

Sama Samajism and the Tamil Speaking People - Part II

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First part: [Sama Samajism and the Tamil Speaking People - Part I](#)

"6. the Problem of National Minorities.

The problem of national minorities, especially that of Tamil speaking people (Jaffna and Baticaloa Tamils, Muslims, Estate workers) has become an acute problem due to the rule of capitalism. It is an absolute lie to say that this problem has been solved or the foundation for a solution was laid in the republican constitution. Tamil people of the North and East as a nation are fighting for their rights. There cannot be a solution to this problem nor a complete national liberation nor a united state, until it is accepted by the Sinhala masses that they are a nation and their right of self determination, i.e. the right of deciding with which nations they will join and how they will join. The transitional demands that arise out of the concrete struggle for true national unity are (i) The consolidation of the right of Tamil citizens to communicate with the state in their own language (ii) Regional Administration in the North and the East be carried out by the intervention of the people of that area and in Tamil language (This is connected with the democratization of the entire state i.e. establishing Autonomy) (iii). Selection for university entrance and for jobs without discrimination on language or racial basis (iv) Removal of the oppression against speaking and agitating on behalf of national minorities (v) Organizing the development of the Northern and Eastern provinces with the allocation of a proper share in the national plan. In carrying out these tasks and changing the constitution accordingly a foundation for real national unity will be laid.

Muslim Masses: They are, though bound together by religious, and cultural ties, not developed as a nation based on a region. Their needs differ widely according to the class differentiation. As different social layers, they are distributed throughout the country. It is necessary to form a state institute to look into the special problems faced by the lower and middle Muslim masse in relation to the education, jobs and land.

Up country Tamil people are tossed here and there as third class citizens. Full citizenship should be granted to all estate workers who consider this country as their own. One of the main tasks of the revolutionary Swaraj movement (in Democratization of the village structure) is to bring about real unity between the estate and the neighboring villages. In their problems the most important is to safeguard their rights as full citizens (in education, land ownership, jobs).

9. Democratic and Human Rights

— — lifting of the emergency, complete release of youth involved in the insurrection of '71, guarantee of their rights as normal citizens, release of all political prisoners including the Tamil youth, political rights of all state employees, guarantee of Human Rights in the constitution without any conditions; these steps are immediately necessary. Especially the lack of political freedom for those who are branded as being involved in 1971 insurrection and as terrorists, and the imposing of special limits and boundaries to the political freedom of Tamil youth should be immediately removed"

Vama Sama Samajaya (Sinhala Vol. 2—14)

While proposing this program as the way out for a United Left Front we directed our attention on the working class struggles that were developing at that time both in the private and the public sectors. When the Railway strike broke out and started spreading to other sectors, the old leadership of the LSSP and the CP were not prepared to direct it and take the struggle forward. They were totally involved in parliamentary manipulations. We took the responsibility of directing most of the party trade union elements. Particularly, we directed those in the Railway Workers Union. (This is why the LSSP controlled Railway Workers Union decided to support us when the split occurred). It was necessary to mobilize the protest of all masses around the strike and develop it towards a massive mass action. The struggle of the Tamil masses should have been integrated into it. If that was achieved at that time, naturally it would have grown into an all Island mass struggle posing the question of power outside parliament. This struggle would have eroded the mass support of the UNP; and made the left movement (of course backed by the Tamil liberation struggle), the main opposition to Sirimao's government. On our own we couldn't do much towards this end. At that stage we were not accepted by the Trade Union Movement as an Independent alternate leadership to any significant degree.

Old leadership not only refused to look back and accept mistakes, but kept on making new mistakes; they did not see anything fundamentally wrong in the coalition tactic. It was on the national question that they retreated the most. They were not prepared to discuss this problem in detail particularly with reference to the growth of the separatist slogan. According to them much of it has been solved through Colvin's Constitution. We maintained that on the contrary the problem has been aggravated by it. Solution can come only through a Constitution that recognizes the right to self-determination (i.e. the right to secede).

Vasudeva and others who were still members of the party were thrown out when the old leadership realized that we were pressing for a party conference. They were not prepared to meet our criticism of their 'new' resolution before the party membership. In the resolution which we put forward with the intention of going before a party conference, we showed that the masses can be won over only by putting forward a bold program and taking the mass struggle forward instead of limiting oneself to the bourgeois parliamentary politics. Our resolution said,

"If were to use the united front tactic.

(a) We must come out with a draft program of the proposed Front.

(b) Working class must be moved into action based on common and urgent demands.

(c) Agitations and campaigns must be launched on relevant issues among the youth, the students, the peasants and the national minorities"

Our struggle (— in Sinhala) —Pages 40 and 84

As we expected the ULF based on the parliamentary reformist program of the Old leadership did not

emerge as a viable alternative. It could not even attract the imagination of workers; leave a side that of the national minorities. In the election of 1977 the left parties lost badly. After pretending to be good temple goers and champions of Sinhala Chauvinists over a decade, our old leaders lost even the support of the urban workers who stood by them when they spoke of parity and were exposing those who pretended to be good Buddhists. Sacrificing principles takes one only to one place: dustbin of history.

During the election we tried to enter the United Left Front of the leaders while proposing a discussion on the program that the leadership put forward. They refused, without any consideration. Hence we participated in the election as a surreptitious force within the United Left Front. The Old leadership sent letters to all their candidates not to allow us to appear on any U. L. F. platform. But many candidates saw it differently. They saw that our presence was vital in getting the attention of the militant sections, particularly the radical youth and the national minorities. We were much in demand on the platform of scores of U. L. F. candidates.

In the election the U. L. F. was mauled. This was a rejection of the policies of the old leadership. With the defeat of the left it was very evident that communal feelings would be aroused by both rightwing parties in order to make way for their ambitions. History has shown that the defeat or set backs of the left movement paves the way for communal elements to move forward. Prior to the August 1977 incidents we appealed to all left parties and workers organizations to unite in forming defence committees against communalists. On August 16th we had a Hartal Commemoration meeting to which we had invited all left parties. We made use of this meeting to warn the people that the rumors "coming from Jaffna" were for the purpose of promoting communal disturbances. Strangely enough, except for the Daily Mirror none of the other papers reported this aspect of our meeting. As the disturbances developed we immediately went into action. We published a special issue of our paper against communal violence. Appeals were sent to all left parties and Tusk including that of the old leadership on 18th August. Special letters were sent to the parties of the ULF on 23rd August. In spite of their inactivity we organized defence committees with the help of other organizations in many areas and work places where we had significant influence. Kandy Peoples Defense Front is one such organization in which we participated. There we collaborated with all left parties (and sections of the SLFP) in developing an influential democratic organ to fight against communalism. Of course what we could do was not much. It was a time of set back for the left movement in general and in addition we were still not accepted as an independent leadership. Our press statement issued on 18th went as follows:

"Left faction of the Lanka Sama Samaja party.

We strongly condemn the police repression launched against the Tamil people of the North and the attempt by some capitalist sections to make use of this incident to arouse communal feelings. Though these acts appear to be accidental, this nature of criminal background is necessary to launch the fascist style solution necessitated by the present crisis in capitalism. It is this necessity which escalates these unfortunate incidences.

During the previous government, the rights of the Tamil people were taken away, and the burden of the capitalist crisis was placed on depressed sections. Whilst there were cuts in job opportunities and university admissions which intensely angered them, police repression was intensified. This was the reason that made them to gather around the narrow bourgeois nationalist slogan of a Separate State.

Since the workers parties were caged in a coalition without showing the real way out to the workers, peasants and other depressed sections while the full weight of the capitalist crisis came on them, these sections became prey to the rightists. Similarly Tamil people too ended up under bourgeois

nationalist leaders.

We appeal to all T.U.s and left parties to mobilize the total strength of the T. Us and the left movement in defense of the democratic rights of national minorities against communalism".

18th August - Vickramabahu and Vasudeva

We were perhaps the first left party or group to send a delegation from the centre to Jaffna just after the disturbances. A delegation led by Dr. Vickramabahu went to Jaffna to make observations and put forward our views. We participated in a number of discussions and seminars. Though in a distorted form, our intervention was reported in many daily papers. During this period our actions were significant though we were tied down by not being a fully developed party.

By December 1977 we called for a party conference of the L. 5. 5. P. We took this step as all our attempts to get back to the Party and hold a conference were thwarted by the old leadership. Not only did they want to divide the Party but also wanted to keep us out of the United Left Front. We collected well over one third of the signatures of Party members thereby establishing the legitimate right to call a Party conference. Naturally we invited all members including the old leadership. (Last Conference was held in November '72 and by collecting signatures of one third of the party membership we had the authority to call a conference). They of course did not come. This historic conference which was attended by an overwhelming majority of the party members totally rejected the opportunist politics of the old leadership and opted for revolutionary Marxism. The resolutions passed unanimously had the following section:

"The Federal Party built by the liberal bourgeoisie based on the middle class of the Tamil people, is a populist development of the 1950's and 1960's. However in the context of the intense capitalist crisis this populism has evolved as a national liberation movement struggling against the oppression of the state. Though moving within the Capitalist framework it has taken the shape of a real national movement. Hindu, Tamil speaking leaders have emerged displacing the westernized English speaking leaders. Pushing caste issues to the background, the need to unite overcoming these conflicts, has emerged to the fore-front.

As in the month of August '77 it is possible for communal problems to arise in the future. In fact these will be aroused by JR's crowd. During the August incidents J. R. safeguarded his popularity among the Sinhala Buddhist forces based on Sinhala petty bourgeoisie. His idea was to allow the situation in the country to develop so as to frighten the leaders of the Tamil Liberation Front. This has been successful to some extent. Agitation was moderated by the Tamil petty (liberal) bourgeois leaders. Conflict between the Northern and the Eastern sections has increased. Above all the contradiction between the radical youth and the leaders has been aggravated and the youth are looking towards the left: Only we, who accept their democratic rights- specially their right of self-determination- and who has a working class base, are capable of winning over the Tamil people from the nationalist struggle to the anti capitalist struggle. When J. R's proposed development program, which is to be launched through District Committees and District Ministers with the help of Amirthalingum goes into bankruptcy from its very inception; our intervention will be of the greatest importance. Our special task would be to explain the nature of the national question and particularly to fight against the deep rooted communal petty bourgeois concept within the Sinhala masses".

From there onwards we have reorganized the Lanka Sama Samaja party under the new leadership. The old leadership collected about 300 people from various contacts (mostly) personal) and held a sham conference in March '78 and unconstitutionally claims the name of the party. It will be the workers helped by other oppressed masses, who will be the arbiter of this dispute. Already the railway workers, office workers, clerks, large sections of the corporation and private sector workers, estate workers and many other sections of workers have made their decision and look towards us for political leadership. Students and youth leagues have followed the same course. Since December

1977 our Party has been in the fore front in the fight against the policies of J. R. and the UNP. One of our first acts was to campaign by hoisting black flags and other means against the policies of this Government, on the February 04th on the occasion of JR assuming Presidential powers. A large number of our comrades were arrested including our Party Secretary Dr. Vickramabahu. They were remanded - and kept in prison for weeks though the police fail to frame any charges against them. The issue of selections for university admissions came up again in the beginning of the year 1978. There were a number of communal and chauvinistic elements, particularly those who under the patronage of the SLFP enjoyed various benefits, were trying to incite the university students with communalism. Many left parties were falling prey on this disgusting propaganda. At this critical moment we intervened successfully to stall this communal twist in the student struggle. With our guidance the Lanka Student Federation took the following position,

"They. (i.e. all student organizations) are helping the Government to find means to step out of the problem by pretending that Standardization along 'racial' lines is some sort of a 'solution'. Any student or left organisation that does this is unwittingly falling into the trap of racialism"
Leaflet of L, S. F.—(Sinhala, Tamil, English)

It is our view that capitalism which is in deep crisis is increasingly using communalism as a means of diverting the rising mass protest. The recent campaign against the so called Tiger movement is so full of contradictions. One gets the impression that it is all a part of a Machiavellian plan. 'Wanted' posters were put up of people who were easily accessible to the police. An impression was created that a war has been declared by the "Tamil Terrorists" against the Sinhala masses. The latest stunt of Cyril Mathew and the Vice-chancellor about examination scripts is yet another step in this direction. Under these circumstances it is very necessary for all those who are actually interested in winning just rights of the Tamil speaking people to develop the correct method of struggle. The Sama Samaja Party under the new leadership proposes the mobilization of all forces against the repressive state power of the capitalists in general and the UNP Government in particular. It should be a mass struggle centered on the general strike of the working class. Such Hartal movement should naturally incorporate the struggle of the Tamil speaking people. We must throw out this government by such a mass movement. Our aim should not be merely to force an election, but to launch a movement to wrench the state power from the hand of the capitalists. People should themselves take power in each factory and each locality, destroying the state power of capitalism. This should develop from the very Hartal movement, which should mobilize all exploited strata of the population for the struggle for real freedom and liberty. This alone will bring justice and autonomy to the Tamil speaking people.

In conclusion it is very necessary to deal with certain questions raised by comrade Karalasingham of the old leadership and Comrade Lionel Bopage of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, and clear the confusion that prevails about the concepts, right of self determination, separatism and autonomy. Comrade Karalasingham, suddenly after 15 years, has realized it is worthwhile to republish his "Way out for Tamil speaking people". During that period when the LSSP old leadership (and the CP leadership) was trailing behind the SLFP completely betraying all principles that they stood for before 64, the problem of the Tamil speaking people is one area in which their subjugation was total. Now in 1978 Comrade Karalasingham, without revealing the truth about the so called coalition tactic, is trying to cover-up their folly by lies and distortions.

To start with, Karlo says that the LSSP old leadership (of course including him) at least made a genuine attempt to stand by the very limited program outlined in his book "Way forward" in 1963. They tried their best to defend it within the United Front against the non proletarian and anti-working class elements inside and outside the coalition. No! A complete lie!! On the contrary the old leadership totally abandoned even this limited position and some times joined the worst chauvinists of the SLFP. In particular when the question of standardization came up the old leadership defended

media wise standardization against some members of the government who wanted it withdrawn.

But the Gem in the postscript of Karlo is his reference to the 'novel' doctrine of Nissanka Wijayaratne, that although the Sinhala speaking people are a majority in Ceylon, they still suffer from psychological weakness of a minority as they are a minority in the geographical region of Deccan India. Well, well, Karlo have you forgotten so easily that Comrade Leslie Gunawardena came out with this 'theory' a long time ago? Perhaps Nissanka Wijayaratne learnt it from him! In 1970/72 Leslie came out with this disgusting adaptation to the chauvinists and it was one point against which our tendency carried out an intense battle within the rank and file of the party. (In fact there are several articles in which Leslie openly took this position of rationalizing Sinhala Chauvinists(i.e. - Magazine Commemorating the 35th Anniversary of the L. S. S. P. — 1970 - page 7)

Finally, this arguments against the right of self determination of the Tamil speaking people is ridiculous. Without going into details we humbly request this 'Marxist scholar' to go through Lenin's writings on national question again! A few points must be made clear. Leadership of the Tamil mass movement has for the last 15 years moved totally into the hands of reaction instead of following the left movements due to the policies of the LSSP and opportunism in working class politics in general. Nevertheless, during the last- two years we see increasingly radical elements forcing the bourgeois leadership of the T. U. L. F. to proclaim it to be socialist. Already the Tamil masses are directly confronting the reactionary bourgeois state machinery, particularly police oppression. Karlo who for a time was helping the smooth operation of this reactionary bourgeois- state machinery, still does not realize that he was on the wrong side of the barricades particularly during '73/76 when the Tamil youth were confronting the state machine of the oppressor on a major scale. The belated and pathetic attempt of Karlo to rethink in terms of civilized norms shows very clearly the plight of the old leadership.

This takes us to the present position held by the JVP and comrade Lionel Bopage. They of course appear to accept the position developed by us regarding the right of self-determination, which of course is a position developed so clearly by Lenin. But, it is still only in abstract theory. When it comes to concrete slogans and actions they come out with strange statements. Lionel says "under a socialist republic the division of the country into two parts as well as the arbitrary centralization will equally be opposed." To say the least this is very confusing. What exactly do you mean by "division of the country into two parts . . . will be opposed"? How does this victorious 'proletariat' propose to do this, by canvassing among the Tamil people or . . .? Is this your defense of right of secession?

It is very necessary to understand the concepts of separatism and autonomy, clearly. Every set of people should have autonomy or self government. As Lenin very clearly points out, this is a universal principle of a democracy. In other words alien or out side elements cannot be allowed to be in effective control of a distinct regional administration. They should be thrown out immediately by any means, and the Samasamajist give unconditional support to such a struggle. Once power is taken out of these out side forces should one decide for political separation? Naturally this will depend on so many conditions. Sama Samajists will agitate or advise for such a separation only if such a development is going to enhance the class struggle in the entire area. This is why we Samasamajists, while giving unconditional support to the Tamil speaking people in their struggle against the Sinhala dominated Military Police bureaucracy of the northern and eastern - provinces, maintains that a democratic solution which preserves the unity of the two nations is possible.

What are our proposals for unity? Firstly the right of secession should be in-corporated in the constitution as a principle. Secondly, the autonomy or the self government of Tamil speaking areas should be preserved. Thirdly, the right of Tamil citizens to communicate with the state in their own language (Departments, Courts, Police, Hospitals, Kachcheries) should be established. Fourthly, discrimination at the university entrance, job-selections, and land allocations based on language or

race should be completely eliminated. Fifthly, at proper share of the national development should be allocated to the northern and eastern provinces. In this context colonization schemes in the northern and eastern provinces will be in the hand of the regional administration. This is exactly the essence of what we suggested in the draft programme for the United Left Front in 1976.

It is clear only such a program will look after the interest of the Tamils in the entire country, particularly that of estate labour. Estate Tamils are not integrated into the T. U. L. F. Even the bourgeois leadership of these Tamils, Thondaman, has left the I. U. L. F to join the U. N. P. This shows that this section of Tamils do not identify with the Tamil national movement to any significant degree.

There is a more important aspect to this problem. The TULF today has developed into a mass movement incorporating within itself several currents. If it is accepted as a mass national movement with a bourgeois leadership, what should be the attitude of the proletarian leadership towards it? Our attitude is very clear. We see the TULF' as the twin movement populism in the Sinhala areas. That is the SLFP, JVP

other radical petty bourgeoisie movements put together. there is no difference between Amirthalingum and Sirima in that sense, or between the youth radicals of both camps. rise of the Federal Party at the expense of the G.G. '5 Congress was very much similar to the rise of the SLFP defeating the UNP. Both popular movements underwent serious in recent times throwing out youth radicals. It was the lack of an independent working class alternative during the last years (due to coalition politics) that kept these political currents from falling into a secondary place.

That is why we say that we are prepared to join hand with the TULF in action in defense of democratic right including the right to canvass and agitate for secession. This is the defense of the right of self determination in concrete terms. Of course this does not exclude either propaganda and agitation against separation or the exposure of bourgeois nationalism of TULF leadership. It is on this question Comrade V. Ponnambalam (breakaway C. P. leader) has dragged his followers of Red Tamil movement to a total blind alley. When we met Comrade Ponnambalam during our visit to Jaffna after the August incidents, we explained our position and warned him of his adaptation to the TULF leadership. He is trying to convert Amirthalingam to socialism by joining the TULF. This is exactly what the old left leadership was trying to do with the political twin sister of Amirthalingam (i.e. Sirima for the last 15 years! What is necessary today is a United left Front based a truly anti-imperialist-democratic program (which opens the way to socialism). Such a program should incorporate the elimination of the oppression and the discrimination suffer by the Tamil speaking people. It should propose to give power of the state to the people so that people will rule themselves without any alien force intimidating in their day to day life. Naturally there will be autonomy for the Tamil of the North and the East. There should not be any privileged position to any language or religion. We openly appeal to all Leftists to come to a United Front to fight for such a program. We appeal to the old leadership of the Left movement and the jvp. Reluctance of these leaders to come to such United Front can be explained only one way. They are not prepared to face the mass mobilization that will arise out of left unity based on a progressive program. Emergence of a United Left Front will push the mass movement beyond the Parliament Politics.

Such a United Left Front should go into working agreements on action on specific issues both with the TULF and the SLFP. In developing a real mass movement, led by the working class it is necessary to go into common action with both populist movements, against the reactionary UNP and the state oppression. Such action will expose the limited nature of the TULF and SLFP leadership and draw the radicalizing Sinhala and Tamil petty bourgeoisie and youth behind the working class and the left movement. Naturally there cannot be any compromise with these bourgeois leaderships.

If the political alternative of a Left government is posed in the context of the development of a

massive Hartal movement, i.e. a general strike supported by the struggles of other masses, then it will be the final chapter of the capitalist power in Sri Lanka. Not only will the UNP be thrown out but the masses will move towards organizing a revolutionary power, a revolutionary Left government, smashing bourgeoisie state which will bring liberation, freedom and democracy to all oppressed sections of society. Such a revolutionary power, having established liberty and democracy will move towards establishing a socialist society.

We, of the Lanka Sama Samaja party appeal to the Tamil speaking people to join in this common struggle that will develop in the period before us.

Nov. 1978
