

on the

TAMIL

NATIONAL

QUESTION

This political document is dedicated to the Revolutionary Tamil Youth who are committed to the cause of liberating the oppressed Tamil nation of Eelam.

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PART ONE:

History of National Oppression and the Decision to Secede.

'A people which enslaves another forges its own chains'.
-Karl Marx

'No nation can be free while it continues to oppress
other nations'.
-F. Engels.

'A socialist of any of the oppressor nations.....who
does not recognise and does not struggle for the right
of the oppressed nations to self-determination i.e. for
the right to secession, is in reality a chauvinist, not
a socialist'.
-V.I. Lenin.

INTRODUCTION.

National liberation struggles are being fought on several fronts of the world today. Oppressed peoples and nations are waging a determined struggle against Imperialism, against neo-colonialism, against totalitarian tyranny, against national chauvinism and many other forms of oppression. Each of these revolutionary struggles has its own historical specificity, its own concrete conjunctural situations, which determine the structure, the strategy and the ideology of each of these liberation struggles. Within the specificity and particularity of these liberation struggles lies the universal historical principle of the Socialist Revolutionary doctrine - that it is the oppressed masses who are the potential revolutionary force, the historical force and that it is the oppressed who create history and change the world. [Within the context of this historical law of social development and transformation, the Marxist-Leninist theoretical and political framework recognises that the national liberation struggle of any oppressed nation is progressive in essence and has revolutionary potential if it is articulated in the sphere of democratic struggle and proletarian revolution.] The right of nations to self-determination in Lenin's formulation is a realistic revolutionary theory which upholds the universal socialist principle of the fundamental right of a nation to secede and form a State of its own, a principle aimed to protect a small nation from the oppression generating from the national chauvinism of a big nation, a principle designed to preserve a nation's cultural and ethnic identity, a principle, if adhered to truly and fairly, can only create the necessary

^{fight}
The Tamil National Question in Sri Lanka is being agitated on the basis of that nation's right to self-determination. For the last thirty years the Tamil nation of Eelam has been subjected to severe oppression. It took the form of a violent oppression perpetrated against a small nation by the national chauvinism of a big nation, the Sinhala nation, the ruling elite of which pursued a disastrous policy aimed at destroying the ethnic identity of the Tamil speaking people and threatened their very survival. Years of struggle against the denial of basic human rights were met with violent forms of suppression and the national friction became acute with events culminating into a historical conjuncture in which a revolutionary rupture from joint existence became the inevitable alternative.

^{outsider}
To the world community, the Sri Lankan ruling class portrays the country as a tranquil island, cherishing the Buddhist ideals of peace and Dharma and adhering to a harmless political doctrine of non-alignment. Paradoxically, behind this political mystification lies the stark reality, the reality of national oppression, of the blatant violation of basic human rights, of racial crimes, of police and military violence, of attempted genocide. Master-minding the worst form of capitalist exploitive machinery under the slogans of democracy and socialism, the Sinhala ruling class since independence, has always reinforced their political power with an abominable ideology of national chauvinism and religious fanaticism. By utilizing such ideological apparatus and by actually practising a calculated policy of national oppression the ruling bourgeoisie has been able to maintain its domination over the proletariat of the oppressor nation. Yet on the other hand, the Sinhala bourgeois nationalism has helped the polarisation of the heterogeneous masses of the oppressed Tamil nation, with class elements of peasantry, proletariat and petty-bourgeoisie and the various stratum of castes into a mass national independence movement headed by the Tamil bourgeois leadership. (Since a national democratic struggle is progressive in its elements, since the struggle against oppression is revolutionary in its character, the task of the proletarian revolutionary is to support that struggle though it is headed by the bourgeoisie and adopt a strategy to advance the struggle towards national liberation and socialist revolution.) As Lenin's formulation on the national question provides a clear strategy of class struggle, in which the task of the revolutionary marxist is to frustrate any collaboration between bourgeoisie of the oppressed and oppressor nations, to ensure the development of the proletarian class consciousness of the oppressed nation, to strengthen that class with the alliance of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, and to establish a revolutionary proletarian leadership to lead the struggle against the oppressive bourgeois state. We advocate that the Eelam

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Liberation struggle must be articulated within such theoretical and political strategy, which we believe, will advance our democratic struggle towards national liberation and socialist revolution.

Situating our struggle in the political sphere of proletarian revolution, we wish to declare that we are the revolutionary allies of the conscious proletariat of the oppressor nation who recognise our right to self-determination, i.e. our right to secede and form an independent State, and call upon them to give us unconditional and unrelented support in our fight against the common enemy, the repressive bourgeois state apparatus.

This political document is an attempt to introduce our national liberation struggle to the world community, particularly to the Socialist world and to the world liberation movements. Giving a brief historical background, and providing a concrete analysis of the socio-economic and political dimensions of our struggle, we argue that our fight for national liberation is progressive and revolutionary and fits within the revolutionary political praxis of Marxism and Leninism. This document also attempts to answer certain controversial debates arising out of the mystificatory misinterpretations advanced by the so-called Marxist politicians in Sri Lanka to the concept of self-determination in relation to the Tamil national question. These theoretical mystifications, which ignore concrete analysis of concrete situations, we will attempt to show, are nothing but disguised political opportunism.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Western capitalism in its historical stages of expansion, and in its drive for global hegemony, had effected different forms of penetration on the social formations of the so-called underdeveloped world, the penetrative effects of which have generated enormous socio-economic and political problems that still beset these countries even after their national 'independence'. Sri Lanka (formally called Ceylon) was a ~~casual~~ victim of such colonial domination. From the Portuguese mercantile penetration in the 16th century to British imperialism, for more than four hundred and fifty years, the island had a profound historical experience of exploitation and underwent severe structural transmutation in the economic base as well as in the super-structural forms. The worst and the most far-reaching structural mutation was effected by the British with the forceful amalgamation of two nations, the Tamil and Sinhala kingdoms under a unitary state in 1833, thus laying the foundation for the present national conflict.

For centuries, before the advent of colonial domination, the Tamils and Sinhalese lived in the island as distinct nations, as sovereign people. The history of the Tamils in the island dates back to pre-historic times. When the first Sinhalese people arrived in the island with their legendary Prince Vijaya from Northern India in the 6th century B.C., Dravidians (Tamils) were living in the island. Though the question of the original settlement is obscured by legends and mythologies, modern scholars hold that Tamils were indisputably

the earliest settlers. 'Mahawamsa', the Sinhalese historical chronicle, records the turbulent historical past of the island from the 6th century B.C., the history of great wars between Tamil and Sinhalese kings, of invasions from South Indian Tamil empires, of struggles for supremacy between Tamil and Sinhalese kingdoms. The island was ruled by the Tamil kings at times and then by the Sinhalese kings and the intermittent wars forced the Sinhalese kings to move their capital southwards. From the 13th century onwards until the advent of foreign colonialism the Tamils lived as a stable national entity, in their own kingdom ruled by their own kings, within a specified territory of their traditional homelands embracing the Northern and Eastern provinces.

Marco Polo once described Sri Lanka as the island paradise of the earth. The British used to call it the 'pearl of the Indian ocean'. Separated from the Southern coast of India only by a 22 mile stretch of water, the island has an area of 25,332 square miles, about half the size of England. For centuries before the colonial penetration, the island had a traditional self-sustaining economy with a reputation of being the granary of the East. The mode of production in the pre-colonial epoch is feudal in character with dying elements of the Asiatic mode. Structured within the feudal mode, the economic organisation of the Tamil nation had a unique set of relations of production characterised by caste stratification with its hierarchy of functions. The extensive hydraulic system, with its network of tanks and canals for which the mediaeval Ceylon was famous, had fallen out of use and was decaying and disappearing under the thick jungles in the North as well as in the North central provinces. The Sinhalese feudal aristocracy, by this time, had moved to the central highlands and established Kandy as the capital.

When the Portuguese first landed on the island in the beginning of the 16th century, they found two ancient kingdoms, Tamils in the north and eastern parts and the Sinhalese in the south, two distinct social formations with different language and cultures, constituting themselves as separate nations of people ruled by their own kings. The Portuguese entered into treaties, and then fought battles, and finally, in the battle of 1619, they conquered the Tamil kingdom and hanged the Tamil king SANKILI KUMARAN. Yet the Portuguese and the Dutch, who came after them, governed the Tamil nation as a separate state entity until the British, in the 19th century, brought about a unified administration, linking both the nations into a single state.

Plantation Economy

It is beyond the scope and theme of this paper to document a detailed historical analysis of the specificity of various forms and stages of foreign capitalist penetration and the multiple penetrative effects and the contradictions that emerged and effected structural transformations in the economic base, as well as in the superstructural

forms, generating the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production in the Sri Lankan social formation. It is suffice to say that the penetrative effects of the Portuguese and the Dutch colonial rule on the Sri Lankan pre-capitalist economic formation is minimal when compared to the profound effects of British imperialism. The most significant historical event of the British imperial rule, that brought about catastrophic changes in the economic life of the island, was the superimposition of an exploitative plantation economy on a traditional self-sustaining peasant economy, a gigantic economic transplantation that transformed the rich fertile hill lands of the island into pockets of tea and rubber plantations. Such a Herculean economic task was performed by conscripting a massive army of cheap labourers drawn from Southern Indian, a work force of hundreds of thousands of Tamil labourers, who, partly by their own poverty and partly by coercion, moved into this promised land to be condemned to an appalling form of slave labour. Thus, an economic structure was built by this immiserated mass, whose sweat and blood generated the surplus value to feed the greedy vultures of British imperialism. This plantation economy expanded with British entrepreneurial investments, export markets and consolidated companies, transforming the structure of production and effectively changing the economic foundation of the old feudal mode and created a basis for the development of the capitalist mode of production. Though the plantation economy effectively changed the process of production, the labour market remained unchanged. The Tamil labourers - men, women, children and their descendants - were permanently condemned to slave under the white masters and the indigenous bourgeoisie. Thus, British imperialism built up the Tamil plantation proletariat within the heartland of the Kandyan Sinhalese, and manipulated the Tamil-Sinhala antagonism to divide and rule and to defeat the class struggle.

English and the Eelam Nation

The impact of the British imperial domination on the Tamil nation of, Eelam, constituted by the indigenous Tamil speaking people of the Northern and Eastern provinces, had far reaching effects. On the political level, British imperialism imposed a unified administration with centralised institutions, establishing a singular state structure which ended the separate existence of the Tamil statehood. This forceful annexation and amalgamation of two separate states, of two nations of people, disregarding their past historical existence, their socio-cultural distinctions, and their ethnic differences was the root cause of the Tamil-Sinhala antagonism.

The Tamil social formation of Eelam was structured within a rigid caste system, a socio-economic organisation typified by hierarchical divisions of labour, in which power, privilege and status were enjoyed by the high caste Hindus, the minority of whom (the landowners and business elites) owned the means of production and exploited the rest, particularly the so-called 'untouchables'. Privileged by caste, and provided with better educational facilities created by foreign missionaries, the high caste Hindus adopted the English educational

system. A new class of English educated professionals and white collar workers emerged and became a part of the bureaucratic structure of the civil service. The English imperial masters encouraged the Tamils and provided them with a major share in the State administration and armed services with the motive of checking the political power and revolt of the Sinhala majority, a notorious strategy of balance of power which later sparked the fires of Sinhala nationalism. The Tamils, inhabiting the most infertile under-developed regions of the dry zone, where the prospects of agriculture and industry are limited, concentrated on English education and looked upon sedentary jobs as the only way to economic salvation.

Sinhala Nationalism

The Tamil dominance in the State administrative structure, as well as in the plantation economic sector, the privileges enjoyed by the English educated elites, the spread of Christianity, are factors that propelled the emergence of Sinhala nationalism. In the early stages, nationalist tendencies took the form of Buddhist revival which gradually assumed a powerful political dominance. Under the slogan of Buddhist religious renaissance, a national chauvinistic ideology emerged with strong sediments of Tamil antagonism. The ecclesiastical leadership attacked both the Tamil and European colonialists and spoke of the greatness of the Sinhalese Aryan race.] To quote a typical example,

"Ethnologically, the Sinhalese are a unique race, inasmuch as they can boast that they have no slave blood in them, and were never conquered by either the pagan Tamils or European vandals who for three centuries devastated the land, destroyed ancient temples..... and nearly annihilated the historic race. This bright, beautiful island was made into a paradise by the Aryan Sinhalese before its destruction was brought about by the barbaric vandals....."

(Anagarika Dharmapala, History of an Ancient Civilization).

The Sinhala national chauvinism that emerged from the Buddhist religious resurgence viewed the Tamil dominance in the State apparatus and in the economy as a threat to 'national development', and such national antagonism articulated on the ideological level began to take concrete forms of social, political and economic oppression soon after the national independence in 1948, when the State power was transferred to the Sinhala national bourgeoisie.

NATIONAL OPPRESSION

The theoretical perspective of historical materialism necessitates the investigation of any national movement in relation to the historical development of world capitalism. The nationalism of the European nation states arose with the collapse of feudalism and the transition to capitalism, with the unification of markets and the revolutionary development of productive forces leading to the birth of a new bourgeois

class. The ascendancy of the bourgeoisie and bourgeois nationalism led to the oppression and exploitation of other nations. Advanced stage of capitalist development gave rise to monopoly capitalism which took the global form of imperialism. The imperialist penetration and its form of oppression produced determinant effects on the mode of production of the peripheral social formations. Separating the direct producers from their means of production, creating a mass of free labourers, these effects generated the dynamics of the capitalist mode in the penetrated societies. The development of the productive forces in the capitalist mode, led to the organisation of the proletariat as a revolutionary class force

The imperialist penetration, not only generated the mechanisms of the capitalist development but also shifted the national struggles to the peripheral social formations. In this context the nature of nationalism, the national struggle and the class relations in the national movements of the Third World countries must be viewed in relation to the transformations in the expanding world capitalist economy, its global effects, its structural relations with developing peripheral capitalism. The world capitalist hegemony and the development of the revolutionary proletarian classes within the space of imperialist dominance, have changed the structure and character of the contemporary national struggles of the Third World. The so-called progressive national bourgeoisie has lost its revolutionary character to advance the national struggle as a democratic social force. The historical conjuncture of the global capitalism has eliminated all progressive elements of the national bourgeoisie, its historical role in the national revolution has shifted to the revolutionary proletariat. Such structural transformation in the class elements has necessitated a revolutionary socialist strategy inter-relating the class struggle with national liberation struggle under the leadership of the revolutionary proletariat, a strategy to advance the class struggle along with the national liberation struggle both against the indigenous bourgeoisie and international capitalism.

Constrained by world capital, the national bourgeoisie can no longer play a constructive role in the national democratic revolution. This is evidenced in the history of Sri Lanka, after 'independence'. The reactionary character of the Sri Lankan national bourgeoisie began to show its ugly face not only in its collusion with world capital to perpetuate a dependent economy, but also in its chauvinistic policies against the Tamil Nation, a policy primarily aimed at dividing and weakening the working class movement of the Sinhalese masses.

Having firmly entrenched the national bourgeoisie in a global neo-colonial structure, British imperialism granted 'independence' to the people of Sri Lanka with the British Queen as their sovereign head. Motivated by their class interests, the national bourgeoisie collaborated with the British, accepted their constitution and assumed power. Soon after the so-called national independence, the national bourgeoisie started to betray its reactionary character. Conflicts arose between the Tamil and Sinhala bourgeoisie over the share of political power.

Sinhala nationalists dominated the scene and gained control over the State machinery.

The history of national oppression started to unfold in its ugly form within six months of the transfer of political power. The first major onslaught of the Sinhala national chauvinism was directed at the Tamil plantation proletariat, disenfranchising more than half a million of this working mass with the most infamous citizenship legislation in Sri Lankan political history, which robbed these people their basic human rights and reduced them to statelessness.

The national oppression against the Tamil nation of Eelam has a history of thirty years; a calculated, systematic oppression, reinforced by the State repressive apparatus, which seriously affected the social, political, economic and cultural life of the Tamil speaking masses and ultimately threatened the nation's geographical entity and its ethnic entity. The oppression assumed a multi-dimensional thrust, attacking simultaneously on different levels on the conditions of existence of this nation of people; on language, on education, on economy, on land, that jeopardised the very existence of that social totality and made unitary life impossible. This oppression has been practised by all successive governments headed by the Sinhala national bourgeoisie, including the now defunct old left, which slipped into the dirt of Sinhala chauvinism to taste a temporary episode of political power.

Sinhala Colonisation of Tamil Lands.

A calculated programme of gradual penetration and annexation of the additional Tamil lands which began soon after the 'national independence', masterminded by J.R. Jayawardane who has now assumed absolute power as dictator has now engulfed nearly three thousand square miles of the Eelam nation. This planned occupation of Tamil lands by hundreds of thousands of Sinhala people aided and abetted by the State machinery in the areas where a huge mass of landless Tamil peasantry is striving for a tiny plot to toil, have generated fear, hostility and hopelessness amongst the Tamil speaking masses. The worst affected area is the northern province, where planned colonisation has produced two new parliamentary constituencies and robbed huge bulks of land from the Tamil speaking people of Islamic faith. The Mahaveli Ganga project of the present bourgeois dictatorship, aided by world capital, is aimed at retreating the North with an army of occupation. Fear runs high amongst the Tamils, since the government's announcement in July this year, that a para-military corps of 150,000 youths will be trained and colonised in this development project, for the 'security' of these lands.

The consistent policy of forceful colonisation of Tamil areas, ignoring the development of vast expanses of fertile lands in the south, have made the Tamil speaking people realise the vicious nature of the oppression they are confronted with. In addition to this, the constant racial violence that erupts in some sensitive colonised areas resulting in the loss of Tamil life and property, has awakened the necessity and urgency to struggle for survival.

Politics of Language, Education and Employment

The national oppression of the Sinhala bourgeoisie soon penetrated into the sphere of language, education and employment. The chauvinist 'Sinhala Only' movement spearheaded by Mr. Bandaranayake brought him to political power in 1956. His first Act in Parliament put an end to the official equal status enjoyed by the Tamil language and made Sinhala as the only official language of the country. 'The Sinhala Only Act' demanded the proficiency of Sinhala in the civil service. The Tamil public servants deprived of the rights of increments and promotions were forced to learn the language or leave employment. Employment opportunities in the public service were practically closed to Tamils. Racial discrimination against the Tamils in employment soon extended to other services and sectors.

The Tamil Public Servants Union (Arasanga Eluthu Vinayar Sangam) observed the steady decline of Tamil representation in the services from 1956 to 1970 in the following percentages.

	<u>1956</u>	<u>1970</u>
Ceylon Administrative Service	30	5
Clerical Service	50	5
Professions	60	10
Armed Forces	40	1

In 1972, the 'Sinhala Only Act' was given constitutional status and the minor concessions given to the use of Tamil were axed, thus institutionalising and legalising the national oppression. The most shattering dismay experienced by the Tamils in this notorious onslaught of Sinhala chauvinism was the collaboration of the traditional Marxist parties, the old LSSP Trotskyites and the Communist Party, with the SLFP the national bourgeois party, headed by Mrs Bandaranayake, in framing such an infamous constitution.

Education was the sphere in which the most blatant discrimination was practised against the Tamil youth, particularly in their university admissions. An infamous discriminatory selective device called 'standardisation' was introduced in 1970 to arrest the Tamil dominance in higher education. This racist scheme demanded higher marks from the Tamil students for admission. The ratio of Aggregate 'A' level marks demanded for admission for the Tamil and Sinhalese students were as follows.

	<u>Tamil Students</u>	<u>Sinhala Students</u>
Medicine	250	229
Engineering	250	227
Physical Sciences	204	183
Biological Sciences	184	175

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This discriminatory device seriously affected the prospects of higher education of the Tamil youth. The admission figures gradually dropped from 40% in 1960 to 15% in 1975.

It is widely believed that Angered by the imposition of an alien language, frustrated without the possibility of higher education, plunged into the despair of unemployed existence, the Tamil youth grew militant with an iron determination to fight back the national oppression.

Economic Strangulation

National oppression showed its intensity in the economic strangulation of the Eelam nation. Apart from a few state-owned factories built soon after 'independence', Tamil areas were totally isolated from all the national development projects for nearly a quarter of a century. While the State poured all the economic aid into the South, while the Sinhala nation flourished with massive development projects, the Tamil nation was alienated as an unwanted colony, isolated into the wilderness of economic deprivation. The most tragic fact is that while the Tamil nation gradually deteriorated into economic backwardness wasting its potential productive labour, the Tamil capitalists, encouraged and aided by the Sinhala ruling class, invested in the South; a brutal fact illustrates the class collaboration and class interests of the Tamil bourgeoisie.

Tamil Agitations and Racial Terrorism.

Since the implementation of the 'Sinhala Only Act' in 1956, the Federal Party, headed by the Tamil bourgeois nationalists, organised mass agitational campaigns demanding a federal form of autonomy for the Tamil speaking people. The Sinhala ruling class, threatened by the emerging Tamil nationalism, agreed to give concessions and a pact was signed. The pact provided some elements of political autonomy under regional councils with a promise to stop Sinhala colonisation in Tamil areas. The pact sparked off suspicion and anger among the Sinhalese and the man who exploited this explosive situation at that time, was none other than the present 'dharmista' President, J.R. Jayawardane, who, with the support of the Buddhist monks, organised a massive protest march to Kandy demanding the abrogation of the pact. This Sinhalese chauvinistic upsurge forced the late Premier Mr. Bandaranayake to abandon the pact. This betrayal of the Sinhala bourgeoisie intensified the national aspirations of the Tamils and the relations between the two nations became hostile. The national friction became intense and exploded into violent racial riots in 1958 in which hundreds of Tamil speaking people were massacred and their property destroyed.

The 1958 racial holocaust cut a deep wedge in the relations between the Tamil and Sinhala nations. Tamil national sentiments ran high and erupted into massive agitational campaigns on the Tamil political scene. In 1961 the Federal Party launched a non-violent civil disobedience campaign and demanded equal right for the Tamil language.

The State oppressive machinery reacted swiftly, unleashing a barbarous military violence against the peaceful agitators. The nationalists leaders were arrested and kept in detention for six months.

In 1965, the Sinhala national bourgeois party, the United National Party, assumed political power. The Tamil bourgeois nationalists collaborated with the new Government and a few concessions were granted to the use of Tamil language. A secret pact was also made but soon abrogated by the pressure of Sinhala opposition.

An Infamous Regime and Institutionalised Oppression

The political history of Sri Lanka from 1970 to 1977 consists of astounding events and unprecedented upheavals, events of great betrayals and shameful class collaborations; events of violent revolts and brutal reprisals. For both the oppressed Tamil nation and the suppressed Sinhala masses, this historical epoch, marked by the reign of an unscrupulous infamous regime, taught the most painful lessons of political oppression. The Tamil nation faced institutionalised oppression and the events that unfolded concretised the objective conditions of national contradiction precipitating the dynamics of a revolutionary rupture. The working class movement as a whole suffered a tragic set back by national chauvinism and by the betrayal of the left leadership.

An unholy political matrimony between the national bourgeois party of Mrs. Bandaranayake, and the traditional old left - the LSSP and the CP - brought into power what was mistakenly called the 'Popular Front' Government. As soon as this new Government assumed power, it was confronted with a revolutionary insurrection. Unemployed militant youth and sections of landless peasantry rose in organised rebellion in the South. This sudden uprising of the adventurist revolutionary youth that took the form of a widespread armed rebellion was met with a most barbaric military suppression. The episode ended with the mass slaughter of ten thousand Sinhalese youth, and the imprisonment of another fifteen thousand.

This unprecedented youth insurrection alarmed the ruling class. Frightened of the possibilities of further revolutionary upsurge emanating from the oppressed sections, the ruling bourgeoisie decided to stabilise its grip on the State apparatus by emergency laws and other oppressive legislations. The most significant of which, in relation to national oppression, was the proclamation of a new Republican Constitution in 1972. The new constitution not only removed the fundamental rights and privileges accorded to the national minorities in the previous constitution, but also categorically rejected all amendments and resolutions proposed on behalf of the Tamil speaking people. Sinhala national chauvinism reigned supreme in the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly which resulted in the Tamil members of Parliament walking out in utter frustration and hopelessness. Thus, this infamous constitution brought an end to Tamil participation in the sharing of State power.

A political alliance between the national bourgeois party of Mrs. Bandaranayake and the traditional old left - the LSSP brought into power the 'Popular Front' Government. This government decided to stabilise its grip on the State apparatus by bringing into effect new emergency laws and other oppressive legislations.

The Struggle for Secession

The adoption of ^{the} this notorious constitution, ^{in 1972,} ^{resulted in} ^{atmosphere} created a condition of political alienation of a nation of people and set a deep crisis in the Tamil-Sinhala relationship. The constitution legalised national oppression and the State apparatus delegated excessive powers to the police to dominate and suppress the Tamil nation. The police practised excessive violence, indiscriminately against the innocent people, and primarily against the Tamil youth. The police tyranny manifested in the horrors of torture, imprisonment (without trials) and murders. The victimised youth grew militant and reacted with acts of violence and terrorism.

The Sinhala ruling elite, unable to resolve the national economic crisis and the mounting social problems, adopted the reactionary strategy of intensifying the national chauvinistic oppression to retain State power by dividing and dominating the Sinhala working class. Thus, the Sinhala national bourgeoisie utilised its invariable policy of national chauvinism to prevent the mobilisation of the revolutionary proletariat against the State machinery. The collusion of the old left in this bourgeois plot struck a shattering blow to the working class movement as a whole.

During the reign of ^{the} this so-called "Popular Front" Government, the national oppression of the ^{big} Sinhala nation against the ^{small} Tamil nation assumed such severity and harshness that made joint existence intolerable. The contradiction between nations assumed concrete reality and the masses of the oppressed nation began to polarise into a single movement for a secessionist cause.

At the peak of national oppression, when secession became the inevitable political destiny of the Eelam nation, the Tamil bourgeois nationalist parties converged into a single movement, ^{the Tamil United Liberation Front, * formed in 1976} and asked for a clear mandate from the people to wage a national struggle for secession. The Front, at the general elections last year, explicitly stated in its political manifesto:

"The Tamil Nation must take the decision to establish its sovereignty in its homeland on the basis of its right to self-determination. The only way to announce this decision to the Sinhalese government and to the world is to vote for the Tamil United Liberation Front".

In reference to the Tamil National Question the verdict at the elections was very crucial. It was fought precisely on a decision to secede. In a political sense, it assumed the character of a plebiscite, a public expression of a nation's will. The Tamil speaking people voted overwhelmingly in favour of secession, or rather, the people of Eelam nation exercised, through a democratic political practice, their right to self-determination, which is the right to secede and form a State of their own. Thus began a new historical epoch in Tamil politics, ushering the revolutionary struggle of a people for national liberation against oppression.

* (TULF) which was formed in 1976,

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The New Government and the Oppressive Laws

The general elections in Sri Lanka last year brought into existence two powerful and mutually irreconcilable political forces. The Tamil National Independence movement demanding secession and separate existence as a sovereign State and a Sinhala bourgeois dictatorship seeking absolute State power to dominate and oppress all sections of the masses. Thus emerged a major political contradiction between the two nations. The intensity of this contradiction took its manifest forms immediately after the elections by the sudden explosion of a racial holocaust unprecedented in its violence towards the Tamils, followed by armed terrorist violence against the State police by the militant Tamil youth.

^{During the racial violence}
In this island-wide racial conflagration hundreds of Tamils were mercilessly massacred and their property destroyed and thousands of them made refugees. The State police openly colluded with the vandals and hooligans in their acts of arson, rape and murder. Instead of containing the violence which was raging with uncontrollable ferocity with the blessings of the guardians of public safety, the government made inflammatory statements with racial connotations that added fuel to the fire.

This racial horror had a profound impact on the Tamil political thinking. It stiffened the Tamil militancy in their demand for secession. It shattered all hopes of a parliamentary form of agitation for the resolution of the Tamil National Question. It exposed the political impotency of the Tamil bourgeois leadership who simply invoked the flames of Tamil nationalism but never found any concrete practical programme of political action to liberate the oppressed nation. A profound disillusionment struck the militant Tamil youth who became disenchanted with the political strategy of non-violence which the leadership advocated for the last thirty years, and produced no political fruits. Caught up in a revolutionary situation generated by the contradictions of national oppression and constantly victimised by police brutality, the youth were forced to abandon the Gandhian doctrine of 'ahimsa' which they realised was irreconcilable with revolutionary politics, and chose the path of violence and terrorism.

The determinant conjunctural factor that led to the growth of terrorism in Tamil politics was the political vacuum created by the absence of an authentic national liberation movement structured within a revolutionary political theory and practice to lead the struggle. Confronted with such emptiness, and impelled by the necessity of concrete action, the youth militancy and its revolutionary ardour took an extreme course in the politics of terrorism. The terrorist assaults were not indiscriminate acts of violence but carefully selected targets, primarily aimed at senior police officers who had a notorious reputation for tyranny and torture against the youth and Tamil political opportunists who betrayed the Tamil cause.

by

Alarmed by the acts of terrorist violence of the militant Tamil youth, who openly proclaimed themselves as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the ruling bourgeoisie utilised the situation to tighten its arm of autocratic domination. In the guise of hunting down the Tigers, the government dispatched large contingents of armed forces to Tamil areas and made the Tamil nation into a permanently occupied territory. In the meantime, an infamous repressive legislation was rushed through the Parliament which not only proscribed the Tiger movement but also made any revolutionary struggle against the State illegal. The legislation contains such devious clauses that even trade union struggles could be conjured as a threat to the State and condemned illegal. Thus, the bourgeois dictatorship struck two birds with one stone, a single legislation to oppress the Tamil agitation as well as to suppress the proletarian struggle.

(3151 words)