

Defend Tamils' democratic rights

Saturday 10 March 2007, by [KARUNARATNE Vickramabahu \("Bahu"\)](#) (Date first published: February 2007).

This speech by Dr. Vickramabahu Karunarathne, the President of the Left Front, was given to a London public meeting.

After more than fifty years of gaining independence from British rule still we are not really free. This was symbolised by the Independence Day celebrations where the president was surrounded by a military wall with people kept in abeyance. We are neither free to decide our economic development programme, nor are we free to decide our political future. We have borrowed heavily and we are seriously in debt. Hence leaders of global capital, America, Europe and Japan, are dictating terms to us. Though elected, the government is a puppet that works according to their rules: the decision making is in their hand.

Secondly, we are tied down by a national, or communal, civil war. We are unable to resolve the national question and to arrive at a constitution that can accommodate all national and religious aspirations. We are still a prison house of nationalities. We are not a free, united republic.

The United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led alliances ruled this country since independence. Hence they are responsible for this misery and the oppressive situation. At the beginning the UNP and the SLFP had different policies. The UNP was close to the foreign capital and the English-speaking urban elites while the SLFP represented interests of the local capital and the majority Sinhala Buddhist lower classes. Hence it was the reformist party.

However today, with the rise of neoliberal economic policies, both have the same economic policies. Even though they differ on the solution to the national question they have come together to give strength to the ongoing war of oppression.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa came to power using three different and somewhat contradictory campaigns.

Firstly, it was the chauvinist campaign led by the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) and the JVP. Though they both represented the Sinhala chauvinist ideology there is a social difference between them. Hela Urumaya is a capitalist organisation that accepts the neo liberal economics of global capitalism. It has no conflict with the American policy, while the JVP shouts slogans against the Americans in the name of the plebeians of the world. They explained that the victory of Mahinda will be the end of the peace agreement and that there will be a real war against the Tamil Tigers (LTTE). The armed struggle against the state is led by the LTTE though it accepts the neoliberal policies of the global capital.

Sinhala racist forces claimed that the hegemony of the Sinhala Buddhists will be restored and the unitary state will be consolidated once Mahinda is in power. Of course there will be discussions to make Tamils and Muslims understand how to work within this system, they said. In Sinhala majority areas Mahinda made use of this campaign.

Secondly, he made use of the social reform campaign led by the old left and the populists of the

SLFP. The JVP also helped them. With coalition politics the old left has reduced themselves to a mere noise within the coalition. They said that Mahinda will change the neoliberal economic policies continued by the Chandrika rule. There will be protection for the local industries. Development will be centred on village regeneration. Agrarian revolution through village self rule. Resources will be directed towards the peasant and the fisher men and other small producers. Social services such as education health and transport will be protected. Privatisation will be turned back. Dependency on global capital will be changed.

Finally he made use of the trade union campaign for wage increase to balance the rise of cost of living. In addition to the old left trade union leaders, this campaign included Thondaman, Chandarsekaran, etc. They believed that the victory of Mahinda will benefit the workers movement. They were of the view that he will consult the Trade Unions regularly and that Trade Union and media freedom will be protected.

Having come to power he turned against the social and Trade Union campaigns but continued with the chauvinist military policy. Aerial bombing, combined with missile attacks at areas suspected of LTTE activity, devastated the Tamil homeland. Whole villages were uprooted, killing thousands, while several hundreds of thousands of people were displaced and became refugees. Mahinda joyfully claims that the east is cleared of LTTE. Before the Independence Day celebrations he made a special visit to Vakarai to inspect the spoils of the war of national suppression. He also boasts that once the victory is consolidated it will be continued in the North as well. At the same time he makes bogus appeals for discussions. On the other hand assassinations and disappearances continue all over the country. At least 2,000 have disappeared.

However he has retraced the promises given to the social and trade union movements. He has implemented the tasks given in the Regaining Sri Lanka programme of the UNP. Indirectly he has used the military chauvinist policy against the Trade Unions. Mahinda claims that any trade union campaign at this juncture, when the government is involved in a "war to defend the nation", is a crime against the nation; a treachery. Hence the anti-LTTE repression can be used against the Trade Unions as well. Mahinda assumes that the chauvinist campaign and the consolidation of the state forces can stand against the social and trade union unrest. Already he has used these against both Trade Unions and media. Global capital is satisfied with his economic policies and the ability to face the social unrest. He was given the \$3.5 billion promised in 2005.

Last week they promised to give 4.5 billion for his future programme. They all stressed the need of peace. But this help is unconditional and, in their peace appeal, there is no mention of the autonomy of the Tamil-speaking people. The Sri Lanka Development Forum held in Galle showed clearly that the global capital is keen only arriving at peace (because) war is a hindrance to their development programme. LTTE and the Tamil liberation leaders expected global capitalist leaders to intervene and flex their muscles to stop genocidal attacks on Tamil people. But that did not happen at Galle. Global capitalist leaders gave indirect approval to similar attacks in Lebanon and the Mahinda state doesn't come second to the Israel state in loyalty to western powers.

With the backing of global capitalists UNP has almost totally come over to Mahinda. With the rest of the party, Ranil Wickremasinghe, the leader of the opposition, will be trailing behind Mahinda. Jathika Hela Urumaya has accepted the American dictates. Hence they have accepted portfolios in the government to implement their Sinhala chauvinist policy. Some UNPers have joined the government with a view to talk about Federal solutions. However, these Federal solutions must first be approved by Champika Ranawaka. Social pressure on the JVP has forced them to move out of the government, but they cannot break away from the chauvinist policy that ties them to the Sinhala educated youth. This will create a crisis in the JVP ranks in the coming period.

The current attitude of the western powers and the global capital in general has created a new challenge for the LTTE leadership. Global leaders easily blame both sides, as if oppressor and oppressed are equal. Then they ban the oppressed and appeal to both sides to come to the discussion table. How ridiculous they are?

LTTEs must turn to the workers movement both locally as well as internationally. It must seek support for democratic rights of the Tamil people from the workers' movement, especially of Lankan and Indian. Thus there is a good opportunity for the Left to intervene.

The struggles of workers in ports, petroleum, railway, telecoms and plantations show that workers are not fooled by the military chauvinism. Other social campaigns are also breaking out. Mahinda regime will not be able to cope with the break down of the system.

The left should be prepared to take up the challenge. We must tell the workers at large that this is the time to help the just struggle of Tamils. One can have loads of criticism against the LTTE, but that should not stop one from coming out against geneocidal attacks on Tamil people. We must build a social movement through out the world to defend the democratic rights of the Tamil people.

P.S.

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