacement of tens of thousands.

Government forces have also, without provocation, committed grave offences against civilians during the past few months. In the East, five students were killed in Trincomalee by the Special Task Force of the government. This was followed by the burning down of many shops belonging to Tamils, within minutes of an explosion inside the Trincomalee Market, which was readily blamed on the LTTE. In the North, thirteen people including children and elders were killed in Allaipiddy in Kayts, five youths were killed in Putthur, and seven in Nellyyadi, while seven youths have gone missing from Manduvil in Meesalai. More recently a young family of four was brutally murdered in Pesalai in Mannar.

Sinhalese villagers in Welikanda in the Polonnaruwa District have been killed, after which hundreds of people in the region protested against the presence of pro-government Tamil paramilitaries in the region, but the protest

was suppressed. Within weeks, Sinhalese villagers were again killed in Gomarankadawala in the Trincomalee District.

Hit squads do not spare civilians in the Batticaloa and Amparai Districts, and most of the victims are civilians. The killing spree has spread to the North as well.

What is disheartening is that the government, the state-controlled media and other mainstream Sinhala and English media while, quite rightly, denouncing the killing of innocent civilians, fail to condemn the killing of innocent civilians by the armed forces. In some instances, they distort the facts to mislead the public into thinking that the victims were killed during an act of terror (as in the case of the youth killed in Trincomalee and Putthur) or to accuse the LTTE of the killings (as in the case of the killings in Allaipiddy and Pesalai).

The response of the government to the killing of innocent Tamils by the armed forces has been as cynical as that of the UNP following the violence in 1977 when President Jayawardane declared to the Tamil leaders “If you want peace you have peace, if you want war you have war!” and his defence of the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 as the understandable fury of the Sinhalese. Since then, with the exception of the genuine left, sections of the trade unions and some humane individuals, concern for the plight of the minority nationalities has not been very visible in the public sphere in the South.

It is the prevalence of negative attitudes that prevented the provision of essential Tsunami relief to the affected Tamils and Muslims in the North East since December 2004. It will not be incorrect to suggest that the apparent concern shown by the mainstream media and the Sinhala politicians about the sufferings of the ordinary Sinhalese is bogus and purely motivated by political considerations.

What is tragic about acts of cruelty driven by communalism is that they aggravate hostile feelings between the nationalities, making it even more difficult to solve the national question. It is time that the nationalities learn from their experience and that of people of other countries about the need to amicably resolve contradictions among the people on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

Power Sharing Should be the Basis for Solving the National Question

by

Comrade E Thambiah

National Organiser, New Democratic Party

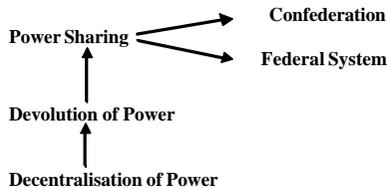
Some intellectuals are busy figuring out how the national question in Sri Lanka could be solved within a united Sri Lanka, and juggle phrases such as unitary government, federal government, decentralization, devolution of power, and power sharing. It will be useful to take a look at these concepts.

A unitary government is one where all power is concentrated at the centre. Local authorities are set up for administration and to implement government programmes, but have no power to decide on matters like policy and development schemes. The local authority acts as a council of government representatives or as part of the government to implement government policies and programmes. It is a means of facilitating government administration. In a country with several ethnic groups, and especially where they are concentrated in some regions of the country, equality between nationalities has proved impossible in practice under a unitary government. The failings of feudalism and capitalism make the sharpening of the contradictions of race, religion, caste, gender and region their tactic for preserving their authority and power.

A federal form of government comprising the union of several states has been introduced at the formation of some nation states. Some countries have replaced unitary states with federal states. The Soviet Union, the United States of America, and Canada are examples of federal states. Here, power is not concentrated at the centre and the regions too have political power; or the state functions as a union of several nationalities with political power.

The extent of power sharing, it could be said, will vary. Power sharing could be maximised to an extent where the state functions as a confederation. The Soviet Union, until its break-up, was one such instance and the union of China and Hong Kong is another. Other systems of devolution of power also

exist. Examples include countries such as India, Belgium, Switzerland, China and Nicaragua. Here, several of the powers of the centre are devolved to the regions, but without proper federation.



It is not possible to share power within a unitary state, but possible to decentralise it. The question may arise as to how China and Nicaragua under a unitary system ensured the autonomy of the nationalities. But it should be noted that there have been socialist structures in these countries.

Although it is not possible to alter the nature of a unitary state through decentralisation of power, it is possible for the state to function with some or many of the features of the federal state. In China and Nicaragua, equality among nationalities was ensured to a relatively large degree. The truth is that there is more decentralisation of power than devolution of power. There is no need for a nationality to secede to fulfil its aspirations, and although there is no federation, adequate autonomy has been assured.

In China and later in Nicaragua, attention was paid to the autonomy of nationalities without a contiguous territory. Autonomous structures were set up within autonomous regions to ensure the autonomy of nationalities living as minorities within an autonomous region. Similar structures exist in countries such as Switzerland and Belgium. Autonomies and federal systems in different countries have been set up according to conditions specific to each country.

In Sri Lanka, the struggle of the Tamils developed under conditions where the national question remains unresolved. The government imposed a war on the Tamils in order to suppress it, and a war of national oppression has been on since 1983. In 1987, during the height of the struggle, Provincial Councils were set up under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. The 13th Amendment to the constitution of 1978, based on a unitary state, was introduced to accommodate the Provincial Councils. It also had provision for a temporary merging of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. There was no provision under the 13th Amendment to dissolve the Provincial Councils. An amendment granting the

President power to dissolve was introduced subsequently. (It should be noted that 13 MPs elected from the Northern and Eastern Provinces voted for this amendment). It had provisions whereby the central government could withdraw through Parliament any aspect of the 13th Amendment that went beyond decentralisation of power to devolution of power. Besides, the central government was reluctant and dragged its feet about evolving in practice powers which were devolved by law under that amendment. As a result, The North-East Provisional Council became defunct.

Later, in 1997, proposals put forward by President Chandrika Kumaratunga included devolution of power with some features of power sharing. But it underwent several serious revisions before presentation in Parliament in 2000 with devolution of power devoid of aspects of power sharing and with the division of the North East into four regions. The Tamil representatives rejected it as did the UNP, some of whose members set alight copies of that Act within the chamber of the Parliament.

In 2002, Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe consented to a federal solution, based on the peace accord of 2002. President Chandrika Kumaratunga too accepted it. The present President Mahinda Rajapaksha does not agree to a federal system, and insists that the solution to the national question will be within a unitary system. The JVP and the Jathika Hela Urumaya have not consented even to decentralisation. The Tamil side insists on a federal solution.

Under the circumstances, the solution to the national question of Sri Lanka cannot be based on decentralisation or devolution of power. It is not possible through either to end national oppression by granting autonomy to the Tamils and to other oppressed nationalities. It will only be correct to accept power sharing as the basis and for a solution to be found on that basis.

There is no need or compulsion to interpret such power sharing as secession or separate state. It is the reactionary forces among the Sinhalese that seek to establish the political domination of the ruling classes who negate and oppose the sharing of power between the nationalities.

As Marxist Leninists, we endorse the growth, existence and future development of nationalities; emphasise autonomy based on the right to self determination; and have been firm that the basis of autonomy be power sharing.

Towards a New Latin America: Hopes and Fears

by

Mohan

1. Introduction

Political shifts in Latin America during the past five years or less would have been unimaginable to many political observers at the end of the 20th century, when the US appeared to be still in effective control over its Latin American 'backyard'. Changes of government had come into being through the electoral process, although mass agitation and struggle have played a pivotal role in facilitating the regime changes in a number of countries, including Chile in the 1990s. Globalisation continued to be implemented as per schedule and elected governments could not resist yielding to pressure from the IMF and multi-national corporations (MNCs) backed by the global super power.

Things started to change, slowly but certainly, at the turn of the century with the masses playing an active role to arrest the slide-back of elected governments to yield to US imperialist pressure, exerted directly and through the IMF. Anti-globalisation campaigns attracted participants by their tens and hundreds of thousands, and their success has now made it necessary for imperialist policy makers to huddle together inside fortified buildings amid tight security in fear of protesting masses.

Electoral verdicts have, by and large, been encouraging to the left, despite some disappointments for the overly optimistic, as in the case of the closely contested Presidential Election Runoff of 4th June 2006, where the openly anti-imperialist and pro-poor candidate Ollanta Humala, who was comfortably ahead of his rivals in the Presidential Elections of 9th April, lost to the former president Alan Garcia, who left office in disgrace in 1990 and Peru in 1992, after charges of corruption were proven against him.

The US imperialists will find solace in Garcia's victory since it has seemingly halted the run of left-wing successes in country after country in South America, with the last one being that of Michelle Bachelet in Chile on 15th January 2006, following a run-off poll in the wake of the inconclusive Presidential Election of 11th December 2005. The imperialists have reason to feel encouraged by the fact that Garcia campaigned on a platform of hostility to Hugo Chavez and his anti-imperialist policies. The problems facing Peru, with over half the population living below the poverty line can only get worse if Garcia would, as expected, follow the path of imperialist globalisation. The re-emergent Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) movement is bound to gain from the defeat of the pro-poor Humala, unless the Garcia government takes the necessary steps to arrest and to reverse the economic reform policies imposed on Peru under successive governments.

It should be also be noted that Humala polled close to 48% despite the combined resources of the ruling classes, their state, their imperialist masters and the media controlled by them. Whether a victorious Humala would have been allowed to act as decisively as Chavez and Morales, who had won overwhelming mandates for their political programmes, deserves consideration. However, with the presence in power of left-wing governments of one description or another in Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Bolivia and Chile, and the increasing international isolation of US imperialism, Humala would have had a better opportunity to deliver on his pledges of ridding the country of imperialist exploiters, and giving the oppressed masses a fairer deal and a greater say in governing the country.

What is undeniable, however, is that political attitudes in Latin America are changing in favour of anti-imperialist struggles, and the need of the moment is to consolidate the gains and carry forward the struggle in the correct direction. There can be no illusions about the feelings of the people of Latin America towards US imperialism. The toiling masses have always despised it. Even the middle classes who, despite their resentment of US domination, once saw in US imperialism a protector of their quality of life and guarantor of political stability are having doubts as a result of the impact of the economic 'reforms' imposed by the IMF on the Latin American economies, especially since the late 1990s.

It was the economic failure of the US-backed dictatorships in South America that compelled the US to opt for democratically elected governments to deliver imperialist globalisation in the region, and there was considerable

initial success. Governments elected on a popular mandate, by promising relief for the vast majority from poverty, unemployment and falling living standards, failed to keep their promises, because of external pressure to implement neo-liberal economic ‘reforms’ that spelt disaster to social security and essential services. Globalisation proved to be exactly what it was intended to be: robbing the poor nations to feed the greedy MNCs. The elected governments by and large proved to be unable or unwilling to resist imperialist globalisation and, in many instances, used strong arm tactics to deal with protests by large sections of the increasingly marginalised population. They were thus caught between rising popular resistance to privatisation and corporate greed on the one side and imperialist pressure through lending agencies and foreign investors on the other.

Besides the failure of the imperialist-dictated neo-liberal economic policies, the disastrous US foreign policy including the US war of aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq, the impulsive reaction of the US to the 9.11 tragedy in the name of “War on Terrorism”, the shameful handling of natural disasters, during which affected Central American nationals were callously deported from the US and denied humanitarian aid, and the exposure of the US as the biggest violator of human rights including those of its own citizens, in the name of national security, are among important factors that have emboldened the people in their resistance to US domination.

What is especially significant about the political changes sweeping Latin America is the emergence of a Latin American identity and moves towards regional solidarity drawing on past struggles for independence from foreign domination. The names of Simon Bolivar, José Marti and Zapata have become forces of inspiration. There is also a shift in the attitude of governments in favour of self-reliance and cooperation with neighbours with whom they share common cultural backgrounds and common problems. The importance of strong government, global security and neo-liberal values as emphasised by the global super power are being called into question while the concepts of socialism, common ownership, community action, regional alliances, economic liberation, conservation of resources, and equitable distribution of wealth attract increasing popular interest.

2. Democracy as Mass Political Action

Democratic politics as mass political action has led to the toppling of heads of state who were mere yes-men to the IMF, as for example in Ecuador and Bolivia; challenging abuse of political power as in Chile and Argentina; amending constitutions as in Venezuela; and, most importantly, compelling political leaders to be responsive to the people. An important contributor to the democratic process is the politicising of indigenous people, which was undoubtedly inspired by the armed struggle of the Zapatistas of Mexico who are in total control of Chiapas region and whose influence is growing among indigenous people in neighbouring regions. It is the resolve of the masses to resist imperialist globalisation and neo-liberal economic 'reforms' that emboldened governments to ignore IMF prescriptions and partially discount debts which have been bleeding the populace of social services and basic subsidies; to refuse to privatize water and other natural resources; and to nationalise major natural resources. Latin American states have also made public their doubts about the hemispheric security alliance proposed by the US, and have distanced themselves from it.

The US government, the mainstream media, and right-wing and liberal commentators in the US portray the changes in Latin America as a leftward shift and at times a Marxist resurgence in Latin America, for the obvious political reason of justifying armed intervention in Latin America in the foreseeable future. What is in fact happening is similar to what happened in many advanced capitalist countries including the US during serious economic crises. In fact, the essentially economic alliances such as those being forged between Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia are practical solutions to problems of survival, which enjoy mass support in the countries concerned, and are far more justifiable than any of the US-dominated military and economic alliances across the globe, including the one now evolving between the US and India. Mass political action has a long way to go before achieving legitimate empowerment of the masses.

What the advanced capitalist countries see as disorder and chaos, like industrial action in Nicaragua, the blockading of highways in Guatemala, the removal of presidents in Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador, and constitutional changes in Venezuela, are democratic processes where the people have begun to have a say in governance and to play a role in writing their own history instead of letting it be a footnote to that of US imperialism. But there is a long way to go before these goals are achieved.

Even governments which, for various reasons, are restrained in confronting US imperialism have been compelled to be responsive to the popular mood and to act in ways that serve national as well as regional interests and emphasise solidarity among Latin American nations. Néstor Kirchner of Argentina, although far from a radical in the mould of Hugo Chávez of Venezuela or Evo Morales of Bolivia, and the even less radical Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil have stood alongside Venezuela in their show of understanding and even approval of the nationalisation of the hydrocarbon fuel sector of Bolivia in May 2006, despite some adverse short-term implications to their own economies. Also an agreement has been reached between the four Latin American countries to construct a 13 000 kilometre long gas pipeline running from Venezuela to Argentina.

3. Mass Protests and Resistance to Globalisation

If the US imperialism should blame any for the current surge of protest and resistance to globalization, it can only blame the greed of its multinationals and coercion by the IMF for the mobilisation of the organised working classes, the urban and rural poor, students, indigenous people, intellectuals and even politicians who once took positions endorsing globalisation. The regional media which until recently were hostile to the anti-globalisation campaigns and held protestors in ridicule now report the protests more seriously, and even sympathetically, especially since protests have produced results and compelled several governments to listen to the people.

It was only twenty three years ago that the anti-imperialist economic policies of Salvador Allende led to his overthrow and brutal murder with the fullest backing of the US, to be followed by the cruel military dictatorship of Chile under General Pinochet. A similar course of events in Venezuela was, however, averted through the mobilisation of the masses so that every attempt by the US and local reactionaries backfired and encouraged President Chávez to spearhead regional trade agreements, promote regional co-operation, and challenge US interference in the region.

Another tangible result of mass mobilisation was the massive mandate for the election pledges of Evo Morales to build a more inclusive nation with a guarantee of indigenous rights and to nationalize hydrocarbon fuel resources of Bolivia. President Morales has since nationalised fuel resources on 1st May

2006, and reinforced his alliances with Cuba and Venezuela, to the ire of the US.

The mass protests against the economic burdens on the people in Argentina led to the regime change in Argentina. President Kirchner has stood up to the IMF and forced down the army to enjoy the trust of the people. The government forced international bond holders to accept losses on their investments as part of restructuring the Argentine debt and thereby reserving some of the country's wealth to fund urgently needed social programs. Argentina also paid off the entire IMF debt, partly through sale of bonds to Venezuela.

The government of Uruguay led by Tabare Vazquez was elected on the basis of popular support for opposition to the privatization of water and its commitment to social reform. The electoral success of Michelle Bachelet earlier in the year is again a sign of the strengthening of the left in Chile. Even where progressive and left candidates have failed to be elected, anti-imperialist candidates have forced their successful opponents to a run-off as in the case of Ottón Solís, an opponent of the US-sponsored Central American Free Trade Association (CAFTA) running against Oscar Arias, a supporter of CAFTA, in Costa Rica in February 2006.

It has also been reported that, in Mexico, the Worker's Party candidate Andrés López Obredor leads both the centrist and the conservative candidates in the elections scheduled for July 2006. Also the worsening of economic conditions in Nicaragua, owing to fiscal policies imposed on the country as a result of the Washington consensus, has made Daniel Ortega, former President of the Sandinista government, which was brought down as a consequence of a US-imposed civil war, and other leftist leaders more popular, and the left is likely to have a major impact on the November elections in 2006.

What has been central to the transformation of the political scene in Latin America is not the electoral success of the left but the mobilisation of the masses against the agenda of imperialist globalisation. This means that, even where the government is compliant to the commands of US imperialism, implementation of the imperialist agenda will meet stiff resistance, especially when economic 'reforms' and 'free trade', inevitably, begin to hurt the vast majority. The turn of events in Latin America suggest that the people are growing bolder in expressing their opposition to imperialist domination in its every form.

4. Confronting US Policy

US imperialism will, however, not be moved by the protests of the masses and, where possible, will compel governments to implement policies of 'free trade' and 'open economy' and to facilitate globalisation through economic reforms. In other situations, the US will use military threat and where threats do not bear fruit will resort to anything ranging from subversion to war in the pretext of defending freedom and democratic values or making the world a safer place. It is in this context that one has to understand the implications of the changes in attitude of governments which the US still considers to be 'friendly'.

Of thirty-four Latin American states twenty-seven, including Mexico, the southern neighbour and a close ally of the US, have refused to support US invasion of Iraq, and most of the Latin American states are reluctant to be part of the Security Alliance of the Americas. The distrust of American intentions is based on the historical experience of one-and-a-half centuries of US invasions across the Americas. Even the limited support to the US is largely based on economic dependence, and not ratified by the people.

It is common knowledge that terrorist threat to public safety in Central America has been from Latino gangs trained in the US, which have infested their communities and pose a more real and imminent danger than 'Islamic fundamentalism'. Problems of crime and delinquency fostered by inherited social problems in Brazil and Venezuela are more immediate than any perceived threat to the US from the Middle East. Thus the recent US-inspired proposal of an "Inter-American Convention against Terrorism" for the region is to most Latin Americans just another US imperialistic plan to serve its own interests for which the Latin Americans will pay the price.

The US policy for Latin America comprises the promotion of trade agreements beneficial to MNCs and US economic interests; unrestricted access to cheap labour and natural resources; and protectionism towards US agriculture. It also includes interference in the electoral process as in Venezuela and Nicaragua; installation of US troops as in Paraguay; and military support to regimes fighting against revolutionary forces, as in Columbia, where support is provided, on the pretext of impeding drug traffic, to suppress the leftist rebel forces, who are in control of a sizeable part of Colombia, while ensuring immunity of right wing vigilantes.

Current US preoccupation with the Middle East and the encirclement of Russia and China as the next stage of its plans for global control does not mean that it has given up on Latin America. Several attempts have been made to remove Chávez from power including several unsuccessful bids to assassinate him. Attempts to destabilise Bolivia have been uncovered recently and denounced by Morales and Chávez. The US imperialists have not denied their underhand activities at toppling governments that appear to threaten the 'American way of life'.

But one should remember that Cuba has stood up to forty seven years of intimidation, economic blockade and sabotage by the US to become a great source of inspiration for the whole of Latin America, except the hard core opponents of the Cuban government. Despite ceaseless efforts by the US to isolate Cuba, Cuba now has diplomatic relations with all but El Salvador and Costa Rica of the thirty-four Latin American nations.

Thus it is important for the states of South America to learn from the Cuban experience since each of them has its choice between letting down its people by submitting to the US and defying US imperialism in defence of the interests of the people.

5. The Future

The new century marks great victories for the people of Latin America, much of which has been achieved without armed struggle, with the exception of the Zapatistas in Chiapas and the Colombian rebels who have persevered in the struggle initiated in the last century. A succession of electoral victories in South America does not mean that US imperialism will allow the will of the majority to prevail. Every victory of the people has to be preserved and protected from imperialist predators.

The plan for regional alliances and sharing of resources initiated by President Hugo Chávez and known as the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America (ALBA) has made a promising start with the setting up of a Development Bank of the South and a Latin American Development Fund to free the region from reliance on foreign capital. Cooperation between Venezuela and Cuba has led to the rapid expansion of public health care in Venezuela with the support of Cuban medical personnel in return for which Venezuela government provides Cuba with much needed oil and investment in

Cuban electric power and oil refining. Co-operation in the energy sector now includes agreements between Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay and involves the entire Caribbean region. Also, Mercosur, the South American trade block consisting of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, with Bolivia, Chile and Peru as associate members, is poised to induct Venezuela as a member and considering inclusion of Cuba as an associate member.

The Bolivarian vision shared by anti-imperialist leaders of Latin America relies on the stability of the government of Venezuela which uses the proceeds of its oil wealth to the benefit of the country as well as the advancement of the region. The commitment of Chávez to socialism is an outcome of the Venezuelan experience in upholding the Bolivarian vision. However, the Bolivarian project in Venezuela is very much a state sponsored activity with support from the broad masses who are for the first time in the history of the country the main beneficiaries of its oil wealth. Politicisation and organisation of the masses to defend the people and the country is essential in the face of persistent US imperialist threats.

It is mass agitation and struggle that made it possible to take steps to arrest the decline and decay of the economies of several countries of Latin America. The forms of struggle that have enabled regime changes through democratic election have been essentially peaceful and, if violence was used at any stage, it has been by the repressive state and the people. But the changes that have taken place have only partially altered the nature of the relations of production and have hardly altered the nature of the state apparatus. The defeated classes are still powerful and can be expected to strike back at an opportune moment, with the support of imperialism.

The commitment of left-of-centre leaders to social change is mostly conditional and volatile. In an international situation where the US imperialists take an openly aggressive stand against 'unfriendly' states, several such leaders could be propelled towards compromise with imperialism, as we have witnessed in many countries in Asia even in recent times.

The lessons of Chile in 1973 and Nicaragua in the 1980s and early 1990s should not be forgotten by the progressive forces of Latin America. It was preparedness and popular support that saved Venezuela from a counterrevolutionary coup. The US imperialists are still waiting for an opportunity; and the defeated local exploiting classes are still intact and have

allies in the urban middle classes and among criminal elements in society. It will require far greater preparedness to defend the gains of the past few years and to build upon them.

Weakening the hold of the exploiting classes on the society is not easy. Already the US has started to apply pressure on Chile, as evident from the meeting in early June 2006 in Washington between Presidents George Bush and Michelle Bachelet. The victory of the centre-left Michelle Bachelet in Chile was not as decisive as that of that of Evo Morales in Bolivia or that of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. The army is still a major political force, although stripped of a formal role following the downfall of General Pinochet, and the influence of the forces of reaction within the army is still significant. The inability of the Chilean legal system to make Pinochet fully accountable has more to do with the influence of the elite classes than with the legal technicalities of his trials. Thus the Chilean government remains vulnerable to pressure from the US.

US approach towards Evo Morales would be open hostility as in the case of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez; and moves are already afoot to create divisions in the Bolivian indigenous mass support base for Morales. Thus the years to come can only be ones of cautious optimism for the forces of anti-imperialism in Latin America, and the need for counter-measures to combat imperialist meddling cannot be over-emphasised. In the final analysis, there is no alternative to mass struggle and mass line in politics.

It is the duty of all progressive forces to encourage and support every form of struggle to rid Latin America of its imperialist burden. It is equally the duty of the progressive forces to caution the forces of social change not to be complaisant about their achievements or underestimate the strength of the enemy.

Nepal: Perceptions of People's Victory

by

Deshabakthan

Preamble

Some 200,000 people gathered in Kathmandu on Friday 2nd June 2006 to demand a constituent assembly to decide the country's future at the first Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) rally there since Gyanendra gave up his absolute grip on power, and reinstated the parliament he disbanded in 2002. Tens of thousands filled into a public ground in Kathmandu, to denounce King Gyanendra in full view of the Royal Palace. Dozens of soldiers carrying automatic rifles stood guarding the heavily guarded palace while riot police maintained a vigil outside and armoured cars and soldiers with machine guns manned major road intersections.

Krishna Bahadur Mahara (see interview following this article), the chief CPN-M negotiator for talks with the government, told the rally that the new government had been slow in implementing a decision to hold elections for a special assembly to draft a new constitution and called for the formation of an interim government that would include the Maoists and organise the assembly poll, and confirmed the commitment of the Maoists to peace talks. It should also be noted that the CPM-N Chairman Prachanda told local journalists a week earlier that, while the CPN-M was confident that 99 percent of Nepalese want a republican state, it was bound to accept the verdict of the people if it was otherwise.

In the short term, much depends on the direction that the negotiations between the government and the Maoists will take as well as on interference by outside elements, especially the Indian and US authorities. The purpose of this article is to examine the implications for Nepal of the developments leading to and immediately following the subduing of King Gyanendra.

Problems of Defining the Struggle

The mainstream Indian and international media had, until late in 2005, been contemptuous of the Maoists and their armed struggle against the dictatorial monarchy. While there has been a shift in attitude since Gyanendra dissolved parliament to assume absolute power on 1st February 2005, media concerns were more about restoring parliamentary democracy and thereby the status quo in Nepal based on the 'twin pillars' of stability, namely the monarchy and the parliament.

With the exception of a section of the left, journalists like Rita Manchanda, progressive commentators like Pratish Chandra and Amit Sengupta, journals such as Monthly Review, and internet journals such as Counter Punch and Tehalka, the general picture presented about Nepal seems to be that it is a Third World country with economic difficulties aggravated by Maoist terrorism.

Within India, the impression has been created that Maoists in Nepal and in India work as a single entity, and that Maoist success in Nepal would intensify Maoists activity India, where they are already in control of substantial territory in several states. There was no doubt that the Maoists of Nepal enjoy the support of Marxist Leninists and genuine leftists and progressive forces in India. They also enjoy strong support within the Nepali community in India, especially immigrant workers who left in the face of appalling living conditions in Nepal. But there has been no question of the CPN-M operating from India in collaboration with Indian Maoists of any description.

It is nevertheless true that success of a revolutionary struggle in Nepal leading to a republic headed by the CPN-M would be an inspiration to revolutionary forces guided by Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought and to struggles for liberation worldwide, which have been encouraged by the victories scored by the masses since 1996 in their armed struggle led by the Maoists. Several things frighten the reactionary ruling classes and the revisionist 'communist' parties of India, especially the success of the revolutionary mass line in politics, and a successful armed revolutionary struggle in a neighbouring country. It is therefore necessary for them to deny success to the Maoists.

The approach of the ruling classes ranged from open support of the BJP and its saffron brigade to the Hindu king and dictator Gyanendra to that of the Manmohan Singh government to ensure the survival of the monarchy in more discrete ways. It was only when it became clear that the monarchy was in deep trouble and prolonging the agony of Nepal would accelerate the fall of the

monarchy with adverse consequences for the Indian establishment that the Indian government changed its tactics. It was at this stage that the CPI(M) and sections of the ruling Congress sought to intervene, with the aim of denying success to the Maoists by assimilating them to the 'democratic process'.

While the goal of the CPM-N was the New Democratic Revolution, which it was implementing in regions under its control, the mainstream media claimed that the aim was to replace the monarchy with a one-party communist state. Such portrayal of the Maoists continued even after the royal coup of Gyanendra on 1st February 2005, following which the Maoists made the restoration of democratic rule their top priority. The Maoists had been flexible in their dealings with the Nepali government but not compromising on issues concerning the rights of the toiling masses. They were even willing to consider an interim settlement with a role for the King until the question of the republic was finally resolved. All of that changed as his regime became extremely repressive.

The CPN-M declared a unilateral ceasefire on 3rd September 2005, which created a climate conducive to the signing of a 12-point agreement with the seven-party alliance (SPA) on 22nd November 2005. Pressure from the ranks of the seven parties was also an important factor in persuading the leaders to agree to cooperate with the Maoists in their struggle against the dictatorial regime. It should also be noted that, since the agreement, the Maoists had been most accommodating towards the SPA, even to the point of calling off campaigns in deference to pleas by the SPA.

The Maoists called off their unilateral ceasefire on 2nd January 2006 since the Gyanendra regime was not reciprocating the gesture and took advantage of the ceasefire to launch attacks against the Maoists and the People's Liberation Army. Neither the US nor the Indian authorities cared to examine why the ceasefire was one-sided; but when it ended, they said that it was unfortunate and denounced the Maoists for their violent ways.

When the Gyanendra regime unleashed violence against democratic leaders, lawyers and journalists in January 2006, the US and India responded by calling upon the SPA and the King to have a dialogue to enable a return to democracy. This approach prevailed even when the anniversary of Gyanendra's seizing power was marked by an upsurge in popular protests and unleashing of murderous violence against the public by the RNA. However, the successful boycott of the local elections of 8th February called for by the King made it clear to all that he was thoroughly isolated and could not survive

in power for a day longer without the support of the RNA and the backing of the imperialists and the Indian ruling classes.

It should be noted here that, to the very end, overt attempts were made by the US to persuade the SPA to make a deal with King Gyanendra to the exclusion of the Maoists. The SPA leaders did not oblige since they knew that a deal with the King would be their doom as well.

The Indian establishment, partly to curry favour with the US and partly because of its own miscalculations, continued to provide support to Gyanendra, despite its formal criticism of his assumption of absolute power and demand for the restoration of parliamentary government. Even when it belatedly realised which way the wind was blowing and endorsed the campaign against the King and reluctantly approved of the SPA's deal with Maoists, it had other things in mind. Its desire to preserve the monarchy in Nepal was beyond doubt so that it sought to drive a wedge between the SPA and Maoists at a crucial stage of the struggle.

It used the president of the Nepali Congress, Girija Prasad Koirala, a client of the Indian establishment, for the purpose; and Koirala cited "international difficulties" for the inability of the SPA to join the Maoists to make a common appeal for a peaceful agitation for democracy. The CPN-M leadership showed remarkable flexibility, and agreed to call off the on-going blockade of Kathmandu, and issued a separate but similar statement as the seven-party alliance calling for a peaceful agitation for restoring democracy, thus opening the way for Maoist sympathizers to join the peaceful agitation of the SPA beginning April 6.

The foregoing would show how different class and national interests have conditioned perceptions of the struggle for democracy in Nepal. All reactionary forces dreaded the Maoists and acted with the aim of isolating and eventually weakening them, knowing very well that the Maoists were the backbone of the struggle against the monarchy.

The parliamentary left in India seems to have had a different perception of the developments in Nepal. The parliamentary left in Nepal is no less opportunistic than its counterpart in India, and the strongest parliamentary left party is the Communist Party (United Marxist Leninist) which formed the government in 1994 only to be dismissed an year later by the then king, Birendra. CPN(UML) has had problems of factional infighting and a record of collaboration with Gyanendra to form a government. Its credibility has eroded since the Maoists combined mass political work in the countryside with armed struggle against the repressive state. The concern of the CPI(M) and the CPI is

based on the fear that the capture of state power in Nepal by the Maoists through armed struggle will add to the credibility of the Maoists and other Marxist Leninists in India who reject the parliamentary road to socialism.

Thus, facilitating an agreement between the SPA and the Maoists so that parliamentary democracy is restored by peaceful mass mobilization was potentially beneficial to the Indian elite as well as to the parliamentary left. The member organisations of the SPA knew that Gyanendra was doomed even before they formed an alliance, and that a working agreement with the Maoists with an assurance of return to democratic politics was the best option before them. The Maoists themselves had decided in favour of a broad united front to isolate the King, mainly in consideration of the geopolitics of the region and the cost to the people in blood if the state of civil war was prolonged under conditions where the monarchy receives military backing from foreign meddlers.

People's war is not eternal war, and the inevitability of armed struggle is due to the violent nature of the state in class society and the way imperialism and neo-colonialism operate. The Maoists consented to a parliamentary democratic system from a position of strength with control of well over 80% of Nepali territory and have awakened the people politically. The parliamentary democratic system that they seek will assure the fair representation of a wide cross-section of the oppressed masses who have been unrepresented or severely under represented under the old parliamentary system. The purpose of the 12-point agreement between the CPN-M and the SPA could not be for a mere return to the old system which has failed more than once.

There is no doubt that the people mobilised themselves to overthrow Gyanendra and not to return to days of a parliament of corrupt politicians under the patronage of the King. When the King relented and offered to reinstate Parliament, the Indian Foreign Minister who flew into Kathmandu persuaded the SPA to accept the offer. This was unacceptable to the people, who wanted the King removed from power. There could be no compromise on this as that would be a breach of the spirit of the 12-point agreement.

Media Induced Amnesia

There is a strong tendency in the mainstream media, both Sri Lankan and international, to portray the events in Nepal purely as a consequence of the dictatorial conduct of an unpopular monarch who ascended the throne following an unfortunate royal family tragedy. The struggle itself is portrayed as mass mobilisation which occurred in the wake of the heavy-handed

suppression of protests by the King, rather in the fashion of the 'velvet revolutions' in former socialist countries and regions.

None of the commentators in the mainstream media ask why it took so long after the King's assumption of absolute power for the parliamentary parties to mobilise the masses or why it was not possible for them to unite against the dictator or why some of them willingly served under the dictator until they were dismissed or thrown into jail. The fact is that the parliamentary parties are only interested in a share of the power for themselves when they cannot have all of it. Most of them have been willing collaborators with the monarchy and as a whole do not have the interests of the masses at heart.

What has been conveniently forgotten by most commentators is that none of the parliamentary political parties claiming credit for the success of the struggle against a monarchy with scant regard for parliament or parliamentary government, has a consistent record of defiance of the King. They would rather scramble for cabinet posts doled out by him than demand democracy.

It is now made to appear that, by some miracle, the SPA mobilised the people in their millions against the King in April 2006. The role of the armed struggle of the Peoples' Liberation Army and the rural militias in weakening the regime, the fact that it was to the call of the CPN(M) that the masses responded, be it a general strike, hartal or blockade, and the fact that it was the strength of the Maoists, proven in combat with the RNA, that emboldened the masses to come out on the streets do not receive a mention.

Minimising the importance of the role of the armed struggle, the value of the political work of the Maoists and the changes that have swept the Nepali countryside during the past decade is intentional. The media are aware of the implications to hegemonic and imperialist interests of conceding that an armed struggle in Nepal paved the way to democracy there.

There is also an attempt, in India especially, to interpret as abandoning the revolutionary path the Maoists' willingness to work within multi-party system and to use means other than armed struggle to achieve their goal of social justice. This is a desperate bid to mislead the new forces who have been enthused by the success of the Maoist struggle in Nepal, and thereby arrest the growing support for the Indian Maoists.

Armed struggle is only one form of struggle and is inevitable in dealing with an armed oppressor; and multi-party systems are not entirely alien to Marxist Leninists and are consistent with the united front approach. However, with a system in which competition is unequal and the media are dominated by the property owning elite, parliamentary elections are not quite level

playground. The Maoists of Nepal seek to rectify such imbalances. They cannot, however, disarm themselves or give up armed struggle as long as forces hostile to them within and outside Nepal are armed.

Returning to Old Habits

The temptation is great to cheat the Maoists by going against the spirit of the 12-point agreement of September 2005. The Indian elite are already at work through the new Prime Minister Koirala to undermine the understanding reached in the 12-point agreement.

Koirala's visit to Delhi and the Indian government's offer of aid for development of hydropower and other projects are seen by the Maoists as part of a conspiracy to create a crisis and thereby avoid fulfilling the commitment to set up a constituent assembly and move towards a republic.

There are already signs that the SPA or a section of it, having stripped the King of his powers, seeks to consolidate power through the reinstated parliament, while there is no sign that action will be taken against officers of the RNA responsible for serious crimes against unarmed civilians, since the RNA, renamed as the Nepal Army, serving under a post-Gyanendra government, would be an equally effective tool of oppression of the ruling classes. Especially, in the event of sidelining the Maoists with the backing of the US and India, the RNA will be essential to the survival of the government.

The RNA has been well armed during the past years by international powers and has been a force to reckon in the affairs of Nepal. The international powers that armed the reactionary RNA have direct dealings with its chief and other officials, and it is significant that the US Assistant Secretary for South Asia, Richard Boucher during his visit to Nepal in early April did not meet with the beleaguered monarch, but opted for a direct meeting with the RNA chief, Pyar Jung Thapa, and stated at a press conference after the meeting, in response to a question whether he thinks that 'the Royal Nepalese Army is going to be one of the decision makers in future instead of parliament' that "I don't think I quite used the word decision maker, but I said something like that. I think that the army is going to have a very important role to play. The army has to help defend the nation; it has to help defend the nation against threats. They also have to be able to implement the ceasefire, and carry it out. So I wanted to check with the army and see, first of all, that they were supporting the political process, that they were supporting the civilian leaders in Nepal, and second of all talk to them about how they saw their job in the days ahead,

and how, when a civilian leadership wanted us to, we could support them in the future."

The Immediate Future

Isolating the Maoists in the short run would lead to civil war and, with the Maoists held in high esteem by the masses, thoroughly isolate the government. Meanwhile, the bickering within and among the parliamentary political parties would lead to political instability and, in the end, a military government, through which the US and India could interfere with impunity in Nepal.

The possibility of undermining the Maoists by making them partners in power is only wishful thinking, since they are running a parallel government over most of Nepal and have implemented their policies of social justice in the regions under their control. It will be suicidal for them to compromise on issues of social justice or to reverse the process of redressing centuries of injustice.

It is, however, unlikely that the elite classes of Nepal will readily concede defeat because their main benefactor has been defeated. They will resist in every way possible to protect their interests and, even in the event of a constitutional assembly being set up and a republican constitution adopted to ensure fairer representation for the oppressed sections of the masses, there will be resistance from reactionary forces within and outside Nepal.

The most serious threat to Nepali democracy is the strengthening of the bond between US imperialism and the Indian ruling elite and collaboration between the two to facilitate efforts by the former to isolate China before it grows too strong to contain. Nepal has always been of strategic importance to the US, but meddling by the US was limited to providing military support to the dictatorial monarchy without causing alarm to an India which was once very wary of US intentions. The new climate is different in the context of Indo-US collaboration, and a stable and independent Nepal with a popular government will not help to further US interests in the region. The forces of democracy in Nepal need to be fully alert to these risks.

What the Maoists have achieved is to have created conditions under which it is possible for Nepal to move towards a genuine and inclusive democracy with social justice with no further bloodshed. Whether the exploiting classes are ready to accept the democratic verdict of the masses under such conditions will determine whether Nepal will peacefully progress towards prosperity and social justice for its people.

As long as the Maoists adhere to the mass line in politics and to the principle of unity and struggle within a united front, the people of Nepal will not be defeated.

Postscript: *Since the article was written, attempts by the SPA and especially Prime Minister Koirala to settle for a constitutional monarchy by consolidating his power through the reinstated parliament have been thwarted by the Maoists. Formal talks were held between the SPA and the CPN-M, and on 16th June an eight-point agreement was reached between the SPA government and CPN-M:*

- 1. Effective and honest implementation of the 12-point understanding of November 2005 between the SPA and CPN-M and the 25-point Ceasefire Code of Conduct signed by the SPA government and CPN-M on May 26, 2006.*
- 2. Commitment to democratic norms and values including competitive multi-party system, civic liberties, fundamental rights, human rights, press freedom, and the concept of rule of law and carrying out each other's activities in a peaceful manner*
- 3. Requesting the UN to help in the monitoring and management of the armies and arms of both Government and CPN-M for a free and fair election to the Constituent Assembly*
- 4. Guaranteeing the democratic rights won through the 1990 Popular Movement and the recent historic People's Movement; drafting an interim constitution based on the 12-point understanding and the Ceasefire Code of Conduct; forming an interim government accordingly; announcing dates for constituent assembly elections; dissolving Parliament and the People's Governments of CPN-M through consensus after making alternative arrangements.*
- 5. Deciding issues of national interests with long-term effect through consensus*
- 6. Guaranteeing the fundamental right of the Nepali people to participate in the Constituent Assembly Elections without fear, influence, threat or violence; inviting international observation and monitoring during the elections as per need*
- 7. Bringing about a forward-looking restructuring of the state to resolve the class-based, racial, regional and gender-based problems through Constituent*

Assembly Elections; and transforming the ceasefire between the Nepal Government and CPN-M into permanent peace by focusing on democracy, peace, prosperity, forward-looking change and the country's independence, sovereignty and pride, and express commitment to resolve the problem through talks.

8. Directing the government and CPN-M negotiating teams to accomplish all tasks related to above without delay.

A committee has been formed as per the eight-point agreement to draft the interim Constitution and submit it to the Government and CPI-M negotiating teams within 15 days.

International response to the 8-point agreement between the SPA Government and the CPN-M has generally been positive despite right and centre-right opinion coloured by fears about Maoist intentions. The response of the opportunist left is interesting but not surprising. The General Secretary of the Communist Party of India complimented the CPN-M for taking the peaceful road to socialism and urged the Indian Maoists to follow suit. Similar comments came from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and commentators sympathetic to them. The fact that it took 10 years of armed struggle to bring the arrogant Nepali monarchy to its knees and to free much of the countryside from the control of the feudal landlords, and to make ethnic and regional minorities, oppressed castes and women stand up for their rights, and that without the armed struggle Nepal would be exactly where it was under the monarchy for centuries are carefully wiped off memory. Such comments are designed to give the impression that the Indian Maoists and other revolutionaries believe in violence for its own sake and should therefore be thoroughly criticised and rejected.

Interview with Krishna Bahadur Mahara

Excerpts of an interview by Gunaraj Luitel and Ujir Magar with the head of the Maoist negotiating team, Krishna Bahadur Mahara, who arrived in Kathmandu in late May to make the environment favourable for talks with the government in an attempt to end the decade-old insurgency that has claimed more than 13,000 lives.

May 23, 2006

Q: How long has it been since you were here last?

Krishna Bahadur Mahara: It's been about two and a half years.

Q: Didn't you come to the capital after the second round of talks?

Mahara: We held talks in Hapure after the talks in Kathmandu. The talks ended immediately in Hapure. Since the Doramba incident, we have not appeared in public.

Q: The main reason why you are in the capital this time is to find a solution to the problems?

Mahara: It's obvious. Not only this time but every time we have come for talks, it has been to give new directions to the people, to make a new Nepal and for bigger social transformation. We have this belief that the above objectives can be reached through talks. We have always believed that there can be peaceful solutions too. A lot has changed in the political scene this time. So, we are here because we seriously believe that we can go for the constituent assembly.

Q: The newly formed government - and the reinstated House of Representatives (HoR) - has made some fresh announcements in favour of the people. Has that helped?

Mahara: It has eased things. In contrast the present government is slightly different from earlier governments. Nevertheless the scenario cannot be considered to be fully acceptable as yet. There still remains a lot to be sorted out.

Q: Your party has critically welcomed the House Proclamation. It's said Maoists were consulted before making the announcement...

Mahara: Our formal reaction to the Proclamation has already been made public. We have welcomed religious secularism and the stripping of many of

the king's powers. This is politically a very positive move. But the leaders of many political parties have said that it has made the house fully sovereign. But people are yet to be made sovereign. Therefore this Proclamation is incomplete. Comparatively, this has been a step forward. We, however, wait to see the practical implementation of the announcement. The verdict of the people's revolution is constituent assembly. The basis of the movement is the 12-point understanding between the parties and CPN (Maoist). Constituent assembly is the heart of the revolution. The ultimate aim of the revolution is republicanism.

We are not involved in the Proclamation. So we are apprehensive as to whether the parliamentary political parties will only work to improve and institutionalise the house and legitimise it rather than moving ahead in the direction of a constituent assembly. At least the government should have come to some agreement with our party prior to the Proclamation. It is either weakness or a conspiracy that the government failed to involve us.

Q: The positive moves by the government have created a wave of support in favour of the government and the parties. You have been positive too. But don't you wonder why this is being done before the talks with the Maoists?

Mahara: Yes in some regards we are thinking that. Parliamentary parties have been fighting in the streets for about one and a half years now. Although they were trying to make the movement effective they were not able to. Everybody has seen the face of the movement before and after the 12-point understanding. Since the 12-point understanding was central in taking the movement to the people, our role and participation has been clearly understood in the political circle. We and the people know this. We have had a major role in the movement and we share a major contribution. So if the leaders fail here the people will assess the parties' weakness. If they don't consult with our party and think that they can do everything on their own, solutions will be difficult to find. It will push us deeper into the maze of problems. If that is the case, we will step forward and lead the people's will and verdict.

Q: Does this mean returning to the armed insurgency?

Mahara: What no one should be mistaken about is that we were taking a peaceful way before our revolution started. We practised parliamentary politics too. When we presented the 40-point demand, we took up peaceful means. We did not choose to start a war; we were compelled to. We came to talks twice and maintained sincerity there too. Our main agenda was always a constituent assembly. So it was not that we spoiled the talks and returned. Secondly, this

time too we have come with sincerity and a sense of responsibility. Our peaceful aspirations have always been there in the past and present and they will be there in the future too. But if any force tries to conspire and work against the people's will, we might be compelled to take that way despite our unwillingness. We hope that will not happen.

Q: The present House, reinstated by the pressure of the movement, is a different House and has declared itself all-powerful and sovereign. When you raise unnecessary doubts it may fail to work as per the people's aspirations?

Mahara: No, it's not like that. Where is our place in the present House of Representatives? We are the political force who is not represented in the present House. Not only us, there are several other political forces who are outside the present House. There are only the representatives of the seven parties. And it's false that the mass movement was launched only by the seven parties. There are parliamentarians (in the present House) elected seven or eight years ago. People have advanced in this period. The House does not represent the people's mandate as expressed during the movement. The base of the House is the Constitution of 1990, which we say is a regressive constitution. We are against the 1990 Constitution. Talking truthfully, there are representatives (in the House) who were against the mass movement.

Q: So which mechanism can be formed to include the Maoists?

Mahara: The central committee meeting of our party has put forth a 10-point roadmap. A broad political conference should be organized comprising all the political forces including the representation of all the levels of the seven parties, the Maoists and civil society. We have been stressing for a roundtable conference for the last few years. That conference will be more powerful than the present House and will work as an interim constitution. The all-powerful interim government formed afterwards will hold the constituent assembly elections.

Q: Nepali people want peace and the present government has been somewhat successful in establishing it. What has hampered taking the talks process ahead?

Mahara: The government has taken a positive step towards creating an environment conducive for talks. But the government should not confine itself just to that. Doubts will be raised if it gets stuck just there.

Q: Perhaps, since the announcement has been made to go for constituent assembly elections, there should be no uncertainties?

Mahara: Yes, theoretically an agreement has been reached. We shouldn't forget the experience of the present House as it has approved various proposals of national interest. But such decisions are still pending so far. To be optimistic, the government itself has presented such proposals in the parliament and that all the oppositions have welcomed them. It's totally false that the proclamation has made the king powerless. The king is still in a position to hatch a conspiracy. There could still be interference by foreign powers. There are still some forces that do not want peace and stability in the country. There are such forces conspiring against us to stop us from the peace process. It can't be said that such forces, that committed incidents like Doramba, will not repeat their tactics against us. The whole peace process depends on how responsibly the seven-party government will come forward.

Q: Don't you believe that a conducive environment for the implementation of all the decisions exists since you have been collaborating with the seven parties for some time now?

Mahara: This government is different than any others in the past. We have called it the seven-party government and not one of the old regimes. Saying that the present government is formed by the pressure of the mass movement, we mean that we are a part of the movement. We have come to assist the government. We have come here to collaborate with it, not to struggle. We will encourage and assist the government to take a concrete step towards constituent assembly elections. So, the talks this time will be different compared to the past two ones.

Q: When will the talks begin?

Mahara: We will start now. First the government should release all our political detainees. The government should not delay as it has expressed its commitment towards the 12-point understanding. The whereabouts of all our comrades who have disappeared at the hands of the past government should be made public. The government has responded responsibly on this issue. Talks should be held after completing all these tasks. We are for accomplishing the talks process as soon as possible. We have also stressed on quickly going for constituent assembly elections jointly.

Q: So the whole process will move ahead after your participation in the government?

Mahara: We will not participate in the present government but will join the interim government. Before that the old constitution should be annulled and

the new interim constitution should be drafted. After the formation of the interim constitution, all the organs of the state will be at the interim stage and through that phase it will be easier to go for a constituent assembly.

Q: When will your Chairman Prachanda come for the final negotiations?

Mahara: It depends on the climate of trust. All our senior comrades including the chairman will come for talks at the time of the final decision, when the process for the constituent assembly elections begins.

Q: Will Prachanda come only for the final signature?

Mahara: Yes, our chairman will lead from our side and Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, as the head of the seven parties, will sit for negotiations. For that we need to accomplish all the procedures.

Q: You seem to be assisting the government but at the same time you have intensified extortions and abductions. How will it be supportive in creating an environment for talks?

Mahara: Hmm, I need to tell you a little bit about this. We recently studied the case of the industries shut in Bara and Parsa. We had begun asking donations with industrialists in the past. But this time the issue has been raised sharply. Arguments on the ordinary issues of donations, military (Maoists') demonstrations and abductions are rife. The elements that are against the talks, have attempted to break up the peace talks, by raising such issues. We have no option but to ask donations from the people for our army. We have directed all out cadres not to take money forcibly. Our friends have handed over the fake Maoists from Kathmandu as well. What has been said on abductions is false, who have not abducted anyone. Some people have come to us and asked us to call it abduction for security reasons. We have not demonstrated our arms in the city. We do not agree that the people are intimidated by the Maoists. A large section of the people is with us and that is why we have arrived at this position. The more the talks gain momentum the more such issues will decrease. There were several complications before reaching the 12-point understanding. The environment for collaboration was created after that. Politics will resolve every problem; there is no room to doubt us.

Q: Why do you ask for donations when the government has already said it is ready to allocate a budget for the Maoist army?

Mahara: We will seriously present this issue during the talks. We will stop asking donations from the people if the government provides the budget to our army.

Q: How can the Maoist militia be managed before the constituent assembly elections?

Mahara: We have not taken it as a big issue. An army can easily be managed if a political solution is reached. The problem doesn't lie with our army; it's with the Royal Nepalese Army. The army (King's) was mobilized against the people and has been in favour of the monarchy for the last 238 years. It will be a serious mistake to believe that everything is all right just by saying that the RNA is now under the control of the House. We have proposed for a restructuring of the state and army. A new National Army can be formed after merging our army and the RNA. There are no obstacles from our side to go for free and fair elections. Both the armies (RNA and Maoist) can be neutralized. It has been mentioned on the 12-point understanding that the armies can be kept under UN or any credible organization's supervision.

Q: Will it be problematic, as the RNA has already been converted to the Nepali Army?

Mahara: The RNA has been converted into the Nepali Army only in words not in practice. There are still aristocrats, feudalistic thoughts and opinions existing within the RNA, which cannot be changed overnight by one decision.

Q: But, it has been mentioned that if the Nepal Army is weakened, problems might be created if the Maoists suddenly try to take control?

Mahara: We have said (before and after reaching the 12-point understanding) that our army is everyone's army. We had even proposed the seven parties to induct their cadres in our army and take responsible positions. We are ready to make our army- the army of the seven parties. It will be a great delusion on their part if they trusted the king's army rather than that of the people's.

Q: When will the people get the chance to hear of peace?

Mahara: We want to end this process as soon as possible. But it doesn't depend only on our desire. We are hopeful that the people's dream will come true soon.

Q: Have you begun talks with the government?

Mahara: I have begun holding informal talks. We are pressuring the government to start the talks immediately. The government has still not been able to form a talks team. The government lacks seriousness. We, on the other hand, are already ready for talks.

(Courtesy: Kantipur Online)

If even today the political leadership only considers the slogans for a democratic republic to be a Maoist slogan, then they would be seen by history to have made the millions of people and their own political activists chanting this slogan in the streets, "Maoists." The CPN-Maoist is flexible and responsible and, keeping in mind the international situation, has been proposing the elections for Constituent Assembly as a meeting point for all. The path for that which will prove correct, scientific and permanent is not the Merciful Reinstatement of Parliament by the King, but the parallel government declared and established by the revolutionary forces. That is crystal clear.

(From Baburam Bhattarai's "Letter to the Editor" of Kantipur , Nepal, 25. 4 2006)

Keeping the Ceasefire Alive

The first round of talks in Geneva achieved little more than the two sides pledging to uphold the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) and the Sri Lankan Government agreeing to disarm the paramilitary forces. There was still hope that something more positive could come out of the next round of talks, scheduled for 19th to 21st April, but failed to materialise.

Violence increased rather than decreased after the Talks, with the CFA observed increasingly in the breach. Attacks on LTTE members and sympathisers increased in the East with leading cadres falling victim to attacks for which the Karuna group claimed responsibility while the Army denied links with the group, despite the group operating from areas under its control. In the North too, killings, allegedly by the EPDP with the connivance of the armed forces, of civilians with LTTE sympathies as well as traders, increased. Opponents of the LTTE too have been killed. A large number of innocent civilians had been killed by the armed forces. The number of civilians killed this year exceeds 200, while the number of LTTE cadres killed is around 15.

Attacks on the armed forces increased in response to attacks by the armed forces and paramilitary groups, and the LTTE denied responsibility, claiming that the attacks were carried out by the angered people and 'mass organisations'. The response of the armed forces to each attack was to punish civilians in the vicinity and harass the public, in the name of search operations. The armed forces also made it difficult for the working people such as fishermen and farmers to earn a living, by placing restrictions on their movements.

There were more sinister operations by sections of the armed forces guided by Sinhala extremist elements. The killing of five students in Trincomalee and the burning down of several Tamil businesses and killing of 20 civilians by racist thugs, following what seems to be a staged bombing inside the vegetable market, were planned acts to create tension in Trincomalee and to drive away the Tamils from the area. The killing of social activist V Vignesvaran with the connivance of the armed forces led to a counterattack that killed several soldiers in a landmine blast. The escalation of violence led to the killing of more civilians including Sinhalese villagers in Welikanda in the Polonnaruwa

District and Gomarankadawela in the Trincomalee District, allegedly by the LTTE.

President Rajapaksha has for advisors several chauvinists who are hostile to a negotiated solution and is under pressure from the JVP and the Jathika Hela Urumaya against implementing what has been agreed upon in Geneva. Little progress was made in controlling the paramilitary groups despite evidence of close links between them and the armed forces. A statement not long ago by an army officer indicated that the armed forces were hopeful of using the paramilitary forces, the Karuna faction in particular, to defeat the LTTE. Steps towards the next round of talks stumbled on the failure to implement the agreement reached at Geneva, and the meeting was deferred to May.

An unsuccessful attack of 25th April on Army Commander Sarath Fonseka by a suicide bomber, just outside the Army Headquarters, seriously injured the Commander and hurt the credibility of the Army. The LTTE denied responsibility, but the government retaliated by bombing Sampur in the Trincomalee District, claiming that it was targeting LTTE positions, but actually killed 14 civilians, injured many and displaced tens of thousands.

Government refusal to provide helicopter transport for LTTE cadres from the East to the North for discussions before the next round of talks in Geneva, met with LTTE refusal to participate in the talks before leading cadres from the North and East could confer. Acrimony about the mode of transport extended to the question of LTTE's *de facto* control over the sea adjoining. The Government's sought to challenge the LTTE claim by transporting 700 soldiers to the North by ship, across waters over which the LTTE claimed control. The presence of members of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) on board the ship as well as on an accompanying high speed patrol boat further complicated issues. While the government claimed that an LTTE attack on the transport vessel was thwarted, the LTTE claimed that it responded to provocation by the accompanying vessels and ceased attack when it was informed of the presence of SLMM personnel.

The SLMM position on the question of marine territory was close to that of the government and was rejected by the LTTE; and the security of the SLMM got added to the list of unresolved issues. The credibility of the SLMM was dented when it amended, under pressure from the Government Peace Secretariat, its report critical of the Government re the bombing of Sampur, and revised it again on protest from the LTTE.

The European Union which placed a travel ban on the LTTE in 2005, banned the LTTE in May 2006 under pressure from the US, which is bitter with the LTTE for denying victory in the Presidential Elections to its client, the UNP. The ban seems to have had a negative effect on the peace process, with the government emboldened by it and the LTTE getting more defiant.

With the prospect of the second round of talks in Geneva receding, Norway proposed talks in Oslo in early June to resolve issues relating to the security of the SLMM. The low key team sent by the Government to Oslo reflected a lack of seriousness on its part, and the LTTE met it by initially refusing to meet the Government delegation and subsequently consenting to send a junior member of the team for talks with the government delegation, but the Government team had left Oslo by then.

It was amid accusations and counter-accusations about the Oslo fiasco that armed conflicts intensified, with both the Government and the LTTE again pledging commitment to the ceasefire agreement (CFA), and the SLMM and the Norwegians assuring that the CFA, however fragile, was intact.

The massacre at Kebethigollawa on 15th June, the hasty response of the government by bombing LTTE controlled areas for two days running, the sea battle of 18th June near Mannar followed by an attack by Navy personnel on fishermen and the destruction of their boats and equipment, and a grenade attack that killed seven and injured many inside a church do not auger well for the ceasefire, let alone the peace process.

(written 19.06.05)

Local Council Elections: Interpreting the Results

Elections to local councils, except those in the North, were scheduled for April 2006. Most were held as per schedule and the outcome was favourable to the PA. The UNP fared poorly capturing less than a quarter of the local authorities contested. The Tamil National Alliance did well in the North East to capture all local bodies in areas with a Tamil majority, except one where their list of candidates was disqualified. Its success in the Batticaloa District was important in view of a campaign by its opponents to separate the East from the North. Splits in the UNP and defections to the PA by leading members including its chief organiser also hurt its performance, but not severely, since the performance has also to be seen in the light of its allies among the minority nationalities switching loyalties or contesting on their own.

The chauvinistic JVP and the JHU fared badly, with the former capturing just one local authority and the latter none. Although in electoral political terms the two parties would be seen to be doomed, the share of votes gathered by the JVP show that it has not lost its voter base and that in fact it is the number of seats held by it in Parliament which is disproportionate to its true strength and was made possible by an alliance with the PA, which the JVP manipulated well. The JHU has a weak mass base and its relative success at the last parliamentary elections was due to the frustration of many Sinhala nationalists with the UNP. Repetition of that performance at any subsequent election was doubted, especially after the way the clergymen MPs conducted themselves in Parliament.

The elections that were deferred owing to litigation were held in late May and the UNP fared better than the PA, because most of the constituencies had been UNP strongholds. The UNP list of candidates for the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) was disqualified owing to an irregularity caused by tampering with the official list by two important UNP personalities. The UNP made a deal with an 'Independent Group' to support it at the polls and for the winners to step down to make way for a UNP administration of the CMC. The UNP-supported group won, despite the PA list being headed by Vasudeva Nanayakkara of the Democratic Left Front, who consistently distinguished his position on the national question from that of the PA and put forward a programme for the CMC aimed to uplift the living conditions of ordinary people.

The parliamentary acrobatics of the two leading Hill Country Tamil parties lost them considerable support, but major gains were by forces which are no more credible and with track records of deals with one or the other of the large chauvinistic parties. The New Democratic Party with its principled stand won a seat in the Pradeshiya Sabha of Walapane but was denied a seat by a small margin in that of Nuwara Eliya.

The implications of the local government election results for parliamentary elections are not sufficiently encouraging for the PA to take the risk of going for snap elections. In any event, the current deterioration in the national situation, with a threat of resumption of war and an increasingly shaky economy, could alter the electoral balance in more significant ways than evident in the local elections

NDP Diary

News Report: Party Position in Local Elections

24th March 2006

Comrade E Thambiah, Attorney-at-Law and National Organiser of the New Democratic Party, addressing an election campaign meeting in Ragala, chaired by Comrade S Panneerselvam, the leading candidate in the NDP list of candidates contesting the Walapane Regional Council said: “The people should refrain from voting for the chauvinistic parties which try to entice the Hill Country Tamils by sweet words and the deceptive leaderships who are their agents and parade as the leaders of the Hill Country. At the same time they should create conditions in the Hill Country where people will fight for their rights with political awareness and self-respect. The NDP is mobilising the people, the workers and youth along that political path. It is as a part of that activity that the NDP is contesting as an independent group with the candle as its symbol. The people should vote for the Party as a way of signalling a New Political Path, New Leadership and New Hill Country.

“The plantation workers, who are Hill Country Tamils, have been an oppressed people for 186 years, exploited and denied their rights by foreigners and local capitalists. They have at the same time been subject to ethnic discrimination, neglect and alienation by the chauvinistic governments. In addition, they have been deceived by their own trade unions and political parties that evolved from their midst. This deception has got worse since the restoration of their right to vote. The leaders of the Hill Country have shown interest only in securing ministerial posts to line their pockets, in the name of bargaining on behalf of the Hill Country Tamils, but not in the problems of the people or of the workers.

“That is why the old leadership and the ones that claim to be new comprise forces for securing positions and accumulating wealth and not those putting forward the interests of the people. All of them have together betrayed the Hill

Country Tamils by securing posts, bribes, and contracts worth many millions to show the green light for the Upper Kotmale Project. The people should teach such elements a proper lesson in the forthcoming local government elections. They should vote for the NDP candidates contesting under the symbol of the candle and make them win.”

The meeting was also addressed by several NDP candidates contesting the Nuwara Eliya and Walapane Regional Councils.

News Release for the Media

May Day Message of NDP

28th April 2006

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party issued the following May Day message on behalf of the Central Committee of the NDP.

Cold-blooded murders in the form of attacks, counterattacks and revenge are the order of the day in the North East. As a result, normalcy is on the decline in daily life and there is anxiety and fear in the minds of the people. A dangerous situation is developing in which war could resume.

While President Mahinda Rajapakse repeatedly emphasises honourable peace and not retreating from peace negotiations, the President and the Government should accept the responsibility for the failure to create conditions favourable to the second stage of the talks in Geneva.

In the meantime, prices of essential goods are increasing by the day. As a result, the working people, unable to bear the burden of the cost of living, are painfully facing hardships. The second government circular on wage increases has aroused dissatisfaction and protest among workers and other wage earners. Silence is preserved about the wage increases for several hundred private sector employees including the plantation workers of the Hill Country. It is under such depressing circumstances that the workers, peasants and other toiling masses are looking up to the forthcoming May Day. Hence, the New Democratic Party emphasises that the government should implement the ceasefire and thereby take the initiative for the second stage of the talks, control the rising cost of living, and grant an adequate wage increase; and calls upon all the working people to firmly resolve on this May Day, the day of struggle of the working class, to struggle in unity.

It is a succession of chauvinistic governments and their leaders from the feudal-capitalist elite classes that carried forward the ethnic contradiction as oppression and transformed the national problem into war. Forces of foreign imperialism and regional hegemony, through providing support for these ruling classes, have been able to secure and safeguard their economic, military and political interests in this country. But the people of the country have been forced to shed blood, lose life and property, and live amid war. It is only when all the working people realise these truths that there could be real political awakening and liberation.

The May Day Procession and Meeting of the NDP will take place in Ragala in the Hill Country. The meeting will be chaired by Comrade S Panneerselvam, Member of the Walapana Regional Council, and addressed by Comrades E Thambiah, National organiser of the NDP, SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDP, S Thevarajah, Member of the Politburo of the NDP, and trade union representatives including Comrades DK Sutharsan and V Mahendran. The Procession will commence at the Nadukkanakku Bazaar at 10.00 a.m.

In view of the abnormal climate of anxiety in the North East, the May Day meeting, chaired by Comrade K Kathirgamanathan (Selvam) will be on a restricted scale. Trade union representatives of the Party will address the meeting.

News Report: May Day Meetings of the Party

1st May 2006

The May Day procession and meeting of the New Democratic Party were held in the Hill Country with great enthusiasm. In view of the prevailing abnormal climate of anxiety in the North East, May Day discussions were conducted on a limited scale in Jaffna and Vavuniya.

The May Day meeting of the NDP held in Ragala was chaired by Comrade S Panneerselvam, Member of the Walapane Regional Council. The May Day procession which started at Nadukkanakku Bazaar ended at the venue for the meeting in Ragala. The stage was decorated with red flags, red banners and cut-outs illustrating workers' struggles. The main address was delivered by Comrade E Thambiah, National organiser of the NDP. Comrade Thambiah asserted that the working class of the Hill Country cannot think of liberation or salvation merely by nodding 'yes' to everything said by the trade unions or by

believing the insincere utterances of the parliamentary leaders, and that, instead, they should mobilise along the path of revolutionary struggle to carry forward their proletarian politics in the Hill Country. He added that it is as an outcome of the various mass struggles carried out by the Party that a comrade has been elected by the people to the Walapane Regional Council, but that does not mean that the people should be drawn into the illusion that they could bring about changes in the Hill Country by depending on elections, while there cannot be any doubt that such electoral work and representation would be fertiliser for the mass struggles to be carried forward in the future.

Comrade Panneerselvam, in his address from the chair, said that the people did not elect him to secure posts and positions but to serve the struggle. He declared that he will be faithful to the wishes of the Party and the people, and will together with the people carry out his work along the revolutionary path.

The meeting was also addressed by Comrades S Thevarajah, Member of the Politburo of the NDP, S Rajendran, J Satkuranathan, Kuyilthoppu Mahendran, S Shanmugaraja, and Puthiya Malayakam V Mahendran. Revolutionary songs were also sung at the meeting.

Portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong and Che Guevara as well as those of comrades who lived and died for the people of the Hill Country and the plantation workers were held high in the procession. Slogans such as 'Distribute land to the Hill Country Tamils', 'Reduce the cost of living', 'Stop the war; Find a political solution', 'Grant the plantation workers their maximum wage' and 'Reject the deceptive leadership' were raised aloud during the procession.

Statement to the Media

NDP Condemns Attack on Uthayan Newspaper

3rd May 2006

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party issued, on behalf of the Politburo of the NDP, the following statement denouncing the shooting attack on the office of the newspaper Uthayan.

The premeditated shooting carried out by armed persons who entered the office of the Uthayan newspaper on the night of 2nd May 2006, comprise shots fired at freedom of the media and human rights. Two of the ruthlessly fired bullets brutally took away the lives of two of the employees. Two others have

been injured. Besides, computers and other equipment belonging to the newspaper have been destroyed by the shooting. The New Democratic Party vehemently condemns this fierce attack by armed persons. It also asks the government to take firm steps to identify the background to this attack and the forces behind it.

As a result of national oppression, there is a shadow war in the North East. As a result, there are cruel killings taking place by the day. It is amid these brutal killings carried out by various factions that the media personnel have been killed. Earlier, the office of Sudaroli, the sister newspaper of Uthayan, in Colombo has been attacked and its security officer killed. Now the office of Uthayan has been attacked and murders have taken place.

Such attacks on newspapers and other media are not merely attacks on the freedom of the media but also a sign of fascist tendencies that seek to bury democracy and human rights deep underground. The attack on the Uthayan newspaper has taken place at the time when the International Conference of Free Media was held in Colombo and awards were being made. It makes one fear whether this incident is a proclamation warning of a war against the attempts to initiate negotiations and people's desire for peace.

Hence the New Democratic Party emphasises that the President and the Government should not dismiss this incident as one of many, and take the necessary firm action.

Statement to the Media

Victoria Project Leads to Fissures on Earth Surface: Stop the Upper Kotmale Project

25th May 2006

Comrade E Thambiah, Attorney-at-Law and National Organiser of the New Democratic Party issued, on behalf of the Politburo of the NDP, the following statement concerning the implications of the major fissures caused by the Victoria Dam for the Upper Kotmale Project.

Major fissures have occurred on the earth surface stretching from Matale to Trincomalee. This is bound to affect human settlements from Matale to Trincomalee. Cracks have also appeared on the Victoria Dam. The dam could fail submerging many human settlements. Despite warnings about fissures that have appeared on the ground in Yorksford, work is to be carried forward on

the Upper Kotmale Project. If the consequent damage is to be prevented, the Upper Kotmale Project should be abandoned and alternative schemes adopted to meet the need for electricity.

Every hydroelectric project undertaken in Sri Lanka has led to cracks in the dams and fissures in the land adjoining the reservoirs. This has serious consequences for the people living in these areas and for the region. The environment has already suffered serious effects.

The government is going ahead with the Upper Kotmale Project despite these experiences and disregarding the continuous protests and struggles carried forward by the Peoples' Movement against the Upper Kotmale Project. It seeks to implement the Project despite incontrovertible evidence of the damage caused by large reservoirs and alternatives for electric power being put forward. The disastrous Upper Kotmale Project should be abandoned and continuous struggles should be carried forward to stop it.

Media Release by the NDP

On the Unrest in the North and East and Threats to our Members

25th May 2006

The New Democratic Party has emphasised the responsibility of President Mahinda Rajapakse's government to create a peaceful atmosphere and by peaceful means take meaningful steps to initiate talks with the LTTE.

The Party has urged the Government to restore peace to the country by negotiations based on a solution which will assure the equality, autonomy and the right to self determination of the nationalities and unity among them, without submitting to imperialist, regional hegemonic and chauvinistic forces.

Further, the Party has pointed out to the President that its Northern Regional Secretary Mr K Kathirgamanathan (alias Selvam) is disturbed by suspicious movements by the security forces that threaten his right to life.

The NDP has brought the above matters to the notice of the President in its letter of 24th May 2006, signed by SK Senthivel, General Secretary and E Thambiah, Attorney-at-Law and National Organiser of the New Democratic Party and addressed to the President.

Excerpts of the letter are as follows:

The North and East has become a real killing field and it is alleged that the killings are committed by the security forces, paramilitary troops and the armed forces of the LTTE.

The alleged attacks and killings taking place between the LTTE and the Karuna group have completely changed the peaceful atmosphere of the East. The killing of five students in Trincomalee and the attacks and killings that followed, the assassinations of Joseph Pararajasingam MP and Vignesvaran of Trincomalee, the tit-for-tat killings of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims, and the activities of the paramilitary troops and the security forces are some of the incidents that have made the East into a killing field.

The Situation in the North also has gone from bad to worse in the recent past. After each Claymore and grenade attack, innocent people are being killed as a hit-back operation of the security forces. Thirteen people including children and elders were killed in Allaipiddy in Kayts. Five youths were killed in Putthur, and seven in Nellyyadi. Seven youths have gone missing from Manduvil in Meesalai. Under the circumstances, killings have become the order of the day.

The Udhayan newspaper office has been attacked and two employees have been shot dead. The lives of the members of the Tamil media are under threat.

Apart from that, headless bodies have been found in Avissawella.

The Tamil people of Trincomalee are fleeing to other parts of the country as well as to India by illegal means, since there is no safety for their lives in Trincomalee.

People of the North are frightened to move about to carry out their day-to-day activities, as innocent people are killed while they are travelling or even in bed.

These terrible acts are acts of fascist cruelty, and peace loving and democratic people cannot be silent on the killings, abductions and attacks on innocent civilians. But they can be stopped only by your peaceful intervention as the Commander of all security forces and Head of State. The responsibility lies with your office to stop all killings, abductions and attacks in the North and East as well as outside the North and East.

Your office is very much duty bound to create a peaceful atmosphere in the North and East and to take meaningful steps to initiate talks with the LTTE. Moreover, we take this opportunity to urge you to use your good offices to look into the risks faced by the members of our Party in the North.

There is reliable information that the life of Mr K Kathirgamanathan (alias Selvam) is under threat, with the security forces moving around his house in risky and suspicious manner. Suspicious movement of the security forces targeting him has been observed by our members.

Please note that our Party has never campaigned for secession or the division of the country as a solution to the ethnic/national question. We are firmly committed to a political solution for the Tamils in the North East based on autonomy, equality and self determination, within an undivided united Sri Lanka.

We are not in favour of foreign powers, especially the US and European imperialists and Indian regional hegemony, to intervene in the guise of mediation to solve our ethnic problems.

We never approved of the presence of any foreign troops in Sri Lanka.

Despite all the risks, threats and challenges, even in the war situation and during struggles against the national oppression of Tamils, we have been working within the legitimate democratic framework, guided by Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought. During the period when Jaffna was under the control of the LTTE as well as during its control by the Sri Lankan armed forces, we continued to function in Jaffna and held our meetings, including May Day rallies.

In 2006, our May Day celebrations were limited to seminars inside halls in view of the unrest prevailing there as well as the suspicious activities and surveillance of our members by the security forces.

Further, you should be aware that we were a founding member organisation of the New Left Front and in 1999 contested the Provincial Council Elections in Colombo and in Nuwara Eliya with the table as symbol. In the General Elections of 2000 and 2002 we contested in Jaffna, Colombo and Nuwara Eliya under the symbol of the clock, on the list of the Democratic Left Front led by Comrade Vasudeva Nanayakkara.

We contested the Provincial Council Elections of 2004 as an independent group.

In the Local Government Elections of 2006 we contested Nuwara Eliya and Walapane Pradeshiya Sabhas as an independent group, with the candle as our symbol and secured a seat in the Walapane Pradeshiya Sabha.

We believe that we are the only party guided by Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought working in the North East, the Hill Country and other parts of the country. We work very closely with Sinhalese people along with left parties and groups and cannot therefore be branded otherwise to be subjected to surveillance or to threats by the security forces.

We urge you to use your good offices to create a sensible atmosphere to enable us to continue with our political work in the North East too. We are not identified with any other forces in the North East.

We understand that the risks and the threats faced by our members are identified with the unrest in the North East, and therefore we reiterate your responsibilities and urge you as the Head of State to take the necessary steps to stop the killings and attacks in the North East and to initiate talks with the LTTE to find a political solution for the ethnic problem.

We expect that your government will restore peace to the country by negotiations based on a solution which will assure the equality, autonomy and the right to self determination of the nationalities and unity among them without submitting to imperialist and regional hegemonic and chauvinistic forces.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

E Thambiah
Attorney-at-Law
National Organiser

Maiden Address by Comrade Panneerselvam

The following is a translation of the summary of the maiden address by Comrade S Panneerselvam at the meeting of the Walapane Pradeshiya Sabha in May 2006 after he took oaths as Member of the Pradeshiya Sabha.

I wish to firstly state that I have been elected to a Pradeshiya Sabha from which no benefits have reached the community of plantation workers who voted for me. I have been elected to struggle to overcome legal and administrative obstacles that stand in the way of benefits reaching them through the Pradeshiya Sabha and to extend the authority of the Pradeshiya Sabhas for development work to include the plantations. I will continue to struggle to fulfil that responsibility. It is said that it is not possible to carry out development schemes inside the plantations because the land of the plantations is under the control of the central government and the plantations themselves

are administered by the private sector. That situation has to be changed. Since those who live in the plantations have the right to vote in elections to the Pradeshiya Sabha, development should reach them as well. Changes should be made to the laws relating to the Pradeshiya Sabhas and Provincial Councils to include the plantations in the Pradeshiya Sabhas.

All local councils, including the Pradeshiya Sabhas, should be developed into autonomous bodies with sufficient authority to fulfil the day-to-day needs, to carry out development activities and to meet the aspirations of the people living within their respective boundaries.

Local councils should not be bodies that merely carry out the agendas of the central and provincial governments, but should be organisations that can function independently with their own agendas for development in accordance with their specific circumstances.

The funds allocated to the Pradeshiya Sabhas and to individual members to implement programmes should be raised. Currently a member could only implement programmes to values less than Rs 50 000. That is a very small sum and should be increased. The activities of the local council should be carried out not only in Sinhala but also in Tamil. The President should issue the necessary legal declarations for it.

Sufficient funds and powers should be allocated to the Local councils to carry out development schemes based on suggestions from and participation by the public.

In some areas, Pradeshiya Sabhas have been set up for regions with fewer than 10 000 voters. But in Nuwara Eliya, the Pradeshiya Sabhas comprise large territories and large populations. Their extent could be reduced to accommodate several Pradeshiya Sabhas. I will make every possible effort through the Pradeshiya Sabha to serve the people who elected me. But this council is limited in scope. I am a communist. I belong to the New Democratic Party. Our task is to struggle for the oppressed people. Thus, I conclude by pledging that I will serve on this council in a way that reflects the aspirations of the people and that I will function as the voice of the people.

International Events

France: A Victorious Struggle

The Contrat de première embauche (CPE) or the First Job Contract legislation nominally aimed at reducing youth unemployment in France, currently running at 23%, was really meant to strengthen the international competitiveness of French capitalism by downgrading the social position of the working class. It allows employers to dismiss workers under the age of 26 without cause during their first two years of employment. Other provisions reduce the statutory school leaving age to 14 for failing pupils and withdraw benefits from parents of absentee school children.

Many economists and business leaders have blamed the labour laws of France for the country's weak economy, and sought to reverse the rights that the workers have won through a series of struggles since World War II. It is said that the catalyst for the new law was the wave of rioting that swept across France last autumn, when youth from low-income, suburban, immigrant housing projects with unemployment rate at 40 percent rioted in a three-week spree of anger directed at what in their view was an unresponsive government. But the ultimate target of the law was the French working class.

The first mobilization against the CPE was on 7th February with participation mainly by students and supported by trade unions and parties of the left. Support grew and, despite the impressive protest of 7th March involving well over 200 000, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin stubbornly refused to listen, and the law was passed on its second reading in the National Assembly, and the government declared that CPE contracts will start to be signed by mid-April.

The result was that the protests grew even stronger with support from wider sections of the population. The trade unions joined in on 28th March in a general strike which paralysed France, and the protest demonstration had a massive participation of 3 million across France. It was followed by an even more impressive mobilization on 4th April, and the government showed signs of relenting on 5th April. On 10th April, President Jacques Chirac announced that the CPE will be repealed and replaced by other measures to tackle unemployment.

What is specially significant about the French protest movement, besides its demonstration of the power of the masses, is that it has flown in the face of the claim by many postmodernists that class struggle has ceased to be as well as the declaration of the 'End of History' by Francis Fukuyama, the 'prophet' of globalization.

Iran: Winning Friends

Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) comprising China, Russia, and the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan who met in May decided to support Iran against US plans to punish Iran. Although no formal statement on Iran was issued, they made their position clear. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov insisted that the problem must be resolved by talks, and that there should be no attempt to isolate or to put pressure on Iran, and rejected the use of military force against countries such as Iran and North Korea. He affirmed that Russia and China will not vote for any resolution that is an excuse for the use of force.

Iranian President Ahmedinejad's visit in May to Indonesia, with the world's largest Muslim population, helped to consolidate Indonesian position as earlier stated by the Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda: "We support nuclear development for peaceful purposes, especially energy, but we consistently object to nuclear weapons proliferation."

Iran's diplomatic offensive, including the 18-page letter from President Ahmedinejad to President Bush in early May and more importantly its abruptly dismissal by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, have exposed the US as a bully in the eyes of many Third World countries, while hardening attitudes within Iran against the US position on nuclear power in Iran.

With increasing opposition to sanctions against Iran, let alone military action, the EU is now seeking to find compromise deals on nuclear power development in Iran. It is, however, unlikely that Iran would consent to forgo its right to develop its nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Iraqi Invasion: Three Years of Getting Nowhere

Without the approval of the UN Security Council and much against the advice of many close allies, the US launched on 19th March 2003 one of its

longest-running wars, now into its fourth year, which critics of the Bush administration refer to as the greatest US foreign policy catastrophe since Vietnam. Over 2 300 Americans have been killed, and over 16 000 have been wounded or maimed. Less importantly to US concerns, the human cost to Iraq is 30 000 deaths as a direct consequence of the war with over 100 000 attributable to the war, while the number of injuries and illnesses due to the use of toxic weapons is many times more. The truth is that the US conduct is not an aberration but an inevitable aspect of the historical development of US imperialism.

Iraq is on the verge of a full-scale civil war, which the US forces cannot prevent but in fact have contributed to in their efforts to put in place an obedient Iraqi regime. The establishment of even an apparently accountable government of national unity and the reconstruction of the country will not be possible as long as US forces are stationed in Iraq, since memories of Falluja, Abu Ghraib and many more will keep haunting the memories of the Iraqis.

The US is the victim of its own lies and is clearly clutching at straws to justify its foreign policy disaster when it hails the killing of the Iraqi Al Qaeda leader Al Zarqawi in May 2006 as a major turning point. The fact is that Al Qaeda is not the main force of resistance to US occupation and its parochial approach only weakens the struggle by contributing to a Sunni-Shiite conflict while standing in the way of a broad based anti-imperialist united front.

The Philippines: Calling in the Death Squads

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Government of Philippines are desperate following a string of military successes of the New People's Army (NPA) against the AFP over the past few years. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's regime has turned to terror tactics by using death squads, according to the Communist Party of Philippines (CPP), which condemned the Malacañang Cabinet Oversight Committee on Internal Security (COC-IS) and the AFP for masterminding the assassination of former CPP leader and National Democratic Front (NDF) peace consultant Sotero "Ka Teroy" Llamas on 29th May. The CPP has vowed to punish the Black Army, a shadowy group of assassins commanded by pro-Arroyo military officers and orchestrated by the COC-IS. Apart from Llamas, another respondent Philip Limjoco, abducted last May 7, is held incommunicado and in grave danger of being liquidated.

The government is most worried of the CPP, NPA and NDF as they comprise a mighty force at the forefront of the broad united opposition against the increasingly isolated regime, which is now said to target nationally prominent leaders identified with the progressive movement, with plans to liquidate principal leaders of the movement, especially those in a list of 49 respondents accused of rebellion by the Department of Justice, which also appears to be an unofficial hit list for the Black Army.

The CPP points out that the campaign to assassinate the progressive anti-Arroyo leaders stems from a desperate effort to paralyse the opposition, terrorize the people and derail efforts to protest against and bring down the pro-imperialist and brutal rule of President Arroyo.

In the light of these developments, the NPA is to intensify its tactical offensives against the pro-Arroyo military and paramilitary forces nationwide to help weaken the regime and punish those who have committed grievous crimes against the people. The CPP has called on the Filipino people to intensify their efforts to oust President Arroyo.

Luis G. Jalandoni, Chairperson of the National Democratic Front on 6th June denounced the hypocrisy of the government in claiming "grave concern" over "the mounting case of killings" while the killings are attributed by witnesses, survivors of the assassinations, human rights and church organizations, Amnesty International and other international organizations, and parliamentarians from various countries to killers from or connected with the AFP, the Philippine National Police, paramilitary and death squads of the Arroyo regime.

Meanwhile, CPP sources have dismissed as bloody intrigue the COC-IS spin that the NPA is behind the killing of Llamas, clarifying that there is no enmity between Ka Teroy, who has always remained a respected friend of the CPP-NPA-NPF and that the revolutionary movement has maintained good relations with him even after he took a leave from the mainstream of the movement. CPP sources also lambasted COC-IS for insinuating that the group of former AFP colonel, senator and 'Reform the Armed Forces' campaign leader Gregorio Honasan as the one behind the killing of Llamas. The CPP sees this as a desperate bid to divide the broad opposition by trying pitting them against one another.

Book Review

Human Rights, Politics and States. Laksiri Fernando. The Social Scientists Association, Colombo 5, 2002, pp. 340 + v., Price not specified.

The book comprises three case studies, namely those of Burma, Cambodia and Sri Lanka. The first three chapters, respectively, deal with the origin and development of human rights, the 'absence of human rights' in our ancient societies, and the role of colonialism in introducing human rights. The fourth discusses 'experiments of democracy' and human rights, and the fifth the background to gross violations of human rights. The sixth examines changes since the Cold War and trends for change and is followed by a short chapter of conclusions.

The author seems to believe that there is something absolute about human nature, and that absolute human rights exist, waiting to be discovered. While hailing liberal values in relation to human rights, he dismisses the Marxist position on such matters as erroneous because of its 'overemphasis on class' and 'considering civil rights and social rights as antagonistic'. Interestingly, the matter of in-built oppression in class society has never concerned the author at any stage. The role of imperialism and social order based on class oppression do not seem to play a role in the exercise of human rights.

The author seems to believe that nation states that evolved in the West followed the path of human rights while those in the East did not. What he has not asked himself in the book is the kind of double standards practiced by Western democracies that are rich in their tradition of human rights in matters relating to ruling class interests. Is the value of human life in a Third World neo-colony the same as that in the European imperialist state exploiting it? Can the standards of human and other rights in the capitalist West survive without the sweat shops of Asia? Does not the exploitation of labour in itself constitute the violation of fundamental human rights?

The difficulty with 'liberal' humanitarianism in all its forms lies in its defence of private property, especially the private ownership of the means of production, which is the root cause of conflict in modern society. The illusion that democratisation in the West has been accompanied by accountability to the people, transparency in economic dealings and even the risk of losing elections through multi-party elections is evident throughout the book.

However, as I went through the relevant sections of the text, I could not escape thinking of the way the largest democracy in the West conducted its affairs recently.

The author has not shown the slightest interest in the class nature of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and the class interests that are being served at the local as well as at the international levels by prolonging ethnic conflicts. Not surprisingly, neither capitalist exploitation nor imperialism receives a mention in this book.

The author's aversion for Marxism and Marxist liberation struggles shows itself all too often so that the author does miss any opportunity to lump Marxism together with fascism. He reserves most of his anti-Marxist venom for Maoism which, along with Stalinism, he describes as an authoritarian version of Marxism, and goes to the extent of labelling the Sinhala chauvinist JVP as Maoist without a shred of evidence to justify his statement. It is not surprising that he draws heavily on Samuel Huntington of 'Clash of Civilisations' fame for his interpretation of issues of democracy.

He attacks 'peasant-based, Maoist-type political mobilisations' as negating fundamental human rights both in theory and in practice, naming the Naxalites in India, the 'Shining Path' of Peru and the JVP as examples. He does not realise that the alleged violations by revolutionary forces like the Naxalites and the Shining Path (and more recently the Nepali Maoists) pale into insignificance against the violations by the state which were the cause for the armed struggles against the state. What the author refuses to see are the invisible violations of human rights inherent in class society which lead to armed struggle against oppression.

Burma's military rule is referred to as 'socialist' without questioning its credentials and the exaggerated death toll in Cambodia is attributed almost entirely to the Khmer Rouge. The author makes nominal reference to Noam Chomsky's articles on Cambodia, but chooses to ignore Chomsky's objective analysis which points out that alleged killings by the Khmer Rouge had been deliberately over-estimated by very large factors.

On the question of anti-Tamil violence, the author seems to go a little out of his way to claim that the refugee flow in 1983 'was skilfully aided by the Tamil militants for propaganda purposes'. Not only does the author avoid criticism of India's role in furthering its hegemonic interests through the Indo-Lanka Accord but also soft pedals criticism of the killings, tortures and other violations for with the Indian Peace Keeping Force was directly and indirectly

responsible, and seeks to explain IPKF conduct in terms of its working in 'unknown terrain'.

The analysis is in most places superficial and fails to give new or useful insights. NGOs and bogus human rights organisations with political agendas such as the UTHR(J) are dealt with tenderly. Former President Chandrika Kumaratunga's commitment to peace is hailed, without even a mention of her infamous "war for peace" and some of the worst violations of human rights under her presidency. The author goes to the extent of exonerating her from responsibility for the misdeeds of 'a gangster layer of politicians' who emerged with the PA. If I remember correctly, she was rather supportive of several of this class of politicians to her last day in office, although some of them crossed over from the PA to the UNP to bring about the downfall of the PA government in 2001.

The author asserts that the two main post Cold War trends are towards capitalism and democracy and that the two are "correlated if not the same". This is a restatement of the position taken by the imperialists and their liberal apologists: democratic freedom is freedom for capital to exploit and plunder. However, the author arrives at one valid conclusion that "the state and human rights constituted a terrible historical antithesis quite detrimental to the present knowledge and values around human nature and human needs". But his reluctance to examine the nature of the state and its role in class society as a tool of class oppression makes him assign the task of transforming this antithesis into synthesis to human rights movements. And it appears that such human rights movements would function above considerations of class and class conflict as well as of the imperialist agenda of globalisation. The author cannot be unaware that many of the human rights movements and activists have not been free of considerations of ideology, class and ethnicity.

Layer of Rock

by
R Murukaiyan

All art is for the joy of people!
If dreams shall make us happy
We are willing to pay to dream.
It's no wonder.

The sculptor who makes a sculpture
Accumulates within stone all his dreams.
The moviemaker presents his dream
In actions, scenes, words and song.
The theatre artist displays his dream
By acting, speech and dance
To make wonder within the confines of stage.
We watch and praise.
We praise his skill of expressing
A fine idea so very subtly –
Wondering at the novelty emerging out of
Gestures, body movement, looks
And the sound of anklets.

We are amazed how one could
Demonstrate such a wonder.
Our words and feelings melt
To blend into the thought of
How such an incomparable idea
Comes to one's mind and found expression.

Imagination should have at its base –
Reality – the layer of rock.
We should realise that too.

Martyrs

by

A. Iqbal

We trapped in our cameras
the miserable sight of
your leaving empty handed.

We projected the scene into the eyes
of the Arabs who without a plan
throw money in all eight directions.

With heavy heaves and tears in their eyes
they give generously.
To prove that we gave what we received
we shared out a part.

Truly we saw
in our heart of hearts
the pain in your wounded heart.

Now in your name we run NGOs
and uplifted our lifestyles.
Unconditionally,
you refugees are the true martyrs.

Announcement

New Democracy publishes articles of social, cultural and political importance to the people of Sri Lanka and their struggle for emancipation from imperialist domination and freedom from oppression of all kinds by the reactionary ruling classes.

Articles on local and international matters, with a Marxist outlook or with a progressive content are invited for publication. Articles should preferably be in English. Articles in Sinhala or Tamil will be considered for publication in translation.

Readers are encouraged to write their comments on the journal and its contents. Where the comments are of general interest, the letter or relevant sections will be reproduced in the journal.

Readers are also encouraged to draw our attention to articles of value to our readers so that they may be reproduced in New Democracy in full or in abridged form with the consent of the author/publisher.

Only a limited number of copies of the journal are published and back numbers may be obtained from the publisher at

47, 3rd Floor
CCSM Complex
Colombo 11, Sri Lanka

We Shall Never Forget!

My house can be stormed, night or day!
I can be arrested, and taken away.
In my own homeland, I am not free:
That is why I shall use an olive tree
To engrave on its trunk my tragedy,
To register on it every evil perfidy,
To document every vile Zionist crime,
Committed in our land at any time.
I shall record the names of torturers.
Looters, thieves, rapists and murderers
I shall keep for each a detailed file,
Containing evidence of everything vile,
From Kafr Kassem to Deir Yassin,
And crimes thereafter, or in between!

On the Trunk of an Olive Tree

I shall engrave, on an olive tree,
The sighs and secrets of my tragedy:
I shall draw the location of my village,
The victim of destruction and pillage;
And the number of each piece of land
That was usurped, and mark it with a brand.
My inscription shall not be wasted,
For every bitterness that I've tasted
Shall be eliminated in the near future
By the sweetness of the coming rapture!
My homeland survived a thousand conquerors,
Foreign invaders, intruders and plunderers;
And despite the death, adversity and pain,
With love and liberty we shall rise again!

The Passport

Mahmoud Darwish

They did not recognize me in the shadows
That suck away my colour in this Passport
And to them my wound was an exhibit
For a tourist who loves to collect photographs
They did not recognize me,
Ah... Don't leave
The palm of my hand without the sun
Because the trees recognize me
All the songs of the rain recognize me
Don't leave me pale like the moon!

All the birds that followed my palm
To the door of the distant airport
All the wheat fields
All the prisons
All the white tombstones
All the barbed boundaries
All the waving handkerchiefs
All the eyes
were with me,
But they dropped them from my passport

Stripped of my name and identity?
On a soil I nourished with my own hands?
Today Jacob cried out
Filling the sky:
Don't make an example of me again!
Oh, gentlemen, Prophets,
Don't ask the trees for their names
Don't ask the valleys who their mother is
From my forehead bursts the sword of light
And from my hand springs the water of the river
All the hearts of the people are my identity
So take away my passport!