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New Democracy

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- THE TASKS AHEAD
- IMPORTANT EVENTS
- REMEMBERING COMRADE K.A.SUBRAMANIAM
- LET US ADVANCE TOWARDS THE NEW CENTURY
- WHY NEW DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION IN SRI LANKA?
- THE POST-MODERNIST ELITE: WHAT IS THEIR GAME?
- CHINA, FIFTY YEARS SINCE LIBERATION
- COMMENTS ON GLOBAL EVENTS

QUATERLY THEORETICAL ORGAN OF N.D.P, SRI LANKA

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New Democracy

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

THE TASKS AHEAD

The first issue of New Democracy was well received by the readers and we appreciate the encouragement and the positive criticism. It is with a great sense of joy and pride that we bring out the second issue of New Democracy and hope that it will be received with even greater enthusiasm.

In this issue we carry four articles and a summary of the address by comrade S.K.Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDP on the occasion of the 21st anniversary celebrations of the party in Hatton. The tenth anniversary of his death of comrade K.A. Subramaniam falls on 27. 11. 1999 and we also pay our tribute in honour of that occasion.

The failure of the left movement as a whole to pay due attention to the national question has been a major factor contributing to the decline of the left movement of in this country and has helped the rise of chauvinism and opportunism. The price that the people of this country are paying for the rise of chauvinism is large. It is therefore the duty of all Marxist Leninists to take a clear and principled stand on the questions of war and a just solution to the national question. This week we publish an article reviewing the role of the Marxists in the national question by comrade S.K.Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDP.

A correct assessment of the stage of revolution is essential for the correct choice of strategy for the revolutionary struggle. The country is in crisis which is being further aggravated by the

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unresolved national question and the consequent war and the disastrous open economic policy initiated two decades ago. The tasks ahead of the Marxist Leninists and other genuine left forces need to be correctly identified on the basis of this reality. It is in this context that we present the article by comrade E. Thambiah, National Organiser of the NDP and General Secretary of the New Left Front on the new democratic revolution.

Post-modernism is being promoted in this country by certain people in the government in order to justify the present policy of totally subjugating the country to imperialism under the guise of globalisation, liberalisation and free trade. It is also being used to create confusion among the progressive forces. An article in Tamil by the Tamil literary critic S.Sivasegaram some months ago is reproduced in translation with some changes by the author in this issue for the benefit of non-Tamil readers.

The liberation of China and the founding of the People's Republic of China on 01 October 1949 was the second most glorious event of this century for the oppressed masses of the world. China was a great inspiration to the revolutionary forces of the world for well over quarter of a century. Changes in China over the past two decades are a matter of great concern for many. We publish a critical assessment of the developments in China since liberation to mark the occasion of the 50th anniversary of liberation.

This issue like the earlier issue carries sections on world affairs and important political events. We reproduce with gratitude two poems by young Nicaraguan peasant poets from the island of Solentiname whose people, in the course of the Nicaraguan revolution, delivered a most powerful blow to the dictatorial Somosa regime.

Once again we seek the continued support and valuable critical comments of our readers on the contents of this issue.

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IMPORTANT EVENTS

The New Left front Celebrates its first year

The leading member organisations of the New Left Front held a public meeting to mark the occasion of the formation of the New Left Front on 13th August 1999 at the GCSU Auditorium, Colombo 1. The meeting was chaired by Comrade E.Thambiah, Secretary of the NLF and was addressed by Comrades Siritunga Jayasuriya of the United Socialist Party, Vasantha Dissanayake of the Diyasa Educational Circle, Patrick Fernando of the National Democratic Movement and S.K.Senthivel of the New Democratic Party.

All the speakers emphasised the need to learn from the mistakes of the past, to guard against individualism and self-promotion, and to preserve unity among the member organisations on the basis of equality. The importance of bringing an end to the cruel war waged against the Tamil nationality and finding a just solution to the national question was reaffirmed and the need to persevere in the struggle against the government's policy of yielding to the demands of imperialism and multi-national companies was re-emphasised.

Demonstration against land grab by the army

A mass demonstration organised by the New Left Front with the active participation of the Valikaamam North Association of Displaced People was held opposite the Wellawatte Market on 05 September 1999 to protest against government backed plans to let the Army acquire large stretches of land for extending the army camp in Palaali in the Jaffna District. The

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Tamil United Liberation Front showed its support by sending its delegate. Other Tamil 'liberation' organisations were conspicuous by their absence as were certain opposition 'left' parties.

N.L.F. Picketing Campaign at Hatton

A picketting campaign was waged on 4th September 1999 by the New Left Front against the arbitrary arrest of Hill Country Tamils and their wrongful detention for long periods without court hearing. The picketing, with the active participation of agitators from all nationalities of Sri Lanka was led by E. Thambiah (National organiser, N.D.P. and Secretary, N.L.F.), S.K. Senthivel, (General Secretary, N.D.P.), Siritunga Jayasuriya (General Secretary, U.S.P.), Patrick Fernando, (Secretary, N.D.M.) and Vasantha Dissanayake (Secretary, Diyasa) and was waged in the town of Hatton in the central highlands of the country.

The agitators voiced their protest against arbitrary arrest and detention, and demanded that the Hill Country Tamil parliamentarians withdrew their support for the monthly extension of the Emergency Regulations which are used to justify such arrests and detentions.

Among the slogans that shattered the silence of the Saturday morning in Hatton were:

STOP THE GENOCIDAL WAR!

FIND A JUST POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE TAMIL NATIONAL QUESTION!

PUT AN END TO PRIVATISATION!

Seminar on Globalisation

A seminar on the topic ' What is Globalisation and How to Confront it' was held at the Mahaweli Conference Centre, Colombo 7 on 11 08 199 to mark the occasion of the release

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of a book in Sinhala with the title Navanidhahasvaadaya thulin Jagathkaranaya (Globalalisation via neo-liberalism) by Ranjit Henayake Arachchi explaining what 'globalisation' meant to the Third World. The seminar conducted in Sinhala was addressed by Professor S.Sivasegaram, Wijaya Dias of the Socialist Equality Party, Deepthi Kumara Gunaratne of the 'X-Group' (a post-modernist group), Vasantha Dissanayake of the Diyasa Education Circle, and Patrick Fernando of the National Democratic Movement.

Various aspects of globalisation were discussed and two opposed views dominated the discussion. One accepted the inevitability of globalisation and emphasised the need to adapt and the other the need to confront it so as to safeguard the interests of the oppressed people of the world. The Marxist Leninists who addressed the meeting exposed the fact that 'globalisation' is a term that was coined to replace the term 'imperialism' which truly represented the reality of monopoly capital. They explained what has been going on for the past two decades under guises of globalisation, liberalisation and free market and exposed that post-modernism was in reality an ideology designed to undermine the unity and struggle of the masses on the basis of the working class ideology against all forms of oppression.

Wherever there is struggle there is sacrifice, and death is a common occurrence. But we have the interests of the people and the sufferings of the great majority at heart, and when we die for the people it is a worthy death. Nevertheless, we should do our best to avoid unnecessary deaths.

Mao Zedong,
Serve the People, September 1944

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LET US ADVANCE TOWARDS THE NEW CENTURY

[A summary of the address by Comrade S.K. Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party on the occasion of celebration of the Twenty-first anniversary of the Party at Hatton on 04 September 1999]

Our New Democratic Party is now completing its twenty-first year. On this occasion the party expresses its revolutionary salutations to all its late comrades including the late comrade K.A. Subramaniam who guided us and dedicated themselves to the founding and the development of the Party.

Our Party is a Marxist Leninist party founded by a few comrades in the middle of 1978. Right from its beginning it set for itself the goal and the political direction of a proletarian party. The Party started its journey with the rich experiences of the past, sincere self-criticism and Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought as its ideological basis. The political situation then was one in which the country was being run by the United National Party government. The country was being taken along the disastrous path marked by a liberal economic policy and privatisation. At the same time military oppression was unleashed against the Tamil people, which would eventually take the country towards a cruel war caused by the unresolved national question. As a reaction to this, struggles with a Tamil nationalist perspective were carried forward by armed Tamil youth. These developments over the past two decades have culminated in a national crisis. The US imperialists and the West have guided and encouraged these developments.

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At the same time Marxism and socialism suffered temporary setbacks internationally. Forces of capitalism and imperialism exploited this opportunity to carry out a global campaign on many fronts so as to make people lose faith in Marxism, socialism and class struggle. Anti-Marxist ideas were propagated in a variety of ways, particularly through the activity of NGOs, who were given sufficient guidance and plenty of resources for their task. Local forces of reaction responded favourably to this and acted to justify and facilitate the imperialist programme of globalisation.

Under these conditions the New Democratic Party, as a proletarian party, had to advance in the face of severe pressures and hardships on several fronts amid serious challenges. This was not something unique to us. Such difficult situations have been faced by Marxist Leninist parties in all countries, especially in the Third World. We have to face the reality that the forces of imperialism are determined to exterminate Marxism and all struggles for social emancipation along the lines of class struggle.

Thus the twenty-first century will be a century which will face the schemes of globalisation and their harmful consequences. It is the duty of Marxist Leninist parties like ours to mobilise the masses to oppose them by carrying forward revolutionary mass struggles.

The imperialists and their local lackeys have used chauvinism to divide the class forces that should unite in struggle and made them confront each other along nationalist lines. This has created a situation where the nationalities have become polarised and are in conflict with each other and suffering destruction by war. The war of national oppression has become the burning issue in the North-East. The ruling classes and the forces of chauvinism are trying very hard to create such a situation in the hill country. By subjecting the Hill Country

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Tamil people and the youth to chauvinistic violence they are trying to provoke them to take the opposite stance of nationalist extremism. The trade unions and the parliamentary leadership in the hill country do not seem to act with foresight in this matter since their policy is to compromise and make alliances with whichever forces of the ruling classes that comes to power. But if extreme nationalism were to develop, willingly or unwillingly, among the Hill Country Tamils in the future, the entire responsibility for it will be with the ruling classes indulging in chauvinistic oppression and the trade unions and the parliamentary leadership in the hill country who are giving them their support. The New Democratic Party which is carrying out steady political work along the lines of class struggle cannot in any way be held responsible for it.

The New Democratic Party at the same time emphasises its serious responsibility of political and organisational mobilisation of the masses for a firm struggle against class and national oppression facing the Hill Country Tamils. It makes this its clarion call to the working class, the masses and the youth of the hill country on this occasion of the anniversary celebrations taking place at Hatton, a principal town in the hill country.

The capitalist and imperialist program of globalisation was welcomed with open arms by the UNP government, and has been happily adopted by the People's Alliance government. The economic foundation of this country has being ruined by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Privatisation is being accelerated, and political repression is intensified in the name of combating and eradicating terrorism. Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people are being tortured in the name of the war and subjected oppression and ruin in various ways. The Sinhala masses are suffering economic hardships and the ef-

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fects of the war. Imperialist culture is subjecting the unique cultures of all nationalities to ruin and destruction. The promotion of cricket culture and computer culture is accompanied by the escalating deception and exploitation by the multi-national corporations.

The whole country and its people are as never before severely affected by economic, social, political and cultural crises. But these problems have yet not reached their boiling point. It is to prevent that happening and to deflect the attention of the masses that the war is being prolonged. The people are being deceived in the name of combating and eradicating terrorism while the forces of the ruling classes are enriching and reinforcing themselves. US imperialism makes use of these forces to establish its foothold in Sri Lanka. It is only now that the long term motive of the US in Sri Lanka is being realised. This situation is not particular to us but a problem faced by every Third World country. As the only super power the US is intensifying its efforts to establish itself as the force that will determine the fate of the Third World countries according to its whims and fancies.

Under these circumstances, the challenges and the problems that we as a Marxist Leninist party face are serious. Hence we need to strengthen the party ideologically and organisationally and work with patience and dedication among the people. It is only through such work that revolutionary mass struggles can be carried forward. The imperialists and their lackeys will certainly be defeated by such a mass uprising and the novel webs that have been woven by them will be cut to shreds, and all masks will be torn apart.

To create such a new situation, we need to develop a new style of work. The new century to come demands that we abandon methods that are outdated and use methods that will politically educate the masses and induce them to act. Let us

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vow on the occasion of this last anniversary celebration of the party this century that we will carry out those task with a sense of responsibility and dedication. We will strengthen our solidarity with other Marxist Leninist organisations and genuine forces of the left. We will continue to make our fullest contribution to the broad movement carried forward by the New Left Front against war, racialism and privatisation.

Long Live Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought!

Long live proletarian internationalism!

Long live the New Democratic Party!

Opportunism is our principal enemy. Opportunism in the upper ranks of the working-class movement is not proletarian socialism. Practice has shown that the persons active in the working-class movement who adhere to the opportunist trend are better defenders of the bourgeoisie than the bourgeois themselves.

V. I. Lenin,
Report to the Second Congress of the Communist International, July 1920

Some consider themselves to be sacrosanct, and look down upon the people. Their every gesture shows them to be 'mandarin revolutionaries'. They fail to realise that their arrogance will lose them the peopleÆs confidence.

Ho Chi Minh,
October 1945 (from Selected Writings, Hanoi, 1972)

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THE NATIONAL QUESTION AND MARXISTS

by **Comrade S. K Senthivel,** ***General Secretary, New Democratic Party***

The national question in Sri Lanka has taken the form of a full blooded war. It has overtaken the fundamental class contradiction of the country to be seen as the main contradiction today. This major contradiction has on its one side the chauvinistic military oppression and on the other the liberation struggle of the oppressed Tamil nationality.

Throughout this century which is nearing its end, the ruling classes have actively encouraged the development of the national problem. The national question has served them well to deflect the attention of the people from the fundamental contradiction between the wealthy exploiting classes and the exploited classes under their rule. During the colonial era as well as the period following the so called independence, oppression of the nationalities has been intensified to ensure the existence and survival of the ruling classes. As a result, people of all nationalities have gradually become polarised on the basis of race, religion and language, and have been pushed to a state where they are unable to recognise their real enemy. The local ruling elite and their imperialist supporters have thus been able to safeguard themselves and secure their position.

Even in the current situation in which the national question has taken the form a war and wreaking havoc, there is a

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tendency to wilfully ignore the gravity of the situation. There is still no recognition of the need to take into account the objective situation in the country and bring the war to an end by finding a minimum solution to the national question.

When trying to solve any problem, it is necessary to identify correctly the historical development of the problem. Historically this country has been one comprising several races, languages and religions. But the fact that this country has a multi-ethnic national character has been denied by differentiation on the bases of first settlers and subsequent settlers, aboriginals and non-aboriginals, majority and minority, the descendants of the rulers and others, the age of Buddhism and of other religions in this country and so on. From early this century the notion that Sri Lanka belongs to the Sinhala people and the Buddhist faith has been vigorously promoted so that, even during the colonial era, it was communal thoughts and deeds that were cultivated instead of carrying forward anti-colonial liberation struggles. This parochial approach manifested itself in several forms and, after independence, surged forward as blatant communalism in the political arena.

As a result of the above trend the Tamils, Muslims, Hill Country Tamils, Burghers, Veddas and other sections of the people were subject to discrimination and marginalisation. Their traditional homelands, economy, education, employment opportunities, religion and culture were seriously affected. Democratic demands put forward against this social injustice were ignored by the ruling classes who wielded political power. At the same time the leadership of the Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils sought to safeguard its class interests by preserving its ties with those in power. But the people who were long subject to national oppression gradually found expression to their resentment, and their struggles were put down from time to time.

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When their just demands were not taken note of, the Tamil people were attracted to Tamil nationalist extremism. While the Tamil people were forced to fall victim to the illusion that it was right to demand a separate Tamil state, those in power continued to carry out planned acts of violence against the Tamil people. The ethnic violence of 1983 was a major high point of the anti-Tamil policy of the chauvinist government. The 1977 - 1994 period of United National Party rule ensured that the Tamil people were totally subjected to chauvinistic military oppression. This period also witnessed the development of the armed struggle of the Tamil youth opposed to national oppression. While communalism developed into chauvinism and then into military oppression, moderate Tamil nationalism became a relentless armed struggle. The resultant cruel war, inherited from the UNP by the People's Alliance government, is today being carried further on an even more elaborate scale.

Under these conditions there are some who argue that the national question is an issue distinct from the war and that the national question is only a matter of some grievances and minor problems of the Tamils while the war concerns terrorism and is therefore inevitable. One need not be shocked to hear such utterances made by spokespersons of the parties of the ruling classes or by the chauvinists. But when such statements are made by people representing some parties which call themselves Marxist, we need to take note of it.

Dialectical materialism is the basis of Marxism and Marxists look at history in accordance with it. They see every issue historically and from the point of view of the class struggle. As a result, the Marxist view of matters of economics, politics, society and culture is objective. They do not allow their subjective likes and dislikes to affect their recognition of the nature of contradictions. The Marxist view and position relating to truth, honesty, humanity, and social justice are scientific. The socio-

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scientific historical approach of class struggle provides the basis from which they approach all problems. It is because of this that every Marxist communist of the world puts forward solutions to problems facing him or her to suit the particular circumstances of his or her country.

Marxists do not accept feudal values or religious standards or conservative thought, nor do they accept the concepts of bourgeois ideology. A Marxist, in the course of his or her development, gains a clear view of this world, about the interaction of its contradictions and about his or her role in that process. Such a Marxist does not only become a social thinker but also establishes himself or herself as a sound revolutionary with the potential to transform this world.

It will be useful to examine on the above basis the kind of views that the Marxists and social organisations of our country have about the problems facing us. Especially in the matter of the national question and the context of its transformation into a war that is rocking the whole country, one finds a serious lack of clarity among many of the Marxists. On the other hand, this does not mean that honest Marxists have failed to put forward a clear policy on the national question.

Fundamentally, it is essential for a Marxist or a Marxist party to take a position consistent with the Marxist world outlook. It is not possible for a Marxist to have a Sinhalese position, a Tamil position or a Muslim position. Such positions are not Marxist but nationalist. But what is saddening is that those who call themselves Marxists tend to classify positions on the national question as Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim positions and put forward policies designed to suit each of them in turn as Marxist policies.

The reason for their taking such flawed positions is that they had fallen victim to bourgeois parliamentary opportunism. Instead of carrying forward revolutionary struggles and mobilising

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the masses on a broad basis, they chose to take the wrong road in the belief that socialism can be achieved peacefully along the parliamentary route. Those who set foot on the slippery road of parliamentary politics slid to its very bottom. These so called Marxists abandoned all their Marxist policies for the sake of gaining a few votes to secure their parliamentary seats. They did not hesitate to fall at the feet of religious leaders, carry flower baskets to places of worship and participate in religious observations.

Efforts to speak circumspectly in a way that did not offend the forces of race and religion led subsequently to positions which were based on considerations of majority and minority along the lines of race, religion and language. On the occassions when Sinhala Buddhist supremacy was asserted through the constitution, its strongest advocates included some who called themselves Marxists. The parliamentary Marxists of today have degenerated to a level that they not only show a lack of courage to speak up against Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism but also lend support to it. While they continue to wave the red flag in ritual fashion, their plight appears to have plunged below that of social democrats

It is absurd for anyone who lacks the courage to oppose chauvinism and Buddhist supremacy to call himself a Marxist Leninist. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, which calls itself the alternative force and Marxist, is unable to take the correct Marxist position on the national question. The reason for this is not only the poverty of their Marxist ideology. They are driven to uphold the opportunistic pro-chauvinist position developed and put forward by their former leader because of the temptation of the chauvinist vote bank. They look at socialism and self determination dogmatically and therefore say that we have to wait for socialism to find a solution to the national question. They fail to see chauvinist military oppression as oppression by the ruling class.

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Oppression by anyone in any form should be opposed without reserve by Marxists. Again, on the question of war, Marxists distinguish between just and unjust was. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are fighting from a purely nationalistic position, using some methods which are unacceptable. Their lack of democracy, intolerance to different points of view and assassination of individuals are not acceptable to Marxists. But the fact that their demands include the genuine aspirations and the future survival of the Tamil people cannot be rejected by any honest Marxist. Also, no Marxist can accept the waging of war against the entire Tamil people of the North-East by branding the LTTE as terrorists and claiming to fight to eliminate the LTTE.

The national question is not something unique to us. It is the outcome of the cultivation of nationalism to reach positions of extremism and has taken the form of struggles and war in the Third World. The October Revolution transformed a Russia which was a prison house of nationalities to give the nationalities freedom, liberty and autonomy under socialism. The Chinese and the Soviet examples demonstrated to the world how nationalities can enjoy freedom and prosperity under socialism. But the fall of the Soviet Union and socialism in eastern Europe led to negative contradictions between the nationalities. Forces of imperialism cleverly created situations in which the nationalities waged war against each other. In addition, the leadership of the ruling classes pursued a chauvinistic line, and sought to oppress other nationalities, and fell victim to the imperialist conspiracy. Yugoslavia serves as a good example for this.

Yugoslavia, once a good example for socialist advancement and unity of nationalities, was splintered into several countries as a result of conflict and war between nationalities. Recently the oppression of the Kosovar Albanian nationality by the Milosovic regime paved the way for US aggression. The

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chauvinist Milosovic is hailed as a socialist by the JVP who demand the 'return of socialism' to Yugoslavia. The failure of these so called Marxists to notice the genocide and national oppression committed by Milosovic will prove be a major mistake. It is really a failure to recognise the current international significance of the national question and the fact that the imperialists are using the national question as a major weapon in their hand. Marxists by viewing the national question as merely a question of the relationship between the majority and the minority and failing to recognise the severity of the issues involved will only strengthen the hands of chauvinism. Activities to popularise chauvinism among the Sinhala masses are being carried out on an unprecedented scale. It seems that the Marxists do not appear to have the ability to halt it.

The social structure of Sri Lanka is in the grips of the alliance of feudalism, big capital and imperialism and being subject to neo-colonialism. National oppression is an essential tool to ensure the continuation of this situation. The chauvinistic war is being carried out under the guidance of US imperialism under the false pretext of safeguarding the Sinhala Buddhists and salvaging the country from terrorism, in order to justify national oppression and deflect the attention of the masses from the real issues. This course of action will only subjugate the entire country to the US imperialists.

Genuine Marxist Leninists have therefore already put forward their understanding of the national question and their position on it. Their position is marked by a Marxist view of history and an approach based on class struggle. They have put forward proposals for solving the national question on the basis of short term and long term programs. Also, they have developed the concept of self determination dialectically in a way that meets the current situation as opposed to taking a static view of it. To thus study and analyse the national question from a Marxist Leninist position and apply the findings in

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practice is the need of our time. Those who mask their real intentions by using the name of Marxism cannot do so for long.

The tendency for the forces guided by Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong thought, the ideology that will enable the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people to transcend differences of race, language, religion and nationality and stand up to their oppressors, to close ranks is becoming increasingly evident. This will put right the current erroneous trend of going along with nationalism and giving Marxism a bad name.

Under these circumstances, all genuine Marxist Leninists should dedicate themselves to the task of strengthening principled policies on all issues including the national question on the basis of the objective reality of the country and free from the illusion of bourgeois parliamentary politics.

[Translated from Tamil]

Where else in history has been an army of a million men that drew its replacements in men and munitions from the enemy and grew steadily for twenty years? "Chiang's soldiers are very good soldiers", Mao told me with a smile, "They need only some political training." Where others would have seen only the enemy, Mao saw within the enemy, the Chinese farmhand who must be made a friend. Today the South Vietnamese Liberation Army understands this approach too.

Anna Louise Strong,
in China's Millions, New World Press, China, 1965

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WHY NEW DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION IN SRI LANKA?

by **Comrade E. Thambiah**

Marxism, the philosophy of Karl Marx, which was introduced in the 19th century has continued to be in practice and has been put to use in the 20th century. In order to establish the classless, equal and just communist society, Comrade Marx proposed a period comprising the initial phase of the communist society, known as the socialist revolution or socialism as a prerequisite. Comrade Marx has categorically stated that in the first phase of communism, socialism cannot yet produce justice and equality: unjust differences in wealth will still exist but the exploitation of man by man will have become impossible, because it will be impossible to seize as private property the means of production, the factories, land etc. During this phase, the mere conversion of the means of production into the common property of the whole of society does not remove the defects of distribution and the inequality. But they are removed with the completion of communism and the withering away of the state, which is always the machinery of a social class.

The October revolution led by Comrade Lenin undertook to complete the task of the first phase of communism, and a state of the workers and peasants was established. Following the establishment of this state, Comrade Lenin allowed a period of transition for converting the bourgeois means of pro-

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duction into one owned by the whole of society, and converting individual private property into common property.

In the Chinese revolution, led by Comrade Mao Zedong, a further phase of transition to communism, one preceding the socialist revolution and comprising the theory and strategy of the New-Democratic Revolution, was adopted. It concerned national liberation through the anti-imperialist and democratic revolution which is the preparatory stage for the socialist revolution.

The socialist revolution and the New-Democratic Revolution are two major developments in Marxism. They have to be further developed and their problems which have come to be known in the 20th century have to be addressed by the Marxist-Leninists in the 21st century too. And with the approach of the new millennium, the Marxist-Leninists of Sri Lanka are deeply involved in dialogue especially about the future direction of Sri Lanka and the stage of the revolution.

The position of the New Democratic Party (NDP), which upholds Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought is that the New-Democratic Revolution is the first stage of the revolution in Sri Lanka. As declared in the Political Report of the Third Congress of the New Democratic Party, 'The creation of a socialist state in Sri Lanka and working for the development of a communist society is the long term goal of our New Democratic Party. The transitional stage of achieving that goal is the carrying forward of the new democratic revolution under the leadership of the proletariat and guided by the light of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.' (p. 66 of the Report).

Commenting on the social structure of Sri Lanka, the Report says, 'Our structure is semi-feudal, big capitalist and neo-colonist. In such a structure the feudal forces, the big capitalists, and the imperialist multinationals have linked hands to form a bloc. Against this bloc are ranged the workers, peas-

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ants, intellectuals, the nationalities, women and the toiling masses who are subject to economic exploitation and political repression. The contradiction between these two blocs is the fundamental contradiction in the social structure of Sri Lanka.' (p. 7 of the Report).

The national bourgeois led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) between 1956 and 1964 and between 1970 and 1977 nationalised various foreign and local enterprises and created some state-owned enterprises. Now, the state enterprises which survived privatisation in the name of 'peoplisation' between 1977 and 1994 by the United National Party (UNP) representing the big capitalists, are sold one by one to the multinational companies by the People's Alliance (PA) led by the very same SLFP. State owned tea and rubber plantations and farms are leased on long term or sold outright to private companies where foreign companies hold a major share.

Advice and pressure from the World Bank and the IMF, which seem to control the economic policy of this country, have, in the pretext of 'restructuring' the state sector, led to the privatisation of state-owned enterprises including those which were outright gifts by socialist countries to Sri Lanka and were operating profitably. The World Bank and the IMF are the driving forces behind the project 'Sri Lanka in the Year 2000: an Agenda for Action' under which the national agriculture which has provided the essential food items for the people of this country will be transformed into one for agricultural export, and agricultural lands will be sold to the multinational companies in devious ways. The islands fishing industry has changed hands to the multinational companies. Already many foreign banks have established themselves in Sri Lanka, and foreign companies are leading the commercial sector in Sri Lanka.

It is clear that the national and the petit-bourgeois are not only under-developed but have already surrendered to the

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multinational companies and to Indian capitalists under the bi-lateral agreement entered into by Sri Lanka and India less than an year ago. This has adversely affected small businesses and small industries.

Most of the urban industrial and commercial workers are permanently resident in the rural areas and have properties there. Although the plantation workers are large in number, they are dominated by extra-rural economic pressures. The Sri Lankan economy is based on rural agricultural production with extra-rural influence, and the poor peasants are the largest section of the rural population and make up 34%, with semi-feudal landlords around 3%, the petit-bourgeoisie 15%, middle peasants 19% and agricultural labour 31%.

There is alongside semi-feudalism an element of petit bourgeois production. They stand in opposition to each other, penetrate each other and determine each other. They exercise control over social relations in the rural society, with the petit bourgeois being the dominant one. This implies a high degree of development of bourgeois exchange relations, not necessarily supplemented by bourgeois production techniques.

The rural mode of production is neither semi-feudal nor bourgeois. It is a mixed mode of production. So that at the village level the semi-feudal and petit bourgeois elements and at the national level the under-developed bourgeois elements face exploitation by the neo-colonialists. The extra-rural dominance in the mode of production means an always dependent bourgeois mode of production, a system of production dominated and determined by the imperialist centres. Thus the economy is sucked out by imperialism.

The Political Report of the NDP makes the following observations about the class nature of ruling classes:

'Under the guise of granting independence to Ceylon, the British colonial masters transferred power to the UNP which con-

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sisted of compradore elements. It was only after that the national bourgeois which represented class interests different from that of the compradore appeared on the political scene and captured power. Since independence the power to rule has alternated between the compradore, big capitalist UNP and the national bourgeois SLFP. These parties exercised state power according to their class natures and needs. On certain occasions the SLFP has opposed imperialism and implemented progressive measures. Its past history has been one of befriending the leftists, forging closer ties with the socialist countries and consolidating the national economy. Self-reliance, development of local resources, preservation and fostering of the national culture, and planned development of education through the mother tongue were some of the national bourgeois characteristics that the SLFP displayed. These features were to be welcomed to say the least.

'Today, for the fourth time, the national bourgeois has captured parliamentary power in the guise of the People's Alliance. Its activities in the two and a half years it has been in office led one to raise very serious doubts about the characteristics of the national bourgeoisie. The policy makers of the SLFP are following policies identical to the big capitalist UNP: the liberalised economy, privatisation, cordial welcome to foreign capital, and embracing the US. Thus they are not functioning as the national bourgeoisie should. They blame the international situation for the deviation. They try to show that, even in the socialist countries, there is liberalised economy and privatisation. But they forget that in socialist countries, ruling power is vested in the hands of the workers, peasants and the toiling masses, and that, constitutionally, they are People's democracies. The economic reforms and the reorganisation being carried out in those countries have as their central aim the fulfilment of the basic needs of the vast majority of the people. But the liberalisation and privatisation carried out in countries

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like ours only benefit and serve the interests of the propertied ruling classes and their masters, the imperialists. They only add to the burdens and the woes of the working class and the toiling masses.

'The economic and political policies and plans of today's People's Alliance government do not have the faintest trace of national bourgeois characteristics. They betray a big-capitalist slant. This is manifested in the frequent conflicts between the top level policy makers and the back-benchers.

'The conclusion that one is forced to draw from all this is that the class nature of the PA gives the appearance of national bourgeois while its essence is big-capitalist. At the same time it should be noted that in this government there are representatives of small producers and rural peasants and opponents of imperialism: these elements continue to manifest the characteristics of the national bourgeoisie. It is necessary that working class and leftist forces should forge close ties with this section of the national bourgeoisie and continue to oppose those forces attempting to march in the direction of big capitalism.' (pp. 31,32 of the Report)

Besides the fundamental contradiction, however, the contradictions among the nationalities which had up to the recent past remained as secondary contradictions have over the past few decades become so acute as to take the form of a full-scale war waged by the ruling class of Sri Lanka. With Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism well established in the state machinery and the emergence of the racist-fascist elements such as the 'Sinhala Veeravidhana Padanama' and the 'National Movement Against Terrorism' among the Sinhala nationality, the ethnic contradiction has become the main contradiction of Sri Lanka.

Discriminatory schemes are being implemented against the Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities. The ethnic contradiction does not does not posses the fundamental ele-

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ments of a class contradiction, but the semi-feudal, petit-bourgeois and imperialist forces have contrived to elevate it to the position of the main contradiction. It is obvious that under the cover of the acute intensity of the national contradiction, they are protecting their property, class interests and ruling class power, while this situation facilitates the penetration by the imperialists through their programmes of 'globalisation' and through military assistance to the Sri Lankan government to suppress the struggle of the Tamil people. As in the past, US imperialism has strengthened its military grip in the guise of assistance to the government

Thus it is clear that the kind of political state that is appropriate to Sri Lanka will be a New Democratic State under the leadership of the working class and under the joint dictatorship of several anti-imperialist classes which are opposed to imperialist globalisation, imperialist intervention using the national question, and hegemony and domination by regional super-powers.

As a result of the ethnic discrimination and contradictions, there are nationalist parties and forces among the Tamils of the North-East, Muslims and the Hill Country Tamils demanding that their national aspirations be fulfilled. Consequently the working class at present is divided along ethnic lines. The powerful trade unions in the plantation sector are almost captive to capitalist trade unionism, and peasant movements are too weak.

Under these conditions it is not possible to find a single political party that fully represents all the people of Sri Lanka. It should also be noted that, with the exception of the NDP which is predominantly active among the Tamils of the North-East and the Hill Country Tamils, there is no Marxist-Leninist party in the country. Also, at present, no leftist tendency that is strong enough to defeat the two capitalist parties has estab-

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lished itself in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless there are forces that are emerging, which while opposing imperialism are aiming to build a broad democratic movement.

Therefore, as genuine Marxist-Leninists in Sri Lanka, we cannot evade the historic duty to mobilise the masses through various democratic, progressive and leftist movements under a minimum common tactical national democratic programme in order to carry out the New Democratic Revolution which is a prerequisite to and the stage that precedes the socialist revolution.

Those who envisage a socialist revolution as the immediate task for Sri Lanka argue that there will not and cannot be anti-imperialist forces that can share the joint dictatorship under the leadership of the working class of Sri Lanka, and that there can only be a period of transition for the conversion from the bourgeois ownership of the means of production to common ownership by the whole society and from private property to common property. They visualise the situation in Sri Lanka as one similar to that in Russia before the October Revolution.

This position denies the reality of an oppressed neo-colonial, Third World country with its poor peasants severely outnumbering the working class. Very similar conditions existed in China, which was a large oppressed country with a large poor peasant population, when Comrade Mao Zedong introduced the concept of the New Democratic Revolution as a preparatory step leading to the socialist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. He explained in his thesis on New Democracy in 1940 that ' The Chinese revolution cannot avoid taking the two steps, first of New Democracy and then of Socialism. Moreover the first step will need quite a long time and cannot be accomplished overnight. We are not utopians and cannot divorce ourselves from the actual condition confronting us'. The proletariat, the poor peasants, middle peasants and a

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section of the national bourgeois were considered as revolutionary in the Chinese revolution. Comrade Mao, who studied the various forces within the united front against imperialism, did not fail to note the dual character of the national bourgeois. Possible participation in the revolution on the one hand and at the same time wavering and indecisive on the other characterised the Chinese national bourgeois. One cannot miss the strong resemblance in the behaviour of the SLFP.

It is noteworthy that Mao advocated the position that 'We communists will not push aside anyone who is revolutionary. We shall persevere in the united front and practice long-term co-operation with all those classes, strata, political parties, groups and individuals that are willing to fight Japan to the end. But it will not do if certain people want to push aside the Communist Party. It will not do if they want to split the united front. China must keep on fighting Japan, uniting and moving forward and we cannot tolerate anyone who tries to capitulate, cause splits or move backwards'

Criticisms of the performance of the New Democratic Revolution in China cannot negate the need for the New Democratic Revolution, since it is only under the policy and strategy of the New Democratic Revolution that the largest possible section of the anti-imperialist forces could be effectively organised and at the same time the re-emergence of the imperialist forces and their interests could be actively prevented through continued and sustained struggle under the leadership of the people. Denying this position amounts to failing to accept the importance of the mobilisation of all the anti-imperialist forces in Sri Lanka and grossly underestimating of the strength of the new imperialist forces.

The guidelines proposed by Comrade Mao on the new economy were similar in nature to those of Lenin during the period of the New Economic Policy after the October Revolu-

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tion, and were designed to consolidate the revolution, raise living standards, and reorganise national wealth and resources for the benefit of the people. But there were differences in the aims and their implementation which took into account the realities of New Democratic China.

Owing to the totally inadequate industrial development, much emphasis was placed on the state ownership of major financial and industrial enterprises which constituted the leading force under the control of the proletariat. Large land holdings were divided and distributed to poor peasants, individually and as co-operatives. But private enterprise was also encouraged in order to diversify production and to overcome the extreme poverty and backwardness of the rural areas. Therefore the national bourgeoisie had an important role to play in the revolution, and it was thus possible to consolidate the gains of the revolution and to isolate counter-revolutionary ideas and the agents of imperialism.

The economic policy of the New Democratic Revolution ensured state ownership of all big financial, commercial and industrial enterprises, and transport and other public services sectors so that private capital could not dominate the livelihood of the people. Socialist agriculture was not established but instead various types of co-operatives were encouraged to develop. This economic policy was changed only after 1956 during the socialist revolution. In recent times we have witnessed a reversal of several of the socialist policies.

The New Democratic Revolution has to be understood in the specific context of each country and applied accordingly. Its relevance to developing countries with a small working class population and a large peasantry and with a need to overthrow imperialist domination is hardly questionable on the basis of the experiences of a century of revolutionary struggles throughout the world.

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The development of the national question into war and the erosion of democratic rights and the denial of basic human rights during the 17 year UNP rule and the failure of the PA government to restore the lost rights appear to have tempted some individuals including a few ex-Marxists to call for another stage of revolution which they call the 'National Democratic Revolution' which in their view should precede the New Democratic Revolution. They see this revolution in terms of a minimum program to be completed under the leadership of all revolutionary leftist, progressive and democratic forces.

Although reference is made to 'programme for National Democratic Revolution' in the political report of the NDP, it was not intended to be seen as a distinct stage of revolution but as a tactical position and such a programme cannot be an alternative to the New Democratic Revolution but a tactical substitute under specific conditions.

The stand of such a revolution is lacking in depth and vision and its scope is poorer than what has historically been offered by social democrats. The demands put forward in the name of the National Democratic Revolution can play a tactical role in the run up to the New Democratic Revolution, but to make the National Democratic Revolution an essential precondition to the New Democratic Revolution or to present it as an alternative will be to hold back the forces of liberation and social justice.

The communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations; no wonder that its development involves the most radical rupture with traditional ideas.

K. Marx and F. Engels,
The Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848

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THE POST-MODERNIST ELITE: WHAT IS THEIR GAME?

by S. Sivasegaram

[This article is a slightly modified version of an article in Tamil by the same author, published in the Sri Lankan Tamil weekly newspaper the Sunday Thinakkkural.]

Introduction

This article is not part of any debate in the name of post-modernism. Much is being done in the name of post-modernism to defend and to justify various things which are not in the interest of the oppressed masses. There is a strong tendency among the intellectual elite to show themselves to be intellectually superior to the rest by using words and phrases that sound new and complex. They seek complicated explanations for things that can be explained simply and clearly. The purpose of this article is to clarify some of the issues concerning post-modernism as it is applied locally and the purposes that it appears to serve. Before we proceed further it will be helpful to remember that post-modernism owes its origin to post-structuralism and to clarify what these as well as the related terms modernism and structuralism stand for.

Modernism is a term that is used now to refer to avant-garde trends in art and literature during the first half of this century, including various attempts of an experimental nature. Many aspects of the realist schools of art and literature which developed during the nineteenth century were rejected by the

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modernists. Good examples of modernism include the various forms of modern art and free verse. One important aspect of modernism is that it replaced the wholesome, orderly and coherent images sought after by tradition with fragmented and disorderly images, out of which the viewer or reader was expected to create order.

Structuralism had its origins in linguistics and has since been used as a methodology in social sciences and literature. Structuralism holds that the meaning and function of all the basic elements of any field of activity depends on the relationships that exist between them. It sees literature not as something that expresses the thoughts of the writer or a reflection of the reality but as an objective structure that puts into operation symbols and practices in a way that is independent of the author, the reader and the outside world.

Post-structuralism, although seen by some to be a logical successor to structuralism, rejects as false the scientific, objective and wholesome approach attributed to structuralism. Jaques Derrida introduced the notion of 'deconstruction'. Deconstruction has been used, among others, by Roland Barthes, who was the author of the notion 'the author is dead', in his literary criticism, by the 'leftist' Michel Foucault in his critical study of history, and Jean Francois Lyotard in his socio-cultural criticism. Post-structuralists placed great emphasis on the 'instability of meaning' in their analysis. They sought to negate all theories that made any claim to universality and as a result the basis of structuralism itself was rejected. Besides, the post-modernists placed great emphasis on the view that the copy (of a text) was not decisive.

Post-modernism on the one hand refers to the cultural environment of the western capitalist countries since the middle of this century. Post-modernists like Jean Baudrillard use the term 'the post-modern condition' to refer to what they see as

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the incoherently fragmented human existence. In art and literature, post-modernism rejects artistic consistency and coherence. Although post-modernism has influenced literary criticism, its impact on creative literature is small. There post-modernist approach has been used by some in the novel and by even fewer in the short story. Defenders of post-modernism claim that one of its merits is that it does not recognise any hierarchical relationship between cultures. Its opponents argue on the other hand that it celebrates in a most irresponsible way the degenerate consumerist culture and that it is not guided by any sense of morality. Post-modernism has drawn heavily on post-structuralism for its application to socio-political matters and as a result it has been strongly criticised as a form of modern nihilism.

Deconstruction was introduced by Derrida who argued that thus far the truths of western philosophy have been established by glossing over the instability of language. He saw deconstruction as a process that intensified the turgidity, ambiguity and instability that the inherent uncertainty in the use of language can cause in the copy (of a text). Thus deconstruction, at one and the same time, breaks up the text and reorganises it. Derrida refused to define deconstruction or to call it an analytical or critical method and argued that it cannot even be translated. He claimed that deconstruction can have no goal and therefore changes nothing. It leaves everything as it was found. But deconstruction allows room for an unlimited number of interpretations and this is what is being taken advantage of by some to justify their subjective interpretation of writings and events.

The phrase 'The author is dead' is a graphical way of stating that when a work (or rather copy as post-structuralists would like to call it) reaches a reader the author is not there to explain his or her intentions. As a result the reader is at full liberty to interpret the book. This notion is taken to its logical

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extreme by many post-structuralists and post-modernists who make it a licence to read anything in any way they choose.

It is against a background of imperialist expansion in the era following the shock of the loss of the colonies where old style colonialism was replaced by neo-colonialism and control of the former colonies is exercised in far more sophisticated ways than under the colonial system that we need to see the role played by post-modernism in our society. The setbacks suffered by the left movement in the 80's and into the mid 90's, including the collapse of the USSR and the fall of the socialist regimes in eastern Europe, also have contribute to the creation of a space for intensive activity by reactionary intellectuals of the Third World.

Although several of the specific arguments in the text that follows relate to experiences in the Tamil-speaking communities of Tamilnadu (India) and Sri Lanka, they are not unique to the Tamil experience. Post-modernism seems to be here with a purpose, and, for socialist intellectuals to deal with it properly, that purpose has to be understood clearly and the sharing of the experience of one community with members of other communities will help all to understand things more clearly.

The Crisis and the New Trends of Thought

Much has been said about post-modernism in Tamil, especially Tamilnadu, in the past decade or so. Some even see a lack of interest in post-modernism as a sign of ignorance and interpret the rejection of post-modernism as conservatism. The fact that there is little in Tamil that explains clearly what post-modernism is and what it stands for makes one wonder whether some of the advocates of post-modernism know what it really means. At the same time, post-modernism is being used to justify a variety of socio-political purposes and it is common practice to cite debates which have long lost their relevance or to quote some western post-modernist in support of their case.

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In an environment where much of the thinking and activity relating to modernism has not seen full development, it is hardly surprising that post-modernism is explained by each according to his need. Pretending to know what one does not know is a sign of poverty of thought and of a complex of inferiority. A common intellectual illness includes childish claims that one was the first local to have stumbled on or to have introduced some theory.

Our societies have suffered a very long period of social and cultural stagnation. Consequently we have conflicting views about matters such as tradition, purity, uniqueness, modernity and development. There has nevertheless been a need for a sober view about the way in which we receive and put to use things foreign to enrich our environment and let things from our past serve the present. Craving for things foreign is as bad as hatred for them. In reality, the more we brag about our glorious past the more we seem to surrender to foreign influence and domination. Our identity is facing a far greater threat from neo-colonialism than it ever did from centuries of colonial rule. Far worse social values than those thrust upon us by colonial rule are being willingly accepted by the community. The modern media, 'globalisation', the 'open economy', and the 'new world order' are exerting a severe pressure on our society. The emphasis of nationalism seems, however, to be not on facing this crisis but on pretending to be what we are not.

Some have a strong belief that our societies can be salvaged only by importing everything foreign that we can lay our hands on. Their preferred sources are invariably European or American. Japan or China may be the occasional exception but, in general, they have little to learn from their neighbours or the rest of the Third World.

Consumer culture and infiltration by multinational companies are imposing on the Third World educational, scientific,

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technological, agricultural and medical practices that do not suit the needs of the countries concerned. It is therefore all the more disappointing to see our intellectuals failing to understand the relationship between our liberation and that of the rest of the Third World and to explore how the struggles for liberation can be developed in a way that they support each other.

The victory of the war for the liberation of south Vietnam and the reunification of Vietnam in 1975 was a high point in the international struggle against imperialism. But many of the victories scored during the 60's and 70's against imperialism through the efforts of the Non-Aligned Movement and other Third World organisations were negated in the decade that followed, and the hard won independence from colonial rule was rendered meaningless in many countries. The political change in 1977 in Sri Lanka was only symbolic of the setbacks suffered by the anti-imperialist movement. The decline of the parliamentary left in Sri Lanka, which led to its ultimate fall in 1977, was something that started many years earlier. The mistakes of the Naxalbari movement in India prevented it from developing into a major revolutionary force in India and hurt the left movement in India as a whole. The collaboration between the pro-Soviet Communist Party of India (CPI) with the Congress government during the notorious emergency rule of Indira Gandhi in the 70's marked the end of its history as a serious Marxist party. The Marxist Communist Party of India (CPM) too indulged in opportunist politics and its leadership showed neither the will nor the capability to restore its credentials as a revolutionary party.

To those used to seeing the USSR as the socialist role model, the collapse of the USSR in 1990 was the ultimate blow. Especially those who believed that peaceful transition to socialism was possible and that Soviet military power and its status as a super power was a guarantee of socialist transformation never recovered from that shock.

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As a result of the various setbacks suffered nationally and internationally by the socialist and anti-imperialist movements, many of the earlier progressive intellectuals sought to abandon their Marxist sympathies and took escape routes to do so without loss of face. Some found refuge in whatever trend that seemed strongest at the time. Some pretended that they were politically detached free thinkers. But their former ideology, be it left extremism or right opportunism, remained a constraint and they needed a convenient intellectual explanation. Structuralism, post-structuralism and post-modernism gave some of them a helping hand in justifying and defending the nationalism, regionalism and caste politics that they chose to embrace.

Again, claims by structuralists and post-modernists that they were in possession of a powerful analytical tool capable of rectifying the alleged flaws in Marxist thinking did cause some anxiety among a few who were not well acquainted with the background to such claims. Perhaps as a result, there emerged a few who were unwilling to abandon Marxism openly but wanted to appear abreast of what seemed to be the latest trends. They made it a habit to make superficial utterances sprinkled with structuralist, post-structuralist and post-modernist terminology.

Before dealing with the post-modernism in our context it will be useful to look at some of the sources of post-modernist thinking. Structuralism, as stated earlier, had its origins in linguistics and played a limited but useful role in dealing with some problems of linguistics.

Problems of Language

It is claimed by post-structuralists that the shortcomings of structuralism were brought to light by post-structuralism. But the inadequacy of structuralism as a linguistic tool was exposed long before, and Noam Chomsky is well known among the strongest critics of structural linguistics.

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The debate about the meaning of words has gone on for long. The credit for clearly demonstrating that words do not have an absolute meaning and that their meaning lies in their social use goes to Ludwig Wittgenstein. He emphasised the social nature of language and also showed that since language is a means of communication there cannot be a 'private language' for one person.

Wittgenstein's explanation makes it clear that no word has a meaning that transcends the limits of time, place and social environment. While it is possible for one to interpret any text in a way that one chooses to, the validity of that interpretation is limited by the social context of the text. Thus, limitless subjective interpretations of a text are not possible.

It is not possible to express one's thoughts in words in an absolutely unambiguous way. Deficiencies in the language and its use are important sources of this problem. On the other hand, the question arises as to whether the listener receives and understands the message correctly. While there is so much at stake in direct communication, how can one expect precise communication between people separated in space and time? If the meaning of words changes with time, place and context, how is one to understand another? Can the use of signals, speech and writing help in precise communication? What does human experience so far tell us?

Limits of Interpretation

That any text can be read in a variety of ways is not a new finding. But the slogan 'The author is dead' and the claim that the interpretation of the text is entirely in the hands of the reader ignore the wealth of human experience in communication. Is it permissible for a reader to impose his or her subjective views on a text in any way he or she chooses. If that be the case, the way in which the wolf in the famous fable of Aesop

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chose to interpret the words of the lamb is also valid. It will mean that one is right to interpret any information that one receives in a way that suits one's subjective views. Can we then find fault with German fascism, South African white racism, chauvinism or religious fanaticism for reading history the way they did? Such reading demands not only the 'death of the author' but also the mutilation of the text.

Language anywhere operates amid the minefield of errors of spelling and pronunciation, errors of grammar, syntax and punctuation, printing mistakes, omissions, and the misuse of words and phrases. But what makes communication possible despite these problems and the risk of subjective interpretation? What is it that restricts the interpretations available to a wrongly written word or a sentence? The relationship that exists between people, as individuals and as a society, is important to communication. We also know that the interpretation of any text is guided by an awareness of its time, its context and knowledge about the author, dead or alive.

No record of human activity is absolutely objective or neutral. In a society full of contradictions and conflicts, history is written to serve the interests of those in power. Even where the records are factual, the choice of facts determines the nature of the written history. Can we use this weakness to reject out of hand all records of human history? Will it, on the other hand, be possible to distort recorded history to suit our subjective views?

All texts have been subject to varied interpretations. Even today the classics are subjected to conflicting interpretations. Religious texts continue to be reinterpreted to serve the interests of the religious hierarchy and also to ensure the survival of the religion. These are instances where subjective needs have dictated the nature of the interpretation.

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Marxism does not merely have a world outlook but also a social goal. But it is not Marxist approach to impose subjective interpretations on religious, ethical and creative works. Marxism has used the historical records of the past to fill the gaps in those records to extract out of a world history, once presented as the history of monarchs and the ruling elite, a history of class struggle. Often the gaps in written history are more important than the recorded material. If we are to fill these gaps in whatever way we like, we will make no sense of history. Multi-disciplinary studies of social development, comparative studies of human experiences, oral tradition and other unconventional forms of history serve to fill these gaps and to rectify errors in recorded history. Reconstruction of history in this way is not and cannot be something that is achieved in one sweep. New information, unlimited re-reading and the viewing history from different angles will always be there.

It is true that history is subjective, but all subjective writing cannot be history. The choice and accuracy of historical data and the method of organisation of the data impose an historical view on the reader. We know that the history has often been presented from diametrically opposed viewpoints, and current events are equally subject to different interpretations, whether they be presented as news, commentary or analysis.

What has been portrayed by traditionalists as the golden era of the Tamils has been shown to be its opposite by Marxists. In a situation in which nationalists impose their interpretations on history, Marxists are able make a sober assessment of the readings of history from the points of view of feminism, nationalism, religion and other social angles such as race and caste. The culture, art and literature of the oppressed people have been long ignored by the ruling classes. If not elsewhere, in the Tamil environment certainly, it was the Marxists who asserted the importance of the contributions of the masses and

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placed them on par with the classical tradition. There is a world of difference between this approach and attempts to read non-existent meanings in texts.

Simply because nothing is conclusive about history, one cannot interpret history as one wishes. The review and reconstruction of history are not matters of remoulding written history to suit our subjective wishes.

Opposing Science

Every science from its beginning has been concerned with finding the truth. Modern science has during its rise been accompanied by the idea that formal logical analysis will come out with the correct answer to any question in any field of study. The flaws of linear logic were realised much later. However, since science is based on practice, it was able to revise and refine its rules and method of work.

All scientific laws are subject to re-examination by new information and in the process face crisis. Crises lead to changes in scientific theories or to the replacement of a theory by a new theory. The differences between the old and the new scientific theories can be of a fundamental nature so that their languages themselves are not the same, and Thomas Kuhn in his study entitled 'Scientific Revolutions' identified such change as paradigm changes. But the view that there is a stone wall separating the different scientific theories was subsequently refuted on the basis that there is common ground between them since all scientific theories relate to practice.

Paul Feyerabend was of the view that the scientific method itself should be rejected and that it was necessary to liberate mankind from science. Even after the exaggerations by Feyerabend were put to rest in the west, opponents of Marxism like Asish Nandi in India adopted some of the views of Kuhn and Feyerabend to promote views opposed to science in

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the early 80's. Nandi, undeterred by the failure of his arguments, is still busy promoting reactionary traditionalist views. Given his anti-Marxist stance it is hardly surprising that he has a ready audience and willing publicists among the reactionaries.

It is wrong to confuse scientific method with the directions in which scientific, technological and medical research are being pushed. The direction of any field of study is determined essentially by the interests of the social class in power. But it is also true that in the process the class in power also generates the forces of its ultimate destruction.

The development of science, like that of human society, was never smooth. New knowledge emerged from the old by drawing on the old and by negating the old. This contradiction is an aspect of the dialectics of the development of knowledge and something that we can see in several other human activities.

Traditionalists have exploited the contradictions and crises of science to their advantage. Whenever a scientific theory is falsified they gleefully declare that science has failed. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution has been a favourite target of Christian fundamentalists. Every flaw in the details of Darwin's theory is to them evidence in support of the theory that man did not evolve but was created by God. The reality is something else: the theory of evolution is further enriched and the theory of creation weakened by the discovery of flaws in the original version of Darwin.

The foregoing is an illustration of how subjective reading operates in matters relating to science. What we may notice is that wherever information is deficient there are problems in communication and there is opportunity for subjective interpretation. But that does not in any way justify deliberate misinterpretation.

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The Marxist Outlook

Marxism views everything as a unity of opposites, and contradictions between the opposites determine development and change. This dialectical approach was combined with materialism by Marx to interpret man's world and to find a way to transform it. A most lucid explanation of the theory and application of contradictions was provided by Mao Zedong in his Four Essays on Philosophy. Mao's mass line is very clearly evident in his exploration of where correct ideas come from and study of the correct handling of contradictions. The concept of 'friendly contradictions' is a valuable contribution to revolutionary theory and practice. It is from the theory of contradictions that he developed his ideas about people's war and mass line, and, after Lenin, it was Mao who delivered the strongest blow to dogmatic Marxism.

Mao distinguished between contradictions between the people and the enemy and contradictions among the people. It was on this basis that he lent unwavering support for the struggle of the American Blacks for their civil rights, the struggles of nations against colonialism and imperialism, and the struggle against racism. China's recognition as national minorities and the provision of autonomous units to safeguard the interests of its ethnic groups numbering as few as a few thousand is a result of seeing national and ethnic identity as matters involving friendly contradictions. It is in this context that one has to comment on the charge that Marxism fails to take into account anything except class struggle.

There are those who like to believe their own lies about Marxism. They collect their evidence from dogmatic Marxism and right opportunism which reject just struggles against caste oppression, national oppression and gender oppression, But they will not take the slightest notice of the experiences such as those of China led by Mao Zedong, the Kurdish Workers' Party

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or the Communist Party of the Philippines. The opportunists dabbling in Dalit politics in Tamilnadu have carefully avoided comment on the leading role played the Marxist Leninists in the north of Sri Lanka in the struggle of the oppressed castes to win social justice. This is the kind of approach that distinguishes the Dalit politics of Tamilnadu from the far more progressive stance taken by the Dalit movements in neighbouring Karnataka and in Maharashtra.

The Arrival of Structuralism

Let us now see how structuralism, post-structuralism and post-modernism were adopted by some of the so-called intellectuals in Tamilnadu. A most unreadable book entitled structuralism, authored by Thamizhavan, one of the editors of the 'little magazine' padikal, was published around 1982. That magazine was among several little magazines that provided a forum for left opinion critical of the CPI and CPM. Such magazines also reflected the frustrations resulting from the setback suffered by the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist) and the Naxalbari movement. There was a search for alternatives which led some of the ex-radicals initially to Jean Paul Sartre, then to the Marxist structuralist Louis Althussar, and in the end through structuralism to a convenient way out of Marxist ideology.

Claims that structuralism was a scientific method which had all the answers were already falsified in the west and the Tamilnadu elite were a little slow to switch to post-structuralism. They were too hesitant to admit that post-structuralism was in fact a negation of structuralism and chose to fudge the differences instead. They do not like to examine why post-structuralism and post-modernism lost all appeal in France where they originated or why post-modernism is actively encouraged by the US establishment. None of the structuralists who moved from structuralism to post-structuralism have explained how their personal experience contributed to this transition. What ap-

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pear in the name of structuralism and post-structuralism in Tamil writing today are largely pretentious literary criticisms which are not alive to the society or its literature. There are on the other hand vain attempts to dress up some Tamil classical writings in post-structural clothing.

Phrases such as deconstruction, reconstruction, re-reading, text and copy are used liberally by some Lankan Tamil intellectuals in a way characteristic of their post-structuralist and post-modernist mentors in Tamilnadu. But there is no evidence of any of them having used their new analytical tool to arrive at any new or useful conclusion. It appears that the use of post-modernist terminology is designed mainly to enhance their reputation as intellectuals.

Post-modernist Trends

Various conflicting trends exist within post-modernist writing in Tamil. At one extreme one finds a neo-nihilist approach that rejects not only Marxism but also all thinking related to liberation struggles. The question as to how post-modernism can be adapted to the Tamil environment is answered in the most superficial fashion. Writers like Gnani and Thamizhavan go to great lengths to seek streaks of post-modernist light in the Tamil tradition. But their writings are dominated by subjective interpretation of tradition.

The point of view of Baudrillard that today's mode of production is not capitalist and that the Marxist view of relations of production is not valid any more is accepted uncritically by some. It is readily assumed here that Marxism is a rigid dogma and that Marxist thought has not taken into account the developments in capitalism since it evolved into imperialism and neo-colonialism. Marxists have recognised that the development of the capitalist system into an even more aggressive and ruthless predatory form is not the end of capitalism or its essen-

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tial nature. It is the development of capitalism into imperialism that has made the anti-imperialist movements of the Third World historically important in the struggle against the rule of capital. To preach that capitalism does not exist is only to divert attention from the main enemy of the oppressed people.

It is easier to fight explicitly reactionary and conservative thought than to fight reactionary thought masquerading as an ideology of liberation. The so-called anarchists once opposed the communist party as the vanguard of revolution and the workers' state as an instrument of working class power. Today, post-modernist theories are used, in the name of opposing all forms of power, to oppose all organisations of mass struggle. One need not be a genius to realise what the refusal to distinguish between organised state power as a tool of class oppression and organisations to combat oppression means and whose interests it will serve. To see only the negative aspects of the experiences of the USSR will lead to no more than bitter frustration.

There are Dalitists like Raj Gauthaman who argue that the dissolution of the Dalit identity in class identity will not eliminate discrimination on the basis of caste. This argument is made by Raj Gauthaman despite his awareness of the status of proletarian ideology and identity in the CPI and CPM. Reference to these parties as Marxist parties and portrayal of their degeneration as Marxist reality is a cheap trick played by the enemies of Marxism. But none of the Dalitists of Tamilnadu even mention the historical experiences of the militant struggle against caste oppression in the north of Sri Lanka and leading role played by the Marxist Leninists in that struggle. The positive approach of the Marxist Leninists in India towards the tribal people and the people subject to caste oppression is, again, not a matter of interest to the Dalitists of Tamilnadu.

What have the Dalitists of Tamilnadu achieved by opposing Marxism and working class solidarity? Trade unions are

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being formed on the basis of caste and the workers are divided along the lines of caste, and to whose benefit? We know that race, religion, nationality and language have been used to divide the workers in the past. Caste politics is diverting the attention of the oppressed masses from even issues concerning their livelihood.

A. Marx, who once sought to advance Marxism and finally ended up as an enemy of Marxism, argues that post-modernism allows one to create oneÆs own reality. This is an interesting extrapolation which will allow each of us to exist in our private universes independent of objective reality, which in any case does not exist in the world of post-modernism. This and many other post-modernist fallacies arise from the view that there are no universal principles and an excessive emphasis of the particular over the general.

Not all the post modernists are anti-Marxist. This is a consolation to some enthusiasts of post-modernism who like to broker a happy marriage between post-modernism and Marxism. They plead that post-modernisrn raises several of the philosophical issues already raised by Marxism. The question before us is whether post-modernism has any ways of averting the erroneous conclusions that it inevitably leads to in several instances. It is worth our exploring why post-modernism, like existentialism some time ago, is used mainly in support of reactionary ideology?

Confusion and Clarity

Uncertainty exists in all fields of human activity but there are two approaches to it, one positive and the other negative. The former seeks to determine the degree of uncertainty in any information and uses it to create order out of disorder. The latter seeks to reject all information as false and finds nothing but disorder even in the most orderly situation.

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Post-modernism has only a negative approach to the problems of mankind. It rejects history and learning from history. It rejects class struggle and in the name of rejecting modernism rejects all positive values relating to progress and social justice. In essence it opposes mass struggle and therefore pleads the case for inaction. This means that the preservation of the status quo too is not possible since inaction by the masses does not mean inaction by the oppressors, so that the imperialists will continue to have their way.

There are some who use post-modernism to attack Marxism. I have little to say to them. There are others with illusions about the possible use of post-modernism to enrich Marxism. Marxism has the need to respond to every issue raised by post-modernism, but to expect it to use the post-modernist approach to arrive at its answer is unacceptable. Marxism will certainly be enriched by every form of struggle, and to that extent post-modernism, like reactionary ideologies since the times of Marx and Engels, too will contribute to the sharpening of Marxism as an ideological weapon of the oppressed masses.

The main features and requirements of the basic economic law of modern capitalism might be formulated roughly in this way: the securing of maximum capitalist profit through exploitation, ruin and impoverishment of the majority of the population of the given country, through the enslavement and systematic robbery of the peoples of other countries, especially backward countries, and lastly, through wars and militarisation of the national economy, which are utilised for obtaining the highest profits.

J. V. Stalin,
Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR, 1951

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CHINA, FIFTY YEARS SINCE LIBERATION

by **S. Jegendran**

Introduction

On 01 October 1999 China will celebrate the completion of its fiftieth year since the liberation of the mainland. Much has been achieved by way of improving the industrial and agricultural output of China and, more importantly, the quality of life of the masses. If one compares the achievements of China with India, which won its independence from British Colonial rule two years before the liberation of China, China's performance is certainly impressive. But it is also true that China today fails to inspire the broad masses and the revolutionary forces of the Third World as it did during the first three decades following liberation.

There are people who believe that China is on the fast track to capitalism, of whom some are gleeful and some resentful. There are those who like to believe that only now China is back on the right track to socialism, and this includes some leaders of the pro-Soviet communist parties such as the Communist Party of India, whose plight has been rather desperate since the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Even the Communist Party of India (Marxist), without the reputation of being a loyal follower of the revisionist Communist Party of the Soviet Union, is more approving of China today than under the leadership of Mao Zedong, especially since the Great Proletarian Cultural

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Revolution (GPCR). Marxist-Leninist revolutionary parties and groups are generally critical of the developments in China during the past two decades, and some see the Communist Party of China (CPC) as a traitor to the communist cause, guilty of pushing China towards capitalism. Others, while being critical of the current trend in China have faith in the ability of the membership of CPC and the Chinese masses to rectify the errors of the past two decades.

The political implications of the events in China for the socialist cause in China and for the liberation struggle of the oppressed nations and people are of greater significance than achievements measured in terms of economic growth using scales such as the GDP and per capita income. Every effort to quantify achievement is subjective and all scales of measurement are biased in some way or another. Even the newly fashioned 'index of human development' is inadequate to assess the importance of political changes which have long term implications for the living and well being of a people. Thus what are seen as achievements and failures by bourgeois political and 'apolitical' analysts need to be reassessed in terms of the interests of the broad masses of China and the oppressed nations and people of the world. This essay concerns the significance of some of the major political events in China to socialism there and the struggle for social justice in the rest of the world.

To the oppressed masses of the world the October Revolution in Russia was the most important and inspiring historical event since the Paris Commune and will remain so for a long time to come. The liberation of China, which was expedited by the victory of the proletariat in Russia, became particularly important not only since China was the most populous country in the world but also because it proved that the proletariat can provide leadership to liberation struggles even in predominantly agricultural economies dominated by feudal thinking. China

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did not only provide inspiration and moral support for anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles throughout the world but also material support as the situation demanded. When the usurpation of power by Nikita Khrushchov in the USSR led inevitably to the betrayal of the revolutionary struggles of the oppressed masses throughout the world and to the inevitable split in the international communist movement, China became the main source of inspiration for the revolutionary masses. China played its historic role of upholding world revolution until the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 but it started to change course around 1978. While it is easy to draw parallels between the USSR after J. V. Stalin and China after Mao Zedong, one faces the risk of oversimplification of the issues by failing to take into account the objective realities of the global situations in which the two changes in course occurred.

The CPC under the leadership of Mao Zedong learnt from the mistakes of the USSR and acted in a way that averted many of them. The CPC recognised the need for political awareness among the broad masses, the need for mass participation in every aspect of social practice and the need to wage continuous struggle against the forces of reaction. This is in a way an extension of the long experience of the CPC in its struggles against the Japanese imperialist aggression and the reactionary and corrupt Guomindang regime. The mass line meant unrestrained mass participation and mass struggle. It is hard for one to appreciate the developments in post-liberation China without an understanding of the mass line. The Hundred Flowers Campaign, the Great Leap Forward and the GPCR have for long been severely maligned by the enemies of China. The new leadership of the CPC too has contributed to the negative assessment of these important political events by emphasising particular aspects at the expense of the essential and the general, so that these historic events are portrayed by some as major political and economic disasters. The Western mass media

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has spared no opportunity to malign China and every shred of information hostile to China has been put to good use. One can expect them to mark the 50th anniversary of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by piling more abuse and slander against China.

China's handling of the national question is of particular importance, especially in the context of the complexity of the problem involved and the current imperialist efforts to promote national conflict and stir up ethnic tension in the Third World. Western bourgeois media have consistently insinuated that the CPC has been iconoclastic and intolerant towards traditional and religious beliefs. It is therefore useful to see how successful the PRC was in its policy of 'letting the past serve the present and foreign things serve China'.

The role of the CPC in transforming traditional attitudes as a whole and the attitude towards women in particular too deserves attention. One of the first major pieces of legislation in liberated China concerned granting equal rights to women. The status of women in China continued to advance. The implications of the present open door policy for the status of women is worth more extensive assessment than possible within the scope of this essay.

Whenever China has acted to safeguard the interests of its people against imperialist exploitation and meddling, it has been accused of xenophobia by imperialism. While it is the imperialists who have waged war against weaker nations in order to prolong their economic and political domination of the world, they accuse China of expansionist ambitions. It is therefore useful to examine the policy and practice of China in the conduct of its international relations.

In view of the changes in China since 1976, this essay will deal firstly with the developments in China during the first quarter of a century or so and assess their implications for so-

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cialism in China and for the anti-imperialist movement and liberation struggles throughout the world. The significance of the developments in China to the emancipation of women and the national question as well as the question of peaceful coexistence and support for just struggles will be commented upon in the context of the changes of the past two decades or so and the concluding paragraphs will deal with the stand that Marxist Leninists may take towards China today.

Rebuilding China and Self Reliance

What was left behind by the Guomindang for the CPC and the new Chinese government was an economy in ruins. The CPC recognised that the major asset that they were left with was the people of China and that it was necessary to win the confidence of the masses and inspire them to transform China into a strong socialist country. As conditions for socialist transformation were not ripe, main attention was paid to land reform in the countryside and to encourage investment in state controlled industrial enterprises. Private enterprises of patriotic capitalists were allowed to continue, but subject to limits on their profit levels. These steps were reminiscent of the New Economic Policy in the USSR following the civil war. Also monetary policies that encouraged the people to save were introduced to generate the financial resources for the new state enterprises.

Shortly after liberation China was dragged into war by the US imperialists who waged a war of aggression against North Korea, the first such war of aggression to be waged against a sovereign state in the name of the UN. The acts of provocation by the US imperialists drew China into the war in support of the government in the north, and this was used as further pretext for the anti-China policy of the already hostile US government. Although China used the contradictions within the imperialist camp to fight the US policy of isolating China, its

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success was largely due to the goodwill that it enjoyed among the newly independent countries. The failure of the US and its reactionary allies to control Korea was a great inspiration for the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggles of the world.

China depended very much on the USSR for its new industries as US imperialism did everything in its power to isolate China and deny China its rightful place in the international arena. Despite strains caused by differences in approach in many issues including the question of building socialism in China, the relationship between China and the USSR was healthy until Nikita Khrushchov chose to accommodate US imperialism at the expense of revolutionary struggles in the world. Khrushchov was hostile to the idea of the setting up of the People's communes in ChinaÆs countryside in 1958 and to several other socialist measures of the government of China. In fact the Khrushchov leadership resented the possibility of China becoming a major international force.

The ideological dispute between China and the USSR was simmering for some years until the split in the international communist movement in 1963. But the withdrawal of technicians from projects initiated by the USSR in 1959 by the Khrushchov leadership came at an awkward moment for China which was then heavily dependent on the USSR for its industrialisation program. Not only was technical support withdrawn, but also the plans and drawings for the projects were taken away by the Soviet experts on the orders of the Soviet authorities. This blow to the Chinese plans for development was all the more severe in the wake of natural disasters that hindered the progress of the Great Leap Forward. Efforts by fraternal socialist states to change the attitude of the Soviet leadership were unsuccessful. The end result was, however, that what was potentially a bad thing for China was transformed into a good thing. The Chinese government was compelled to complete the projects by using its own resources. This valuable

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exercise in self-reliance inspired the masses of China and the oppressed nations.

The short lived Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1957 was again evidence that the CPC learnt some valuable lessons from the mistakes made in the USSR. The concern of the CPC, and Mao Zedong in particular, that the party ran the risk of creating an elite which was alienated from the masses was what motivated the CPC to launch this campaign. Its purpose was to attract positive criticism from the masses so that the CPC and the Chinese government improved their style and quality of work to serve the masses well. When the enemies of the party and opponents of socialism took advantage of the situation to mount negative criticism against the socialist state, the campaign was brought to a halt. But the lesson of that exercise was that the mass line and mass participation were all the more important for socialist construction. The involvement of the masses at every level was encouraged and was evident in the events of subsequent years.

The Great Leap Forward (GLF) launched in 1958 was intended to inspire and involve the masses in rebuilding China. Unfortunately it coincided with unprecedented natural disasters. The setting up of People's Communes also happened in this period. Many of those who assess the GLF purely on economic terms also tend to exaggerate the effects of its mistakes by not taking into account the natural disasters on the one hand and the socio-political benefits on the other. China had to cope with is problems with little or no help from the outside. The spirit of self reliance and an industrial policy designed to serve the countryside are of particular value even today to many Third World countries. Also, it is doubtful whether China would have withstood as effectively as it did the impact of Soviet revisionist sabotage by the withdrawal of its specialists in 1959 if not for the spirit of self reliance tempered by the GLF.

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Nothing has been maligned more viciously than the Cultural Revolution (GPCR) ever since its inception. Its every mistake has been given great prominence and every achievement ignored or denied credit. One of the major issues that led to the GPCR was rural health care. The fact that China's health care was for the urban population and benefited the more privileged sections of society was criticised by Mao Zedong. The party was running the risk of becoming a party of the elite and the prospects for correcting it from within were poor. It was under these circumstances that the masses were asked to criticise the party. The slogan "Bombard the headquarters!" may appear too strongly worded, but there seemed to be no other options besides allowing China to drift in the direction that the USSR did.

Some of the violence was the consequence of pent up anger about the oppression of the past and resentment about the attitude of party officials, bureaucrats and the elite. Things did go out of control and opportunists took advantage of the situation to settle their own grudges at the expense of the general good of society. But to reject the GPCR is to reject the spirit of serving the people, putting politics in command and continuing the revolution under the leadership of the proletariat.

Among the positive features of the GPCR were the spirit of learning from the people, serving the people, being open and above board, placing manual work on an equal footing with intellectual work, and placing moral incentives above material incentives. They reflected so well in the attitude of the masses that some visitors were even tempted to say that China has created an entirely new human being. The role of the GPCR in improving health care and living conditions in the countryside is undeniable. The concept of the 'barefoot doctor' is something which many Third World countries can usefully apply. Educational reforms provided children of workers

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and peasants with access to higher learning and to the professions, and it was during the GPCR that Chinese traditional medicine found its place of pride besides western medicine and gained international recognition. Traditional patriarchal social values of the feudal era were also challenged, including the place of women in traditional Chinese society. A holistic attitude towards economic development which took into account all round human development, conservation of natural resources and care for the environment also emerged out of the GPCR.

There were serious mistakes too, of which a good number were forced by ultra-left elements with the backing of some people in high positions within the CPC. There were also politically confused elements who saw the struggle as an end in itself at the expense of unity and upheld criticism at the expense of the spirit of criticism and self-criticism. As a result a large number of people were wrongly targeted and fundamentally good elements were condemned as bad. The excesses committed by mischievous elements deflected the course of the GPCR, and the CPC had to act to rectify the errors.

Events following the death of Premier Zhou Enlai in early 1976 had in them the signs of a rightist backlash but their mishandling only strengthened the resolve of the opponents of the GPCR. The change in leadership following the death of Mao Zedong that year showed that the price to be paid for the errors committed during the GPCR was heavy and meant that the CPC was in for a major change of course. The election of Hua Guofeng as Chairman of the CPC after the removal from power and arrest of the so called 'Gang of Four' did not in itself signal a change of course. But by 1978 China was steered in a direction away from that of the first three decades since liberation.

Economic success of all ventures took precedence over socio-political considerations. It became more important to be 'expert than red'. Much was done to promote private enter-

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prises in the countryside so that the spirit of collective effort and working as a community that was built up through People's communes and co-operatives was gradually undermined. The official view that it was 'good to be rich' encouraged some to get rich at the expense of the community. Private plots received greater attention at the expense of community farms. In the urban industrial sector, worker's control has given way to managerial autonomy in several factories and plants. Putting profit above people has not only resulted in large scale unemployment due to rationalisation of the work force and closing down 'unprofitable' industries. At the same time, the urge to industrialise fast has contributed to poor industrial safety and worsening environmental pollution.

Some Chinese policy makers in an effort to defend the policy of 'opening up ' to the outside world go to the extent of being apologetic about Chinese 'insularism', forgetting that it was the imperialists who had tried to isolate China and are still working hard at keeping China down. They even go to the extent of accusing the Chinese policy in the past of 'confusing self reliance with self sufficiency'. Such defences of the change in economic policy are subjective. The fact remains that the desire for rapid economic advancement led to opening the doors to foreign investment, initially through the setting up of Free Trade Zones where the workers enjoyed far less rights than their counterparts in the rest of China. The foreign companies that have invested in China are not interested in the development of the Chinese economy, and the technology that they bring in is not for the upliftment of the Chinese masses. The rapid growth of Free Trade Zones combined with increased unemployment in the rural areas has created a large 'floating population' of cheap labour. The fact that China did not suffer at the hands of speculators in the way Thailand, Malaysia and South Korea did during 1997 - 1998 was partly because the scale of the investment was rather small compared to the size of the Chinese economy.

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There is no doubt that the Chinese economy is more stable than many others in Asia and has one of the fastest and steadiest growth rates in the world. This growth has also been accompanied by an increase in corruption on an unprecedented scale, crime, prostitution, drug abuse and many of the evils that one never associated with China in its first three decades since liberation. To allow these trends to continue will finally undermine the authority of the CPC and the Chinese Government.

The Chinese economy is still predominantly controlled by the state and public sectors. But if coexistence of corruption in high places with big capital, both foreign and local, is to be tolerated, public ownership will have no meaning, as we have seen in several state owned enterprises in non-socialist countries. The current economic policies cannot be isolated from ideology, and explanations in terms of the prevailing global situation where imperialism seems to be in command are inadequate. There is a need to seriously assess the effect of ideological errors and increasing political apathy, among the younger generation in particular, on the changes in social attitude in China.

The traditional status of women in China was one of total subservience to men. The revolution changed it. Women were encouraged to demand equality with men whether at work or at home. Chinese women have, despite some of the old attitudes towards them still remaining, made far greater advances than in any non-socialist Third World country. This was something that women won by participating in the liberation struggle alongside men. 'Opening the doors' to foreign capital has also let in some of the major social evils. Women are increasingly seen as a commodity for the enjoyment of men. The increase in prostitution in China today is only an indication of the more serious issues of sexism and male chauvinism that lie underneath.

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China set a good example to the rest of the world by its recognition of even ethnic groups with very small populations as minority nationalities and granting them autonomy in an appropriate form. This policy combined with socialist economic development led to the rapid advancement of what were once backward and oppressed communities. But the arrival of market forces is likely to lead to greater unevenness and consequent resentment among the affected minority nationalities.

The Chinese policy towards religion was one of tolerance of religion as a matter of personal faith, with the right not to believe enjoying the same status as the right to believe. It was not permissible to use religion as an ideological weapon against socialist transformation. There have been mistakes in handling matters relating to religion during the GPCR but these were soon rectified. Criticism of the Chinese policy on religion often fails to take into account the role of religion in safeguarding feudal values and imperialist interests. The CPC respected traditional knowledge as something of the people and it strove to make tradition serve the needs of modern China by adapting it to modern thinking. Those in the west who complain about the loss of ChinaÆs glorious traditions forget what capitalism has done to what was good in the traditions of Europe and of the colonies elsewhere and the fact that all glorious traditions have a bright as well as a dark side to them. The approach of China to tradition has been essentially positive and it has put the good aspects of tradition to far better use than any capitalist country.

China's Foreign Policy and Foreign Relations

Chinese foreign policy has been based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence which should not be confused with Khrushchov's idea of peaceful coexistence according to which socialism will triumph over capitalism by peaceful means, and hence there was no need for armed struggle by the op-

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pressed masses. China has consistently claimed that it will not exercise hegemony over any other country and has sought to settle border disputes by peaceful means. Every effort by the China to settle by negotiation the disputed borders with India, which were a legacy of colonialism, was thwarted by the arrogant attitude of the Nehru government. In the border conflict that followed in 1962, China demonstrated that it could capture the entire disputed territory if it wished but withdrew to its pre-war positions except in the strategic north-western region. China has since expressed its desire to settle the dispute with India by negotiation, while it has been the Indian authorities who have shown reluctance until recently.

The conflict with Vietnam in 1979 is attributed by some to a Chinese desire to 'teach Vietnam a lesson' for invading Cambodia. China-Vietnam relations were strained ever since Le Duan took power in Vietnam. Especially after the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, the Le Duan leadership with the support of the Soviet authorities acted in ways hostile to China. The persecution of citizens of Chinese origin and the expulsion of overseas Chinese from South Vietnam is often forgotten by left-wing analysts like John Pilger whose bias towards Vietnam has been no secret. Vietnamese provocation along the Sino-Vietnamese border during the 6 months that preceded the conflict too are ignored by many commentators. The border conflict was unfortunate, especially when one recalls the fact the Chinese government has consistently denounced the acts of national oppression against Vietnam by the rulers of China in the past.

The border conflict with the USSR in 1969 needs to be seen in its historical context. Successive Soviet governments have ignored the fact that 1.5 million square kilometres of Chinese territory were ceded to Russia by unequal treaties with the Tsarist regime during the 19th century and that Lenin argued that territories so annexed be restored to China. Soviet hostil-

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ity to China and anger at China's stand against Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 were also important factors related to the conflict. In all instances China sought to settle territorial issues by negotiation while not allowing itself to be bullied by others. Even today, China is perhaps the only major military power without any of its soldiers stationed on foreign soil.

China's relationship with other countries has always been on the basis of equality, independently of the size of the country, and mutual benefit. It was this policy which helped China to defeat the US imperialist policy of isolating China and to secure its rightful place in the UN.

Chinese policy on foreign aid during the 60's and 70's showed it in a different light from capitalist 'donor' countries. China always defended the right of the Third World countries to protect their human and natural resources from imperialist plunder. What was remarkable about Chinese aid to the Third World was not that China provided soft loans, often interest free or at very low rates of interest, to friendly states during the 60's and 70's despite its own economic difficulties but the fact that China did not dictate terms about the projects and gave pride of place to the needs of the recipient country.

The attitude of Chinese experts towards the recipients of Chinese aid was another important aspect of Chinese policy: Chinese experts were required to adapt to the way of life of the people with whom they were working and not to expect any form of special treatment. The Chinese aid workers were humble in their ways, were willing to learn from the others and respected the views of those with whom they were working. This showed them in sharp contrast with aid workers from the west and the USSR and its allies, with perhaps the sole exception of Cuban experts. It is often the fond memories of the spirit in which the Chinese aid workers acted that have preserved the love and friendship of the people of many Third World countries towards China than the aid projects themselves.

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Another matter that deserves mention in the context of foreign relations was the spirit of the Chinese artists and sports persons in the 70's. Zhou Enlai summed up the Chinese attitude as "Friendship first, competition after". The Chinese teams were most willing to share their experiences and skills with their counterparts from other countries. The experience of recent years is different, and success seems to be the main thing and as a result Chinese athletes have, although not to the extent that the Western media like us to believe, indulged in the use of performance enhancing drugs. This change in attitude is particularly significant because of its socio-political implications for other fields of human activity.

China and the Third World

Chinese support for the Third World did not stop at economic aid, it also included support for the defence of countries against threats to their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. This policy was of great value in the defence against imperialist subversion of the independence of the former colonies. But the class nature of most of the Third World governments limited their ability to defend their countries against imperialism and neo-colonialism. ChinaÆs involvement in the defence of Korea against US led aggression and its support for the struggle to liberate south Vietnam, including the supply of weapons to the National Liberation Front (in contrast to the reluctance of the USSR which put pressure on the Vietnamese to take the path of peaceful accommodation with the US) are the greatest material contributions that China made to anti-imperialist struggles in its 50 year history since liberation.

While the foundation of Chinese foreign policy based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence has remained intact at the state-to-state level, essential features of China's relationship at party-to-party level and people-to-people level have eroded since 1976. China was a selfless supporter of liberation

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struggles against colonial rule. The fact that certain liberation movements such as the MPLA in Angola were under Soviet influence did not prevent China from extending support to them. In fact, China supported the three rival movements in Angola until 1974 when the MPLA with the connivance of the USSR and the 'socialist' regime in Portugal seized control in Angola. After that event China ceased assistance to any of the three rivals.

China's support for the FRETILIN in East Timor continued from the time of the anti-colonial struggle and after the occupation of that country by Indonesian forces in 1974. The quality of that support later declined to no more than a recognition of the right of East Timor to independence. What the CPC once saw as a moral right to support just struggles of the masses against oppression irrespective of state-to-state relations between China and any other country has since 1976 given way to the interests of the Chinese state. China's support for the just struggles of Afro-Americans in the US against racial discrimination and against US aggression in Asia, Africa and Latin America in the 60's and early 70's showed it in a different light from the USSR. Today, China's support for liberation struggles is at best passive.

China used its right to veto only once in the UN Security Council and that was against the admission of Bangladesh to the UN without the consent of Pakistan, since the problem concerned the dismembering of a sovereign state through foreign intervention. That principled stand is in contrast with China's reluctance in 1990 to refuse UN endorsement of the war of aggression by the US and its allies against Iraq.

Chinese support for liberation struggles did not stop at support at state-to-state level or support for struggles for national independence from colonial domination. It included moral and material support to the armed struggles by revolutionaries in several countries including Burma, Malaysia and the Philip-

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pines. China recognised the difference between support for revolutionary mass struggles and exporting revolution. Support at state level applies to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. But support at party and mass level is a separate issue and the CPC used that right in providing assistance to revolutionary forces throughout the world. When the imperialists are actively arming and training the oppressor it is the moral duty of every Marxist party to support any struggle against oppression.

The people of Asia, Africa and Latin America responded enthusiastically to China's successful detonation of its nuclear device in 1961 and its launching of a space satellite in 1970 because they saw China as a close ally and ChinaÆs strength as their strength. Thus China's ability to defend itself was important to the revolutionary struggles of the world. But China is today a major arms exporter, although not to the same extent as the US or UK. Supplying arms and providing military technology so that a country can defend itself against global and regional hegemonism is acceptable and even welcome. But today's arms export policy appears to be increasingly driven by the profit motive more than anything else. When Chinese weapons are used against oppressed masses by a state it does no good to China's image as socialist state and that of the CPC as a communist party. It is no surprise that the discredited revisionist parties of various countries are warming up to China, and it not a matter of pride for the CPC to recognise them as fraternal parties.

Concluding Remarks

The growth rate of the Chinese economy measured on the basis of GNP may perhaps have been slower if China did not change course in 1978. But the price which has been paid in terms of the surge in unemployment, the creation of a new rich class and, more importantly, the decay in social values es-

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pecially among the youth may be far higher than the Chinese leadership would like to admit. The changes in China also mark a serious loss for the oppressed masses and the revolutionary forces. Fears about the direction in which things may move in China were expressed at least as early as 1980 by friends of China and many of those fears have since been realised.

The argument that there is no choice for any country except to go some way along the current trends of globalisation and safeguard the national interests as best as possible is unacceptable. The imperialists are never satisfied until they have the whole world under their control. World events in the past decade only confirm this view. There are contradictions between the various imperialist forces, but the oppressed masses cannot rely on these contradictions alone to free themselves from the fetters of neo-colonialism. China was in a position to play a leading role in combating imperialism, especially after the collapse of the USSR, but is now playing an even smaller role. Thus it is impossible for the oppressed masses to look up to the China of today for inspiration.

Lip service is paid to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought from time to time, but the reality is something else. If 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' means an economy driven by market forces, there is a need to examine the way in which such socialism differs from reformist social democracy. The survival of China and the Chinese economy are important in an era of brutal assault by the forces of imperialist neo-colonialism, but if the defeat of socialism is the price to pay, that survival has no value or meaning. It is the duty of Marxist Leninists throughout the world to draw the attention of the Marxist Leninists in China to the dangers of the current trend and urge action to rectify the errors before very serious damage is done. At the same time, one has to guard against the tendency to see China and the CPC as enemies.

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China is still a Third World country, it is not meddling in the internal affairs of other countries, it has no military presence outside its borders and it, like many other Third World countries, is a target of imperialist attack and sabotage. It cannot be anything but anti-imperialist in the foreseeable future and this should not be forgotten. The CPC is a party with a great revolutionary tradition and it is wrong to write off the entire history of the CPC because of the erroneous trends of the recent past. Capitalism cannot solve the problems of any country and it is bound to lead to social crisis, conflict and war. It is the duty of the progressive forces throughout the world to encourage the Marxist Leninists of China to persevere in their struggle to reverse the wrong trends of the recent past. China today is not the friend of the revolutionary forces of the world that it used to be over twenty years ago, but it is certainly not an enemy. Thus there is still room to treat the contradiction between China and the Marxist Leninists of the world as a friendly contradiction. To take either extreme position will be to fall victim to right opportunism on the one hand or to left extremism on the other.

The masses are the real heroes, while we ourselves are often childish and ignorant, and without this understanding it is impossible to acquire even the most rudimentary knowledge.

Mao Zedong,
Preface and Postscript to Rural Surveys,
March-April 1941

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COMMENTS ON GLOBAL EVENTS

EAST TIMOR

The events in East Timor have shocked the world. The genocidal Suharto regime which initiated its thirty three year long rule with the brutal murder of well over 500 000 people on the grounds that they were members or supporters of the Communist Party has one of the worst records of human rights violations. But none of the capitalist democracies took note of the crimes of that regime until after the overthrow of General Suharto following mass unrest in the wake of the economic disaster brought about by the open economic policy. East Timor has been unlawfully occupied by the reactionary Indonesian armed forces for almost a quarter of a century. Nothing was done to put pressure on Indonesia to seek a mandate in East Timor. The liberation forces of East Timor who waged armed struggle against their Portuguese colonial masters continued the struggle against the new aggressors, but the struggle was weakened by several factors including active US support for the Suharto regime and Soviet indifference resulting from a desire to take advantage of Indonesian hostility to China at the time.

While the resistance of the Timorese people continued, the Indonesian armed forces created their fifth column within East Timor in the form of pro-Indonesian militias. These gangs systematically terrorised the population and killed the fighters for East Timorese independence. The attitude of the West towards dictatorial regimes showed a superficial change after the collapse of the Soviet Union and 'moderate' East Timorese resistance leaders gained recognition. The fall of Suharto created conditions favourable to the independence of East Timor

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and the cost of holding on to East Timor and hostile international opinion persuaded Suharto's successor Habibi to hold a referendum in East Timor. The UN sponsored referendum was preceded by thuggery by the militias and UN impotence was fully exploited by the Indonesian army and the militias armed, trained and backed by it.

Despite threats by the pro-Indonesian goons the people of East Timor voted overwhelmingly for independence and were being punished for it. Tens of thousands of a population of less than a million have been killed, over ninety percent of the population have been displaced and their property has been looted, vandalised and destroyed. The UN has with the blessings of the big power in control agreed to send a peace keeping force to East Timor.

But there are many unanswered questions. The UN has agreed that the UN forces will be led by the Australian forces who will be playing a leading role in peace keeping. Successive Australian regimes have been keen to make Australia a regional super power. Given the record of Australian racism and oppression of its native people, there are naturally concerns about the future of an independent East Timor. Again, experiences with peace keeping forces in the past decade or so leave much room for anxiety.

Above all, an important lesson, lest we forget it, is that the people of East Timor are unarmed victims of a fully armed aggressor and mercenary accomplices. East Timor is one more reminder that without a revolutionary army the people have nothing.

INDIA GOES TO THE POLLS

The toppling of the Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janatha Party by the Indian National Congress with the support of the left parties and deserters of the BJP coalition has led to the

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third Indian general election in three years. The BJP government was divided and unstable and its fall was only a matter of time. The urgency of the Congress to topple the BJP was based on the results of state assembly elections held late last year where the BJP performed poorly because of the increase in price of some essential commodities. Also the euphoria over the detonation of nuclear devices had subsided. It appears, however, that the Congress had miscalculated. The escalation of the conflict in Indian occupied Kashmir led to a border conflict with Pakistan, in which the Pakistani government was brought to its knees by pressure from the US. The boost to the image of the BJP as the 'saviour of the nation' is being fully exploited the BJP, accompanied by a personal attack on the leader of the Congress on grounds of her Italian origin.

While earlier opinion polls indicated a landslide for the BJP and its allies, recent polls suggest a Congress recovery. Whoever wins, the biggest losers are the National Front and the left. With the contest seen as one between the Congress and the BJP and with the media advocating a strong and stable government, the third electoral force is becoming increasingly marginalised.

The left has still to explain its need to do the dirty work for the Congress. Had the BJP led government been allowed to go on for longer, its bankruptcy would have been exposed thoroughly and the left could have used that opportunity to do mass political work. What has instead been achieved is that the BJP will, if it wins, be given a new and stronger lease of life or, if it loses, be again in a position to actively stoke the reactionary fires of Hindu nationalist sentiment as a strong opposition party. Mixing Marxist politics with parliamentary political opportunism has always spelt disaster to left politics. If India's left cannot learn from the mistakes of others it is doomed to make its own, which it seems to be doing rather happily.

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To my Nicaragua, from exile

Ivan Guevara

Nicaragua is weeping, weeping like a forsaken girl.
Nicaragua is weeping .... But the day is near
when we shall no longer have to live in hiding or in exile,
or distribute leaflets and documents secretly.
The day will come when thousands of heroes will rise up
who are yet unknown to the people.
The day will come when we shall be able to shout
in the open street:
LONG LIVE THE SANDINISTA FRONT!

Brother soldier

Bosco Centino

Soldier of the National Guard, you are my brother,
so you must forgive me if I have to
take careful aim when I shoot you.
But from our bullets will come hospitals
and schools, which we never had before -
schools where your kids will play with our kids.
Take my word, these things will vindicate our killing,
but every shot fired by you will be
the shame of your whole generation.

[Translated by Peter Wright.
Courtesy: The Peasant Poets of Solentiname,
published by Katabasis, London, 1991]

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