

Sri Lanka: UNP to outmanoeuvre Mahinda and JVP

Monday 27 July 2009, by [KARUNARATNE Vickramabahu \("Bahu"\)](#) (Date first published: 26 July 2009).

According to some news items, opposition leader, Ranil Wickremesinghe had announced last week that the UNP's executive and political committees had given their approval for the party to hold discussions with other political parties and organisations to explore the possibility of forming a common front. He has further said that the UNP was in discussion with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), the Sri Lanka Freedom Party Mahajana wing (SLFP-M), the Democratic People's Front and other parties not currently represented in Parliament. Certain civic organizations have also been invited to join the discussions.

Not be compromised

Apparently they have reached a consensus on issues such as the country's economic structure and devolution of power. A market-driven economy that is responsible for society and speedy development projects are some of the issues on which they have reached consensus. On the subject of devolution of power, all proposals put forward stressed that the country's territorial integrity should not be compromised. He further added that the common front would have a majority of UNP political committee members. It was also decided that the party symbol would remain unchanged. Many of us were interested to know whether any left party was involved in these discussions. To my knowledge there was none.

I am sure that the UNP is now making preparations for the impending presidential elections. Mahinda has a specific plan to consolidate the gains before the lustre of military victory is over. He is not sure whether he could wait till December. Everyday he is losing supporters. Even the opportunist Left leaders, who helped him so much to crush the Tamil rebellion, are now critical of the situation within refugee camps and the government's inability to put forward proposals for the Tamil national problem.

Small holdings

But what is it that the Opposition can get from the UNP led front in the present circumstances? Can they challenge the government for its inability to put forward a political solution and dare say that they stand for a solution based on equality, autonomy and self determination? Can they demand that illicit prison camps be closed immediately and give back fundamental rights to herded Tamil people; to close up high security zones and to give back the land to Tamil owners?

Then on the economic front, the most important thing is to revise the salaries of all proletarians to counter the rising cost of living. That means an immediate rise of salaries, at least by Rs.5000. Plantation workers are demanding a salary of Rs.500 per day. It has to be either the salary increase or in the alternative land should be allocated to workers to run as small holdings.

Fisher folk are totally alienated by restrictions made under emergency regulations. Leaders of the fishing community told me that the problem of fishermen who are pushed out of fishing is more acute than the problem of workers thrown out of work. Even those who have access to the sea are

continuously harassed by big players. Can they win freedom?

In any event, the number of displaced workers is more than a lakh. This includes workers who have come back from abroad without any compensation. What help can they expect? What about companies that cannot function under the present world economic crisis. Will the UNP government take these over and try to run them as public sector enterprises?

All these are democratic slogans and demands, appropriate to the situation. I haven't put forward any demand which could be identified even vaguely as socialist. But can the UNP led democratic front at least stand for a consistent democratic programme? Indications are the other way around. The discussions they had have emphasized the market, but nothing on the role of the state. Territorial integrity has been reasserted as if the UNP had other programmes in the past. But nothing is said about devolution or the 13 plus.

Clearly they are trying to outdo both the JVP and the Mahinda regime in the name of Sinhala chauvinism. In this scenario, the Left has to challenge both Sinhala chauvinism and the global capitalist agenda to fight for a free democratic state. That will be the programme of the Left presidential candidate.

P.S.

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