

# **Sri Lanka: Retrogressive policies of reactionary racists**

Friday 20 February 2009, by [KARUNARATNE Vickramabahu \("Bahu"\)](#) (Date first published: 7 December 2008).

Campaign for People's Solutions to Food Crisis (CPSF) has started a many sided campaign to change the disastrous policies of successive governments. In the past it was the habit of the radical movements to pin the label of reaction on the UNP, but today the SLFP and the racist parties in its alliance have turned out to be equal or more retrogressive in socio economics policies.

One point that many have raised is the importance of the small holder in relation to food production. It is claimed that the type of agriculture where small scale farmers play a lead role is the only effective way to solve the food crisis. It should be environmentally friendly (ecological) and should be a way of rebuilding the capacity of nature to regenerate itself. Resources spent on fertiliser subsidies and other chemical inputs should be given directly to farmers engaged in such ecological agriculture.

Unless such emphasis is given, programmes for rural poverty alleviation such as Api Wawamu - Rata Nagamu, Gama Neguma, Gemi Diriya and the Samurdhi movement will be at most white elephants. One problem raised by agrarian activists is that of rational use of land. The land rights and ownership of land, necessary for food production by farmers engaged in natural farming, should be ensured. At the same time it is absolutely necessary to defeat rural reactionary elements that compel or encourage peasants to sell their land at times of economic hardship.

## **Indigenous knowledge**

We must protect and propagate indigenous knowledge and domestic seeds with capacity for repeated planting (regeneration). The neglect of traditional knowledge and carefully selected seeds in the past has already created problems for the farmer. We have lost our heritage and ancestral wealth. We have to enlighten farmers about pseudo technology that could be harmful in the long run. In this manner the commercial propagation of seeds that are useful only for one generation should be prevented. In the context of the accelerating world food crisis it is obvious that priority should be given to production of food for the people of the country. It is necessary to stop the present trend of giving priority to commercial, export oriented agriculture in the allocation of land and resources.

In spite of all the noise made about developing national production with village authorities, the Mahinda regime too has enhanced the domination of companies and private businesses over agriculture and marketing of food. This has brought untold suffering to the producer as well as the consumer. Both the fisher and the farmer are oppressed by the big businesses and the latter is protected by the political establishment. Promises made by the government to intervene to strengthen peasants and small scale fisher folk by ensuring them reasonable prices for their produce, remain empty.

The use of illegal fishing gear, expansion of tourism zones and large scale industrial fishing that destroys the livelihoods of small scale fishermen still continue. A struggle for conservation of aquatic resources and for sustainable development of inland and coastal fishing by the fisher folk is the

inevitable result. The right of such fisher folk to have access to the sea and inland fishing areas and to sell their produce must be ensured. The war contributes to massive destruction of life and economy. Declaration of large areas of land and sea as high security zones in the war affected areas has become a serious obstacle to the lives of people living in these areas. Since marketing facilities are lacking in these areas the people encounter serious difficulty to make a good living. That is why they relentlessly struggle for peace.

### **Dignified citizens**

People in the plantations should be provided land in order to meet their food and nutritional needs satisfactorily and for them to lead lives as dignified citizens of the country. The salaries of plantation workers as well as of all other workers should be increased in relation to the increase in cost of living. Considering the contribution that women could make towards a healthy society, they must be provided with space and opportunity for equal participation in the development process including planning. Using women merely as cheap, subservient labour and as housemaids in the Middle East and in garment factories should be rejected.

As the working class and the urban middle class have found it extremely difficult to face the current economic crisis, it is necessary to struggle for higher wages. The massive loans taken to build express highways, international airports and harbours and other infrastructure development projects to make the country attractive to foreign investment, have contributed tremendously to the indebtedness of the country without much benefit to the country. This should be stopped.

Development should be primarily based on people's strength and should be people friendly.

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### **P.S.**

\* From <http://www.nssp.info/ninawwa/bahusc...>