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**Organ of the  
Central Committee CPI(ML)**

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**Discussion on Sanctifying Culture of Hate**

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**A Comment on Current Political Crisis in Sri Lanka**

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# World Order at Stake in Ukraine War

The world today is going through cataclysmic changes raising the spectre of nuclear war. Possibility of the present conflict developing into third world war is being openly talked about. Big powers in the world are openly talking about the present conflict in Ukraine being about the international order itself; who will control the world is being bandied to be at stake. US imperialism wishes to restore the uni-polar world while their rivals- Russia and China- wish to consolidate the present multi-polar world and end US domination. The present conflict may also result in ushering in a bi-polar world albeit with some changes in alignment of different players or set of players. What stands out is that the present conflict has aggravated the crisis in all the countries, though to varying degrees; has pushed increasing number of people into hunger and malnutrition; has imposed higher prices on the world people and lowering living standards of an increasingly growing number of people. It has brought the deepening crisis of imperialist world order into sharp focus. While all major contradictions of the imperialist system are intensifying, the inter-imperialist contradictions have come to the fore for the time being. US withdrawal from Afghanistan in defeat is resonating in the growing conflicts in the world even as Afghanistan is suffering from the wounds of decades of war waged first by Social-imperialists and then by US imperialists.

## **Emergence of Multi-polar World**

Present developments may be understood by combining the two oft-quoted and repeated sayings that war is a continuation of politics by other means and politics being a concentrated expression of economics. The economic competition among principal imperialist powers for resources and markets of the world is intensifying with China emerging as the principal competitor to USA; complementarity giving way to contention. China has already surpassed USA in GDP calculated on the basis of purchase power parity and is likely to also surpass it in nominal terms i.e. in US dollars, in a few years. Huge military expenditure of USA is becoming a big drag on the largest economy in the world whose share in the world production and trade is continuously shrinking. US efforts to secure world hegemony through control over natural resources of the world, over trade routes and with military bases in all corners have been thwarted due to setback in Iraq and defeat in Afghanistan. Explosion of world financial-economic crisis from 2008 onwards seriously impacted US economy and economies of other western imperialist countries. Bubbles in their economies burst to drag down their economies. On the other hand, China, which had already emerged as the main manufacturer of goods, entered high tech capital goods sector. USA has tried to overcome this challenge through forced sale of its high value goods i.e. high tech goods and services and capital goods. To enforce this sale it raised a storm of currency manipulations. US imperialism relies on getting goods of labour intensive production from other countries, much of it through its own MNCs who have shifted such production abroad and also extracting surplus through financial assets and supply of high value goods and services. To retain its dominant position in the world, USA is taking increasing recourse to military means. Its

military industrial complex is still the largest seller of arms and ammunition in the world and to further these sales it foments trouble and conflicts in different parts of the world.

Over past decades, several important power centres have emerged in the world. USA continues to be the biggest economy and the strongest military power in the world though the extent of its power has been exposed both in economic and military fields. European powers grouped under EU have tried to steer a course different from US imperialism. British withdrawal from EU (Brexit) has further increased influence of old European powers – Germany and France - in the EU who along with Italy are termed as Old Europe. Franco-German alliance dominates European Union, yet is still dependent on USA for its defense purposes. They too eye the resources and markets of Eastern Europe including former Soviet republics which bring them in collision with Russian imperialism; hence their continued dependence on US imperialism. Former members of Warsaw Pact and former Soviet republics are collectively called New Europe, a term popularized by Rumsfeld during military invasion of Iraq in 2003. This New Europe is being harnessed by US imperialists to further press Russia from the West and also to keep Old Europe in line on this policy of eastward expansion of NATO. Hence, emergence of Franco-German led European Union as a separate power centre is still a work in progress.

Russia has emerged from the setbacks it had suffered during disbanding of Warsaw Pact and dissolution of Soviet Union. It had all along been a strong military power. However, during the transition from bureaucratic capitalism to private capitalism, Russian ruling elite drew close to USA for help in this transition. This situation was utilized by US imperialists for eastward

expansion of NATO to prevent Russia from reclaiming influence in Europe especially in former Warsaw Pact countries and former Soviet Republics. It was also aimed at utilizing this situation to exploit vast mineral resources of Russia. Despite all assurances for no eastward expansion of NATO, east European countries and former Soviet republics were encouraged to join NATO and advanced military infrastructure and substantial US military force was stationed there. However, no benefit came to Russia in terms of market access as Russian industrial products were competitive in nature to US industries. Having stabilized their rule and some recovery through export of petroleum products and continued sale of military equipment, the ruling class of Russia saw further expansion of NATO as threatening them and depriving them of all influence in Eastern Europe.

China too, after restoration of capitalism, embarked on capitalist development and attracted imperialist capital through “open door policy”. MNCs of developed capitalist countries especially USA transferred labour intensive production processes to China to exploit its vast trained labour force and enter a large market. Over time China emerged as the “factory of the world”. In the first phase Chinese capitalist rulers concentrated on appropriating surplus from vast labour force of China and sharing this surplus with western MNCs. Amassing this surplus gave the Chinese ruling elite the ability to embark on entering new areas of production especially on production of high tech and capital goods. They could also undertake modernization and strengthening of their military forces. Chinese ruling elite also started export of this accumulated capital to harness natural resources especially petroleum products and minerals for their industries and for markets for their goods. They embarked on large investments in

West Asia, Africa and Latin America besides petroleum exploration in Russia and mineral extraction in Central Asia. China emerged as the largest trade partner of Latin American countries considered as its backyard by US imperialism. China has deepened its economic ties with Russia and Central Asian countries, investing in extraction of natural resources and supplying them finished goods. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is Chinese rulers' plan for investments in foreign countries. China emerged as the main competitor of America in economic field. China also started deploying its military force to support its commercial interests, setting up its first foreign military base in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.

These four power centres emerged when the US imperialism dominated uni-polar world declined owing to failure of its wars of aggression against Iraq and Afghanistan and explosion of world financial economic crisis from 2008 onwards. Russian war against Georgia the same year also signaled the decline of uni-polar world. Contradictions among the imperialist powers intensified on this basis and gradually a multi-polar world emerged. The intensification of these contradictions and emergence of China as a global economic power in trade and investments, allowed several semi-colonial and dependent countries to have some bargaining power and defy diktats of US imperialism. These led to emergence of several other centres, though of lesser importance. Withdrawal of US military from Afghanistan in defeat marked another turning point in the state of inter-imperialist contradictions. US imperialism tried to belittle the impact of this defeat, to portray it as relocation in view of its changed priorities and sought to assert its commitment and capacity to defend and dictate to its allies. Their imperialist rivals, especially Russia and China, saw in this an opportunity.

## **Russian Invasion of Ukraine**

US imperialism has for some time been bogged down in the dilemma of choosing between pursuing restoration of uni-polar world or striving to remain the dominant power in the multi-polar world. The latter meant concentrating on its contention with China while the former involved taking on both Russia and China and also pressurizing other centres to fall in line. US under Biden has chosen to pursue the course of striving to restore uni-polar world. There is relative unanimity among rival powers on the content of the present war going on in Ukraine. US led NATO's relentless eastward expansion provided the background while Russian assertion of its sphere of influence became the precipitating point. *(Also see ND, February 2022)*

The mismatch of relative military power between Russia and Ukraine is so much that despite all out material support by US and its allies, Russia will achieve its war aim objectively; if not fully, at least substantially. Even if it does not succeed in regime change by imposing a Govt. in Ukraine favourably disposed to it, Russia is likely to take over major chunks of Ukrainian territory in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine. These are areas predominantly inhabited by Russians and Russian speaking Ukrainians. These are also areas where major parts of industries of Ukraine are located as well as a good part of its agricultural production. Slow pace of Russian military advance is due to resistance by Ukrainian military but also due to Russians avoiding high military casualties on their side or higher civilian casualties of Ukrainians. UN has confirmed 4,031 civilian deaths in Ukraine on May 28, 2022, after over three months of war. No reliable figures of military casualties are given by either side except in very general terms. This has been a war of attrition between two militaries with a



high cost of civilian hardships. Over 6.5 million have reportedly left Ukraine by May 27, 2022.

USA and other western powers are openly supplying arms to Ukraine and encouraging their people, including Army men, to volunteer for war in Ukraine. As repeatedly articulated by US officials, American aim in this war is to weaken Russia so that it cannot dare a similar adventure elsewhere. US Admn. has sought to provoke this war with the aim of weakening Russia at the cost of Ukrainians, rally the whole of Europe behind itself and the NATO led by it and in the process undermine the efforts of France, Germany and Italy, called Old Europe, to advance towards an independent policy. With regard to China, US Admn. banked on isolating Russia so much that China would be either forced to distance itself from Russia or face isolation from other countries. Biden Admn. sought to kill several birds with this stone. Its cohort, UK Govt. is once again acting as US puddle partly for its imperialist nostalgia but largely with a view to get greater share of resources of and markets in East and Central European countries. It also wants to pressurize European Union to acquiesce in proposed British transgression of Northern Ireland protocol, which was part of Brexit deal signed by Johnson Govt. This protocol regulates trade between Northern Ireland and rest of Britain.

While the military outcome of this war may be to an extent predictable, its ultimate impact on world order will hinge on the economic war being waged by USA and its allies. While France, Germany and Italy have been advocating negotiation between Russia and Ukraine, even US Admn. has changed its tone on arming Ukraine by shifting the aim of ensuring defeat of Ukraine to one of strengthening position of Ukraine in negotiations with Russia. UK however is still talking of bringing Russia to its knees.

Ukraine war in fact represents two wars rolled into one. One is the war between US-UK and Russia in the main and the other between parts of Ukraine itself i.e. between Western and Eastern Ukraine. After military backed coup ousting then elected President, Yanukovich, in 2014 Ukrainian nationalists have consolidated themselves in power. Their main base is in western Ukraine which has had different history as well as rulers over time. Ukrainians comprise over three fourth of the population of Ukraine (nearly 77%) while Russians are less than a fifth (nearly 18%), the rest being accounted for by people of other nationalities. Of the Ukrainians, nearly half are mainly Russian speaking, concentrated in south and east Ukraine. Most of the rulers of Ukraine have been drawn from Russian speaking Ukrainians. However, Ukrainian nationalists have been working to eliminate Russian language and culture from amidst Ukrainians as they define Ukraine primarily in anti-Russian terms, tearing all the bonds between Ukrainians and Russians. Ukrainian nationalists had not hesitated to join hands with Nazis against the then Soviet Union and their closeness to US-UK is largely due to this factor. Over last eight years Ukrainian nationalists have outlawed Russian language and outlawed even the political parties and organizations having positive approach towards Russia. They built military strength with the help of US imperialism including setting up of laboratories for biological and chemical weapons. They had been preparing for this war for last eight years. Ukrainian nationalists wish to draw western powers into this war; rather that is their main hope. Hence, they are demanding such weapons which can strike deep into Russia thus forcing such a war. However, Russian invasion of Ukraine has cost Russia support among Russian speaking Ukrainians.

Ukrainian nationalists are rabid anti-Russians and will go to any extent as they had done in the past. Now that they control the state machinery including armed forces and are backed by rabid war mongerers – US & UK - they don't care for destruction in Ukraine and reject any idea of Ukraine adopting neutrality between Russia and NATO controlled by USA. They are a willing tool of the US imperialist strategy and are opposed to any idea of peace with Russia and hence their aversion to old continental powers.

### **What is at Stake?**

While war is being fought on the soil of Ukraine, its implications obviously go far beyond. It may or may not prove to be the beginning of Third World War but it is already a war in which several countries are directly or indirectly participating and which has grave implication for the whole world.

Biden Admn. is articulating its position as one of defending liberal world order and recognizing the need for waging war for defending liberal world order. Such phrases are generally used by US imperialism for its imperialist war aims and US Admn. is willing to go to great length for restoring uni-polar world. Speaking before Business Roundtable's CEO quarterly meeting on March 21, 2022, Biden said, "We are leading on the global stage... Because of this aggression we presented a united front throughout NATO and in the Pacific ... Ukrainians are fighting so valiantly and using the equipment we've given them." After such remarks he proceeds to deliver the thrust of this speech, "You know, we are at an inflection point, I believe, in the world economy — not just the world economy, in the world. It occurs every three or four generations. As one of — as one of the top military people said to me in a secure meeting the other day, *60 — 60 million people died*

*between 1900 and 1946. And since then, we've established a liberal world order, and that hadn't happened in a long while. A lot of people dying, but nowhere near the chaos.*" Biden is talking of the death of 60 million people to establish the liberal world order, and this order is again in chaos. It is obvious he is preparing the mood to launch such a massive war which may involve death of 60 million people to save the liberal world order. US and its allies also call this as "rules based order" whose rules US imperialism unilaterally decides. It is significant that it is not an UN based order or an order based on international law but one based on rules decided by US and its allies.

Even leaders of Russia and China acknowledge that the war is for a multi-polar world order and against restoration of uni-polar world. Former President and current deputy head of the National Security Council of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev told RT and RIA Novosti, "The uni-polar world dominated by the US and its allies is now over." He went on to enumerate USA's economic strength, dollar as the main reserve currency and its willingness to use military power for imperialist aims like in Vietnam and asserted, "The US behaves this way around the world because they think there is no longer any competition. But they are wrong. Life does not stand still, prompting new developments in international relations and new countries emerging as strong powerhouses. The uni-polar world is over. The US is no longer the master of planet Earth." Russian President Putin has also on several occasions talked of his opposition to restoration of uni-polar world. Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov told China's Xinhua News Agency in an interview, "The conflict between Moscow and Kiev, as well as the long-running Ukraine crisis, is a direct result of the West's push to create a uni-polar world, one which involved NATO's unabated

eastward expansion.” and “Moscow’s Special Military Operation’s aim is to put end to U.S. domination”. Chinese official media has been criticizing US and allies for provoking war in Ukraine by eastward expansion of NATO. China has also criticized USA over operation of biolabs by Pentagon in Ukraine.

That the war in Ukraine is linked to global order as a result of US attempts to restore uni-polar world, is also demonstrated by US Admn. linking developments in Ukraine war to the situation across Taiwan straits. US President Biden had, at the occasion of Quad summit in Tokyo, expressed US commitment to intervene militarily if People’s Republic of China attacks Taiwan. This is a departure from US position of not committing any stand in such an eventuality what has been called as strategic ambiguity. And this is not the first time that Biden has taken such a stand. Though Admn. officials later reiterate that there is no change in policy but there obviously has been a change with increased deployment of US forces in the region. Biden said in Tokyo that if, after any future rapprochement between Russia and Ukraine, “the sanctions are not continued to be sustained in many ways, then what signal does that send to China about the cost of attempting to take Taiwan by force?” Peace across Taiwan straits is maintained through recognition of One China policy, Taiwan not declaring independence and China not using force to integrate Taiwan with mainland. Now US is trying to upset this delicate balance and encouraging pro-independence forces in Taiwan. This is containing both Russia and China at the same time. And China recognizes this and the impact of the outcome of Ukraine war.

### **Whither Global Order?**

As argued earlier, while military outcome of the Ukraine war may to an extent be predictable unless US decides to plunge the

world into Third World War, the impact of the war on the global order will be decided mainly on the economic front. US and its allies have embarked on and depend on weakening Russia economically so much that Russia cannot pursue war. Hence, such extensive and unprecedented sanctions are being imposed on Russia. But USA and its allies have overestimated the efficacy of its oft-repeated tool except to boost the morale of Ukrainian nationalists. The economic impact of these sanctions i.e. how much it can force Russia to acquiesce in US dominated world- will be determined not by the participants in the war but by the rising economic power in the world i.e. China.

If we take a look at Russian economy it is not only a military superpower but also a superpower in primary commodities. Its vast lands are rich in petroleum and mineral resources. Crude oil is Russia's biggest export (\$123 billion in 2019) followed by refined petroleum like petrol and diesel (\$66.2), natural gas (\$26.3 billion) and coal (\$17.6 billion). Russia is the world's second largest exporter of cobalt used in making rechargeable batteries. It is also second largest supplier of Vanadium, which is used in large-scale energy storage and in steelmaking. Russia is a large exporter of nickel, platinum, tungsten, lead and gold besides of smaller quantities of copper, zinc and manganese. Besides, Russia is world's largest exporter of wheat accounting for over one fifth of supply in international market. Russia is also a big exporter of fertilizers. If one looks at Russia's main imports, these are machinery and equipment including that used in transport (estimated to be 45%), chemical products and medicines (19%), foodstuffs and agricultural products (14.5%) etc. Russia has a positive balance of trade. China is the main export destination and main source of imports for Russia followed by Germany in case of imports and the Netherlands in case

of exports. Western investments in Russia are not very big and are largely in oil gas fields.

A cursory look shows that what Russia supplies are essential for society and for industrial production. Western Europe has been the main importer of Russian oil and gas. On the other hand, what Russia imports include large non-essential (some of them luxury) items, especially what comes from western countries. Here, it is important that China can supply all that Russia needs and can be a major consumer of Russian exports. Anyway Russian exports are essential items like crude oil; that it is a seller's market anyway. Russia has emerged as the second largest source of crude oil imports for India while Russia's share was small earlier. Sanctions hence do not play much role here. The biggest weapon under the control of US with its close allies is their sway over the financial markets, dollar being the main currency of international trade. By cutting off Russia from international financial and banking systems, they seek to seriously hamper its trade with other countries. Though this has serious effect, methods are being found to overcome this. Russia has demanded payment for its gas and oil in Russian currency- Ruble- and countries are paying. Russia has entered into agreement with a number of countries to conduct trade in their national currencies. US misuse of the reserve currency status of Dollar has long been subject of consideration and BRICS too considered trade in their national currencies. Oil plays a big role in determining world reserve currency. It is therefore significant that the largest exporter of crude in the world- Saudi Arabia- has decided to use Chinese currency for its trade with China. One consequence of the US led economic sanctions against Russia may be advance towards compromising dollar's status as the global reserve currency- obviously a result not intended by authors of the

sanctions. This may deal a big blow to the dominance of USA over international financial markets and thereby its status as biggest economic power.

### **Impact on the World People**

Western sanctions against Russia have led to sharp rise in prices of essential commodities, decline in the standards of life even in western countries and worsening balance of payment situation in a large number of countries which are dependent on imports for their essential commodities like petroleum, food grains, medicines etc. Prices of petrol and diesel have reached unprecedented height in US, UK and other western countries. US has been pressurizing Gulf countries to increase supply of crude oil but they have expressed their inability as they do not want to disturb unity of OPEC+ of which Russia is an important player and also because of logistical difficulties. Now Biden is going to meet the Crown prince of Saudi Arabia long considered pariah by Biden and Democrats, once again demonstrating that 'human rights' are only a tool for USA in service of its imperialist interests. The rise in the prices of crude in the international market has impacted prices of all commodities. Agriculture is also badly affected due to rise of prices of diesel and fertilizers.

Sanctions imposed by USA and its allies have also aggravated a serious food crisis in the world. Already a growing number of people are starving, malnourished and anemic and this number will grow much higher with disruption in the supply of food grains. Russia and Ukraine are among biggest suppliers of wheat and cereals; the two accounting for one third of wheat supply in the world market. Now Russian wheat is impacted by sanctions and Ukraine wheat is being held back due to ongoing war in that country



and Ukraine's insistence on full lifting of Russian blockade of Ukrainian ports. Ukraine has rejected plan of Turkey with Russian agreement for export from Ukrainian ports, the plan included inspection of incoming ships for arms. However, western powers are totally insensitive to needs of world people and are painting only Russian leadership as mainly responsible for current price rise of essential commodities including oil and food items, disowning responsibility of their actions. In fact, rising of prices of essential commodities had commenced much earlier during the period of Covid. Russian invasion of Ukraine has only aggravated the situation. In fact expansion of money supply especially by western countries – USA and others- and showering of bonanza on big corporate while draining expenditure on public production of essential goods thereby strengthening monopoly control of corporate have been significant factors behind rising prices. Ukraine war with cutting of supplies from Russia and also Ukraine, besides supply chain disruptions from other countries especially China due to Covid lockdowns have all contributed to an already crisis ridden global economy.

Imperialist countries are not even speaking of root causes of the growing crisis but are only blaming each other. The people across the affected countries are seething with anger, demanding more expenditure on social sectors and increased taxation of the rich. This growth of people's disaffection is being manifested in a number of ways like increasing anti-corporate mood among the people; people being no longer content on waiting for trickles. March of history has increased its pace. Disaffection is growing in all countries- in rich North and poor global South. Obviously this disaffection is targeting the effects and not yet the root cause; demanding immediate measures and not yet the solution i.e.

overthrow of imperialist world order; yet it carries within it the prospects of people marching against exploitation and oppression. And people are on the move.

## **Conclusion**

As argued above, the world is reaching an inflection point. While beset with growing domestic disillusionment and rising competition at the world stage, US imperialist rulers egged on by its vast military industrial complex and big corporate are bent on pursuing the dream of US dominated 21<sup>st</sup> Century, hoping to drown people's anger in the chauvinist wave. But US imperialism no longer holds sway over world production and world trade. It has little to offer to other countries; gone is the time when US could dangle the bait of share of US markets to different countries. President Biden has announced economic partnerships with Asian countries (Asia Pacific Economic Framework) and is going to announce one for Latin American countries in June. But he also made it clear that these do not involve any reduction in tariffs on imports from these countries nor offer any increase in their access to US markets. Trump's "America First" policy holds sway. Without this, countries are skeptical of biting the US bait.

While all the major powers are harping on high stakes in the war, the stakes are particularly high for US led Anglo Saxon imperialists. Despite ups and downs in their fortunes they (then colonial powers) have been dominating the world over last two centuries since the battle of Waterloo. After Second World War and victories of Communist Parties in East European countries and China, and growing people's movement against colonialism all over the world, there was a period when it appeared that "East wind prevails over the west wind." That was sabotaged by Soviet

revisionists who dreamt of ruling over the world in collaboration with US imperialism. At that time domination of western imperialist powers was challenged by socialist states and working class led revolutionary movements. But presently the challenge to the domination of US led western imperialist powers is posed by other imperialist powers. Contention among imperialist powers is intensifying in all regions of the world; from remote African enclaves to so-called developed European regions & including Latin America and Asia.

As mentioned earlier, ultimate effect of the present conflict will be shaped by economic factors. USA itself is facing growing internal dissention with sharp rise in prices. Biden Admn. is even forced to consider reducing tariffs on imported Chinese goods to ease prices which were imposed by Trump Admn. USA is undergoing a sharp internal division and Biden Admn. has not been successful in shaping its anti-Russia rhetoric to its benefit in domestic politics where it is losing ground. In USA the main challenge to ruling democrats is posed there by rightist forces led by Trump as the political landscape is largely carved up by so-called liberal defenders of finance capital oligarchy and white supremacist corporate defenders. This is also the picture in all developed countries where ultra-right forces are pushing forward anti-immigrant agenda.

This situation of unprecedented crisis of imperialist world system is favourable for the growth of the movement of working class and other toiling people. This is a situation which should enable communist revolutionary forces to overcome their weak state and mobilize the people into struggle against burdens heaped on them and develop these struggles into a powerful movement against the present system and the ruling classes which are heaping this

burden. The growing struggles of the people world over will help in combating anti-communism of the ruling classes. It is by increasing their role through participating, building and developing such struggles that communist revolutionaries will emerge stronger and come into a position to change the narrative shaped by ruling classes and agenda set by them.

By playing their role against the ruling classes in their own countries i.e. settling scores with them, while co-operating in anti-imperialist struggles of different countries, communist revolutionaries will play their role in the unfolding situation.



**Sri Lanka: Lions Roar as “Things Fall Apart”**

## **People’s Upsurge Against Rajapakses’ Neoliberal, Majoritarian Authoritarianism**

● **Zameer**

**E**conomic crisis leading to disruption of people’s lives and collapse of their livelihood has resulted in a political crisis in our Southern neighbour, Sri Lanka. Everything is going wrong for the people and they are rising against the ruling family, Rajapakses, who monopolize power in Sri Lanka. Whimsical decisions have played a role in precipitating the crisis, brewed by long duration of neoliberal policies; but then ‘strong’ men and women are ‘revered’

for their whims so long as these work. In third world countries these strong leaders have little control over happenings as they are propped up and undermined by imperialist powers. Led up the garden path, flowers turn into thorns and the green carpet into scorched earth. Once again, a show piece of imperialist capital-propelled- development lies in shambles.

First, the difficulties of the people. There is lack of food, fuel and medicines. There have been 10 to 12 hours of black out every day and the number of hours of black out have increased to 13-14 hours a day. Long queues are there for food, milk and fuel, including kerosene whose prices have sky rocketed. Serpentine queues have already taken a toll of elderly and sick with several having perished in the queues. To keep 'order', Army is deployed at state run fuel depots. Economic activities have come down including in industries which have had to close down or work for reduced hours for lack of power. Power plants have either closed down or reduced output due to lack of diesel. Even students' examinations have been put off as there is no ink or paper. Most of the newspapers and magazines have closed down and those afloat have reduced number of pages. There are no essential medicines and even emergency surgeries are not being carried out. Some people have also reached Indian shores due to economic hardships. Inflation has reached 25.7%; worse, essential commodities have just disappeared from the shelves.

People are protesting, clashing with police and armed forces. Protests at President's house have been dispersed by use of force. Govt. proclaimed Emergency and imposed curfew to check protests. But protests continue unbowed. On April 5, Govt. was forced to lift Emergency. Workers, students, lawyers, teachers, all sections of people are protesting and joining protests. Health workers throughout Sri Lanka called a general strike on April 8.

Economic hardships are so widespread that political crisis has engulfed the island. Strongmen of yesterday are appearing sheepish now. All ministers except the Prime Minister have offered their resignation. But the target of people's anger is the Rajapakses who have monopolized power in Sri Lanka and refuse to go. Not only the President and Prime Minister, there are also seven ministers from this family which also controls 75% of the country's Budget. To shield himself and his family from people's anger President Gotabaya Rajapakse invited opposition parties to join a National Unity Govt. Expectedly, main opposition parties have declined the offer, refusing to do scavenging for the ruling family. Resignation of President and Prime Minister- Rajapakse brothers, has crystallized as a battle cry of the protesters.

The present crisis presented itself as a serious depletion of foreign exchange reserves to foot the import bill, with Sri Lanka unable to buy essential necessities of daily use like food, fuel and medicines. Foreign currency reserves have dwindled down to less than two billion US\$ (these were US \$2.31 billion during February 2022). Exports have dwindled and tourism is at a standstill, putting further pressure. But this gross trade imbalance (trade deficit being 9.1 billion \$ in 2021) expresses the underlying imbalance of economy brought about by the policies pursued by successive govts. The main foreign exchange earners for Sri Lanka have been remittances of Sri Lankan labour working abroad, export of textile garments and tea and tourism. With remittances from abroad and export of textile garments stagnating since 2013 onwards, it was earnings from tourism that have been rising continuously, earning revenue of 4.4 billion \$ in 2018.

Some commentators are attributing the crisis to foreign debt burden. It is definitely an important factor but not the whole story.

Foreign debt of Sri Lanka was estimated to be over \$51 billion in 2021 while GDP was estimated to be around \$81 billion. Though a section of media has insinuated Chinese loans to be the main factor but analysis of Sri Lankan external debt shows it to be only one of them. As of end April 2021, 47% of the foreign debt of Sri Lanka was market borrowings and nearly 13% from Asian Development Bank. Loans from Japan, China and World Bank constituted roughly 10% each of foreign debt, loans from India 2% and rest is the foreign debt of Sri Lanka from other countries. Foreign Debt to GDP ratio sharply worsened over the last three years from roughly around 85% in the beginning of 2019 and 94% of the GDP in end 2019 to 119% of the GDP in 2021.

How has Sri Lanka reached the present situation? There are several factors which contributed to this situation. While Covid pandemic definitely hit tourism, Russia's war against Ukraine also contributed to the precipitation of the crisis. Travelers from Russia and Ukraine constituted more than one fourth of all tourists. Nearly 45% of the wheat imports of the island came from these two countries. More than half of the imports of soya, sunflower oil and pulses also come from Ukraine while Russia and Ukraine are also reportedly important suppliers of semi-finished products of iron and steel, asbestos, copper (cathodes) and potassium chloride for fertilizers. Besides, these two countries bought 18% of the black tea produced in Sri Lanka. But these are only some factors in what has been a crisis of imperialist backed corporate majoritarian authoritarianism.

Rajapakse Govt. symbolizes unity of corporate friendly neoliberal economic policies and majoritarian, in this case Sinhala Buddhist, authoritarianism. Rajapakse Govt. stands on the heap of the military-cleric regime. Military officers are appointed to head

the public sector undertakings and hard line clerics from Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force) are appointed to steer education, culture and laws towards a majoritarian authoritarian rule. People's upsurge brought about by economic collapse has once again proved that main challenge to corporate, especially foreign corporate backed majoritarian rule, comes from the people's movement. Parliamentary opposition parties are paying lip service to the people's anger doing little to bolster it and hoping to ride on the people's anger much like in India. Just this was the case during historic farmers' movement in India. The opposition parties have no alternate policy frame work; hence they are limiting themselves to criticism like not approaching IMF in time, thanking foreign countries for help and the like. In many ways development of crisis in Sri Lanka has parallels with India, Sri Lanka in fact is ahead in some respects in chronological order.

The economic catastrophe was long in the making. Sri Lanka was the first country in South Asia to embrace neoliberal agenda. It was the UNP Govt. led by J.R. Jayawardene which adopted what were then called 'open economy reforms' in 1977. These were accompanied by attacks on trade union rights with setting up of free trade zones without TU rights and enactment of Prevention of Terrorism Act. With infusion of imperialist capital, a bubble was created which burst a few years later. In the need to divert people's anger away from economic policies pursued by ruling classes, Jayawardene Govt. stoked majority Sinhala chauvinism. Attacks on Tamils were intensified with 1983 infamous massacre of Tamils. What followed were decades of conflict between Sinhala majority Govt. and Tamils, including war between LTTE and Sri Lankan Govt. It is in the later stages of this war that Rajapakse family consolidated its leadership over ruling class politics of Sri Lanka.



Civil war in Sri Lanka ended in 2009 with total suppression of democratic rights and even cold blooded murders of Tamils in Northeast by the military under Rajapakse brothers' govt. They inherited and strengthened a majoritarian Administration forged during over two decades of conflict. From 2009 followed a second wave of liberalization with flurry of multilateral and bilateral loans mainly from imperialist countries. China too entered in a big way with funding the infrastructure projects. But what use of world class infrastructure with no improvement in main sectors which provided bulk of the employment to people of Srilanka, with agriculture and industry employing nearly 25% and 28% respectively, rest being contributed by services. While GDP figures including per capita GDP improved, people's hardships were not mitigated. This imperialist sponsored model was waiting to burst in which authoritarian Rajapakse extended no mean helping hand.

Besides suppression of democratic rights and cold blooded killings of Tamils towards the end of civil war, Mahinda Rajapakse's term was marked by rising contradiction between US and India on the one hand and China on the other. Rajapakse also helped growth of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism especially its organization Bodu Bala Sena which articulated especially anti-Muslim programme in Sri Lanka, like against Halal, Hijab and raised the issue of Sri Lankan migrant workers in Islamic countries not allowed to practice their religion. BBS also held that “.. democratic and pluralistic values are killing Sinhala race” and similar things, with which we are quite familiar in India. No wonder RSS forged close relations with BBS and similar chauvinist organization in Myanmar as a part of its anti-Muslim front in the region. Rajapakse was defeated in elections in 2015 January. He had at that time blamed Indian agency RAW for orchestrating his defeat attributing it to Indian Govt. seeing him

close to Chinese Govt.

Rajapakses, who had been the main representatives of Sinhala chauvinism, utilized the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka in April 2019 and consequent anti-Muslim propaganda in Sri Lanka. Younger Rajapakse- Gotabaya- who had been defense minister during the civil war, was elected President. During their stay outside the govt. Rajapakses had built bridges with US and youngest brother Basil, who had been finance minister, was a US citizen. They also repaired their relations with India's ruling RSS-BJP. After the parliamentary elections that followed, Mahinda Rajapakse became Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. They interpreted their victory as a license for their majoritarian authoritarianism and unleashed an autocratic and whimsical rule.

After their return to power, with their programme to create "vistas of prosperity and splendour" Rajapakses showered largesse on the very rich. National Building Tax of 2% which was being levied on all businesses was waived off and wealth tax reduced. To help Business, VAT was reduced from 15% to 8%. Total tax exemptions were granted to religious institutions. This greatly reduced the revenues of the Govt. which fell to only 9% of the GDP.

Considering themselves unchecked and not responsible to the people, Rajapakse Govt. in May 2019 banned use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides (prohibiting their imports) and announced total switch to organic farming. This sudden switch without any background preparation went with their autocratic way but agriculture declined. Prior to ban, 91% farmers used chemical fertilizers and pesticides. There was sharp decline in agricultural produce. Sri Lanka used to be self-sufficient in rice production which fell by 20%. There was sharp decline in the production of tea

leaves which has been the main export of Sri Lanka. The order was withdrawn in November 2021 but damage to main crops was already done. This unprepared, unregulated, whimsical switch forced Sri Lanka to import even rice and reduced its exports.

While trade balance was distorted, payment of foreign debt servicing became a further burden. It will be nigh impossible for Sri Lanka to service its debts. Sri Lanka which used to boast of its transition to middle income country is going around with begging bowl. China has already offered 2.8 billion US \$ and is considering giving a further \$ 2.5 billion. India has offered US \$ 2.4 billion. Even Pakistan and Bangladesh have already given credits of US \$ 200 million. IMF too has extended credit.

With economic collapse leading to political crisis, people of Sri Lanka are out in the streets. People's anger has pushed the ruling Rajapakses and their military chauvinist backers on the backfoot. However, what type of change this anger brings about will be determined by the conscious forces leading the struggle and how much and for what aims they can mobilize the people. Opposition ruling class parties may benefit from this anger but these parties stand for the same policies which have led to the present catastrophe and are discredited among the people.

Another important lesson of the developments in Sri Lanka is that people's struggles for their basic economic issues are most important struggles for pushing the agenda of chauvinist majoritarianism on the backfoot, while conscious struggle will be required to decisively defeat the forces championing this agenda. Such struggles bring the people together cutting across social divisions. Same lesson was furnished by the historic farmers' movement in India. Nobody hears of BBS nowadays in Sri Lanka

though they will most probably resurface when the movement subsides if the present ruling class politics remains and so does remain their need to divide the people to perpetuate their rule and serve the interests of imperialists and domestic reactionaries.

Sri Lankan crisis has much relevance for India though the latter is a large country with deeper pockets of economy. However, some aspects are quite alarming. Indian Govt. also heavily relies on borrowings to meet state expenses. With elections out of the way for the time being, Indian Govt. has increased fuel prices 11 times over last 13 days. On the other hand, public sector assets are being sold from banks to railways. Govt. efforts at monetizing public assets is continuing with pace. Besides, interest rates of provident fund have been slashed. Despite admittedly record GST collections, states' dues of GST have not been given. Indian rulers too are following the policies which are against the interests of Indian people and in favour of foreign and Indian corporate.

Sri Lanka is witnessing a sharp crisis but the factors leading to this crisis are present in a number of countries including India, following imperialist sponsored path of 'development'. And in this lies the lessons for the people and tasks before the revolutionary forces.

April 8, 2022



# **Keeping the Dream Alive: In Memory of Comrade George Reddy**

● **Pradeep Burgula**

**"H**e placed himself in the path of death without asking for permission or excuses: he went to meet it in ....." The famous historian, Eduardo Galeano wrote these lines on the death of Che Guevara in 1967. George Reddy, a Gold Medalist in Physics, research scholar and a boxer met death in a similar fashion on 14th April 1972 in one of the hostels in Osmania University. He was killed by the hired goons of the RSS-ABVP communal forces, the killers making sure that he died and stabbed him to death. It is now fifty years since and the friends of George are commemorating the 50th death anniversary, apart from the PDSU which on every 14th April commemorates his martyrdom.

Hazaaron khwahishen aisi ke har khwahish pe dam nikle  
Bahut nikle mere armaan, lekin phir bhi kam nikle  
Thousands of desires, each a deadly force,  
I have had surfeit of them, still I yearn for more.

(Mirza Ghalib)

Those were the tumultuous sixties, the second half of the decade in particular stretching into the seventies. A period when

young rebels and revolutionaries among the students in the universities and colleges in many developed capitalist and underdeveloped countries of the world were building images of 'revolution'. Some conjured up images of revolution as emerging from the mountains and the countryside. There was that 'rage' that manifested itself in various 'movements'. The Soweto student revolt against the apartheid in South Africa, the May Student upsurge in France, the emerging Black Panthers movement in the US, and above all the Vietnamese peoples struggle against US imperialism and at home the peasant uprisings in Naxalbari and Srikakulam were important political events of those times. As Tariq Ali wrote in one of his articles, 'Where has the Rage Gone', "A storm swept the world in 1968. It started in Vietnam then blew across Asia, crossing the sea and mountains to Europe and beyond... if the Vietnamese were defeating the world's most powerful state, surely we too can defeat our own rulers.... That was the dominant mood of the more radical of the 60s generation." George grew up to be our hero in this political milieu.

As one who was on the OU campus doing graduation in Science College, I had the opportunity to associate with George as one of the members of the progressive group that was a precursor to the PDSU formed after his death. Even before my first formal meeting with George sometime in June 1971, I had heard of him as a fighter with a group of his own. In those days, the CPI-affiliated Marxist Educational Society used to organise lectures on topical issues and I remember having attended two such meetings in YMCA where the CPI ideologue Mohit Sen was the speaker. It was here I saw a short statured fair looking person raising questions and debating the issues. That was George whom I did not know as George then. After my formal meet up with George, interactions

became frequent and the canteen adjacent to the Astronomy department in Science College became some kind of a regular ‘adda’ where we would sit to listen to George discuss on a variety of subjects. Those who were frequenting this adda included opponents of Marxism and Socialism holding in their hands books like ‘Atlas Shrugged’, Fountain Head by Ayn Rand. It was in this rendezvous that debates around issues of ideology and philosophy, science and revolution used to take place. George had a clear Marxist world outlook and in order to spread and inculcate socialist ideas and ideals, he formed study circles. I was a part of one such study circle studying Lenin’s classic, ‘Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism’.

Those were times when the revolutionary icon, Che Guevara exerted profound influence on the young radical minds and to many of us George was a local version. George once organised a debate on the topic, ‘Armed Revolution in India”, in the Science College in which he made the concluding remarks that were quite significant and stuck to my mind. He raised the issue of violence, questioned the colonial mindset of accepting white man’s supremacy even after the end of colonial rule. Looking back, the very subject of debate he organised was pertinent in the context of the political situation obtaining then, that is the post-Naxalbari, Srikakulam armed peasant upsurges.

George was a multi-faceted personality. An academically brilliant student, it was said that when he enrolled for Ph.D., none of the professors from the Physics department volunteered to be his guide and it was only after a professor in the Astronomy department accepted to be his guide that he proceeded to do research. George was concerned about the downtrodden in society

and I remember when we were talking about the rickshaw workers in the city, at that time they were huge in numbers, he asked a question as to how one felt sitting in a rickshaw when another human being was pulling it on the up. He was an altruist in a sense. He was a fearless person who, to many of us, was a symbol of courage who would not hesitate to take on a bunch of goons single-handed. It looked as if he had conquered fear. Two months before his death, that is sometime in February, 1972 he was attacked by goons near his house in the DD colony. He resisted and fought back but was injured. Some told him to take precautions and not move alone. But he would say that death would not get him so early. He was an adventurer alright, but as Che said of himself that he was “of a different kind of those who risk their skins to prove their truths”. Above all, he was a revolutionary who dreamt of a society free from exploitation and oppression.

That was the rage of the sixties that created extraordinary personalities like George who continues to be an inspiration, an exemplary martyr in the cause of the people. Forty years have passed and in this long period the legacy left behind by George has continued in different, difficult environs. The rage continues but in different forms expressed in the various class and democratic movements. The label of PDS under which George used to bring out pamphlets, became an organisation at the state level after his death and in 1974 it was formally named PDSU. The imposition of the Emergency in 1975 stifled all democratic activity in the country, with innumerable fake encounter killings in the state that included the mantle-bearer of George, Jampala Prasad and many more like Surapaneni Janardhan and Srihari. In the last forty years many like Madhusudhan Raj, Rangavalli, Veeraiah fell to the bullets of the State, but the rage continues till today.



Dreams for a better future are still alive and they cannot be snuffed out. As one poet says, the most dangerous of all dangers is the death of dreams. Malcolm X speaking to the black students once said “you will get freedom by letting your enemy know that you will be able to do anything to get your freedom, then you will get it. It is the only way you get it... They will call you an extremist or a subversive or seditious or a red or radical. But when you stay radical long enough and get enough people to be like you, you will get your freedom”.

[On 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Martyrdom of George Reddy on April 14, 2022 mass programmes were organized at several centres in Telengana and Andhra Pradesh. In Hyderabad many programmes were organized. We are here giving a photo of a meeting organized by PDSU in Nizamabad (Telengana).



# **Discussion on ‘Sanctifying the Culture of Hate and Future of Indian Democracy**

Janhastakshep (Delhi) organized a discussion on the above topic on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2022 at the Press Club of India. Among the eminent personalities who addressed the meeting were senior journalist Prem Shankar Jha, Hartosh Singh Bal – Political Editor of Caravan, senior journalist and founding editor of ‘The Wire’ Sidharth Vardarajan, former professor at Delhi University and noted author, columnist and theatre personality Shamsul Islam, author, activist and film maker Sanjay Kak, and the President of the Press Club Umakant Lakheda. The topic of the discussion was introduced by senior journalist and co-convenor of Janhastakshep, Anil Dubey while the meeting was presided over and conducted by convenor of Janhastakshep, Vikas Bajpai.

Among those in the audience were academics, lawyers, journalists, students, authors and cultural activists.

Highlighting different aspects of this ‘Culture of Hate’ being promoted chiefly by the RSS and BJP government at the Centre the speakers highlighted the social, cultural, political and economic aspects of the problem. Declaring that this culture of hate was based on utter lies and falsehoods being dinned into peoples’ minds, Prem Shankar Jha narrated numerous examples of the syncretic religious traditions of Islam as practiced in Kashmir to debunk the utterly

misleading agenda about Kashmiri Muslims that is being promoted through the film ‘The Kashmir Files.’

Highlighting the erasure of Muslims from everyday life as a policy, Siddharth Varadarajan stated that rather than stage big communal riots as in the past, the Muslims today are being sought to be alienated through small scale but high impact tactics. He said – “They are trying several things – love jihad, hijab issue, conversion, land jihad, triple talaq, Babri Masjid verdict etc. They are bleeding Muslims with several small cuts. .... The cumulative impact of the lynchings, hatred, and creation of doubts about each other has much more of an effect.”

Addressing the gathering Shamsul Islam emphasized that it need be understood by all that RSS is not against only the Muslims and the Christians, but also against a large section of Hindus too. He said – “RSS is against the fight for equality. When the Constitution was adopted, RSS reiterated that they wanted Manusmriti, which is against most Hindus and women.” Commenting on the role of the traditional leadership among Muslims, Islam stated that rather than seeking to unify with the larger oppressed majority, they are getting embroiled in the RSS game plan. Islam cautioned - “We are now fighting cases stating that Hijab is an integral part of Islam. We are playing the RSS game. We have to fight the disease and not just the symptoms.”

Activist film maker Sanjay Kak emphasized the need to accept and respect the Kashmiri people given their distinct cultural, linguist, political and religious identity rather than seeking to dilute their identity to suite political agenda of the powers that be. Kak expressed his sense of alarm at the manner in which the rationale for killing and dispossession of Muslims is being cooked up in the

film ‘The Kashmir Files.’ He warned that the willfully misleading agenda is bound to hit back at the larger Indian society sooner than later.

Highlighting the trajectory of the rise of RSS-BJP, Hartosh Bal underscored the unbreakable vote bank enjoyed by BJP in the north of Vindhya among the upper castes, primarily the Brahmins and the Baniyas. He said that the upper caste consolidation is fostered through a well thought out strategy of hatred that is directed at the construction of Muslims as the new untouchable class. BJP is working towards the permanent untouchability of Muslims without which the entire project of ‘Hindu Rashtra’ shall stand undermined. By contrast, the other political parties had failed to bring larger sections of people under their fold.



# **IFTU CALL ON MAY DAY 2022**

**CELEBRATE MAY DAY, HOLD HIGH THE BANNER OF STRUGGLE**

**INTENSIFY THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE LABOUR CODES!**

**FIGHT FOR JOB SECURITY AND AGAINST PRIVATISATION!**

**FIGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE UNORGANISED SECTOR WORKERS!**

**T**his May 1 will be the 136th year of the historic struggle of the Chicago workers for an eight hour working day. “Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest and eight hours for what we will” was the slogan. The first days of May in 1886 witnessed a spate of workers’ rallies against the horrific conditions in which they were placed and blood spilled at the Hay Market Square on 4th when violence broke out. The subsequent trial, that was a farce, convicted the leaders of this eight hour working day movement and on 11th November, 1887 Parsons, Spies, Fischer and Engel were hanged to death. They despised capitalism as it is based on the exploitation of the many by a few and espoused socialism as it can “secure the welfare of every human being”. **This call by the martyrs for socialism as an alternative to capitalism has immense relevance in the present world of capitalism which is causing**

**impoverishment of a huge mass of people, mounting unemployment and inequalities in societies.**

In our country today joblessness, low wage employment, insecure and temporary employment are growing, with unemployment rate reaching a forty year high at 8%. Forty five percent of the workforce earns a paltry income of less than six thousand rupees per month. While in 2018 alone 11 millions lost jobs, the CMIE stated that in the period of the pandemic some 12 crores lost jobs. Inequalities in the last decade have risen. The top ten percent of the rich own 77.4% of the wealth while 60% own a mere 4% of the wealth. What a CEO would earn in ten minutes, a domestic servant will have to slog for a year.

Viewed in this backdrop the four labour codes, if implemented, will further exacerbate unemployment and joblessness as retrenchments, lay-offs and lockouts have been made easy by giving a free hand to the managements to hire and fire. Contractualization and casualization will be dominant. This will have a spiraling effect on the economy with purchasing power of the workers further sliding down that in turn affects demand. These anti-worker labour codes were to come into effect from April 1 but this has been postponed by Centre saying that some states have not yet notified rules. The NDA government seems hell bent on enforcing these codes despite the huge opposition from the working class as exhibited in the recent two-day general strike. This strike may also have been a factor in delaying implementation. But **the struggle for the repeal of these codes needs to be intensified if workers rights are to be protected.**

The NDA government has been declaring its commitment to sell away public assets to private players. Public sector industries

and public sector banks are already under the axe of privatization. LIC is in for divestment. It does not matter for the government if a particular PSU is making profits and paying huge taxes and dividends to it. The government loves privatization just as it loves Adanis and Ambanis and the like. It intends to fatten the coffers of this class of the rich and tries to make us believe that the economy will grow and will be safe in their hands and it will be ache din for all; it will be sab ka saath, sab ka vikas. We have seen the adverse effects in several parts of the world where this policy was implemented. It has aggravated the malaise of unemployment with throwing out workers from jobs, caused wage depression by employing contract, casual labour that again impacted the economies. Privatization is accompanied by job losses and contractual employment. Therefore this policy has to be resisted by the working class. In addition the Central Govt. has adopted a policy to sell away land with PSUs. Acres and acres of land will be handed over to private players. **Workers must demand repeal of both these policies.**

In the second quarter of 2020, the country witnessed the exodus of a massive mass of workers trekking to their far away villages from the places of work in metropolitan cities as a consequence of the harsh and unplanned lockdown. Thousands slogging in the construction sites and in other work sites were moving away desperately to their abodes as they were thrown out from work in the pandemic. These were the nameless making a living in the unorganized sectors of the economy and the government declared that they do not have any concrete data. **These are migrant labour who suffered the most during the lockdown and it is estimated that their number would be around 14 crores in the country.** The employment share in

the unorganized sector is 83% of the total workforce and in this category are the Anganwadi workers, Asha workers and other scheme workers. Add to this 83% another 9.8% informal workers in the organized sector, we get nearly 92% in the unorganized sector. It is this huge majority of the workforce of the country that are the most disadvantaged and exploited without many statutory protections that accrue to those in the organized sector. They constitute a huge majority in the workforce and their interests should be protected while unity of different sections of the working class is the need of the hour as those in power are engineering, encouraging divisiveness in the name of religion.

This May Day comes at a time when working class and common people are being crushed under rising prices including the price of fuels like diesel and gas. A large part of the price of these is of taxes which go to the pockets of central and state govts. Transport workers, auto workers are facing tremendous strain. App based companies continue to earn profits while drivers of their vehicles bear the brunt of fuel price rise. Workers must fight to demand that Govts bring down fuel costs and rein in price rise.

May Day 2022 comes amidst the Russian attack on Ukraine. This is a result of the race for supremacy within the imperialist camp, chiefly America and Russia. Imperialist wars are a threat to world peace. The attack must end and so must military pacts like NATO.

Come let us mark May Day 2022 by resolving to build broad-based struggles to fight back the attacks on working class and to defend rights and demand job security.

**(Issued by National Committee of IFTU)**



# **Successful Conclusion of Founding Conference of AP Progressive Anganwadi Union**

**T**he Founding Conference of AP Progressive Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union was successfully held on 24-4-2022 at Vijaywada (Andhra Pradesh), after overcoming many hurdles created by the State Govt. In the face of the latter, the Anganwadi members of IFTU showed tremendous quiet courage and resolve. The Union was formed on the decision of the AP State Committee of IFTU, which guided the entire fight back as well as the Conference.

Over 800 delegates from 8 old districts of Andhra Pradesh and roughly equaling 15 new districts, attended the Conference. Of course the preponderant number of delegates was from Chittoor District and it is the Chittoor Dist Com of IFTU which has shown the way to IFTU committees of both state and in the rest of the country of how to form a live anganwadi sector union. The District's comrades are with IFTU since 2018 and the formation of an all AP union was begun since then. Some time was lost due to Covid lockdowns, but this founding Conference was the materialization of efforts of these four years.

The Conference was scheduled to begin at Vijaywada at 10 AM. IFTU state and Anganwadi union leaders had arranged to reach the city with delegates from their districts after overnight journeys in buses, vans and trains. Thus delegates were to come in

from Chittoor, Kadappa, West and East Godavari, Vijaynagram, Vishakhapatnam, Srikakulam, Anantapuram and other districts, while of course all comrades of Vijaywada were into full activity for over two weeks preparing for hosting the Conference.

14 buses with anganwadi workers and helpers set off from Chittoor district on 23rd evening, hoping to reach Vijaywada in the early hours of 24th. All Anganwadi workers and helpers had made contributions themselves for buses' expenses. However, 6 hours away from the city, on the Nellore highway, police began stopping the buses and demanding that they turn back. 4 buses were thus stopped late at night, before the leaders, with presence of mind, warned the buses coming behind them and thereby saved the day for their Conference. Thus 10 buses left the highway, turned into loop line route and reached Vijaywada well in time for the Conference.

The comrades in the stopped buses sat down on the highway in a protest dharna. Ruling class political leaders appeared to



help them return, the police insisted that they do so, but the adamant delegates sat on the Nellore highway in front of 3 buses for 15 hours including through the night. IFTU state leadership initiated contacting media of Vijaywada and Nellore district. It came into the lime light the same night. Ultimately the Govt. of AP was forced to retrack and in the morning the buses were allowed to proceed towards Vijaywada.

Delegates from other districts arrived in the morning hours, with police briefly detaining delegates from Eluru as they marched out of the railway station raising slogans for the success of the Conference. All delegates who had reached gathered at Mogalaraja Puram centre in Vijaywada, at a 1 km. distance from the Conference Hall, elated at the news that the delegates who had spent the whole night on the highway had now been allowed to proceed. A rally of over 600 delegates joined by PDSU, IFTU and POW activists of Vijaywada marched down to the Conference Hall in a colorful march, waving IFTU flags. Ahead of the rally danced the troupe of Arunodaya from Vishakhapatnam and West Godavari, keeping perfect pace with the drumbeats. The Rally was led by office bearers of IFTU AP State Committee, AP POW and especially of the AP Pragatisheel Union of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers.

The Rally concluded outside the Conference Hall at Siddharth Academy Auditorium where flag hoisting took place. To deafening slogans hailing the red flag and the Union, Com. Gangawati (from Kadappa) President of the Anganwadi Union unfurled the flag. The delegates then marched into the hall and the Conference.

The proceedings of the Conference were presided over by Com Gangawati and Com. Shiromani who also led the hall in observing a minute's silence. Third member of proposed presidium,

Com. Bharati, could not reach in time as she was in buses that were stopped. The first speaker was Com Aparna, President of National Committee of IFTU. She began by condemning on behalf of the National Committee, the anti women worker AP Govt. which had forced women workers to spend the whole night on the highway to defend their right to attend the Founding Conference for which permission had been granted by the AP Govt. She placed this attack against the countrywide attack on democratic rights spearheaded by the fascist Central Govt.

Discussing the issues of the 'voluntary' or scheme workers, she reiterated the demand of IFTU that scheme workers must be recognized as regular govt employees as their jobs are regular. They must be entitled to minimum wages of the state they work in, to ESI, PF and other rights of regular workers.

Discussing recent experiences of struggles of anganwadi workers in various states post pandemic period for higher wages, the use of ESMA against them by Delhi Govt, with holding of wages by Haryana Govt, she underlined the need for sustained, wide based and determined struggles to be recognized as regular workers. With around 28 lakh Anganwadi workers and helpers, another few lakh each AASHA, mid day meal workers, assistants and allied workers, almost all women, this massive women workforce was systematically exploited countrywide by taking regular work for pittances paid under various lofty names. This workforce also has to fight back the 4 anti worker Labour Codes while expanding its own rights. She also stressed the need for leading women workers to take part in trade union committees at all levels.

The Conference was also addressed by Com. Laxmi (Gen Sec AP POW and also Legal Advisor to the Anganwadi Union), Com.

Polari (Gen Secretary AP IFTU Com), Com. Jyoti (General Secretary of the Anganwadi Union), Com T. Srinivas (NCM and President Telengana State IFTU Committee), Com Hari Krishna (Honorary President of the Anganwadi Union and member of AP IFTU Committee) and other comrades. Com. Hari Krishna discussed the problems faced by anganwadis in AP in detail, the anti struggle attitude of other unions and emphasized the need to build IFTU unions in all sections of scheme workers.

By the time the delegates reassembled after lunch, the buses blocked by police arrived. These delegates led by Com Bharati of AP IFTU Com and also an Executive member of Anganwadi union, and Ganga Devi of Chittoor district were marched onto the stage and given a standing ovation by the entire Hall. Thereupon, representatives of AP committees of PDSU, Arunodaya, POW and AIKMS addressed the delegates, followed by Com Bharti, Com Ganga (from Chittoor and a member of Anganwadi Union Executive) Com Rani and others. In her speech Com. Bharati told how CITU leaders of Chittoor Dist had pretended to see off the buses and then sent photos of the number plates of the buses to the Police.

At the end, the Executive Body of the Anganwadi Union was announced and it was administered the oath by Com. K. Polari. The meeting concluded with the address of Com. P. Prasad (Secretary IFTU NC and President of AP IFTU State Com). He discussed the challenges being faced by workers countrywide.

The entire Conference was enlivened by the spirited performances of singers from Arunodaya.



# **Nava Keralam - Pinarai Vijayan's love letter to Indian ruling Class**

● **Amit Chakraborty**

**T**he Kerala Model of Development (KMD) has often been the object of much admiration in development debates in India. Kerala, which has been in the forefront of literacy and educational achievements, obviously deserves credit. A state with much lower child and infant mortality rate deserves even more admiration. But this is not the whole story. We must try to understand the real content of earlier Kerala Model and where it is heading under the leadership of Kerala Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

‘Nava Keralam’ (New Kerala) was the mostly circulated word at the recent State conference of the CPI (M) in Ernakulam. There Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, presented a ‘CPM and development vision for modern Kerala’, an alternative policy route to reinvigorate the ‘Kerala Model’. While the State has ranked high on several social and sustainable development parameters, its inability to increase production, develop infrastructure and generate employment is telling. The recent turn of events during Covid19 pandemic including return migration and a change in its demographic profile added to the turmoil. But the attack on fiscal federalism and the GST regime tightened the noose around the State’s finances.

During the first term Pinarayi Govt. claimed to focus on enhancing the infrastructure of the state. Now they are looking for a time to bring in more changes for a new Kerala. It is similar to the call given by Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya in the name of ‘development’ and ‘industrialization’ about a decade back that led to the disastrous consequences.

The ‘policy document for a new Kerala’, presented by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan at the state conference of CPI(M), says that the investments of global finance will be allowed in selected areas to improve the use of technology and better productivity. However, it will be controlled! Even Com. Lenin, while running a workers’ state, lamented that the steering of the state appears to be controlled by the bureaucrats not workers! Here in a reactionary state great Pinarayi claims to control them. Surely he will control. But on whose behalf? The answer is blowing in the wind.

Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, CPI (M) state secretary, said that it is normal for such a policy to get more attraction. According to him, some people who did not like the return of the Left in 2021 are opposing this policy.

Pinarayi’s Nava Keralam is claimed to target the improvement in knowledge production to boost the higher education sector. This has been planned to be linked to industrial production. The new policy aims at drawing private investments in education sector. SFI, the student wing of CPI (M), had fought fiercely against privatization of education during Congress led UDF regime in Kerala. They are also fighting against ‘New Education Policy’, privatization and other anti people policies of Central government. The document coins the term knowledge society. SFI is fighting against building PPP model educational institutions in

West Bengal. It is very interesting to note that no longer are Public education or workers' rights getting any importance in Pinarayi's policies but his priority is 'knowledge society' to serve the intellectual demand of finance capital. This document also says that the trade unions should adopt positions to ensure the smooth functioning of industries. The call to TUs to ensure smooth functioning of industries in the state is part and parcel of de-unionization initiative of neoliberal order in a different cloak.

The development model is also boasting of K-rail or Silverline project. It is a project by Kerala government and Indian Railways. A superfast train will run from Thiruvanthapuram to Kasaragode. It is a 530 km project which will play havoc with the environment and biodiversity of that region. Eminent Ecologist Mr. Madhab Gadgil is highly critical of this project. It will cost about Rs.64 000 crores but Railways' estimate is about 1.24 lakh crore rupees. The time to be taken for it to be completed is about 37 years if it is done at the speed of Delhi Metro and 127 years if done at the speed of Kochi metro. Still Pinarayi is after the project for better future! It is further more interesting to note that Pinarayi's party in Maharashtra is fighting against the Bullet train project in Maharashtra on the ground of displacement and other sociopolitical issues for the people inhabiting the proposed project area. Dichotomy is the other word for CPI (M)'s dialectical materialism.

There are several failures in Kerala Model. The foremost is the inability to meet the employment aspirations of the people. To earn their livelihood they are forced to live under authoritarian regimes overseas. The public provision of health and education has been financed by borrowing. Kerala has the highest per capita public debt among States implying that they are passing on the bill for their own maintenance to future generations.



High levels of women's education have not led to an equally high participation of women in the labour force or in governance. High levels of violence against women including domestic violence as well as sexual violence are prevailing; even dowry system continues to be still a menace. Women comprise only around 11 per cent of the elected legislators or MLAs. The rate of depression among women in Kerala is also stated to be high.

Kerala government has failed miserably to regulate rampant quarrying, which destabilizes the ecology. In 2015, the Congress party did away with the requirement of environmental clearance for quarries in existence for three years. Then in 2017 the Pinarayi Vijayan government took initiative to relax the rules for quarrying further. The provisions of the legislation governing conversion of agricultural land into construction sites were weakened. Kerala's principal political parties, irrespective of their ideologies and politics, have responded to commercial interests over people's interests. Scheduled castes, tribes, fisherfolk and plantation labour have been excluded in this 'model'. Despite radical land reforms "Land to the tiller" slogan remains unrealized. A study in the Economic and Political Weekly based on NSSO 70th round data shows that in 2012-13, 93.2 per cent of scheduled tribes and 72.3 per cent of scheduled castes in Kerala are landless (owning no land other than the homestead). Kerala's Gini coefficient, 0.83 (only Punjab and Bihar have higher numbers), shows that land distribution remains highly skewed.

Although in 1957 the revenue minister had announced in the State assembly that 7.82 lakh hectares of land would be available for redistribution, hardly 5 per cent of it was redistributed. The exemptions were given to plantation crops and there were series of amendments to ratify mala fide transfers and that too when land

became a lucrative means of accumulation of wealth by influx of Gulf money. “Land to the tiller” slogan vanished, resurfacing only during political debates.

Following the rapid commercialization of health and education since 1991 the price hike excluded the poor from these services. Health expenditure in Kerala as a percentage of SGDP expanded at the rate of 0.30 per cent per annum and that of education 0.91 per cent during the 1980s, in the last 15 years (2000-2015) there has been a decline of the order of (-)0.49 per cent and (-)1.85 per cent respectively.

Gap between monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) of the bottom 10 per cent and the topmost decile has widened since 1993-94. Toiling people belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes, fisherfolks, plantation workers, continue to remain marginalized.

Alcoholism in Kerala is exceptionally high. The government is not very keen on its part to reduce high levels of alcohol use; moreover they have come up with premium liquor shops for the privileged. It appears also that environmental aspects have not received the desired attention in the official development effort. It does not appear that such thinking has been appreciated in official thinking and the actual working of successive governments.

With its long coastline and as a land of many rivers and hills, Kerala in any case needs better environment protection and this is increasingly important also for protection from disasters including cyclones and floods. Unfortunately adequate protections and precautions have not received the due attention in this state.

In this backdrop if we try to understand Pinarayi Vijayan’s development model then we can easily appreciate the retrograde

political course of CPI (M) party. The so called Bengal Kerala line of parliamentarism in CPI (M) party programme has completed its lifecycle and its obituary has been written in West Bengal, now it is Kerala's turn.

When CPI (M) was formed in 1964 it upheld the 1951 policy statement against the revisionists. But now CPI (M) like the CPI earlier, has abandoned the 1951 policy statement. In article number 112 of CPI(M)'s earlier party programme it had been mentioned: "The party will utilize opportunities that present themselves, of bringing into existence governments pledged to carry out the minimum programme of providing immediate relief to the people" and give "immediate relief to the people and thus strengthen the mass movement the party will continue to educate the mass of the people on the need for replacing the present bourgeois landlord state and government headed by the big bourgeoisie". This pledge did not bar them from killing peasants in Naxalbari or at other places during their tenure of governance. The present CPI (M) party programme has replaced this by: ..... "The party will utilize opportunities that present themselves, of bringing into existence governments pledged to carry out a programme of providing relief to the people and strive to project and implement alternative policies within the existing limitations." They also claim that "The formation of such governments will strengthen the revolutionary movements of the working people and thus help the process of building the people's democratic front." CPI (M) party, even after their retrogression in building peoples movement during Left front government regime in West Bengal, shamelessly revised the programme, "The party therefore will continue to educate the mass of the people on the need for replacing the present bourgeois landlord state and government headed by the big bourgeoisie even

while utilizing opportunities for forming such governments in the States or the Centre, depending on the concrete situation and thus strengthen the mass movement”. (Paragraph 7.17)

There are some people who think that present amendment in CPI (M)’s ‘government formation programme’ reflects the degeneration of CPI (M). It is definitely so but its root lies in CPI (M)’s Kerala Bengal road. This amendment is a willful culmination of that revisionist politics. Pinarayi’s model is part and parcel of that revisionist legacy. If we follow their revised programme it is clear that their earlier concept of state governments is of those of transitory nature which strive to implement the minimum programme of giving immediate relief to the people. This has been supplemented with ‘alternative policies within the existing limitations’. The amendment gives the message that even within the limitations of the existing reactionary state people can be given relief by implementing alternate policies. Abandoning the previous policy that the party will not participate in a government where it has no decisive influence, they have decided to take part in the Central government as a junior partner of bourgeois parties. Paragraph 112 of CPI (M) programme did not prevent them from killing peasants in Naxalbari; 34 years of Left Front government in West Bengal bear testimony to all sorts of corruption and anti people policies of neoliberal order. They are imbibed with the ruling class policies and activities and now politically ideologically ready to get into central government at least as a junior partner. Pinarayi Vijayan’s development model is sending this signal to finance capital and Indian ruling class.

Pinarayi’s ‘Nava Keralam’ is a love letter to Indian ruling class with a tag line “We are in the queue, please don’t forget us!”



## **On the 165<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Beginning of 1857 War of Independence**

# **Bring Back Remains of Bahadur Shah Zafar**

**M**ay 10 marks the day when in 1857 soldiers of Britain's Indian Army began a revolt against the colonial rule. It led to rise of the people through vast parts of India against colonial rule. It indeed was the first pan India people's war for independence. Basically it was the first independent assertion of Indian peasantry, while also the last hurrah of the independent minded feudal princes.

This war continued for nearly two years in which reportedly 23 lakh Indians laid down their lives. This has been hailed as the biggest war of 19<sup>th</sup> Century by many historians. Indians who rose in revolt against British colonial rule regarded themselves independent of foreign rule till the advent of British rule, hence proclaimed last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar to lead the Indians' war for independence. Events of 1857 are a clear refutation of revisionist history pedaled by Hindutva inspired historians that India was nor free even before British colonial rule. This revisionist history was patronized by colonial rulers as it negated the importance of anti-colonial struggle of Indian people.

It has been nearly 75 years since colonial rule in the country ended with transfer of power. However, during this period the

heroes of 1857 were largely ignored. The leader of that war, Bahadur Shah Zafar, died in captivity in today's Myanmar. However, no attempt has been made to bring his remains to India and bury them here (a place is already marked for this near Kutub Minar). This demand has been repeatedly raised but the rulers of the day have been deaf to this. Indian rulers have been more beholden to the erstwhile colonial masters than to Indian people who struggle against the colonial yoke.

War of independence of 1857-'59 symbolized people's united struggle against foreign colonial rule. Its most pronounced aspects were anti-colonialism and unity in struggle of the two major communities in India- Hindus and Muslims. This secularism was of united aspirations to make India free of foreign domination and not of mere mutual tolerance. While many other aspects got imbibed in further course of movement for freedom like democracy, social justice and federalism; these two aspects i.e. anti-imperialism (genuine freedom) and secularism (of common aspirations) continue to be of vital importance.

Bahadur Shah Zafar is a symbol of both India's yearning of freedom from imperialist influence and unity of different religious communities inhabiting India. It is time that his remains are brought back to India, his beloved motherland for whose freedom he laid down his life.

Present rulers i.e. RSS will not countenance with this demand. They are out to erase all examples of unity of Indian people especially Hindu-Muslim unity. They are attacking Muslims under one pretext after another; even attacking their means of livelihood. Moreover they are out to erase Muslims from Indian history itself; negating common sacrifices and common heritage. It

was not accidental that they kept themselves aloof from the freedom movement of Indian people. They were intent on dividing Indian people on communal lines, a goal which they shared with the then colonial rulers of India. Ruling class politicians as well as other authorities talk of Indianization but their Indianization does not include ethos of Indian people, their shared heritage and their common struggle for better future. Present rulers are dead afraid of unity of Indian people and they would not like any symbol of such unity be allowed to exist, leave alone brought to India.

It is for the people to raise the demand for bringing back Zafar's remains. This demand should be raised from all fora, all avenues and in all meetings. It is a symbol and a powerful symbol.

**CPI (ML)-New Democracy**

**May 10, 2022**

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<b>Inquilabi Sada Rah</b>	<b>Punjabi</b>
<b>Sangrami Ekta</b>	<b>Odia</b>

# **A Comment on the Current Political Crisis in Sri Lanka**

(We received this comment by **S. Sivasegaram** from Sri Lanka on the current situation in that country. We are publishing this here for the information of readers.)

## **Origins of the Economic Crisis**

The main source of the crisis is the neoliberal economic policy adopted in 1978. The country has not looked back since, for its all-powerful executive presidency would put down all protest lawfully where it could and unlawfully where it could not.

The economy has been distorted by neo-liberalism and its manifestations, including the total wrecking of any prospect for building a national economy by a process of privatization of state enterprises, practice of open economy allowing unlimited import of luxury goods, and unrestricted inflow of private capital that did little to develop the country industrially. Free Trade Zones (now Export Processing Zones) followed encouragement of labour to seek employment in the Middle East. In 2020, two million out of a population of 22 million were employed abroad and around 200 thousand served in EPZs, denying the country of a quarter of its labour power, comprising a good part of the skilled and semi-skilled workers who could have contributed to industrial development.

External debt of the country has risen since 1978 owing to the open economic policy which boosted consumerism while failing to match it with industrial economic growth. Much of the foreign currency earnings went to consumer goods and luxury items, with



direct and indirect impact on consumerism. Consumerism based on foreign credit and exported labour denied opportunity for investment in agriculture or industry.

Several economic and geopolitical commentators now say that opening up of the economy was premature, although once many overwhelmingly endorsed the open economic policy by contrasting it with the preceding frugal policy designed to conserve foreign exchange causing a dearth of luxury goods besides shortages of staple food and fuel precipitated by a seven fold rise in petroleum price and two years of global drought in the 1970s. The policy of frugality was essentially wise and even necessary in the context of a country relying mainly on export of plantation produce to earn foreign exchange. Sri Lanka was also a net importer of grain and pulses. The government's notion of self-sufficiency had inherent weaknesses and created issues because it was interpreted as a clamp on all manner of imports, including some material essential for the industry.

The government was mauled at the polls in 1977 because of fresh public memory of shortages and long queues for bread and other goods amid false promises by the UNP including the pledge of 8 kg of cereal per week in place of the then uncertain 2kg per head per week. The splits in the ruling coalition in 1975 and 1976 with the left going it alone at the elections that followed in 1977 humiliated the SLFP that led the now dead UF. The parliamentary left was decimated, but for Sarath Mutthetuwegama who entered parliament on a successful election petition, despite Jayawardene playing all the tricks in his book to avert it.

The UNP took full advantage if its 5/6 majority to introduce a new constitution with a powerful executive presidency and to

systematically privatize the state controlled economic sector. To retain its huge parliamentary majority it prolonged the life of parliament by a full term, by a 'referendum' in 1982. While opening up the country to foreign businesses under a liberal import policy continued unhindered, there was little fresh investment in industry.

Most investments were commercial ventures with short term profit in mind. Even the EPZs were dominated by foreign apparel manufacturers who sought to take advantage of the concessional import quota allocated to the country as well as the highly competitive manual skills in the region. Results of the reckless economic development policy took time to show. Local industry, including the state sector, withered and privatization and free trade strangled any that withstood.

The government also targeted the Tamil minority and used discrimination, police brutality and communal violence to foster communal tension, and with it grew Tamil militancy. In the name of fighting separatism and terrorism it distracted the population from worrisome economic issues. The government quickly put down the trade union movement and working class protest by taking advantage of the state of shell shock of the opposition since the electoral defeat of 1977. The net outcome was a rise in ethnic tension, prolonged war, suppression of democracy, ruin of the economy and more privatization to fund the war. The political crisis made long term investors even more reluctant. Escalation of the war in the North East was encouraged by India and resulted in Indian intervention and a weak solution to the national question in the form of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment which is still to be implemented properly, and has been undermined in various ways since passage through parliament.

Popular frustration with prolonging war, aggravation of economic problems and the assertive executive presidency led to change of government in 1994. But that change altered very little nationally. The executive presidency remained intact, war escalated and economy stagnated. Following the humiliation of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces in 1990, India kept a distance. War soon resumed in 1991, and India's then rival the US sneaked in under pretext of backing a peace process in 2001, while India did its mighty best to wreck the peace talks. Peace talks failed, thanks to the intransigence and dishonesty of both the LTTE and the government, besides Indian intrigue. A furious US used the pretext of its War on Terrorism to support the government against the LTTE, and India, now warming up to the US after the collapse of the USSR, joined in.

None of these helped to revive the weakening economy. War continued to slow down the economy, drain resources and escalate debt. Borrowing until 2006 was confined to government to government lending and loans by bodies such as ADB, IMF etc.

The Mahinda Rajapaksa government turned to capital markets in 2006 when refused credit by IMF to meet loan commitments, whereby Sri Lanka issued international sovereign bonds (ISBs) to secure dollar-denominated loans, a method encouraged by powerful global interests since interest rates fell in the Global North. ISBs allowed financial autonomy, but at high interest rates and short repayment periods. As there was no restriction on spending the money borrowed, which could be used to carry out any project to the government's liking, successive governments made ISBs the chosen way to obtain foreign loans, particularly since the upgrade of Sri Lanka to middle income status in 2007, which restricted the volume of concessionary loans on

offer. In 2019 ISBs comprised approximately 47% of the total foreign loans of the country.

The US and India strongly supported Mahinda Rajapaksa government's war efforts that resumed in 2006. But the US held back on supply of arms in 2007 in order to exercise control over Sri Lanka. China came to the rescue at a critical moment in the war to subvert US plans and reinforce goodwill with Sri Lanka. This infuriated the US, already obsessed with a fear of rising Chinese influence in Asia. Its desire to punish Sri Lanka for war crimes soon after the end of the war had little to do with US interest in democracy or human rights.

UNHCR's human rights theatre staged annually in Geneva has often been a means to harass an inadequately friendly government, which is by no means free of grave fault. But human rights issues were soft pedalled when the UNP was in power from 2015 to 2019. Yet Tamil political leaders persuaded the Tamils that the US will secure justice for them in Geneva and elsewhere. India forever walked the tight rope of raising the hopes of Tamils without letting down the Sri Lankan government in international fora.

## **The Current Crisis**

It was to be anticipated that the economy would face difficulties relating to the global economic impact of the COVID-19 'pandemic'. The government should have been ready for a fall in income from tourism, regardless of how well the country withstood the infection. The government took unduly harsh measures to control infection, thereby seriously hurting the local economy. It inflated mortality and infection rates to persuade people to vaccinate, for it to claim success in infection control. Bigger mistakes were made, like offering tax cuts when the economy faced trouble

and thoughtlessly banning the import of synthetic fertilizer overnight, ostensibly to transit to organic farming. The import ban led to fertilizer shortage when farmers needed it most. Farmers protested in anger and, to placate them, the government ordered organic fertilizer from a reputed Chinese manufacturer, which the Agricultural Department analysts declared as contaminated with a hazardous bacterium. The supplier contested the claim with test reports by independent European laboratories and took the matter to an international arbitrator. The government beat a retreat and paid compensation to the supplier, but without accepting fault and, interestingly, ordered a fresh consignment from the same supplier. Meantime, an Indian supplier of 'organic fertilizer' was identified, who really supplied pelletized ammonia fertilizer. Unfamiliar with the fertilizer, the farmers could not apply it properly and their paddy crop suffered. The catalogue of mistakes by the government was mostly the making of the President who counted on his circle of ill-informed advisors (the Viyathmaga group of 'intellectuals') and using armed forces to deliver civilian tasks including infection control.

In the context of the huge foreign debt of the order of US\$ 50 billion with US\$7 billion needed to service the loan in 2022, foreign reserves down to \$1.6 billion in March 2022 and falling to 0.5 billion in April, a bailout by the IMF was widely considered the only way out, regardless of the austerities that IMF credit entails.

Shortage of foreign reserves and mismanagement of funds meant that vessels carrying shipments of food, fuel and medicines were stranded in the harbour for shortage of funds to unload the cargo. Amid the chaos, the government messed up the schedule of import of fuel, while the petroleum refinery remained closed down. Uninterrupted supply of petroleum based fuel and coal is essential

to sustain electric power and road transport, while households rely on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and kerosene for cooking. Mishandling of LPG import by securing a large stock of a highly volatile LPG mix led to a string of fire accidents at homes and restaurants. Withdrawal of unsafe LPG cylinders caused a huge shortage of LPG, while switching to kerosene was hard for shortage of equipment and kerosene, and use of firewood was impractical in urban areas. Production and supply chains of food items were severely disrupted by shortage of fuel.

There seemed to be an inexplicable change of heart of the US towards the Gotabaya Rajapaksa government, which has in turn worked hard to please the US and India since mid-2021. India grabbed the opportunity of the financial crisis to offer generous credit to purchase essential goods from India besides some currency swap deals in return for strategic projects in Sri Lanka. However, downgrading of Sri Lanka by rating agencies such as Moody's added to difficulty in further borrowing to meet debt repayments. The devaluation of the Sri Lankan rupee since early March and flotation of the currency has raised the cost of a US dollar from around 200 rupees to 350 rupees by late May. The move made in the hope of rescue by the IMF exacerbated the plight of the people, with soaring prices adding to persistent shortages of food, fuel and medicines.

Shortages and endless queues led to urban protest which struck root on the Galle Face Green (GFG), Colombo, close to the old Parliament, now Presidential Secretariat. Its slogan "Gota Go Home" demanded that the President and with him the Parliament should resign. Protests starting in early March with modest numbers swelled to thousands by the end of the month. Having failed to disperse protesters with tear gas, the President on 2<sup>nd</sup> April

declared a nationwide public emergency. However, the police and armed forces were instructed to refrain from use of excessive violence. Continuing shortages and long queues aggravated public anger, and countrywide mass protests met with a few instances of excessive police violence. Protests persisted with even private bus drivers, carpenters and fishers joining in. A 36-hour island-wide curfew failed to intimidate protesters, and other urban centres of protest sprang up. Trade unions threw their weight behind the protests in the island wide *hartal* (shut down) of 28<sup>th</sup> April and pledged a general strike starting May 6<sup>th</sup>.

Part of the protest moved close to the Prime Minister's official residence, the Temple Trees, on Galle Road near the GFG. The Prime Minister perhaps lost his calm. On 9<sup>th</sup> May, busloads of his supporters arrived at Temple Trees. Following a provocative address by him, they swooped on the protesters near Temple Trees and went on to attack the main site of the protest. There were injuries to protesters. Shelters and other constructions at the site were destroyed, while, not surprisingly, the police stood and watched. The Prime Minister had to resign.

This was followed by arson that destroyed properties including the ancestral home of the Rajapaksas and several key personalities of the ruling SLPP. In the aftermath of this orgy of anti-government violence of dubious origin, with arson not hurting even a fly, the President, who had never agreed to resign, recovered slightly. Amid political chaos that started weeks earlier with resignation of ministers and infighting in both the government and the main opposition parties, he found a new Prime Minister in Ranil Wickremesinghe, the sole (unelected) MP of the UNP. Ranil's appointment was received with glee by both the US and India, and

one wonders who threw this buoy at the seemingly sinking President.

The President agreed to certain political terms including the repeal of the obnoxious 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment and restoration of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and thereby agreeing to slacken the Rajapaksa family's hold on power. But the debt crisis is far from over and the ragtag army of new ministers with scant reputation for integrity are unlikely to show a way out of the more crucial political crisis that is brewing.

### **Debt Crisis and Geopolitical Rivalry**

Economic crises open opportunities for external powers to expand economic exploitation and gain geopolitical control.

In Sri Lanka's context, this implies India, the US and China, and of course proxies of the US.

The country is in the grip of a foreign debt trap, which was never an issue until the US chose to attack Chinese development loans to Sri Lanka. About half of the total foreign debt of the country comprises market borrowings through US- and EU-based ISBs. Other major lenders are Asian Development Bank (13%), World Bank (9%), China and Japan (10% each). Information on ownership of ISBs is not publicly revealed.

Sri Lanka has recently been under US and Indian pressure to negotiate with the IMF on restructuring and repaying its massive debt. But IMF structural adjustment demands the usual prescription of privatization, cutbacks in social safety nets and alignment of economic policy with Western interests, to the detriment of standard of living of the local working people, while widening the wealth and earnings disparity. The country will be



eternally stuck in debt as the IMF is hostile to the concept of protective economic policies.

India extended a \$1 billion credit line to supply essential food and medicine. While the Sri Lankan government claimed that there no conditions are attached to the loans, local analysts suspect a strong link with agreements offering Indian companies exclusive access to investments in the island.

The US with the open-ended Acquisition and Cross Services Agreement under the belt in August 2017, is still seeking to sign a Status of Forces Agreement, which would effectively make Sri Lanka into a US military base. While US attempts to foist the US Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact failed owing to local protests, attempts at US control over land, transportation and communication infrastructure in Sri Lanka persist.

Sri Lanka's strategic location amid the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean makes it vulnerable to the cold war now in place between China and the Quadrilateral Alliance (or Quad, comprising US, Japan, Australia and India) over curtailing China's influence in Sri Lanka and its right to navigation in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka is part of China's trillion dollar Belt and Road Initiative that includes the Hambantota Port and Colombo Port City.

Sinister motives cannot be attributed to inclusion of Sri Lanka in China's Belt and Road Initiative (B&R) involving over 140 countries and regions, with India, Japan and Taiwan as notable Asian absentees. The Quad has a special interest in Sri Lanka, mainly to disrupt Chinese influence, especially the B&R, besides US plans to encircle China and Indian paranoia about China threaten peace in the region, regardless of China's assurance that it has no military intentions in its harbour projects in Sri Lanka. But China's

military presence is best avoided at any cost, while all aid programmes should like in all cases not be undertaken at the expense of Sri Lanka's national interests or at cost to its environment.

In this context of Sri Lanka as a potential theatre of geopolitical rivalry, the debt crisis is not just an economic crisis. The fear that a “staged default” could push Sri Lanka into an IMF bailout is real, with the added prospect of completing the island's integration with the US-dominated geopolitical and economic agenda.

The reputation of Mahinda Rajapaksa government for corruption and their warmth towards China are twinned by pro-West ideologues and media persons. Warmth towards China has more to do with Chinese diplomacy based on non-interference and unwavering support to their friendly countries. But India readily attributes each of its failures to secure contracts in Sri Lanka to Chinese influence. Attacks on China for “supporting” the Rajapaksas in past years are somehow not barely matched in comments on the influence held by the US and India since Basil Rajapaksa, a US citizen, was brought in from the US to be made Minister of Finance, only to create a financial mess with his ill-advised monetary and tax policies and step down when he could not face Parliament.

## **The Protest Movement**

Government supporters readily claim that the entire protest was a conspiracy in which NGOs had a big hand. Not just NGOs, even dubious business and media sectors too had for undeclared reasons financially assisted the protest. But that cannot

characterize the protest movement as it is a common vulnerability of any 'apolitical' mass protest movement. The undoubtedly spontaneous protest gathered a momentum of its own. There is predominance of urban middle class youth, and there has been, from the very outset moves from within to depoliticize protest. While that saved the protest from being hijacked by opportunist politicians, it also denied the protest opportunity to develop into a mass movement for democracy and social justice. Support and sympathy from trade unions and the general public from other parts of the country could not transform it into an all island movement.

A commendable feature of the protest movement is that it has in no way been parochial or unwilling to see the country as multi ethnic and multi religious. Nevertheless, the GFG protesters and adherents elsewhere could thus far not offer an alternative leadership with a vision or a viable political roadmap for mass mobilization. The country, amid growing confusion and chaos, risks heading towards a volatile political impasse. The protest movement to understand the complexity of the economic issues involved and break out of the paralyzing debt cycle needs to see beyond domestic issues and the incessant news cycles of corporate media to study the oft overlooked but important global economic and geopolitical aspects of our problem.

Leaders of narrow nationalist political parties, while expressing support for the demand for the President to resign, had no thoughts for developing parallel movements among their respective electorates to dovetail into a national democratic movement for social justice. They remain hidebound by their parochialism and chained to their loyalty to foreign patrons.

## **Alternative sustainable approaches**

The young protesters who still demand President Rajapaksa's resignation are not alert to the global dimension of the Sri Lankan crisis. They have an oversimplified image of corruption and theft as the main causes of the problem, and it helps the local and foreign interests who still have a say in steering the course of the protests to keep it that way so that the campaign is not diverted by other political issues that could create problems in the aftermath of the regime change that they desire.

The protesters are not encouraged to join growing global calls for debt cancellation, and restriction of capital market and for protective economic policies to save fragile economies and above all measures to prevent debt crises from occurring.

The GFG campaign has secured partial victory with the resignation of the Prime Minister. But the US has manoeuvred to replace him and his cabinet with its client and a pro-West cabinet. The government could be stabilized in the short run and there is no long term prospect for a stable government with the consumerist economic policies.

Redefining development is essential and its delivery demands the resolution of the national and democratic crises facing the country. It is not an easy task, but is essential for building a democratic anti-imperialist movement for national unity and social justice. Enabling that is the challenge facing the genuine left.



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