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Developments in Sri Lanka

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EVENTS in Sri Lanka have again confirmed that the bourgeois-landlord ruling classes of newly independent countries are incapable of safeguarding the unity and integrity of their countries and peoples, that their policies of building capitalism without doing away with feudal and even pre-feudal relations, in fact, lead to the growth of divisive, separatist and secessionist forces which pose a threat to national unity and national integration, and to the very freedom that has been won. Their incapacity to solve the problem of minorities in their counties makes the situation worse.

Sri Lanka developments also underline the fact that imperialist forces, ever on the lookout for avenues to pursue their neo-colonialist policies to attain their ambition of global domination, fish in the troubled waters of the newly independent countries. In many countries they support and give material help to the divisive and separatist forces, in addition to applying pressure exploiting the economic dependent of the Governments of these countries on "aid" from the Western imperialist world for their capitalist development. The aim is to destabilise these countries with a view to bending their Governments to imperialist dictates or to replace with subservient regimes those Governments, which resist the line laid down by imperialism for them. In some of the newly independent countries, Governments themselves, faced with the struggle of minorities for their rights and mass movements against their anti-people policies, rush to the imperialists for military help to put down the people. They are incapable of reversing their basic policies. The result is that fertile ground is provided for the growth of disruptive force and for the imperialists to through their nefarious designs.

Example of Pakistan

Pakistan is a classic example of such development. Except for a brief period at the beginning and the short interregnum of the Bhutto

regime, since its inception in 1947, Pakistan has been under the heels of successive military dictators for most of the time. The US imperialist has been wooing the Pakistani regime right from the early fifties, giving it arms aid making it a junior partner in military blocs like the CENTO and so on. Imperialist military aid, membership of imperialist-sponsored military blocs and military dictatorships, all meant growing suppression of the people. Additionally, the ruling circles of Pakistan came predominantly from West Punjab with the power and pelf going mainly to the vested interests of that area. The Sindhis, Baluchis, Paktoons and, even more so, the Bengalees of East Pakistan were thoroughly dissatisfied and extremely resentful. The powerful 1952 language struggle in East Pakistan, when Urdu was sought to be imposed on the people there in place of their Bengali language, a struggle in which many Bengalees were killed by the Pakistani armed forces, did not hammer any sense into the heads of the Pakistani ruling circles. The resentment of the Bengalees continued to grow leading ultimately to the liberation struggle in 1971. General Yahya Khan's last-minute manoeuvre declaring the turning of Pakistan from a unitary set-up into a federation of five Provinces –Punjab, Sind, NWFP, Baluchistan and East Bengal-was defeated. Despite the most brutal repression by the Pakistan army, belonging mainly to West Pakistan-the killings, torture, rapes, arson, despite the menacing posture adopted by the US imperialists in support of their Pakistani ally (Nixon has now said that he was thinking of using nuclear weapons against India 1971), the liberation struggle of the Bengalees, with the support of the people and government. Even after that, the Pakistani ruling circles Sindhi, Baluchi and Paktoon people. The result is that General Siaul Haque is now sitting on a volcano, the result is also that the military dictatorship has made Pakistan more dependent on, and a surrogate state of US imperialism.

What is happening in our own country, India? The policies pursued by the bourgeois-landlord classes have provided the ground for the growth of divisive, separatist and secessionist forces, and imperialist agencies have been using them to push forward their reactionary aim of destabilising the country.

Why are these developments taking place, how have these reactionary forces gathered strength? Our own experience provides the answer. The forces that made for unity during the days of the freedom struggle against the British colonialists have lost their momentum in many spheres. The separatist tendencies that existed in the earlier period were to a certain extent controlled and guided

into the anti-imperialist struggle. Now that freedom has been won and thirty-eight years have passed since then, the common enemy, imperialism, is no longer seen as a danger and the separatist tendencies are again coming on top. Indian independence was not based on the liquidation of feudal relations; on the contrary, it was based on compromise with feudalism and the feudal ideology. That the ruling classes embarked on the path of building capitalism without abolishing feudal relations and in collaboration with foreign monopoly capital has had its own logic.

In Sri Lanka, faced with the problem of an ethnic minority which has been suffering from discrimination for long, instead of solving the problem according to democratic norms, the bourgeois-landlord government tried to find a military solution and even rushed to the imperialists for military assistance, posing a threat not only to Sri Lanka's freedom and integrity, but to the freedom and security of the entire region. A strife torn weakened Sri Lanka admirably suits the US imperialists who have been for long seeking a naval base in Trincomalee and naval facilities in that country.

The Problem in Sri Lanka

What is generally referred to as the "ethnic problem" is in fact the problem of a minority nationality-the Sri Lanka Tamil people-whose aspirations and legitimate demands have been denied by the ruling classes.

There are about three million Tamils who are Sri Lankan citizens concentrated in the northern and eastern districts of Jaffna and Trincomalee. The Jaffna Tamils had emigrated to Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, about 2000 years ago. The majority of the population-about 75 per cent-is Sinhalese. The root of the problem is that the Sinhalese consider Sri Lanka to be their country where the Tamils have no business to be.

Citizenship Denied

Apart from the Sri Lanka Tamils, the overwhelming majority of workers in the tea plantations in the Kandy hills are Tamils of Indian origin. Their forefathers were taken from the then Madras Presidency as indentured labour by the British colonial rulers. When the British started the tea plantations, the Sinhalese peasants, who

were cultivating small plots of land in the forest areas of these hills, were evicted. The Sinhalese naturally did not take kindly to the immigrant Tamil workers. When the indentured labour system was abolished in the first decade of this century, the Tamil workers were freed but they did not get citizenship rights and remained stateless. It was only the Communist Party of Ceylon which right from the beginning took the stand that these Tamil plantation workers should be given Ceylonese citizenship. But they continued to remain Stateless even after the country won its independence. The bourgeois-landlord classes who took over power did not take any steps to solve this problem. It was only in the 1960s that the problem was tackled and the then prime ministers of the two countries – Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Lal Bahadur Shastri- signed a pact. According to it, out of an estimated one million Tamils of Indian origin, 525,000 were to be repatriated to India and 300,000 were to be granted Sri Lanka citizenship. The agreement was not implemented in full before 9it, lapsed in ten years leaving behind a large number of Tamils with an uncertain Stateless future.

In addition to these stateless Tamils, there are about 200,000 Indians in Colombo and other cities and towns mainly engaged in industry, business, trade, etc.

But the main problem concerns the three millions Sri Lankan Tamil People.

Single United State

Sri Lankan has always been a politically and geographically single united state. The Tamils as much as the Sinhalese had accepted this position. The Tamils, in fact, had rejected federalism a number of times. Jehan Pereira, a Sri Lankan student of the Harvard school of Law in the USA who has done extensive research on his country's ethnic problem, has traced this history in an article in *The Hindu* (May 31, 1985) When S W R D Bandaranaike, who was to become Sri Lankan's Prime Minister in 1956, first proposed federation in 1925, the Tamils along with the Sinhalese living in the low country had opposed it. When the Federation Party was formed in the wake of denial of citizenship rights to the Tamil estate workers, the Tamils rejected federation once again and thoroughly defeated the Federal Party in the 1952 general elections. It was only in 1956, when both the major political parties the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP), opted for the Sinhala-only language legislation that the Tamils finally turned towards federation federalism. Even then, every Tamil candidate who campaigned for

separation lost his security deposit. After the riots of 1956 and 1958, the university admissions crisis of the early 1970s and the adoption of the first republican Constitution in 1972, which eliminated the guarantees given to the minorities, the Tamils still rejected separation. Finally, in 1975, separatism was accepted by the major Tamil political parties, which formed the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). Even then, at the 1977 elections, a majority of Tamils voted for candidates who rejected separation. Most of those who voted for the TULF voted for a party that championed Tamil rights and not for separation in itself. The demand for separation was then seen as a bargaining chip.

This is how the Tamil leaders traveled from rejection of even federalism to the demand for a separate Tamil State. This demand, of course is untenable and vitiates the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils and their struggle for autonomy for the Tamil majority areas. But it should not be forgotten that it is the refusal of successive bourgeois-landlord governments to concede autonomy to the Tamil majority areas, the breaking or scuttling and again of agreements arrived at that finally brought the separatist slogan to the forefront.

Discrimination Against Tamil Areas

Discrimination after discrimination had been heaped on the Sri Lankan Tamils- economic, political, social, cultural. The economic development of Tamil areas was neglected. The Committee for Rational Development in a study (quoted by frontline) pointed to the decentralised budget; capital expenditure under the Central budget was Rs 260 million for Jaffna in 1981 and this amounted to 2.6 per cent of the national capital expenditure of Rs nine billion; per capita expenditure in Jaffna is Rs 313 compared for Jaffna during 1977-82 was Zero.

In 1996, both the major political parties of the ruling classes Sri Lankan opted for the Sinhala-only language policy. In 1970, the media-wise standardisation policies discriminating against the Tamils in the higher education sphere were introduced. In 1981, the Public Library of Jaffna was burnt down and ninety thousand books, including irreplaceable first editions and manuscripts, were reduced to ashes.

In 1978, a new Constitution, generally known as the "Gaullist" Constitution, was introduced which provided for a unitary set-up and concentrated all the powers in the hands of Jayewardene, who was elected for a six-year presidential term in 1982. The unitary set-up

shut the door completely to the Tamil demand for autonomy. What was really atrocious was that in the same year, the tenure of the parliament, which was elected in 1977, was extended up to 1989 through a referendum. Jayewardene's UNP had 140 members out of the 168 in Parliament and the referendum manoeuvre was to enable him to ensure this huge majority for seven years without facing the electorate. The Sixth Amendment of the Constitution disavowing separatism was then enacted and this effectively prevented the TULF members of parliament from attending it, thus denying representation to sixteen constituencies in the North and East. And to cap it all, the country has been under continuous emergency rule since May 1983, and the Tamil people have been the main victims of this dictatorial regime.

Four-Point Demand For Autonomy

The federal party, at its Trincomalee convention in August 1956, had put forward a four-point demand for autonomy, not for a separate state. The demands were: a rational and democratic constitution based on the federal principle and autonomy (including residuary powers) for the whole Tamil linguistic region; citizenship rights for all Tamils who have made Sri Lanka their home; guaranteeing the integrity of the traditionally Tamil-speaking areas against the encroachment made by State-sponsored colonisation; and equally of status for the Tamil language in relation to Sinhala at the level of the Central government. This became the basis for the Bandaranaike Chelvanayagam Pact of 1957, but it was never implemented. This was the only time that a Sri Lankan Government had acceded to the demand for regional Councils. The present President J R Jayewardene himself organised a big campaign against the pact and scuttled it.

The demand regarding state-sponsored colonisation arose because it was adversely affecting the Tamil population. According to Special Correspondent in the, *The Hindu* (June 17, 1985), "After the peasant rebellion of 1848, the idea of 'preserving' or 'rehabilitating' the peasantry was enunciated by many British bureaucrats". Since the pressure of landlessness was heavy on the Sinhala peasantry, which formed the bulk of the population, they were naturally the main beneficiaries of the State-sponsored colonisation scheme. The Tamil fear was that the demographic composition of the Tamil majority areas would get already taking away the legitimacy of their demand for autonomy for these areas.

Two Pacts Not Implemented

The Bandaranike – Chelvanayagam pact of 1957 dealt with this issue and said: “It was agreed that in the matter of colonialism schemes, the powers of the Regional Council shall include the power to select allottees to whom lands within its area of authority shall be alienated and also power to select personnel to be employed for work such schemes.” The understanding implicit in this was that the Regional Councils would be concerned with the preservation of the linguistic and cultural identity of their regions.

The breakdown of this pact under pressure of the majority opinion led to a faster of settlement and Tamil grievances continued to mount. The second pact-the Senanayake – Chelvanayagam pact- which was made in March 1965, had to take note of this situation and be more explicit on this issue.

The relevant portion of the pact said: “MR, Senanayake further agreed that in the granting of land under colonisation schemes, the following priorities will be observed in Northern and Eastern Provinces: (a) first, to the landless persons in the district, (b) second, to the Tamil-speaking persons resident in the Northern and Eastern provinces, (c) third, to other citizens of Ceylon, preference being given to Tamil residents in the rest of the island.” This agreement, too, was sabotaged by Sinhala chauvinists. If these agreements on the colonisation scheme and the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact conceding Regional Councils had been sincerely implemented, the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka would perhaps have not attained the proportions that it now has.

President Jayewardene’s Government is now proposing to settle 250,000 Sinhala peasants in the northern and eastern areas. According to all reports the Sinhala settlers will be given training in arms and provided with weapons to “protect” themselves from Tamil militants. This policy of the government cannot but led to a situation of virtual civil war.

Programme Against Tamils

Ever since independence, for almost four decades now, the Sri Lankan Tamils have not only been denied an equal, honourable and

secure place in the socio-economic cultural and political life of the country, what is worse is that on a number of occasions, they were victims of violent pogroms-in 1956, 1958 and 1961, and since the present UNP Government assumed power, in 1977, 1979, 1981, and 1982. It has been the normal practice of the bourgeois-landlord governments of newly independent countries to incite the majority against the minority. They know no other way of dealing with the minority problem. It is no different in Sri Lanka. The majority is told that they are victims of unemployment because jobs have been grabbed by those belonging to the minority. The passions of the Sinhala majority are roused against Tamils engaged in trade, business or industry. In the first round of violence in Colombo and other towns, it was these establishments belonging to the majority people that became the targets of looting and arson. Some Ministers were themselves guilty of rousing these chauvinist feelings. The anti-Tamil violence, which began on July 23, 1983, took the country into a situation of virtual civil war.

Attack On The Left

In his broadcast speech after the violence began, President Jayewardene charged the Left parties with being in league with the "extremists" of the TULF, and his Government banned the communist party of Sri Lanka and two other Left parties and arrested their leaders and activists. The ban was later lifted, and the arrested persons were released.

The public media in Sri Lanka, including those, which are known to be close to the President, launched a virulent anti-India campaign characterizing as interference the expression of the Indian people's legitimate concern for the human rights of the Sri Lankan citizens of Indian origin. They alleged that "Tamil terrorists" were being trained and equipped in Tamil Nadu and then sent to Sri Lanka.

Along with the anti-Indian tirade and the attack on Left parties, the ruling classes of Sri Lanka made the Socialist countries another target of their attack. Circles close to the President demanded publicly that the diplomatic representations of the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic should be sharply curtailed. This

was at a time when the US embassy was being allowed to expand with an Israeli interest section.

Appeal To Imperialists

There were reports of an even more dangerous move the Sri Lankan government had made-of asking for military assistance from the US and British imperialists to solve the country's internal problems. Just five months earlier Jayewardene himself had attended the New Delhi summit of the Non-Aligned Movement which had given a stirring call for the unity of the non-aligned countries against imperialist. Having decided to suppress the Tamil people with force, President Jayewardene forgot the NAM Summit call. Though Colombo denied these reports, as India's then External Affairs Minister PV Narashimha Rao told the Indian Parliament and people, there was reason to believe that there was substance in the report. Later it became known that while the US government for its own reasons refused to give military assistance, the British had extended credit to enable Sri Lanka to buy helicopter gun ships. But it was the US administration that arranged gunships the induction of the Israeli Mossad into Sri Lanka and opening of the Israeli interest section in its embassy in Colombo, since Sri Lanka and Israel did not have diplomatic relations. The Mossad was brought in to train the Sri Lankan armed forces in "anti-guerrilla warfare" which, in effect, meant to suppress the Tamil minority. The government at the same time hired services of some ex-SAC British mercenaries for the same purpose.

It was clear that the Jayewardene administration's enemies were the Sri Lankan Tamils, the Left parties of Sri Lanka, India and the Socialist countries, and the friends the whom it looked for assistance were the imperialists and Israeli Zionists. Then the army which Jayewardene himself called "the most undisciplined outside Africa", police commandos and dismissed from the army for indiscipline, were thrown into the field to suppress the Tamil people. In 1983, it was Tamils living outside the northern and eastern provinces who were under attack, but later the State-sponsored terror was extended to the traditional Tamil homelands. Since March 1984, according to a TULF spokesman, Tamils numbering close upon 2000 have been killed by the security forces, and the killings continue.

Official pronouncements said that the operation against "terrorism"

and the Government's first task was to liquidate "terrorism". But it was innocent Tamil Civilians who were tortured, maimed and massacred, it was women who were raped, it was houses of Tamil civilians that were raided, looted and burnt down.

Brutal Repression

TULF president M Sivasithamparam has described in detail the extent of the repressive taken by the Government of Sri-Lanka. He writes, "In November 1984, the Government introduced a series of harsh emergency measures which turned Jaffna into a beleaguered district."

Among the measures are:

"1. For a distance of 100 metres from the sea along the coast from Manner through Kankesabthurai, Myladdy, Pt Pedro to Mullaitivu, no one can move about – a short of 'no man's land'. This has resulted in about 100,000 people moving out from their houses and a total ban on fishing by Tamil fishermen.

"2. No private vehicle can ply in the entire Jaffna peninsula, except with a pass from the Superintendent of Police. Even cycles require a pass from the Assistant Government Agent.

"3. No one can enter or leave the Jaffna peninsula without a permit from the Assistant Government Agent.

"4. Every person has to carry the National Identity Card, wherever he goes. Every Tamil in Sri Lanka has become a black as in South Africa. These measures have had the immediate effect of an acute scarcity of food. The economic life of the people of the peninsula has almost come to a halt. A daily curfew from 6 pm to 5 am completes the scenario of a besieged city.

"Taking advantage of these measures, the army and police commandos operate jointly to carry out a systematic search of areas... Some of the young people taken to the army camps are released after a day or two. Others are taken, often by cargo, ship, to a detention camp in Boosa, 272 miles from Jaffna. Cruel and degrading torture is routine in these army camps... It is from such

terror that many young men who can gather together some money flee; other remain to fight this terror with rare courage and determination.

“There are laws but the illegal killings by the army continue apace. In the streets, inside house, in army camps, in churches, innocent Tamil civilians have been shot dead in their hundreds since March 1984 in every Tamil area.”

As if all this was not enough, National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali has added one more ‘crime’ for which people can be punished, and that is “vicarious responsibility”. According to Athulathmudali’s decree, if any action by “militants” takes place in any area, the people of that area and nearby areas will held responsible and the reprisal could in many cases be killings. There have been reports of firings on people from helicopter gunships and at least in one instance Athulathmudali himself was reported to be on board the helicopter.

It is estimated that about a hundred thousands people have fled Sri Lanka and come to Tamil Nadu. Another 40 to 50 thousands are estimated to have fled to other countries-West Asia, Western Europe, Britain, the USA and so on.

Rise of Tamil Militancy

The official terror has invited militancy from certain sections of the Tamils. There are a number of militant groups, but the important ones number five with about 10,000 fighting people owing allegiance to them. Tamil militancy had appeared after the wanton police attack on January 10, 1974, on those who had gathered at the World Tamil Research Conference which was held in Jaffna. Even earlier, the discontent of the Tamil youth had begun with the introduction in 1970 of media-wise standardisation policies, which discriminated against the Tamils in the higher education sphere. Immediately following the July 23, 1983, violence against the Tamils, or as a part of it, in the afternoon of July 25, a mob of Sinhalese remand prisoners with arms were let loose on the Tamil prisoners kept in one of the blocks in the Wellikade prison. Fifty-two Tamil prisoners were butchered, among whom were Kuttimani and Thangadurai who had been sentenced to death in 1982. These two were the founders of the militant Tamil group, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO). The militant groups also found that the District Development

Councils set up by the Government were a hoax on the Tamil people as there was no real devolution of powers. By 1980-81, they came to the conclusion that the TULF leadership had failed to win the Tamil's legitimate rights and only through an armed struggle they would be able to achieve their goal, which now had become a separate sovereign Tamil Eelam. With the launching of the State terrorism against innocent Tamil civilians, they began taking retaliatory actions mainly against the State's armed forces. They had differences between themselves on the tactics to be followed. Only recently four of the five main organisations have come together in one front-the Eelam National Liberation Front consisting of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students, Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The fifth organisation, the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam, though not part of the front, also began cooperating with it. Representatives of all five participated in the recent Thimpu talks. However misconceived their demand for a separate State, the Tamil people regard them as "our boys" because of their retaliatory attacks on the highly oppressive armed forces. This was how a virtual civil war situation was created with Sinhala opinion overwhelmingly backing the armed forces and Tamil opinion equally strongly demonstrating its sympathy for the militants.

Economy In A Shambles

All these developments especially, the government's stringent repressive measures, have had their impact on the country's economy, which is at present in a shambles.

Sri Lanka's Finance Minister Ronnie De Mel said, on July 15 last, that unless an amicable solution to the ethnic problem was reached, the island nation would face a disaster within two years. He said the defence budget and the money spent on the armed services had increased sevenfold in recent time. He added that the National Security Minister had asked him for Rs 1200 million more for the armed services. De Mel said that the prevailing situation in the country was "a hundred times more serious than the 1971 insurgency" (by Sinhala youth). The country could not develop by fighting wars all the while, he said.

The same Finance Minister, during the course of a speech at a

Colombo meeting early this year, gave a similar warning when he said that economic ruin would be inevitable if the present state of instability arising out of the Sinhala Tamil conflict continued.

From all that has appeared in the Press, especially in journals like *Frontline and Herald Review*, it is evident that the economic situation in Sri Lanka presents a grim picture. The defence allocation last year was nearly Rs four billion, a many-fold increase from 1977 and supplementary demands for defence expenditure are a regular feature like the National Security Minister's demand for Rs 1200 million more to which the Finance Minister referred. All development projects in the Northern Province, which had even before been discriminated against, have been stopped and the funds diverted to "defence" purposes. A National Defence Fund has been set up and defence gets priority everything else. Education and health have been pushed to lower positions and welfare measures like free education and free medical care have been eroded.

Tourism, a major foreign exchange-earner for the island has been affected very badly. Foreign investment has dropped sharply from an envisaged investment of Rs 7.5 billion in 1983 to Rs three billion in 1984. As a result the construction boom is coming to a halt.

Another vitally affected sphere is food. Jaffna Mannar and Mullaitivu districts, generally known as the fishing triangle, accounted for about 40 per cent of the annual catch of about 120,000 tonnes. Because of the surveillance zone and prohibition along the northern coast, the fishing industry in the three districts has been hit hard. The loss to this industry alone has been estimated at Rs 800 million so far. Twenty thousand fishing families have been displaced. Some 80 per cent of the processed exports, which accounted for Rs 491.4 million in foreign exchange in 1983, came from these three districts. The prices of essential commodities have skyrocketed. The violence has hit both production and distribution since the North is the prime grower of subsidiary food crops. If the Eastern province, which is the rice bowl of Sri Lanka, is also affected in the same way as the North, there would be a major food shortage.

When even a big country like India is sought to be pressurized by imperialism, the small island republic of Sri Lanka with the present tattered state of its economy becomes all the more vulnerable to arms-twisting by the imperialist countries and the international

institutions they control.

The Present Phase

The preliminary talks in Thimpu (Bhutan) between the representatives of the governments of Sri Lanka, led by President Jayewardene's brother H W Jayewardene, and the representatives of the TULF and the five militant Tamil organisations, are over. The talks are to be resumed on August 12. No one is claiming that there has been any advance worth mentioning in the first round of the Thimpu talks. All that is claimed that both sides have had their say, and that the Tamil representatives charged the Sri Lanka government with continuing violations of the cease-fire and attacks on Tamil civilians by the armed forces.

The representatives of the militant organisations, after initial hesitation because of the cease-fire violation, have now decided to participate in the second round of talks. The TULF leaders are said to be sceptical about the outcome of the second round. There is enough ground for their scepticism because of the record of the Sri Lankan governments so far. And the latest statement of President Jayewardene on August 6 has not improved the situation at all. He has said that any settlement of the ethnic crisis must be within the framework of a "unitary State" and recognition of Sinhala as the official language. The president is also not prepared to go beyond District Development Councils and at the most inter-district coordination within a province. This will not satisfy the Tamil leaders who, according to all indications so far, may be prepared to give up the demand for a separate state if the Tamil majority provinces in the north and east are merged into a single province and granted full autonomy within a united Sri Lanka.

According to the TULF leaders, just before the outbreak of the violence on July 23, 1983, the annual convention of their party had taken the decision that they would have no more talks with Jayewardene. Their reason was that they had been having an almost continuous dialogue with Jayewardene and his government without anything materialising out of it. Particularly from July 1979 to August 1980, for thirteen months, they held discussions; even a presidential commission was instituted on the setting up of District Development Councils. According to TULF general Secretary Amrithalingam, "Our bitter complaint is that 90 per cent of the matters that were agreed to were never implemented by the government. It was because of

this bitter experience of ours, that nearly three years of dialogue with them yielded no results and they went back on what they promised, that we decided we would not negotiate.”

India's Initiative

The situation changed when after the July 1983 violence, India's Prime Minister Gandhi took the initiative to send then External Affairs Minister P V Narashimha Rao to Sri Lanka, offering India's services to help the Sri Lankan Government find a solution to the ethnic problem. The Government of India made it clear that it would not interfere in Sri Lanka's internal affairs, but was only extending a helping hand to bring the Sri Lanka government and the Tamil leaders together at the negotiating table to find a solution to the minority problem. Also the influx of refugees into Tamil Nadu was causing concern. The Sri Lanka President sent his brother Hector Jayewardene to New Delhi. He had discussions with the Indian Prime Minister, and after talking on the telephone with President Jayewardene, he said the Sri Lankan Government was prepared to go beyond the District Development Councils to meet the aspirations of the Tamil people.

After this, the TULF General secretary met Indira Gandhi and told her that the TULF was prepared to accept India's good offices and work for a peaceful solution.

Four months of talks followed during which g Parthasarathy, Chairman of the Policy Planning Committee in the External Affairs Ministry, went twice to Colombo and had talks with President Jayewardene. Jayewardene came to New Delhi and had talks with the Prime Minister and other. When Parthasarathy visited Colombo the second time in November 1983, Jayewardene gave him the proposal for Regional Councils. The TULF leaders came to Delhi, had discussions with Parthasarathy, and among themselves, and wanted some changes in what Jayewardene had prepared. That is how what came to be known later as "Annexure C" for setting up Regional Councils came into existence.

But then the old story was repeated, the story of going back on agreements. Jayewardene called the All-Party Conference (APC) and invited the Buddhist clergy of the Maha Sangha to attend it. They rejected Annexure C saying that it was concocted in New Delhi and was being foisted on Sri Lanka. The hawks in Jayewardene's government took the same position. Prime Minister Premadasa, right

from the beginning, had taken a virulent anti-India stand and kept himself away from all the talks between the government representatives Athulathmudali was not far behind and was responsible for many provocative statements against the Tamil minority and its representatives and against India. Both of them have given up their anti-India stance for the being in view of the Thimpu talks. They know that if they continued their anti-India positions, it would be impossible for them to carry on the negotiations with the Tamil leaders and the ethnic problem would continue to fester. Only time will prove whether this is just another monoeuvre. Minister Cyril Mathew who went even farther than the two had to be sacked from the government.

But what scuttled Annexure C was Jayewardene's own performance. At no stage of the APC did he try to correct the wrong impression that Annexure C was a product manufactured in New Delhi, but that the proposal for Regional Councils had originated from himself. That would perhaps have persuaded his own party, the UNP the Maha Sangha and other Sinhalese associations to accept it. In the even Annexure C was allowed to lapse. The Tamil leaders felt that their fears that the Government was not prepared to concede any genuine devolution of powers were confirmed. All the more so, when the President, without any notice or any further attempts at negotiations, abruptly postponed the APC for two months and went abroad.

There were two more stages in this series of negotiations. The stalemate that was created by the sudden postponement of the APC was to an extent broken by New Delhi-Colombo diplomatic contacts. India, in its anxiety to see that the problem gets solved, again took the initiative. National Security Minister Athulathmidali was sent by Jayewardene to Delhi with some vague suggestions concerning a second chamber and some coordinating unit suggestions concerning a second chamber and some coordinating unit between the districts. These suggestions were later concretized and placed before the APC by the President on September 30, 1984. The proposals as placed before the APC were for an inter-district coordinating committee within a Province and for a second chamber from which the District Minister or Provincial Ministers could be appointed by the President. This was a far cry from any genuine autonomy for the Tamil areas and the TULF leaders genuine autonomy for the Tamil areas and the TULF leaders stated their position that they would have to reject it as it did not contain "any meaningful scheme of devolution." Even the powers of appointing Ministers remained in the hands of the

President and there was no proposal to amend the Constitution to change its unitary set-up.

Even then the TULF continued informal discussions with the President and some Ministers. As a result the Government made some change in the proposals and two draft Bills were placed before the APC on December 14. One of the Bills was for an amendment to the Constitution for setting up a second chamber and enabling the President to appoint the Provincial Ministers from the second chamber and give certain powers to them. The other was a draft district and Provincial Councils bill. The TULF had various objections to these draft Bills, since they were nothing more than a rehash of earlier proposals and did not provide for any “meaningful devolution of power”. The schedules, which were presented along with them, were found by the TULF leaders to be extremely unsatisfactory.

The Government agreed to drop the schedules and continue informal discussions. The TULF delegation, along with other was invited to a session of the APC on December 21 to make their observations on the modified proposals. Instead of holding the APC session and hearing the observations of various participants, President Jayewardene on that day announced the winding up of the APC. While winding up the APC, the President stated that if any delegation had any views to express on the government proposals, they could send them in writing, and that the draft Bills were now before the people to decide. Since the draft Bills were before the public for discussion, the TULF sent to the government the statement it had prepared for the APC session on December 21 and also released it to the Press. On December 26, the government dropped the proposals and the president stated that this was being done because the TULF had rejected the proposals and that the TULF had said that it “saw no purpose in having further discussions on that.” The TULF leaders refuted this and said that their statement did not contain anything which they had not told the government in the informal discussions, and also that they had not said they saw no purpose in continuing further discussions, that, in fact, they were waiting for further discussions.

This was the height of political chicanery. First Jayewardene and Co. had taken the position that they would not talk to the Tamil leader unless they gave up their demand for Tamil Eelam. But after being persuaded by India to open talks without any preconditions, the way the President has behaved only gives the impression that he has

been trying to buy time, meanwhile continuing the undeclared war against the Tamil population. The convening of the APC, postponing it and winding it up later, scuttling of Annexure C, ending of the talks with the TULF, all point to this.

Again, the government of India took the initiative to invite President Jayewardene and he came to New Delhi and had discussions with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the latter sent Foreign Affairs Secretary Romesh Bhandari to Colombo. All this resulted in first, the round of talks between constitutional experts of Sri Lanka and India followed by the first round of the talks in Thimpu.

While the militant organizations have now decided to attend the second round of the Thimpu talks even while protesting against the army patrolling of Jaffna and Trincomalee which has been started again and attacks on the Tamil people, the TULF has been constrained to warn the government that it would be responsible for any deterioration in the situation because of the cease-fire violations. As for the government side, according to a report in the daily *Sun*, considered to be close to the Establishment, Hector Jayewardene has asked from the Cabinet for a wider mandate for the second round of talks because certain issues have come up - issues like employment, colonization, education and security. While these issues are certainly important as far as the Tamil people are concerned autonomy for the Tamil majority areas is much wider than just these issues, and the success of the second round of the Thimpu talks will depend on whether the Government is willing to concede this demand.

Political Parties

While the ruling UNP is divided, one group not wanting to concede anything more than District Development Councils and the other prepared to go a bit farther but not accepting autonomy for the Tamil people, the main opposition party, the Sir Lanka Freedom Party has been changing its stand often to mainly appeal to Sinhala opinion. In any general election it is the Sinhala vote that will be decisive and the SLEP leadership is swayed by this consideration more than anything else. SLFP leader Sirimavo Bandaranaike - who has been deprived of her civil rights till 1987 and whose son Anura is the leader of the Opposition in Parliament - first demanded that the government should talk with the TULF without any preconditions when the Government position was of no talks without the TULF eschewing separatism. It looked as if the SLFP wanted concessions to be given to the TULF and consideration of the proposal for

provincial councils. The SLFP initially joined the All -Party conference, but later backed out of it. When Annexure C came up, the SLFP did not give support to it. Later, Mrs. Bandaranaike condemned the Government for killing innocent Tamils. Now she is demanding that any agreement that is reached between the government and the Tamil leaders should be ratified at a general election. The Buddhist clergy represented by the Maha Sangha has been totally opposed to making any concession to the Tamils. Some chapter of the Buddhist clergy recently held a conference and formed a front to safeguard the interests of the majority community. A notable personality present at this conference was Mrs. Bandaranaike.

Communist Stand

The Communist Party of Sri Lanka is to be congratulated for taking a right stand even when the atmosphere was charged and the party itself was illegalised for some time. The CPSL was the first and only party to demand citizenship rights to all the Tamil estate workers even before independence. In the new phase after the July 1983 violence, it stuck to its correct Marxist Leninist stand of autonomy for the Tamil majority areas within a united Sri Lanka. This will necessitate a change in the present Constitution with its unitary set-up, something which president Jayewardene is refusing to accept even now.

Three other parties, which have taken a supportive attitude to the Tamil movement, are the Lanka Sama Samaj Party, Sri Lanka Mahajana Party (SLMP) and the Nava Samaj Party (NSSP).

The SLMP is a breakaway group from Mrs. Bandaranaike's SLFP and is led by Vijay Kumarantunga, her film actor son-in-law. He has come out in support of setting up Regional Councils as proposed in the Bandaranaike-Chevanayagam pact. He has also come out sharply against the anti- India tirades of Sri Lanka official spokesmen and is quoted to have said that even Lord Buddha, being an Indian, was likely to be locked up if he visited Sri Lanka today.

The NSSP is breakaway group from the Lanka Sama Samaj Party, the old Trotskyite party belonging to the Fourth International, and is led by Vasudeva Nanyakkara. He has gone further than Kumaranatunga and advocated the right of self-determination for the Tamil minority.

The Polit Bureau of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), in the first statement it made after the outbreak violence in July 1983, had called for a solution of the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka on the basis of autonomy for the Tamil-problem in Sri Lanka on the basis of autonomy for the Tamil-majority areas within a single Sri Lankan state. In this it was guided by the teachings of Marxism-Leninism.

Lenin brilliantly summed up the Marxist-Leninist understanding on the question of self-determination of nation and nationalities when he wrote: "complete equality of right for all nationalities, the right of nations to self-determination, the unity of workers of all nations-such is the national programme that Marxism, the experience of the whole world and the experience of Russia teaches the workers". Communists everywhere, all the time, fight for the complete equality of rights for all nationalities and unity of workers of all nations. As for the right of nations to self-determination, Lenin said, "The several demands of democracy, including self-determination are not an absolute, but only a *small part* of the general-democratic (now general-socialist) world movement. In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole, if so it must be rejected". The right of self-determination, hence, is not an immutable principle to be applied in every case; a Marxist has to analyze the concrete conditions in his own country, the international context, before raising the demand for self-determination. Above all, he has to be guided by the class struggle nationally and internationally. As Lenin said, "The bourgeoisie always places its national demands in the forefront and does so in categorical fashion. With the proletariat, however, these demands are subordinated to the interests of the class struggle." It is in line with this understanding that the Polit Bureau of the CPI(M), in its statement on Sri Lanka, pointed out: "The P B warns that bourgeois-landlord government know no other way of dealing with the minority problem except inciting the majority against the minority. The same process is going on Sri Lanka. The struggle for justice to the minority is an integral part of the struggle of the people for economic emancipation and democratic rights. All democratic forces in Sri Lanka, irrespective of the communities to which they belong, must come together to protect the unity of the country, do justice to the minority and ensure the advance of the people".

Any failure to protest the unity of the country even while fighting for the legitimate rights of the minority will retard the democratic

movement, the class struggle and the struggle for Socialism in Sri Lanka which has to be led by the united working class belonging to both the Sinhala and Tamil communities. Any delay or failure to solve the ethnic problem and protect the unity of the country will be to plat into the hands of imperialism, especially US imperialism, and endanger the very freedom and security of the country. Not only Sri Lanka, the whole sub-continent, the entire Indian Ocean area will be under threat by imperialism.

Defeat Imperialist Game

Though the US imperialists right at the beginning did not respond to the Jayewardene government's plea for military assistance, it was they who enabled the Israeli interest section to be opened in the US embassy in Colombo. Top US officials both defence and non-defence, have been descending on Sri Lanka one after another. The USA obtained from the Sri Lankan government a lease for the voice of America to set up its biggest radio transmitter station outside the USA, to conduct the imperialist ideological aggression against the Socialist countries, India and other countries that follow an independent foreign policy. The US imperialists have obtained refueling facilities for their navy in some Sri Lankan ports and are continuing their efforts to get naval base facilities in Trincomalee. The US imperialists, standing whole hog behind the reactionary government of Sri Lanka, having succeeded for the time being to divided the people and derail of democratic movement, are now able to secure concession after concession from the Jayewardene Government to plant their feet firmly on Sri Lanka soil.

The imperialist threat to Sri Lanka's freedom and integrity its nefarious game to use Sri Lanka, along with the military dictatorships of Pakistan and Bangladesh, to surrounded India with hostile government and bases to pressurize it, to intensify the militarisation of the Indian Ocean are all aimed at achieving the goal of world domination, carrying on the crusade against communism and imposing neo-colonialist domination over newly independent countries. This game has to be defeated the preserve peace and security in the region. That underlines the urgent necessity of finding a democratic solution to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, so that the democratic forces there, now in disarray, can regroup themselves and fight back the imperialist conspiracies, along with democratic forces in the rest of the sub-continent.