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Lankan Party Politics: an Obituary

Ways of Neo-colonialism

Mass-Based United Front to Confront Imperialism

Poetry: Bertolt Brecht, Eugène Pottier, Langston Hughes

The Unconquerable Inscription

Bertolt Brecht

During the war
In a cell of the Italian prison in San Carlo
Full of imprisoned soldiers, drunks and thieves
A socialist soldier, with an indelible pencil, scratched on the wall:
Long live Lenin!
High above, in the semi-dark cell, hardly visible, but
Written in large letters.
As the warders saw it, they sent for a painter with a bucket of lime.
And with a long stemmed brush he whitewashed the threatening inscription.
Since, however, with his lime, he painted over the letters only
Stood above in the cell, now in chalk:
Long live Lenin!
Next another painter daubed over the whole stretch with a broad brush
So that for hours it disappeared, but towards morning
As the lime dried, the inscription underneath was again conspicuous:
Long live Lenin!
Then dispatched the warder a bricklayer with a chisel against the inscription
And he scratched out letter by letter, one hour long
And as he was done, now colourless, but up above in the wall
But deeply carved, stood the unconquerable inscription:
Long live Lenin!
Now, said the soldier, get rid of the wall!

(1934)

Editorial

Political events of the past few years have affirmed that the constitution of 1978 and the dictatorial executive presidency have reduced electoral politics to a cynical contest for power.

The growing economic crisis was compounded by the mishandling of the COVID 'pandemic', and a financial crisis followed from sloppy handling of fiscal matters. These crises were in waiting under an economic policy that opened up the country to predatory foreign capital.

Since 1978 the country was run on borrowed money and remittances from foreign employment of labour that is essential to develop the national economy. Rash consumerism ensured that inward remittances that could have assisted modern technology-based ventures to advance industry, agriculture and fishing to uplift the economy went to wasteful consumption and rising demand for nonessential goods and private cars, all leading to environmental ruin. Even imported modern electronic and communication technology did not serve to build the economy so that the rising demand for electricity did not mean economic growth but soaring consumerism and hazardous waste.

A major flaw of national politics since 1978 was the indifference of major political parties towards weaning the country from consumerism and developing local industry to serve a sustainable economy. Much is heard about developing advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and nanotechnology to advance the economy of a country that does not care to produce the basic goods needed to sustain a local industry.

Political parties learned little from the economic blow delivered by global overreaction to COVID. Vulnerability to global crises of the economy of a small country relying on tourism and remittances by migrant labour is still not a concern of leading political parties. A lack of vision underlies the unquestioning submission of political parties to the core conditions of the IMF relief package that will keep the country eternally indebted.

The economic crisis is an aspect of the country being a neo-colony. The unresolved national question harms economic development by hindering unity among nationalities while US imperialism and India the regional hegemon seek to dominate the country and meddle in its internal affairs. Foreign powers already exert influence on political parties in many ways so that no parliamentary political party dares to defy the imperialists and hegemons seeking to impose their will on the government.

Foreign interests exploit public grievances to manipulate the course of national events. Meddling is via agencies, mostly NGOs. The Aragalaya was a classic case where NGOs penetrated a mass protest — one against shortages, mainly of fuel — to manipulate the protest movement, which they kept 'apolitical' for a while. As signs emerged that protesters were gaining political awareness, the protest was deflected in an adventurist direction to provide pretext for violent state intervention.

Flow of foreign money into the media keeps the public in the dark about foreign interests indulging in shady operations. Abuse of the media as a tool of disinformation happens in the print, electronic and social media

With presidential and parliamentary elections just months away, election campaigns have so far cynically evaded commitment in matters of long term public and national interest. With ideology faded out of electoral politics, parties merely seek ways of win elections. There is no difference in the essence of what parties offer, but for the party label. This context puts to test JVP's claim to be Marxist. It promises clean administration but evades details of key economic issues and the national question. Lack of a firm position on key issues will make it susceptible to pressures from opportunist forces and vested interests rendering it no different from the reactionary parties that have ruled the country thus far.

The left and progressive forces should use the election process to restore political debate by bring to the fore the national question, the price of IMF relief, foreign intervention and predatory foreign investments.

Lankan Party Politics: an Obituary

Imayavaramban

Prelude to Party Politics

Electoral Party politics in Sri Lanka started in earnest with the setting up of the State Council and elections to it. Prior to that franchise as limited to a select elite and the purpose of the members elected to the Legislative Council was to help the smooth running of the affairs of the colony.

Politics was about rivalry for favoured positions in the colonial administration. The rivalry also had an identity dimension based on caste and religion more than on ethnicity. Until universal franchise for election to the State Council under the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931–47, it was beneficial to be an English speaking Protestant Christian. Yet, there were members of the Legislative Council who seriously took up matters of social concern with the colonial government. But administrative changes left unaltered the undercurrent of ethno-religious rivalry among the elitist leaders and their relatively wealthy class of supports.

Apparent favouritism of the colonial administration towards people of European descent and Protestant Christian faith led to resentment among others and parochial forces capitalized on them to stir communal tension. The elite classes, despite their resentment of colonial rulers, demanded only a bigger share of administrative power and not freedom from colonial rule. Targets of Sinhala Buddhist parochialism were decided by class interests. Anagarika Dharmalapala who personified this attitude got along with the colonial rulers, and his Sinhala Buddhist zeal fell far short of waging a campaign to end colonial rule.

The bulk of the elite who resented colonial rule held parochial views. This was a key factor in Sri Lanka's trailing several British colonies in South and South East Asia in fighting for independence and in giving rise to a native Left movement. Another factor was that the burden of colonial exploitation was mainly borne by immigrant plantation workers receiving minimal wages and living under sub-human conditions.

Ethnocentric nationalism gained force during WWI, accompanied by the Sinhala–Muslim violence of 1915 and the arrest of prominent Sinhalese leaders for provoking communal violence. Resentment among Sinhalese about the arrests survived the release of detainees. The Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim elite who sought a common platform to express a nationalist viewpoint formed the Ceylon National Congress in 1919. The CNC, in its proposals for constitutional reforms, called for an elected majority in the legislature, control of the budget, and partial control of the executive.

The new constitution announced in 1920 by Governor William Manning was modified in 1924 to meet several CNC demands and provide for an elected majority in the legislature, a larger number of territorially elected members, and election of communal representatives. Ceylon thus had a government representing the local elite classes. But the executive branch remained under the British governor and the official Executive Council.

Politicization of the public took off with the anti-colonial Sooriyamal (Portia flower) Campaign (launched on 11 November 1933, protesting the collection of funds on Armistice Day to support British ex-servicemen instead of Sri Lankans by calling to boycott the Red Poppy and buy instead the Yellow Sooriyamal (Portia flower). The Sooriyamal workers also played a valuable role in saving lives during the malaria epidemic of 1934-35 which took 125,000 lives across the country.

The Sooriyamal Campaign was thus the precursor of the leftist Lanka Sama Samaja Party founded in 1935. The LSSP was the first political party of the country, which had a clear political agenda.

The first call for total independence was however from a social reformist movement in the north of the country, the Jaffna Youth League, which was inspired by political developments in India. It took principled stands on national independence and issues of social oppression including caste. The JYL campaigned to boycott the first elections to the State Council in 1931 since the Donoughmore Constitution denied dominion status to Ceylon. The campaign which had overwhelming support in the North was let down by potential allies, and the prospect of its yielding a secular progressive political party was hampered by the fact that elections were not held on party lines. Political issues were hardly raised, despite arrival of universal franchise in 1931. Voting was guided by considerations such as caste and religion, besides personality. With politics mostly confined to the English educated few, public meetings tended to be in English.

Although trade unions had started in colonial Ceylon in the 1890s, political awareness was weak. It was so weak that AE Gunasinghe who is credited with founding the trade union movement in the country was very anti-communist and in 1933 his Ceylon Labour Union sent Sinhalese blacklegs to break the strike in the Wellawatte Spinning and Waving Mills, where most workers were of Indian origin. Following this betrayal, leaders of the Left established the Wellawatte Mill Workers Union.

The Sinhala and Tamil nationalists then were mostly personalities who did not think beyond their own personal and class interests and a bigger role for themselves in the administration of the colony. This is not to reject visionary leaders among them who spoke and campaigned for the social elevation of the oppressed majority. Political mobilization of such ideas was quite another matter.

Colonial rulers were concerned by the emergence of LSSP as a popular political party and did all they could to choke it. The bourgeois–feudal classes responded with parties representing their class interests, and pandered to sectarian attitudes to gather votes.

[Interestingly, HR Freeman, an Englishman by birth who arrived in the country in 1885 to join the Ceylon Civil Service and retired in 1919 after serving in many parts of the country, entered politics in the 1920s. He was elected from the North Central Province to the Legislative Council in 1924, and from Anuradhapura to the State Council in 1931 with huge majorities, defeating a powerful local candidate and won uncontested in 1936, showing that in pre-independence elections, community work could override wealth, social position, ideology if any, and even ethnicity— a tendency that seemed to survive even in elections to the first Parliament of Ceylon in 1947.]

Prelude to Party Politics

Sectarian politics driven by electoral ambition struck root in elections to the State Council, and thrived after independence in 1948. State Council elections based on universal franchise made leaders shed their Christian identity and Western attire more for fear of opponents using their 'alien' identity against them than for mass appeal. Elitist class interests united the communally split CNC, the Sinhala Maha Sabha and other rightists to form the United National Party, the main feudal-capitalist political party, in 1946 in anticipation of independence from the weakening British Empire. The predominantly Sinhala UNP did attract affluent Tamil and Muslim members of propertied classes from the south of the country.

The communal split in the CNC gave rise to a conservative Jaffna-centred All Ceylon Tamil Congress. Hill Country Tamils, comprising a majority of politically backward plantation workers, came under the sway of the Ceylon Indian Congress an elite-led trade union formed in 1930 and renamed Ceylon Workers Congress in 1950. Leftist trade unions initiated by the LSSP and the Communist Party could not penetrate large plantations, thanks to obstruction by the management and the CWC.

Muslims were scattered across the island and, unlike in India, despite several Muslim associations, lacked a Muslim political party. Influential urban business elite saw no benefit in a Muslim political party and chose

to associate individually with a strong national party to seek election to parliament in electorates with a large Muslim population, but insufficient to assure election based on identity. Left parties attracted working class Muslims in fair number and had Muslims among leading party cadres.

Political leadership at independence broadly belonged to two categories. One was rightist and friendly to colonial rulers but divided on communal lines. The other was leftist secular and anti-colonial, but ideologically split, more than elsewhere in Asia. A contributory reason seems to be the Trotskyists domination of the Left in Ceylon.

Feudal values influenced politics in the country with a mainly agrarian economy and a British dominated plantation sector. Feudal values also dominated the plantation sector comprising wage labourers who were willingly kept illiterate. Industrial development was limited and mostly based on plantation production, transport and shipping of produce.

The national bourgeoisie did not assert themselves politically until after the split in the UNP in 1951. The economy which relied heavily on the plantation sector with a severely under-paid labour was vulnerable to the vagaries of the global market. The UNP was unready for the financial crisis of 1952, aggravated by the surge in the price of rice owing to the Korean War. The burden was passed on to the public. Rice almost trebled in price when the government removed subsidies in that year.

The Left successfully organized the Hartal of 1953 to give voice to public anger over the rise in cost of living. The repressive response of the government led to 10 killings and the resignation of the prime minister. The left leadership, especially the LSSP, misread the success of the Hartal and called it a revolution in the making.

The Sri Lanka Freedom Party which split from the UNP in 1951 gave voice to national bourgeois interests as opposed to a comprador class that controlled the UNP. It exploited the political space created by the Hartal by indulging in populist politics, capitalizing on the genuine grievances

of a Sinhala-speaking majority, and building a mass support base among the peasantry, Sinhala medium teachers, Buddhist priests, Ayurvedic physicians and sections of the working class. It had no clear ideology but for promise of social elevation of its electorate.

Party Politics in Action

Party politics seemed rather cloudy in the elections of 1947 with the UNP having no programme or policy for the development of the country but to keep the system going the way it did under colonial rule. The three Left parties were secular and had visions of a planned economy free of foreign dominance. They did well in regions where they were socially active amid harassment by the colonial regime. A Sinhala chauvinist agenda had been set in motion well before the Left could establish itself among the Sinhala peasantry. Disenfranchisement of Hill Country Tamils in 1947 ensured denial of parliamentary representation for the HCT and weakened support for the Left in electorates with a significant presence of the HCT.

Despite winning just 42 of the 95 contests seats, the UNP took the reins of power with the help of a few of the 21 independent MPs and reinforced its position by using the privilege of the government to nominate six members to represent numerically weak minorities. Besides, the Tamil Congress joined the government in 1948, but with two dissenting MPs and a Senator splitting to form the Tamil nationalist Federal Party.

Party politics had matured by 1952, and the UNP won 54 parliamentary seats. The newly formed SLFP secured 9 seats and the left parties won 13 seats. Independents still held 12 seats. Leaders of the LSSP harboured illusions of seizing state power through parliamentary elections, as its revolutionary rhetoric of the 1930s and 40s faded out as empty slogans.

The Hartal of 1953 exposed to the public the class nature of the UNP as a feudal–comprador alliance, and brought mass political issues to the fore

in the elections that followed. The UNP's pro-imperialist, anti-communist ideology manifested itself in its wish to continue as a British Dominion, continuation of British naval and airbases in the country and the place of English as the sole official language and language of higher education to the exclusion of users of native languages in government administration, and preference for everything western became political issues. But the success of the Hartal was no promise of a left government without a mass political base reaching out to the rural regions.

Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), the SLFP-led alliance with the Revolutionary LSSP (VLSSP), the smaller Sinhala Bhasha Peramuna and some independents was not a socialist alliance. Bandaranaike, leader of the SLFP, declared that his policy was the 'Middle Path'. The foreign policy of the government took a progressive hue to adopt non-alignment and anti-imperialist positions on international issues. The government, subject to pressure from other forces including the Governor General, was prevented from adopting radical paddy land reform. Although several influential members of the cabinet were anti-left, global trends located the SLFP in the anti-imperialist camp in contrast to the UNP which in 1953-56 willingly antagonized China and the Soviet Union.

The anti-imperialism of the SLFP found expression in the taking over of the British naval and air bases and the British owned harbour during 1956-59, and endured the failure of the MEP alliance. It followed up with the nationalization of the petroleum trading companies in 1961 and a warm relationship with socialist countries.

The progressive identity of the SLFP was tainted by Sinhala chauvinism which had a hold on all non-left Southern political parties. The UNP took to overtly Sinhala chauvinist positions in matters of language policy, settlement of predominantly Tamil and Muslim areas with Sinhalese and discrimination in employment among other matters. Demands of electoral success induced further ethnic polarization.

The Changing Party Political Map until 1977

The main electoral political parties of 1952 could be broadly classified as: (i) chauvinistic comprador bourgeois, (ii) chauvinistic national bourgeois, (iii) a secular but ideologically divided left and (iv) Tamil nationalist.

Since 1956, Sinhala and Tamil nationalists expressed themselves openly in electoral politics, for long based on the language issue. The underlying ethnocentric nationalism that has been driven by class interests of the elite of each ethnic group since early 20th Century fast infected the middle classes. However, the ideological identities of 1952 lasted into the 1970s but for changes in emphasis in core issues as the national question edged out class contradictions as the main contradiction of the country.

After the split in the UNP in 1951 facilitated the national bourgeoisie to become a political force, political splits and formation of alliances were driven by personal ambition as much as ideology. Frustration too played a role in switch of loyalty and actions without a long term view of matters. Notable alliances and splits that affected the course of party politics between 1952 and 1977 are listed below.

- The MEP, an alliance of the SLFP and the VLSSP, was helped by a no-contest pact with the LSSP and CP to defeat the UNP in 1956. Rightists in the SLFP resented the VLSSP and forced the resignation of the two VLSSP cabinet members in early 1959. But the alliance lasted until the death of Bandaranaike, after which the VLSSP called itself MEP.
- The badly divided parliamentary Left formed the United Left Front in 1963 for electoral gain, as the trade unions as a whole united to press their 21 demands. Frightened, the SLFP government set out to divide the left and thus be rid of the trade union threat. The offer of a cabinet post failed to persuade the VLSSP, which wanted a deal with the ULF as a whole. But the LSSP yielded. It called the SLFP petty bourgeois to claim that its alliance was not with a bourgeois party. But the LSSP's move ruined the ULF and aborted the joint trade union action.

- Joining the government split the LSSP. With leading opponents of the move beating a retreat, a weak minority formed the LSSP(R), which went on to suffer further splits.
- To counter sustained hostility of the Lake House media empire, the government sought to nationalise it in 1963. Lake House hit back by inducing some MPs of the SLFP to cross the floor and vote against the government on the Throne Speech. Numbers were still short. But, thanks to the two LSSP dissenters, the government lost by a vote.
- The Communist Party too split on the parliamentary path to socialism. The pro-Beijing faction prevailed over the pro-Moscow faction which prescribed a parliamentary path, but lost its advantage in course of time owing to splits including that of the Sinhala chauvinist JVP.
- The betrayal of the trade union action of 1963 and the electoral success of the UNP in 1965 hurt the hold of the Left on the trade unions so that the traditionally anti-union UNP became able to build trade unions.
- The Federal Party which led Tamil nationalism since 1956 launched a poorly planned Satyagraha campaign in 1961 that collapsed when the government declared emergency. Desperation pushed the FP into a futile alliance with the UNP in 1965 and a call for secession in 1976.
- The pro-West UNP-led seven-party government of 1965–70 which had in it Tamil nationalists and former opponents of the UNP failed to honour its promise of district wise devolution of power. It also failed on the economic front and lost badly in the general election of 1970.
- In 1970m the LSSP and the CP set aside differences to join the SLFP in the United Front and won the elections. The UF claimed to be socialist, as the LSSP sought to secure socialism by a series of nationalisations. Assertiveness of the LSSP led to friction with the SLFP whose rightists aggravated the friction, causing the collapse of the UF in 1975, while the LSSP itself suffered a split of minor significance.

- The JVP insurrection shocked the Left as a whole. While it did not hurt the UF very much, it strengthened the hands of the police and armed forces. The UNP had a leadership tussle, and JR Jayewardene, rather clumsily, tried to capture the head office of the UNP. Having failed, he tried to join the UF government, but the LSSP blocked him. (Political historians have carefully committed these events to amnesia.)
- The Constitution of 1972 hurt Tamil feelings and Tamil politics got dragged into secessionism in 1976 by the TULF, an alliance of the FP and Tamil Congress. The TULF also made a deal with the UNP to back it at the next election in return for a pledge to address Tamil grievances. (The outcome, however, was the aggravation of the national question and its escalation into a war.)
- After the UF split, the LSSP and CP jointly contested the next election to the exclusion of the SLFP. The move split the anti-UNP vote, and the UNP secured a huge majority. The SLFP was humiliated while the parliamentary left was decimated, and the political map of the country changed dramatically and irreversibly.

Although the country had many splits in major political parties and a variety of electoral alliances, the personal factor was a weaker force than political ideology in the political landscape. Notably, despite changes in the policies of parties, their political identity endured. Implications of changes in policy apart, each party had a mass political base which politically identified itself with the party until after 1977.

Parties sans Ideology

The ideology of every parliamentary political party deteriorated visibly since the executive presidency was imposed on the country by the 1978 constitution which also made it hard for a party or an alliance to win the necessary majority to amend the constitution. Parties got ideologically depoliticized owing to the decay of the parliamentary political system

and erosion of national sovereignty by planned wrecking of the national economy and penetration of foreign capital under UNP rule.

The UNP took full advantage of the demoralised frame of mind of the SLFP and the Left and disrupted their public political activities. The JVP obliged as an instrument between 1978 and 1980 in gratitude to the UNP government that released all JVP detainees convicted for their role in the 1971 insurrection. But UNP–JVP friction grew since 1980. The JVP, which earlier denounced trade unions as debased, exploited the weakening of the parliamentary left to make inroads into trade unions.

The constitution of 1978 also ensured that the changes that it made were virtually impossible to dislodge. It prohibited MPs changing loyalty after election, but enabling crossing the floor to join government, not *vice versa*. Election of MPs on a district basis instead of electorate basis, made it hard for a party to win a 2/3 majority needed to change the constitution.

There was a positive side to district-based election in that it helped parties with scattered support bases win more parliamentary seats than possible with the electorate basis. But the preferential vote scheme that decided the elected candidates from among a slate of candidates of a party led to bitter rivalry among candidates for 'preference votes' in order to be elected. This led to intra-party rivalry, personal bickering and even violence, and a breakdown of party unity and discipline. Financial inducements played a big role in the electoral process, and most elected candidates were ill-educated and politically illiterate, with the parties themselves desiring candidates with financial means to fight elections.

Electoral malpractices also escalated after 1978. Election officials were openly threatened in polling booths by ruffians enjoying state support in order to facilitate impersonation. Violence was used to block likely voters for rival parties or candidates, and on occasion ballot boxes were stuffed.

Abuse of executive presidential power included political appointments to posts including Supreme Court judges and the use of the police to bully

political opponents. Political victimisation went to the extent of using hand-picked members of the judiciary in 1980 to deprive former Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranayake of her of her civic rights for seven years. Overall, politicisation wrecked the credibility of the judiciary and police.

It was well known that undated letters of resignation were secured from each MP before his nomination as candidate in 1977. Secret files with data on financial and other activities of ministers and political opponents came in handy to blackmail potential dissent. That enabled the denial of the people their right to elect a new parliament in 1983 by extending the life of Parliament for a further six-year term in 1982 through a rigged referendum using an amendment of the Constitution.

The NSSP, which broke off from the LSSP in 1977, rather prematurely, launched a general strike in 1981, before the opposition could recover its stamina. The government used brute force to suppress the strike and severely penalised many strikers with dismissals. That proved a severe setback for trade union action, which was further undermined by the use of courts of law to declare a strike as unlawful.

Systematic undermining of the state sector by privatization, penetration of the economy by foreign investor capital under the open economic policy, setting up of Free Trade Zones and encouragement of workers to seek employment abroad as cheap labour marked a persistent economic trend under which the national bourgeois SLFP surrendered to foreign capital and the Left as a whole was too weak to challenge the harsh reality of the open economy. The parliamentary left compromised itself further by making itself an eternal junior partner in electoral alliances led by the now reactionary SLFP.

The UNP government of 1977–94 was also marked by state sponsored ethnic violence against the Tamil nationality followed by oppression by the armed force and police. While foreign meddling hindered a peaceful resolution of the national question, the escalation of armed conflict

created a situation in which successive governments, despite declarations by both sides to pursue peace, war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) lasted 30 years.

The context of war proved instrumental in the destruction of even pretences to ideology. Since 1994, successive governments have induced minority nationality political parties to join the government by offering ministerial posts. This marked the virtual destruction of ideology, if any, of all Hill Country Tamil and Muslim political parties. It also caused splits in the parties with leaders of rival factions demanding posts for themselves. Tamil parliamentary party loyalties were divided between India and the LTTE (especially since early this century).

Horse trading of MPs to topple the government happened again in 2001. The SLFP-led People's Alliance government lost its majority when four MPs of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress / National Unity Alliance left in June that year. In October the government was brought down by the crossing over of 13 MPs including 8 from the SLFP under dubious circumstances, excuse being that the PA sought JVP support to survive.

A UNP-led alliance came to power in December, but President Chandrika Kumaratunga had her revenge in October 2003 by declaring a state of emergency and placing three key cabinet portfolios under her direct control. The UNP led government was left in a state of limbo and the UPFA, in which the SLFP partnered with the JVP and old allies, was elected in 2004, and 3 SLMC and 8 CWC defectors helped it secure an absolute majority. But it went on to be a carnival of defections and counter-defections. The 39 JVP MPs who left the UPFA government in September 2005 supported the election of Mahinda Rajapaksa as President in November, thanks to a boycott enforced by the LTTE in the Northern Province. 12 JVP MPs rebranded themselves as NFF and re-joined the government in December 2008. Two UNP MPs defected to the government in early 2006, followed by 18 UNP MPs and 6 SLMC MPs in

2007 January, on the pretext of strengthening the government's hand in its 'war against LTTE terrorists'.

The JVP joined forces with the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist Jathika Hela Utrumaya in 2005 to torpedo the PTOMS, the Tsunami relief package proposed by President Kumaratunga, on pretext that the LTTE will access the allocated funds, and even more cynically to litigate to demerge the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Both were disappointed in their bid to be the main defenders of Sinhala chauvinism when President Mahinda Rajapaksa decided to resume the war against the LTTE that ended in 2009 with the decimation of the LTTE for which he claimed full credit. The conduct of the JVP was consistent with its chauvinism that overcame its usual anti-India rhetoric to heap praise on India for warning the LTTE against seizing the Sri Lankan army headquarters in Jaffna in May 2000.

The period also marked major splits: the JVP into three factions; the UNP into two which formally parted company in 2019; and the fragmentation of the SLMC and the CWC. The Tamil National Alliance too had fissures that reduced its parliamentary strength to 10 from over 20 earlier on. Main credit for the fragmentation of parties since 2005 is due to Mahinda Rajapaksa who also caused the break-up of the SLFP when he failed to take control of it after his defeat in 2015. He went on to be leader of SLPP, founded in 2016 as a mighty successor to the SLFP but fell into disarray since the stepping down of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2022.

The second presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa was also notorious for buying the support of opposition MPs to pass laws that enhanced the powers of the executive presidency way beyond that it had in 1978.

In Summary

De-politicization of political parties began with the weakening of left by decades of parliamentary opportunism and accelerated under the open economic policy introduced in 1978.

The 30-year war had deeply divided the country along ethnic and ethno-religious fault lines later while failing to unite even a single nationality.

The old parliamentary 'left' fell victim to ethnocentric politics, which also hurt the anti-imperialist trends in the country. Its responded weakly to chauvinistic legislation and national oppression. The JVP which replaced the old left as the main 'left party' has remained just as chauvinistic as it was at its founding and unwilling to review its chauvinist past.

The ideological de-politicization of the parties is due to the decay of the parliamentary system under the executive presidency and the erosion of national sovereignty by the planned wrecking of the national economy and penetration of foreign capital under the open economic policy. The absence of clear ideological guidance ha reduced electoral politics to an opportunistic exercise in electoral alliances, bargaining for posts and horse trading to serve personal ambition devoid of political purpose.

Foreign powers, especially the US and India, exert direct control over parliamentary political parties and their leaders. While China also seeks to increase its influence in the country, an imagined 'Chinese threat' has become the pretext for the US and India to meddle in the affairs in the country and impose their will on successive governments.

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Ways of Neo-colonialism

Monopoly capitalism to manifest itself as imperialist global dominance relied heavily on its colonial and semi-colonial control of countries with less advanced economies, ranging from pre-feudal to feudal and semi-feudal economies and backward capitalist countries.

Colonial control was in the form of direct colonial presence or exercise of power through an agency. Whatever could be plundered, be it mineral resources, agricultural produce or semi-processed goods that cost less to manufacture in the colony, was plundered. Theft also included labour for low wages as well as export of a sizeable population of workers of one or several colonies as slaves or bonded labour to another colony to provide intense labour in plantations, mines and manufacture of primary goods.

Colonial plunder changed its form and content to match developments since the industrial revolution. Colonialism also helped the colonial power by transferring a larger share of the burden of exploitation of labour from the colonial metropolis to the colony and somewhat ease the pain of exploitation at home at the expense of toilers in the colonies.

The Concept of Neo-colonialism

The term 'neo-colonialism' emerged from discussions in the All African People's Conferences (AAPC), a movement for freedom from colonial rule. The term, formally used in the AAPC conferences in the late 1950s and early 1960s, was formally defined and described as the deliberate and continued propagation of the colonial system in independent African states in the "1961 Resolution on Neo-colonialism" of the AAPC. Neo-colonialism put Africa through socio-political, economic, military, and cultural agony without the direct violence of the colonial era by indirect

and subtle means including technology. Publication in 1965 of Kwame Nkrumah's seminal work *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* took the term to the fore in internal political discourses. Nkrumah went on to depict the socio-economic and political control on the economic, linguistic and cultural fronts, whereby promotion of the culture of the neo-colonist country supported the cultural assimilation of the colonized people to expose their national economy to multinational corporations of the neo-colonial country.

The notion of neo-colonialism attracted leading left intellectuals like Jean Paul Sartre who in his *Colonialism and Neo-colonialism* (1964) called for the immediate disengagement of France's grip on its ex-colonies and the removal of sustained French influence in the affairs of the colonies. Neo-colonialism has since been written on and studied by scholars in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond as a major theme in African philosophy.

Nkrumah, created the term when he was president of Ghana, based on his study of the African experience. The term earned wider relevance soon to be further researched and dissected in detail by anti-imperialist theoreticians from Franz Fanon to Samir Amin.

Mao Zedong gave the title "Apologists of Neo-Colonialism" in 1963 to his critical comment on Soviet efforts to placate US imperialism much to the detriment of on-going anti-colonial revolutionary armed struggles. *"(https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/polemic/neo-colon.htm)* Significantly, Mao endorsed the idea of neo-colonialism when the term 'semi-colonialism' dominated discourse on former Asian colonies.

Neo-colonialism referred to retaining the contents of colonial rule even after the end of such rule by an unequal relationship based on economic, political or ideological dependence. Thus the term which once addressed the postcolonial relationship between European colonial powers and their former colonies later found wider use to refer to contexts of unequal political and economic relations between two countries that enable one to economically and politically dominate over the other.

Semi-colonialism

The term semi-colony referred to states that were never colonies but suffered domination by colonial powers which allowed them a nominal status of independence and to states that were freed of formal colonial rule but still suffered control by the colonial power.

Ethiopia, Persia (now Iran), Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Thailand and China were the first category. Strictly, it would cover the princely states of India that were not British ruled and protectorates of colonial powers.

The second category comprised former colonies whose sovereignty was breached by intervention in their affairs by the former colonial ruler. A classic case was the dismissal in 1953 of the People's Progressive Party government of British Guyana (now Guyana) 133 days after appointment by Her Majesty the Queen of England, formal head of state of ex-colonies with dominion status, as Prime Minister Cheddi Jagan was a communist. Ethnic rivalry was stirred later to divide the people and keep PPP out of power. Ceylon decided to declare itself a republic after Her Majesty's Privy Council rescinded verdicts of its highest court.

Rising nationalism amid waning power of the former colonial master made it hard to sustain residual colonial power. Imperialist rivalry too was transformed with the US becoming the main imperialist power after WWII. Britain and France kept a semblance of imperial might. But heir impotence showed in 1956 when Egypt challenged them by nationalizing the Suez Canal to raise funds for development.

The emergence of Soviet led socialist countries was the pretext for US-led imperialism to fortify militarism. Britain, by seeking US backing, made its colonial territories vulnerable to US penetration. The same happened to France, but slower, except in Indo China where it ceded control to the US. Despite waning semi-colonial control of the state in former colonies, British economic control survived by means like monopoly over access to crucial exports and essential imports. Lack of capital, industrial skills and

educational resources helped to sustain imperialist economic control. Education and training were areas where links with the colonial power were vital. Police and military training was in the colonial metropole until alternatives were found, although not to the exclusion of imperialist powers. Colonial military bases endured for varying periods. British naval and air bases took nine years to leave Sri Lanka. In 1966 Britain leased the island of Diego Garcia to the US to build an airbase. Stationing British troops abroad declined under Britain's East of Suez Policy of 1971.

French ties with Africa formed part of its colonial history. The end of colonial rule muted old ties into agreements to serve French regional interests. France established defence pacts that assured strong influence, and its engagement in Africa was driven by access to resources, political stability, and protection of investments. As the continent was crucial to French interests, France backed corrupt puppet leaders militarily and financially in exchange for serving France at the expense of their country.

French military presence survived under a cunning post-colonial policy that drew on bitter lessons in Algeria where France fought in vain against the Algerian National Liberation Front between 1954 and 1962. Between 1960 and 1994, France updated defence treaties with 27 African states, to lay a legal foundation for its sustained military presence. In the 1970s and 1980s, French forces remained in over 20 African states covering 40% of African territory, making France the most influential in former colonies.

From Colonial to Neo-colonial Masters

France

Although as a colonial power France lagged Britain, its military and economic presence endured better. The idea of "Françafrique" prettified its semi-colonial control by locating it as a home to freedom and human rights and a friend of Africa, hiding bonds designed to defend French domination in Africa with help from African partners. France exploited the ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity of African countries whose

borders were drawn by colonial occupiers. French, the colonial official language, is now the sole official language in ten African countries and shares official or semi-official status in ten others.

The fifteen African countries under French semi-colonial control were tuned to adapt to the emerging neo-colonial order. France has given priority to control of strategic resources over trade as Africa was until recently the source of most of its strategic metals (all uranium ore, 90% of bauxite and 76% of manganese ore and 59% of cobalt ore). State-owned Elf gets 70% of its petroleum from Africa. Seven of the nine Francophone West African states use the CFA Franc, a currency pegged to the Euro and backed by France— a legacy of France's colonial economic practice.

To retain France as a force in the international arena, its political leaders kept France-Africa relations on the front line, backed by affiliated African states. Economic tools like CFA Franc and extraction of natural resources intensified political influence. Personal ties between the French President and African leaders too helped while military bases remained a key aspect of French strategy. Cultural co-operation via La Francophone and French residents in Africa help to keep relations alive and active.

Although English penetrated most African colonies, Arabic began to dominate northern Africa, but independent South Sudan giving official status to English. The blocking penetration of former French colonies by English forced the US to rely on France for expansion in Africa, and Francophone Africa was relatively less prone to US intrusion.

French attitude towards former colonies showed colonial features like callous meddling in internal affairs. Algeria which fought a bitter war of liberation (1954–62) and Guinea which proclaimed independence in 1958 were exceptions. When free Guinea asked to stay in the CFA Franc Zone, France arrogantly banished it from the monetary union, and Guinea responded by initiating a new currency. Fearing similar moves by other former colonies, France turned to political and economic coercion. Given

the context of the Cold War, Guinean President Ahmed Sékou Touré warmed up to the Soviet Bloc. France, in response, used its "Operation Persil" in 1959 to derail the Guinean economy by introducing into Guinea large amounts of fakes of the new currency and thereby induce inflation. Thanks to the USSR and China, Sékou Touré held until death in 1984.

French policy towards former colonies was interventionist, regardless of government, and was backed by the West throughout the Cold War, giving France free rein to intervene in its exclusive African sphere. France intervened militarily to protect French nationals, prevent coups, crush rebellions, restore order or support chosen African leaders in Benin (1991), Central African Republic (1967, 1979-81 & 2013–16) , Chad (1968–72, 1978, 1983 & 1986-2014), Comoros (1989 & 1995), Democratic Republic of Congo (1978, 1991 & 2003), Republic of Congo (1997), Côte d'Ivoire (2002–4 & 2011), Djibouti (1991), Gabon (1964 & 1990), Mali (2013–14), Mauritania (1977), Rwanda (1990–93, 1994 & 1994), Togo (1986), Senegal (1962) and Sierra Leone (1992). Its help to keep loyal rulers in power paid political and financial dividends. President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974–1981) received suitcases of diamonds on several occasions from Jean-Bedel Bokassa, ruler of the Central African Republic. Given France's support for corrupt leaders, it is no surprise that 21 of 27 West African coups between 1990 and 2023 were in Francophone states.

Like the US in much of Latin America even in the latter half of the 20th Century, France until recently decided who survived in office in much of Francophone Africa. But things have changed rapidly since the coup in Mali in 2020. Mass enthusiasm for coups to oust pro-French regimes was based on memories of colonial rule marked by cultural erasure, racial segregation, forced displacement, brutal military attacks and forced labour, much of which still survive in the Sahel.

Moves by France and the pro-Western ECOWAS alliance to browbeat the popular coup government of Niger backfired. Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali signed a mutual defence pact to collaborate against external threats.

They also left G5 Sahel, the five-member military alliance to fight Islamist rebels in Sahel, in limbo with just two members, after Mali left in 2023 May and Niger and Burkina Faso in December. ECOWAS is facing chaos as Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali announced plans to quit the 15-member alliance. While the coup in Gabon in August 2023 did not hurt ties with France, Senegal in March 2024, pulled out of its political crisis to elect a new young president Bassirou Faye asserting Senegal's determination to be rid of French domination. France, however, will for some time retain its bases in Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Gabon, Djibouti and Chad.

Britain

Even in the neo-colonial era, Britain tried to keep its grip on agricultural production in former colonies. This relationship of dependence, where the economies of former colonies rely on the purchase of crops by capitalists in the imperialist West, without which subsistence was uncertain for the people of the neo-colony. To sustain the agricultural economy nurtured by colonial rule, the neo-colony had to maintain a steady outflow of produce to imperial powers amid depreciating returns caused by weak bargaining power. World market prices of primary agricultural goods were held low or let slide while prices of industrial goods, especially ones using advancing technology, were kept on the rise. Britain acted to retain the imbalance in bargaining power with its former colonies, so that the latter remained subject to the whims of British monopolists as before. Even with ownership of plantations restored to a former colony, agency houses intervened to collect large commissions and freight charges.

Industrial backwardness of former colonies was no accident, and persists in most of Africa. India applied strict import control of a variety of goods in order to encourage their industrial production, but it took decades to be globally competitive in industrial goods. Products like motor vehicles that were made under foreign licence or in partnership, incur large costs as licence and royalty.

British influence in commercial and political affairs of some former colonies endured through the closeness of the rulers to the Empire. British intervention between 1948 and 1960 to put down a communist uprising in Malaya (the main component of Malaysia now) bonded the rulers of Malaya to Britain so that British influence remained strong for years after independence in 1957. British Sinophobia which projected the sizeable ethnic Chinese population in Malaya as a threat was a key factor in the founding of Malaysia comprising Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah. Ethno political considerations forced Singapore out of Malaysia in 1965. British influence held strong in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei until the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) emerged as a strong economic alliance and the US became assertive in the region.

Acute post WWI & II labour shortage in Britain was met by cheap labour from the West Indies, India and Pakistan, with profound implications for racism and exploitation of Third World labour several decades later.

The Whites Only British Commonwealth founded in 1926 with Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa was enlarged after WWII to include former colonies but not republics. It soon accommodated republics in view of the prospect of several member countries becoming republics. The club became the Commonwealth of Nations by 1949 to include all willing former colonies, and has since 1995 admitted states that were not British colonies. The global impact of the Commonwealth has shrunk in the face of rising US global dominance. It is now a residual colonial institution like Westminster style parliamentary government, the legal system, link to the Pound Sterling and businesses with British links.

The role of English as link language or even official language in former colonies is a bond backed by cultural influences, especially among the elite. But the US, in a matter of decades, usurped the benefits of colonial bonds, especially English, to nudge Britain out of it influential status as global economic, commercial and technological might steadily eroded the status of British English as the standard for English. The challenge to

English was strongest from French while Russian and German posed challenges in science and technology. These challenges have waned since the US became the preeminent capitalist super power.

Unable to identify itself with West Europe, Britain plays second fiddle to the US in global issues, even after joining the European Union in 1973.

Failed Colonial Powers

Of European states with colonies Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands and Denmark had colonies in the Americas, Asia and Africa.

Spain held much of the Americas and the Caribbean and the Philippines which it forfeited first to Britain and then the US. By the end of the 19th Century it was not a colonial power. Its tenuous hold in Africa lasted until 1956 in northern Morocco, 1968 in Spanish Guinea (Equatorial Guinea) and 1975 in Spanish Sahara (Sharawi) seized since by Morocco but for 20-25% of the territory controlled by the liberation movement POLOSARO. Spain lost nearly all of its small island possessions including Guam now a US naval base, but holds to the Canary Islands off northern Africa jointly with the EU, Ceuta (a tiny region of northern Morocco) and a few Caribbean islands. Its own Gibraltar is British controlled.

Portugal was the longest-lasting European colonial empire, lasting nearly six centuries from the conquest of Ceuta in North Africa in 1415 to the loss of Macau to China in 1999. It stretched across the globe, with territorial control in Africa, North and South America, Asia and Oceania. At the peak of European colonialism in the 19th Century, however, Portugal had already lost its South American colony of Brazil and all Asia colonies but for a few pockets. But it expanded its outposts in Africa, and held on to its colonies for decades since WWII, and secured Madeira and the Azores as its autonomous regions. While it forfeited Goa to India in 1962, its hold in Africa held amid liberation struggles, thanks to the Apartheid regime of South Africa, and backing by Western powers. The Cape Verde islands, São Tomé and Principe, Angola, and Mozambique in Africa and Timor-

Leste in Asia won freedom in 1975 following the 1974 revolution that got rid of its fascist rulers. But Macao returned to China only in 1999. Portuguese failure to arrange smooth transition to independence led to chaos, especially in Angola where civil war intensified with South Africa siding with rebels only to be humiliated years later by a Cuban-Angolan alliance. Portuguese indifference also let the Indonesian fascist regime of Suharto seize Timor-Leste whose independence had to wait for his fall.

The Netherlands became a colonial power in Asia by seizing Portuguese colonies to achieve strategic presence in coastal southern India, control coastal Ceylon and a strategic port in Malacca (in Malaysia). It had a strong presence in West New Guinea and what is Indonesia. Territory held by it in the Americas and the Caribbean was smaller than those of its European rivals. Its presence in coastal West Africa included what are Ghana, Namibia and South Africa (with a Dutch settler colony). Declining naval power left it with Indonesia (until 1949) and Dutch New Guinea (until 1962) in Asia. To its west, it could hold only Surinam (until 1954) in South America and the Dutch Antilles (until 2010) in the Caribbean.

Denmark had a colonial history spanning mid-16th to mid-20th Centuries with colonies in Africa, the Americas and Asia. It inherited the medieval Atlantic colonies of Norway, including Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands from the United Kingdom of Denmark-Norway. Its remaining colonial vestiges are the autonomous territories of the Faroe Islands (a Danish county until 1948) and Greenland, colonial status ceasing in 1953.

Sweden had colonies in Africa, Asia and North America: 1638–63 in West Africa and North America; in 1733 in Parangipettai, India lost to the French and the British East India Companies; and its longest held (1784–1878) colony of Sankt Barthélemy (Saint-Barthélemy) was sold to France and briefly held French Guadeloupe (1813–14) were in North America.

Italy had a colonial empire covering Libya, Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia (the last three together officially named Africa Orientale Italiana). Outside

Africa, in 1912, it seized the Dodecanese Islands and Fascist Italy settled them with Italian colonists in the 1930s until defeat in WWII. It occupied Albania (1917–20 and 1939–43) besides concessions in China, including in Tianjin. It forfeited all colonial possessions after defeat in WWII.

Belgium ruled the Belgian Congo (modern DR Congo) from 1908 to 1960, Ruanda-Urundi (Rwanda and Burundi) from 1922 to 1962, and the Lado Enclave (now Central Equatorial Province in South Sudan) from 1884 to 1910. It also had small concessions in Guatemala (1843–1854) and in Tianjin in China (1902–1931). It co-administered the Tangier International Zone in Morocco. Its rule over its African colonies, especially the Congo, was notorious for cruelty and plunder of mineral resources. Sixty years after end of colonial rule, residues of Belgian rule still prevail.

Germany, a late comer to colonial expansion, became active after German unification in 1871 and seized unclaimed African territory in what are Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Namibia, Cameroon, Gabon, Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Nigeria, Togo and Ghana to be the third-largest colonial power after Britain and France. It also held north-eastern New Guinea, Samoa and numerous Micronesian islands in the Pacific. After defeat in WWI, its colonies became League of Nations mandate territories of one or another of the allied powers.

Russia, also known Imperial Russia, covered a vast territory in northern Eurasia since 1721 until dissolution in 1917. It sold its only overseas territory of Alaska to the US in 1867. Russia lacked access to the sea until early 18th Century, when it gained access to Baltic Sea. By then other Europeans had conquered all lands that were desirable and accessible for colonization. Thus, despite having the second most powerful navy after the British in early 19th Century, Imperial Russia had no overseas colonies.

Turkey (renamed Türkiye in 2021) had strong presence in Europe, Asia and Africa under the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922) that gave way to the Turkish Republic. It gave up its North African administrative regions of

Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Eritrea in 1912. The final retreat that began with the First Balkan War (1912–13) ended with the carving up of the Ottoman Empire with the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres after defeat by the Allies in WWI. This humiliation too contributed to the notoriously chauvinist state oppression of minorities, especially of the Kurds.

Japan, as the only Asian capitalist colonial power, had a colonial empire formed by annexing Taiwan (1895) and Korea (1910), establishing a client state in China's Manchuria (1932) and occupying parts of northern China (from 1933). During WWII Japan expanded in Asia at the expense of European colonial powers, but defeat shattered Japan's imperial dreams.

The US as Leading Imperialist Power

Latin America was the world's first region to decolonize. But trade links with Europe and proximity of the US, the main capitalist power in the hemisphere, bonded Latin America to imperialism. Growing domination by the US well before imperialism emerged meant that neo-colonial ways penetrated Latin America much earlier than they did Asia or Africa.

Economic gains from WWI & II helped the US to become the regional hegemon. Proto neo-colonialism in the Americas and the Caribbean were products of US dominance. Being a settler colony eased the switch of the US from a pioneer of independence in the Americas to an expansionist power. Seizure of Mexican territory and colonial or quasi-colonial control of former Spanish colonies made the US a *de facto* colonial power. It bid for influence in Africa by subsidizing freed black people to settle on the west coast of Africa from 1820. The American Colonization Society and other state colonization societies settled freed blacks in separate colonies. These became the US colony of Liberia, which with a desire for home rule formed the Commonwealth of Liberia in 1839. Liberia became independent in 1847.

In the early 20th Century, the US held Puerto Rico and the Philippines as colonies and Cuba and Panama among others as protectorates. Its open

door policy in China was part of imperialist collusion. Absence of other colonial baggage made credible its posture as a champion of democracy, freedom and human rights, which for long assisted political penetration.

Despite the impression that the US stood for independence of colonies, the US had laid claim to many mostly uninhabited islands and atolls in the Caribbean and the Pacific for a century until WWII. It annexed Alaska and Hawaii in 1959 and holds the overseas territories of Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands besides minor outlying islands and nearly 800 overseas military bases around the world.

The Colonial Heritage

Neo-colonialism arrived in its present form in the 1960s as colonialism died out. Colonialism in Asia was unlike that in Africa, Sub-Saharan especially, which was to it an endless source of industrial raw materials. While Asia industrialized, slowly, without hurting colonial interests, Sub-Saharan Africa was left behind, except in chosen sectors in South Africa. Racial and colour prejudices, built on centuries of slave trade and slavery, hardened the racist mind-set that kept down a whole continent as children of a lesser god. Notably, legal segregation by colour in the US long preceded apartheid in South Africa and the racist Nazi ideology.

Some countries avoided colonial conquest owing to lack of attractive resources (Ethiopia), geographic remoteness (Nepal, Bhutan), cultural and military resistance (Afghanistan), strength of the indigenous state (Japan, Iran, Turkey), or big power rivalry (Thailand) or a combination of such factors. But the picture changed with the neo-colonial upsurge.

The limited sovereignty of neo-colonies shrank as the USSR declined and later collapsed. Weaker partners of the imperialist order too were cut to size. Meantime, some former colonies and semi-colonies developed fairly strong capitalist economies, with a few even aiming to fulfil their regional hegemonic ambitions by colluding with a global power.

While neo-colonialism has its variants, its control of neo-colonies is by economic or monetary means. The economic penetration necessary for the purpose has been enabled by aid programmes and trade agreements besides subversion of regimes or even armed intervention.

Colonial rulers curbed the economic growth of the colonies and impeded competition in exports. Neo-colonialism changed this to make some neo-colonies a source of cheap labour. Greedy for profit, imperialist capital outsourced labour intensive manufacturing wholly or partly to poorer countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America. Such industrialization did not economically help poor countries but made them sweatshops for US and European based investors. Meantime, soaring debt and weakening economy bonded the neo-colony and imperialism even closer. Growing consumerism made neo-colonies dumping grounds for surplus non-essential goods. Price fixing of primary goods including cash crops and minerals, and financing of development (as defined by imperialism) hurt balance of payments to aggravate the debt burden of neo-colonies.

Socio-cultural control, a key aspect of colonialism, took complex forms to condition society via the urban elite. The entertainment industry, mass media and now Internet impose the imperialist world view on the Third World. Meanwhile, parochial groups, mostly in South and Southeast Asia, indulge in ethnic, religious and cultural identity politics to provoke communal tension, backed by agents of imperialism, which takes advantage of social dissent to undermine the unity of sovereign states.

Economic control needs political control, and imperialism has in its pay a network of subversive forces including aid agencies and NGOs to destabilise governments through stirring civil unrest.

Neo-colonial Methods and Means

Let look at the neo-colonial means and methods to secure and sustain control over neo-colonies in the economic, political, social and cultural realms. Aggression, occupation, domination, interference and hegemony

are key features of the neo-colonial strategy. When seemingly passive methods fail, neo-colonialism will resort to force to implement its aims.

Economic methods

- Exploitation of market and cheap labour by mass private sector investment in developing countries
- Unfair exchange value for traded goods
- Manipulation of balance of payments by lowering prices of primary goods and raising those of industrial goods from the West
- Making the neo-colony depend on economic aid and grants with harsh conditions
- Propagating indebtedness by lending at high interest rates
- Making neo-colonies dumping grounds for Western goods
- Sustaining technological disparity by minimal transfer of technology so that the neo-colony relies on foreign investment to mass produce goods for the investor but not compete with advanced economies.

These interlinked economic methods contribute to prolonged indebtedness and economic backwardness. The neo-colonial purpose is realized when a neo-colony becomes an economic dependency through the agency of international economic institutions that control foreign aid and loans and multinational corporations that wield control if not monopoly over trade. Conditions are imposed on the neo-colony to ensure technological disparity by denying transfer of technology so that the neo-colony is held to ransom by the investor.

Neo-colonial penetration, mainly in the form of direct investment and setting up of branches and subsidiaries of foreign monopolies, also operate profitably as partnership with local big businesses in countries with a substantial industrial base. The local partner helps to build a market for goods made abroad as well as to facilitate payment by way of royalties and fees for 'technical services', patents, brand names and royalties.

The patronizing attitude of the neo-colonists is most evident in Africa, where the people are kept in need of guidance from the "master". This is flagrant in aid, grants, loans and contracts offered by Western dominated financial institutions with conditions that often deny independence of choice to African countries. Privatization of public enterprises and implementation of structural adjustment programs are demanded for debt alleviation of an indebted country. Aid is tied to procurement, and the beneficiary is compelled to spend it on specific goods and services from countries chosen by the donor. Donors also employ their own citizens to carry out tasks even when suitable candidates exist in the beneficiary country. They reserve the right to determine the sector of development or even the project that would be supported. Most importantly, aid will flow only if the recipient conforms to economic and political conditions laid down by the donor.

Social methods

- Control of information by domination of mass media
- Subversion of education by imposing curricula designed and monitored by imperialism
- Creation of an alienated elite through award of scholarships
- Promotion of neo-colonial socio-political values through propaganda

The imperialist state wields absolute control over the global media who are tasked to determine what the public deserves to know by controlling the content of information, misinformation and disinformation. For instance, the mainstream media and the Internet provided biased information at the behest of the Big Pharma to portray the COVID-19 virus as a deadly life threat in order to urge multiple administration of mRNA vaccines as well as edit out news of hazards of these vaccines including threat to life. Also, while an alliance of Western media goes on the attack to discredit Russia, the Russian news media are blocked by the US, Canada and EU countries in breach of the right to information.

During colonial rule, many resented colonial education owing to its irrelevance and over emphasis of colonial values. But post-independence education was only free of the visible signature of colonial thought but failed to develop curricula

that address the developmental needs of country and community. The myth that Western models of education and training are universal and suit all regardless of socio-economic context is sustained in the name of globalized educational norms,

Cultural methods

- Subversion of native languages
- Distortion of purpose of education and employment
- Subversion of cultural and ethical values
- Patronizing attitude towards tradition art and culture

A large section of the educated elite, notably those handpicked for training in the West, promote educational values that bond the neo-colony to imperial masters. They view the worth of education in terms of 'global employability' and not benefit to community or country. They also over-emphasize education in English (not learning of English to meet specific needs) to the detriment of education of the vast majority by the neglect of learning in one's own language.

Under colonial rule traditional art and culture faced neglect and humiliation but for aspects that interested the collaborative feudal elite. Post-colonial revival of tradition was not decolonization but vulgarization of rural art and culture as entertainment sapped of social and ethical worth. Globe-trotting Third World cultural troupes have alienated themselves from the community to which their art belonged and are if at all a negative influence on communities of performers.

Political methods

- Planting and sustaining in power members of a loyal elite
- Meddling in the affairs of the neo-colony
- Regime change
- Destabilizing 'unfriendly' governments
- Creation of satellite states
- Making defence treaties and military alliances
- Establishment of military bases

Unless a liberation struggle secured freedom, colonial rulers handed power to a loyal elite group. Even in India, where a loyal client was hard to install, steps were taken to pre-empt a left government. Otherwise, regime change was the way to re-colonize and open up to imperialism. Political assassinations and coups d'état, once common methods, are now followed by bogus mass protests including colour revolutions. But attempts at political assassination persist.

Meddling in the internal affairs of a state aims to weaken the opponents of a client regime or to destabilize an 'unfriendly' government. Coups d'état were the norm for regime change in Latin America and Africa during post-WWII 20th Century, especially the third quarter of the 20th Century. Such regime change brought no social or economic gain to a neo-colony or its people. Anti-imperialist governments are still targets of CIA guided coup attempts.

Creation of satellites and client states is an old imperialist strategy. Ironically the US and NATO partners called partners of the Warsaw Pact (an alliance formed in response to threats posed by NATO, SEATO and CENTO military alliances of the US and satellites) Soviet satellites. An alliance of equal predatory partners is vulnerable to splits until one partner fully subjugates the rest. The US-dominated NATO justified its existence based on the Soviet threat to Europe. But the NATO, having survived the Soviet Union by a quarter century, seeks to expand to encircle Russia, affirming aggressive expansionist aims.

The US has unprecedented global military presence with hundreds of overseas military bases, including the notorious base of Guantanamo in Cuba held amid decades of protest by the Cuban government and the base of Okinawa in Japan amid public resentment. The U.S. Defense Department has 11 combatant commands assigned to various regions of the world and other specific purposes.

The US has successfully bullied many Third World governments into defence treaties that allow US military presence on their soil and transport of military personnel and supplies to and across the country.

The US is the world's leading merchant of military equipment and its weapons industry has a strong hold on government policy that persuades the government

to pursue war as an essential part if its foreign policy. Since humiliation in the Vietnam War, the US has changed its global war strategy. Proxy wars are more the norm, where the US advances its expansionist goals through proxies while profiting by the sale of arms to its clients.

Neo-colonial Challenges

Attempts at Control

Weakening of the Non-Aligned Movement and widening Sino-Soviet differences helped the US to reverse in two decades some of its political losses in the Third World following its Vietnam debacle. The US gained in Africa at the expense of former colonial powers, but like its European allies viewed Africa as an eternal source of minerals. Africa was denied development and forced into debt.

Awareness of their neo-colonial condition persuaded African countries to find trade and development partners outside the imperialist West. Much to the fury of imperialism, a string of coups d'état in Francophone Africa in the past decade replaced governments loyal to French neo-colonialism.

The success rate of US in regime change has declined in this century and US efforts have been frustrated by its longstanding targets of Cuba, Iran, Venezuela, Nicaragua and North Korea.

Even before the fall of the Soviet Union the US had exerted economic and political pressure to neutralize challenges to its hegemony. During the US-Japan trade war in the 1980s, it painted Japan as an economic threat, attacked Japan's industrial policy and accused Japan of intellectual property theft and dumping products into the US. It imposed heavy fines on Japanese firms accused of theft and sale of militarily-sensitive products to the Soviet Union to force Japan to sign agreements to share electronic technologies and import more American electronic products. The undeclared trade war of the US against China, seemingly a rerun of that show, had a different outcome. The US could not subdue China.

The occasional dissenting European voice on international issues during the Cold War is now unheard in the conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine. In Ukraine, the EU, to its own peril, succumbed to US pressure to impose sanctions against Russia, from which the US profited while Russia was unhurt. But the loyalty of the European partners of the US now is such that their relationship with the US is akin to a neo-colonial relationship.

Desire to dominate partnerships makes the US prefer bilateral economic alliances. It uses bodies like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to force its will on beneficiaries of its 'aid'. Recent initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for prosperity (2022) are designed to stop countries from joining Chinese projects like the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI). Former Malaysian Premier Mahathir Mohamad called the IPEF a political and not economic grouping meant to isolate China. Strategic anti-China alliances like AUKUS and QUAD have, however, failed to bear fruit. In fact, the setting up of AUKUS irked France as its Australian interests were undercut by it.

Similar motives drive the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (2023) which is organized as separate topical buckets addressing a wide array of economic policy challenges common to the US and eleven other states—Barbados, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay.

The US has hegemonic control over the NATO and the Organization of American States (OAS), and abuses the UN and its organs in ways that an imperialist power would treat its colonies. It decides who holds key posts including UN Secretary General and will humiliate any SG who may show the slightest sign of defiance. Boutros Boutros-Ghali (January 1992–December 1996) was made an example for SGs to follow by denying him the usual second term as SG.

The US, while arming its clients to keep its own enemies at bay, also has economic interests in arming them. Profits for its Military Industrial

Complex demand keeping wars alive even when defeat is certain, as in Afghanistan and now Ukraine.

Global Military Presence

The US relies much on its global military presence and economic bullying. But public anger about loss of American lives on foreign soil compels it to use proxy wars to avoid direct confrontation with a strong 'enemy' like Russia or China, or even Iran or North Korea. Drones came in handy to spare the lives of American pilots, but America's opponents soon caught up on that front.

The US still has the edge in advanced weapons and has a very powerful naval fleet, reputedly the strongest in the world, with unmatched ability to project force globally to protect American interests. The US also has by far the largest fleet of military aircraft. Its military might is much greater if one counts in the NATO and other military alliances. However, the war in Ukraine has punctured the myth of invincibility of the US and NATO.

Economic Domination

Even in the 21st Century, the US and its European allies view Africa as an abundant source of industrial minerals, managed for them by compliant heads of state. They wantonly ignored economic development of Africa, especially Sub-Saharan. But for South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Morocco and a few others, manufacturing in African countries has always lagged their overall economic growth, so that Africa's share of global manufacturing shrank from 3% in 1970 to less than 2% in this century.

Chinese economic support without strings for infrastructural development, industrialization and economic assistance appealed to Africa countries as it offered technology transfer and infrastructure building in contrast to the West laying down demands like stronger governance and investor-friendly environment. Anxiety over growing China–Africa partnership has forced

the West to see African countries as business and investment partners. However, given their neo-colonial mindset, they have some distance to go.

The West resents China's non-interference, which it claims would prop up corrupt leaders and dictators. But what has the West done to reduce corruption? Did not the likes of Mobutu Sese-Seko of Congo, Omar Bongo of Gabon, Gnassimgbe Eyadema of Togo, Sani Abacha of Nigeria, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Ben Ali of Tunisia thrive with their blessings?

China invests mainly in manufacturing and SEZs and infrastructure. Large and small enterprises have invested in textiles, leather processing, building materials, metal smelting and processing and investment is essentially market-driven. Chinese-backed SEZs attract Chinese investment, largely in sectors with development potential. Of Chinese investments infrastructure is most prominent. The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway in Ethiopia and the Mombasa–Nairobi SGR in Kenya lead the replacement of Africa's narrow gauge railway of the colonial era with modernised standard-gauge. That, besides improved logistical capacity for trade and industrial development, could connect the whole of East Africa by rail. Such investments generate employment and exchange of knowledge. If the West too would act to industrialize and modernize Africa in an inclusive way even if it is to wean Africa away from China, that will be a blessing, with due credit to China.

Political Bullying

Having lost its initiative in manufacturing and international trade to China, the US resorted to economic bullying. Methods that worked with Japan and European allies failed against China, which the US now calls a threat more than a rival. Political skulduggery in Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong failed to bear fruit and the US resorted to sanctions on pretext of human and democratic rights violations. With that too failing, it is now busy provoking proxy wars in the South China Sea by arming Taiwan against perceived 'Chinese invasion', promoting separatists in Taiwan and meddling in marine boundary disputes between China and its neighbours.

Chinese initiated projects like the BRI, BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) are back on track after the COVID-19 induced global economic hiccups and amid US efforts to subvert and sow political discord. Prospects of drawing China into a war seem bleak, but the US is working on China's historical issues with Japan, India and Vietnam. It is unlikely that any of them would willingly harm itself to oblige the US.

Encircling Russia proved more confrontational than encircling China, and was accelerated following regime changes in Middle Eastern and North African countries that refused to be clients of the US. Post 9/11 sympathy for the US let invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq pass unchallenged. Russia and China erred in not using their veto in the UNSC to block NATO attack on Libya in 2011. Targeting of Syria alerted Iran and Russia, and Russian intervened in 2015 after the CIA orchestrated coup of 2014 installed a fascistic anti-Russian government in the Ukraine. The Syrian government survived, thanks to support by Iran, Russia and the Hezbollah of Lebanon, but with a third of Syrian territory still under some form of foreign control.

The current US global agenda is a product of desperation. Russia distrusts the US which sought to make a subservient client of Russia when Yeltsin was in charge. The economy revived after Putin took charge and Russia projects itself as a nationalist military power with a sound economy. That hinders the hegemonic ambitions of the US more than anything done by post-Khrushchev Soviet Union. Russia's siding with any state that seems to defy the US has also made its military presence welcome in Africa.

Ukraine was encouraged to join the NATO to provoke Russia, and Ukraine rashly ignored Russian warnings against a bid to join NATO. The US and NATO misjudged Russia's military strength and economic tenacity. Their hope that Ukraine with their military support will subdue Russia was dashed when Ukraine's autumn 2023 counter-offensive slumped. Besides, not only did US-led sanctions against Russia fail they also hurt European economies reliant on cheap natural gas from Russia. Blasting of the Nord-Stream-2 gas pipe from Russia to Germany, in which a US role is suspected,

compounded the agony. Economic reality has made support for Ukraine unpopular in many EU member countries and a divisive issue in the US.

The suicidal policy of the US to defend Israel unconditionally located it as a supporter of Israeli genocide in Gaza. US reluctance to accept calls in the UNSC for a ceasefire shows it as a partner in genocide, making it hard for its Arab allies to defend US policy even in other global issues.

China made matters worse for US imperialism by helping normalisation of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia in March 2023, which made political isolation of Iran harder, helped Syria re-join the Arab League and eased tensions in Yemen. The Sunni-Shia contradiction that the US used to divide the Muslim world too has lost much of its clout. Today, the Gulf allies of the US remain neutral as Iran-backed Houthis of Yemen fire missiles in the Red Sea at any ship associated with Israel.

US diplomacy, or more precisely a lack of it, has politically weakened US influence with its former partners including Türkiye, its NATO partner and close ally until a decade ago. To its dismay, its financial harassment of Afghanistan did not impress any, but helped China, Russia, Iran and Turkey gain in relations with Afghanistan.

Dollar Dominance

Following the Bretton Woods International Monetary Conference in 1944 to agree on an international system for trade and finance, the US secured top spot among international currencies as the world's reserve currency based on the strength of its economy and its huge possession of gold, which boosted the confidence in the US dollar.

The Gold Standard established by the Bretton Woods Agreement fixed the price of gold to the dollar and leading capitalist economies agreed to an adjustable exchange rate fixed to the dollar. This made the dollar the world's reserve currency and located it at the centre of global business. Bilateral business between countries was in dollars and not their own

currencies. Buying and selling US dollars incurred bank charges. This also offered US businesses a home advantage in foreign trade, as they settled international balances in dollars without converting to gold.

The pre-eminence of the dollar began to slip owing to a global surplus of dollars in the 1960s implying that the US lacked the gold to cover the face value of dollars in circulation globally— meaning that the dollar was overvalued. President Nixon effectively scrapped the convertibility of the dollar to gold in 1971 (the Nixon's Shock) causing the collapse of the Bretton Woods Agreement. On the positive side, central banks got more control over their nations' money and management of fiscal policy. This could have led to the rapid loss of centrality of the US dollar, but was arrested by the petrodollar system, created in 1973 by a deal between the US and Saudi Arabia, which standardized oil in terms of dollars and payment for oil from Saudi Arabia had to be in dollars. The system, by making the dollar the dominant currency in the vital energy trade sector, enabled the US to retain its hegemony in global political economy.

The US dollar is still dominant despite the US having the biggest external debt by far. The Federal Government for decades failed to reduce its indebtedness which poses a threat to economic stability. It is against this background that recent developments pose a challenge to the US dollar.

The Economic Reality

With finance capital deciding US economic policy manufacturing moved to places with lower production costs, and the US ceased to be the strongest industrial economy. Greed for profit made MNCs invest in capitalist China, which took two decades to lead global trade and manufacturing. The trade gap between China and the US is huge in favour of China. Unable to narrow the deficit by fair means, the US went on to violate norms of free trade and politicized trade, hurting its own credibility.

China is the main trading partner to more than 120 countries, and Africa's biggest in trade, and infrastructural and industrial development. With trade

and investment growing in Latin America and the Caribbean, it leads the US in trade with Latin America less Mexico. With more Latin American economies warming up to China, It is likely that in a few years the US would trail China in global trade. The political–military hold of the US is bound to weaken as more countries dare to defy US imperialism and its partners.

China, although alert to war, is wary of military confrontation. Even when clashes occurred, as with India in 2020–21, it acted to stop escalation. The US, in contrast, stirs conflict in the South China Sea and across the Taiwan Strait. Still unsuccessful, it provokes China with economic sanctions and seeks to isolate China economically. Economic reality, however, makes it hard for the US and allies to curtail trade and investment relations.

The US tried in vain to discredit the BRICS, BRI and SCO. IMF estimates of the total GDP based on purchasing power parity placed BRICS ahead of the G7 (US, Canada, UK, Germany, France, Italy and Japan) in 2023, that is before BRICS membership rose to ten in 2024. Based on nominal GDP the G7 is ahead of BRICS but the lead is narrowing there too. So far 155 countries have signed up to the BRI, representing nearly three quarters of the world's population and over half of the world's GDP. The SCO (not a military alliance) is now a strong Eurasian political, economic, international security and defence outfit meant to ensure regional stability.

Politically driven punitive economic sanctions and freezing of assets of countries can backfire. Faith in the US dollar as currency for global trade received a blow when China, for the first time, paid for UAE gas in RMB instead of US dollars in March 2023 followed by China and Saudi Arabia agreeing to trade Saudi oil in RMB in November. These events should be seen in the context of economic bullying of Russia by the US by using sanctions as well as compelling EU countries to impose sanctions, followed by freezing Russia's dollar assets. The moves alerted several countries to the risk that a country which does not serve the geopolitical interests of the US could face freezing or confiscation of its dollar holdings (as happened to Afghanistan in 2022). It has made several governments outside the West

seek ways of avoiding exposure to the dollar. Russia settles a quarter of its international trade using Chinese RMB, and its bilateral trade with China is almost entirely in roubles and RMB.

With over half the global trade transacted in US dollars and nearly 60% of all foreign reserves held in dollars, the US dominates the global economic and financial systems. But economic trends point to an erosion of its dominance.

The very dominance that enabled the US punish defiant countries became its peril when the US slapped sanctions at will so that countries resentful of the power of US had over their economies sought to decouple from the dollar. Shutting Russian banks out of the global financial telecom facility SWIFT in 2014 made Russia painlessly move on to its alternative to SWIFT.

With the US abusing its financial might, the prospect of the Chinese RMB challenging the US dollar as a global currency is stronger than a decade ago, but not an immediate prospect however, despite increased use of the RMB by Russia, Brazil, and Iran, as the RMB is only 2.3% of the global reserves. There are other likely challenges. Partial return to a gold standard is a possibility as China and Russia have accrued substantial gold holdings. The entry of crypto currencies in itself was a response to the financial crisis of 2008 that shook the banking systems. The proposed BRICS currency could attract countries seeking to avoid the dollar trap. Although the currency will take time to establish, the clout of the dollar will waken as countries targeted by the US find suitable currency options.

Developments in 2022 and 2023 disturbed the stability on the monetary front that was restored shortly after the financial crisis of 2008–09. Calls for a meaningful alternative to the dollar have returned. Banking itself is not out of the woods as three large and credible American banking institutions failed in rapid succession in 2023. Although the crisis was contained by Treasury and Federal Reserve intervention with unprecedented guarantees,

the credibility of the US economy has taken a knock, as such bank failures are not what are epected in the financial capital of the world.

The all-encompassing sanctions against Russia and the freezing of Russian funds by the US and its European allies following Russia's military action in the Ukraine in 2022 has made many countries fear that US could freeze their funds in response to any political dispute.

The 58% US dollar component of foreign exchange reserves of overseas central banks is a record low, and the oldest international currency, gold has risen from 11% of reserves six years ago to 15%, to erode some of the dollar dominance. The global GDP share of the US is falling too. The national debt of the US, the world's biggest debtor nation, has passed US$33 trillion, or 123% of its GDP from below 100% twenty years earlier. Political rivalry cannot explain the failure to reduce the national debt resulting from a flawed economy which spends more than it earns. Issuing more Treasury Bills, notes and bonds to fund government spending amid inflationary shocks and interest rate increases will make the debt harder to service and bring forward the day of debt default, whose implications for faith in the dollar will reflect on the image of the US as a global power.

Besides geopolitics, inflation is also weakening the international standing of the dollar, as in recent years inflation soared to previously unknown levels, casting doubt on the security and stability of the dollar for long-term savings and investment.

The Growing Crisis

The Price to Pay

US imperialism survived its crisis by adapting to growing crises, but always at a price. But crises persist and drive imperialism to desperation. It was the unsustainability of free market capitalism that led to the emergence of imperialism, and adaptations of imperialism including neo-colonialism, neoliberalism and globalization are outcomes of crises rather than by plan.

Imperialism is predatory by nature and competition overrides cooperation even with an imperialist ally. The very attitudes that led to wars between colonial powers persist among imperialist powers. The US became the most powerful imperialist power after WWII and has remained at the top of the economic and military hierarchy. Bids by imperialist powers for regional hegemony have failed as they relied on US backing to protect their national interests against external threats. The EU had long ceased to be a potential economic alternative to the US even before the fall of the Soviet Union which elevated the US to the status of sole global super power, and master of the neo-colonial global order.

Contradictions cropped up between the US and European states from time to time, but not to the point of challenging US supremacy after De Gaulle asserting French interests (1962-69). European powers that sought friendly relations with Russia were compelled to take a hostile stance by the US especially after Russia began to assert itself. The coup of 2014 in Ukraine worsened relations and relations have turned hostile under the Biden presidency (2021–). With the electoral weakening of the Left in Europe, Third World anti-imperialism has become central to the struggle against the neo-colonial order, as evident in challenges to US domination, with the 'Global South' (the masses mainly and heads of state for political survival).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the US made the dollar its economic weapon to punish any country that it saw as defiant of its dominance. Economic isolation using sanctions worked as the European and American continental allies of the US lacked the spine to defy the US. When the US unilaterally withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, fear of US sanctions killed all European efforts to sustain engagement with Iran. The US has imposed economic sanctions on more than 20 countries since 1998, Sanctions and freezing of dollar assets, which were used against Cuba, North Korea and Iran were later extended to China and Russia among others. But, in the short term, sanctions against Russia backfired, economically by boosting the Russian economy and geopolitically by

bringing Russia and China closer. A lesson that has never been learned is that sanctions have failed to bring down targeted governments, and instead helped to reinforce the government.

Sanctions, the Rock that Dropped on the Feet

The immediate cost of US sanctions to its economy is small but excessive use of sanctions has incurred serious long term costs including growing political isolation of the US and continuing decline of US influence in an emerging, multi-polar world. The US and Europe, even as they agree on sanctions, dispute implementation, especially of secondary sanctions that prohibit and prevent trade and dealings with a third country, individuals and organizations. Unlike primary sanctions that apply to US companies, institutions, and citizens, secondary sanctions concern other countries and amount to US intrusion in internal affairs and national interests, and are increasingly seen as a breach of national and EU sovereignty, and unacceptable meddling that hurts EU's independent decision making. Secondary sanctions relating to Iran and Russia, especially, led to dissent and public calls for breaking with the US.

The Global South rejects the stand of the US and its EU allies in the in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the Israeli genocide in Gaza. This is clear demonstration that US foreign policy is failing. Countries of the Global South have become bolder since they can turn to China and Russia for support with trade, development and even defence against US threats.

The highhanded approach of the US invited its nemesis in the form of moves by countries to de-dollarize and free themselves of US dollar hegemony, which is resented even within the EU and Japan, but not resisted adequately. The position of the dollar as the dominant trading currency and main reserve currency were passively accepted until the dollar visibly became a political weapon, with the US imposing sanctions on countries at will. One outcome was money transfer alternatives to SWIFT: Russia's System for Transfers of Financial Messages from 2014,

China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System from 2015 and the European Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges or INSTEX (2019–23) were responses to financial sanctions by the US. But Europe which created INSTEX to circumvent US sanctions against Iran when the US left the Iran nuclear deal decided to close INSTEX in 2023 as Iran was seen to support Russia in Ukraine.

ASEAN partners during the 42nd Summit in 2023 signed an agreement to pursue better regional payment connectivity and use of local currency transactions. India, China, Brazil, Malaysia and Bolivia among others seek to set up trade channels using non-dollar currencies. The trend to use local currency instead of the dollar is emerging as a global trend with more countries in Africa and Latin America seeking to switch to local currency. Expansion of trade with China, Russia and India as well as the expansion of BRICS as an economic alliance will boost the trend.

Beyond the Dollar Trap

Besides politicization, the status of the dollar too has contributed to an increasing shift, even partially, from dependence on the dollar.

The anomaly of a dominant US dollar amid declining economic power of the US hurts global financial stability. Key indicators of economic vigour like share of the US in global GDP and trade, trade deficit, international debt securities, international foreign reserves and cross-border loans signal weakness. But the US insists on leading the world's economy. The dollar-dominated international financial system is loaded in favour of the US and cannot forever be sustained. The imbalance born of the scrapping of the convertibility of the US dollar to gold in 1971 needs correction.

Weakening of the economy and failing domination of the dollar do not mean the end of US imperialist might despite the loss of strength of the dollar as a political weapon. A decline in the military might of the US is no sign of the fall of US imperialism. The world still lacks an economic alternative and more importantly a political alternative to cure not just

the economic ills of capitalism but also its ill consequences to humanity. It is thus necessary to ensure that the collapse of the neo-colonial order does not lead to a situation in which forces of fascism will thrive.

Any capitalist power is potentially imperialist. But to locate a potential or an emerging imperialist power on par with US imperialism can weaken the global anti-imperialist struggle. It is crucial to understand how each developing imperialism will turn out, as its mechanisms of control need not be in the same mould as those of US imperialism or its allies.

Yet, the agent of change from a US-dominated world order could be an alliance of the Global South led by China and/or Russia, neither of which is socialist. Such an alliance cannot lead to socialism and Third World capitalism is no answer to imperialism. But what are the options?

The emerging multipolar world shows no sign of giving up on capitalism soon, and imperialism could take new forms. But the challenge facing the oppressed nations and people today is US imperialism. While we debate if China, Russia or any other capitalist power is imperialist, it will be naïve to label current global conflicts as clashes of imperialist rivals.

Theoretical models based on neo-colonial rivalry do not explain current rivalry for global influence. The Left needs to evolve strategies to enable the defeat of the current imperialist world order while preventing the emergence of a new imperialist order. That demands mass political work to mobilize anti-imperialist forces as a broad united front nationally and internationally. Our notions of development need to be reviewed based on social equality, a sustainable environment, economic policy based on conditions specific to each country. The task cannot be left to the bourgeoisie of the Global South.

Mass-Based United Front to Confront Imperialism

Deshabakthan

Need for a Mass-Based United Front

The united front strategy is an act of bringing people together to address a specific issue or set of issues. While it has no ideological basis, it has to be principled so that each participating organization (or individual) is clear about the purpose and knows where it stands in relation to each of other participants. The strategy despite its limited in purpose needs to have a long term vision so that partnership can continue in domains that will emerge in the wake of the resolution of the issue(s) addressed.

There is a qualitative difference between a mass-based united front and partnerships or alliances between political parties and groups. We have seen electoral alliances to capture parliamentary or other political power. Rival trade unions come together to fight for a set of demands. Political groups unite to push a political agenda. Often the unity that is pursued is among individuals or groups of leaders and mass support bases back the leaders in their pursuit of the common goal. Rivalry often gets the better of unity of purpose as we will see later in the discussion.

Any united front is contextual, conditional and subject to change. While the context can broadly define the goals the choice of allies involves several subjective factors. Yet there are fundamental principles and guidelines that have evolved from practice and study of historical experiences, both positive and negative. The mass-based united front proposed here is based on the current global context in which US

imperialism is weakening, although still the strongest economic and military power, and the Left, despite its historic achievements for humanity, is divided and weak. The purpose is for the Left to rediscover its power and mobilize the masses against seemingly powerful enemies both nationally and internationally.

Marxists in United Fronts

Marxists have entered into alliances from positions of relative strength as well as positions of relative weakness, not out of desperation but as a well thought out move whose purpose transcends popularising the party. It will be dogmatic if not parochial to dismiss a united front as desertion or dilution of ideology or a betrayal of working class interests Marxists create and join united fronts with well-defined goals to address issues characteristic of specific situations. Clear goals, uncompromised principles and sincere purpose permit cooperation among people with diverging views on any specific matter but agreeable to achieving a common purpose and collaborating on a common minimum programme with the option of expanding the scope of collaboration.

The Marxist purpose of united fronts has changed with time. Historically the origins can be traced to the Russian revolution with the theory of the united front elaborated at the 3rd and the 4th Congresses of the Communist International held in 1922.

Revolutionary socialists were at the time a minority among the working class, and a united front offered them the means to work with the large numbers of workers who were mostly non-revolutionary as well as opportunity to win them over to revolutionary politics. This strategy, used since the revolutionary tide of 1917 did not sustain its momentum. According to the leaders of the Communist International, a shift from offensive to defensive struggles by workers strengthened the desire for united action within the working class. They hoped that the united front would enable the revolutionaries to win a majority of the working class.

As the task of a Communist Party is to lead the proletarian revolution, it had to base itself on the overwhelming majority of the working class and summon the proletariat for the direct conquest of power. Where it did not hold the majority, it had to fight to win it.

Core principles of the united front strategy as stated by the Communists remain valid to this time, even with ongoing changes in the purpose and the composition of the united front. The guiding Marxist principles in its approach to the united front comprise principled adherence to ideology alongside readiness to accommodate difference in views and upholding ethical values of honesty in word and deed.

> The revolutionaries were told to maintain independence, which meant that the united front is not a surrender of their complete freedom of action in relation to the bourgeoisie and counter-revolutionary social democracy
>
> The united front tactic has nothing to do with the 'electoral combinations' of leaders in pursuit of one or another parliamentary aim. The united front tactic is only an initiative whereby the communists seek to join with all workers belonging to other parties and groups and all unaligned workers in a common struggle to defend the immediate, basic interests of the working class against the bourgeoisie.
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> (*Fourth Congress of the Communist International, Theses on Comintern Tactics. 5 December 1922*)

Lenin initiated the concept of the United Front concept a century ago to bring together the working class that was divided between revolutionary and social democratic parties in order to achieve specific goals. The idea of uniting the many to isolate the few has since been expanded to encourage communists to support anti-imperialist struggles even when led by members of a reactionary class, as long as the struggle is revolutionary enough in character to deliver a blow to imperialism.

Leninist Far-sight

Lenin, addressing the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations on 22nd November 1919, prophetically declared that "The socialist revolution will not be solely, or chiefly, a struggle of the revolutionary proletarians in each country against their bourgeoisie— no, it will be a struggle of all imperialist-oppressed colonies and countries, of all dependent countries, against international imperialism". (*Collected Works, 4th English Edition, Moscow 1965, **30**, pp. 151-162*)

His comment is as valid a century later with neo-colonialism increasingly transfers the burden of capitalist exploitation to the Third World, aided by the national bourgeoisie who had become junior partners and proxies of the neo-colonists to exploit the toiling masses and put down resistance and revolt on their own soils. Hence, a large share of the anti-imperialist struggle has to be borne by the toiling masses of the Third World. To say this is not to spurn the revolutionary potential of the proletariat of advanced capitalist countries but urge the importance of struggles in the neo-colonies to the anti-capitalist struggle in the imperialist countries.

As Lenin anticipated, the struggle for socialism became closely knit with global anti-imperialist struggles in the colonies and semi-colonies. Thus the United Front strategy, initially formulated to unite parties of the working class, moved on to cover situations that demand broad alliances to combat a common enemy of the toiling masses, even in countries with a numerically weak industrial working class. The strategy which proved effective in anti-fascist struggles in Europe and liberation struggles in the colonies and semi-colonies of Asia and Africa now needs to be honed to address the challenges of a neo-colonial world order.

The United Front strategy called for broad-based alliances that to isolate imperialism and its reactionary allies. Such alliances helped to break the isolation imposed on the revolutionary left by reactionaries who had for long divided the oppressed masses using race, religion and caste.

Neo-Colonial Consolidation

Success of anti-imperialist struggles did not necessarily mean transfer of state power in a colony or neo-colony to social forces led by or guided by a party of the proletariat. Emancipation of a colony or a semi-colony is incomplete if the national bourgeoisie who assumed power lacked the will to break with the former rulers. Unable to meet the just demands for economic and social justice by the exploited classes under the inherited socio-economic order, the national bourgeoisie to retain their hold on power opted to compromise or even collaborate with the neo-colonial masters. The extent of collaboration varied with the political balance of forces within the country. Where the Left was a significant force and the labour movement was politically alert, the national bourgeoisie could resist imperialist pressure in many issues including foreign policy. Also, in the post-WWII context, the Non-Aligned Movement encouraged Afro-Asian states to boldly assert their national interests.

The vacillating national bourgeoisie, however, let neo-colonialism gain the upper hand amid the decline of the international socialist movement. Also, following the split in the international communist movement, opportunist factions took the cue from the revisionist post-Stalin leadership of the Soviet Union, to readily abandon revolution. Pro-Soviet parties were induced to cooperate with national bourgeois governments. This was transparent in India and Sri Lanka where revisionist factions aligned with the national bourgeoisie. The price paid was heavy in India, where, by the late 1970s, the parliamentary left was decimated in all but two states, where a dissenting faction held sway. That led to the steady rise of the Hindu fascist BJP which surged electorally in this century to change the political landscape of India. In 1977, the parliamentary left of Sri Lanka paid the price for its opportunism to become politically irrelevant without support from a bourgeois political party.

US imperialism consolidated itself as the predominant imperialist power by making inroads into former colonial territories in Asia and Africa,

except in states which persisted in anti-colonial resistance amid a series of coups that overthrew anti-imperialist heads of state. Some of the states were able to defy the US by leaning on support from the Soviet Union, whose interest was driven by global power rivalry with the US.

While the Soviet Union was for good reason charged of practising social imperialism and exercising hegemony over its East European allies, it did not belong to the category of capitalist imperialist powers, as its economy was at best state capitalist and way behind on finance capital and export of capital, besides the other three imperialist features noted by Lenin.

Anti-Imperialist United Front for Today

While the fall of the Soviet Union marked the end of nominally socialist Soviet Union and its East European allies, US imperialism went on to pre-empt the resurgence of a socialist alliance in the West. The break-up of Yugoslavia and Colour Revolutions in former Soviet republics seemed inadequate to US imperialism. It proceeded to expand NATO even after the 'threat' that justified its creation ceased to be.

Resistance to US imperialist hegemony came from unexpected quarters. Islamic fundamentalist terrorists nurtured by the US to punish the Soviet Union became its retribution. The once docile Latin American clients of the US want to be free of US hegemony. US support for Israel's atrocities in Palestine and aggression against neighbouring states has angered the Arab public. Overuse of the US dollar as a political weapon to punish political foes has alerted even friendly states like Saudi Arabia.

China's growing economic might and refined diplomatic skills helped it to gain foothold in Africa and Latin America at the expense of the US and its European allies. Thus the forces that are challenging US hegemony are by no means socialist with some of them utterly reactionary.

The decline in manufacturing industries in the US and West Europe has aggravated the already weakening trade union movements of the West,

and the fast growth of the service sector has been accompanied by a decline in class consciousness. Nevertheless, left and progressive forces persevere in fighting imperialism and neo-colonialism, as witnessed in the movements to oppose Israel's genocidal war on Gaza. But they have yet to seize the initiative to make a lasting impact and become a mighty social force suggests. This failure points to serious shortcomings.

The case for anti-imperialist united fronts is strong in all countries, especially since the left and progressive forces are not a majority in any advanced capitalist country. Protest movements such as the "Social Forum" and "Occupy" movement are signs of recognition of the need for united fronts, but not of the ability to mobilize the masses to challenge the state. The failure of mass upsurges like the 'Arab Spring' has lessons to offer. A major weakness seems that protest movements get mixed up with the limited goals of electoral politics. In that sense, despite ability to arouse public sentiment and support, none of them sought to organize as a mass movement with a clear political goal or even a programme.

Only the revolutionary Left, genuine Marxist Leninists especially, have a sound theoretical understanding of imperialism today and recognize the need for anti-imperialist mass struggles at various levels. Hence Marxist Leninist parties and organization need to play a leading, not necessarily dominant, role in planning the goals and strategies for mass struggles. Without it, mass anger and desire for struggle could be appropriated by NGOs and bogus populists serving imperialist interests, to deflect any mass campaign away from what should be its main thrust.

As the United Front Strategy is not hazard-free, Marxist Leninists should be alert to risks. It is thus important for a Communist Party to take the initiative in all struggles and preserve its independence.

Mao Zedong, summing up the experience of the Second Revolutionary Civil War, urged the Communist Party to be firmly in the lead: "Only the proletariat and the Communist Party can lead the peasantry, the urban

petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie; can overcome the narrow-mindedness of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, the destructiveness of the unemployed masses and also (provided the Communist Party does not err in its policy) the vacillation and lack of thoroughness of the bourgeoisie— and can lead the revolution and the war on to the road to victory." [*Problems of Strategy Issues in China's Revolutionary War, December 1936, Selected Works, Volume One*]

Mao Zedong upheld the independence of all member parties in the United Front against Japanese invasion,: "To sustain a long war by long-term co-operation or, in other words, to subordinate the class struggle to the present national struggle against Japan— such is the fundamental principle of the united front. Subject to this principle, the independent character of the parties and classes and their independence and initiative within the united front should be preserved, and their essential rights should not be sacrificed to co-operation and unity, but on the contrary must be firmly upheld within certain limits. Only thus can co-operation be promoted, indeed only thus can there be any co-operation at all. Otherwise co-operation will turn into amalgamation and the united front will inevitably be sacrificed." [*The Question of Independence and Initiative within the United Front, 5th November 1938*]

Substituting electoral alliance for united front is hazardous. Such an error occurred in Sri Lanka when the parliamentary left discarded revolution and joined hands with the national bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party in a bid to share power. The 'United Front' alliance was elected by defeating the comprador bourgeois United National Party. But the left parties soon became subordinates to the dominant partner. When reality dawned on them, the left parties had lost their mass base, and the parliamentary left was reduced to an appendage of the once national bourgeois SLFP, whose anti-imperialist armour is now in tatters. The error of the Left was twofold. One was forming a 'united front' purely for electoral benefit. The other was failure to assert their independence for fear of being kept

out of power. Things could have been brighter for the left if it had secured its working class base by putting working class interest first.

Lack of vigil can be costly in any alliance, with the bourgeoisie especially. The Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), despite commitment to a revolutionary path, had excessive faith in President Soekarno's support. Although Soekarno was personally trustworthy, the PKI failed to take into account the prospect of other bourgeois interests that worked hand in glove with US and British imperialism. The error cost the lives of an estimated 7000,000 to a million suspected PKI supporters.

Imperialist Strategies

Transition to capitalism in the Soviet Union and China began well before the Soviet Union fell, The US has since 1990 been the unchallenged global imperialist power. The other imperialists were its underlings. With unmatched military and economic power it flexed its political muscle to callously disregard International Law in its pursuit of any country it saw as a threat. That scenario began to change with Russia's economic and militarily recovery this century after a decade of surrender to the US, and China's rapid economic growth threatened to overtake the US.

Consequently, some believe that Russia and China are imperialist powers vying with the US for global domination. The veracity of this has been examined in earlier studies in this journal (MLND**, MLND**). Not just China or Russia, but any powerful capitalist economy is potentially imperialist. To conclude whether a country has crossed the threshold depends on the criteria used. Notably, some lists of imperialist countries are laughably long and include even countries of the Global South.

There is, however, consensus that the US is the biggest global imperialist power that it leads an imperialist alliance including countries of the EU, Japan, Canada and Australia. Most of the allies are not economically and militarily strong enough to be imperialist powers in their own right.

What is important is that US imperialism is the main imperialist power and will remain so for the foreseeable near future.

US imperialism has at its disposal an unprecedentedly strong military apparatus. It dominates strong military alliances and has a powerful network of intelligence and subversion agencies, devices for economic pressure and control, and *de facto* control over the UN. It has assigned to itself the role of the defender of the international order, and exercises its will mostly with the support of its partners, and occasionally without.

The US has reduced European Union to a compliant client and is unwilling to let go of its neo-colonial control over the Third World. Its military expansion continues to assure political and military domination and exploitation of the Third World. It uses the claim of defending "the American way of life" to justify heavy handed actions to protect the imperialist world order, and often acts in breach of the national interests of its imperialist partners, and turning a blind eye to rising European fascism feeding on racism and anti-immigrant feelings.

While the US readily resorts to economic sanctions, trade barriers and political subversion against perceived enemy and rebel states, military intervention, often based on fictional pretexts, is its ultimate means of control. Racism and xenophobia are called to the rescue when allusion to threats to national security and economy prove inadequate to justify wars of aggression.

While defending democracy and human rights is often a pretext for meddling in the internal affairs of countries by subversion or war, the US stifles domestic opposition to its aggression. Methods range from stirring patriotic sentiments to brutal repression, as seen in recent police attacks on students protesting genocide in Gaza. The mainstream media loyally oblige the state, at least for the duration of aggression.

Having paid a heavy political price for war, the US uses proxies now to fight its battles. It also uses various regime change strategies to

overthrow unfriendly governments and exploits historical disputes like border disputes to provoke conflict between countries to destabilise 'less friendly' countries. But its success rate in subversion has declined very much. Several of the CIA backed coups have been reversed in the past two decades like in the Honduras and Bolivia. Its use of the Kurds to hurt Syria backfired to harm relations with Türkiye. The CIA facilitated regime change in Ukraine to expedite the encirclement of Russia has only strengthened Russia politically while hurting the European economy.

It had some success, however, with Islamic fundamentalist organizations in stirring trouble in Russia and China, and in overturning a pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan. But the net result was negative. Third World countries nevertheless need to be more alert to their vulnerability to civil war and foreign meddling on pretext of human rights violations and war crimes by failing to address the just grievances of ethnic, religious and caste minorities. What are friendly contradictions should not be allowed to grow into hostile contradictions on which imperialism thrives.

Towards an Anti-Imperialist Strategy

Anti-imperialist strategy develops in different forms at different levels to counter imperialism according to its manifestation. Imperialist are less explicit in the neo-colonial era than during colonialism, and are harder to draw public attention to. But as long as the main enemy of the toiling masses is correctly recognized, the different strategies with concur to achieve the common purpose.

Identifying the main enemy resolves the question of who the friends and enemies of the revolution are. Even someone who calls Russia, China, India and other capitalist states imperialist, based on a specific set of criteria, faces inescapable questions when contrasting the conduct of such states with those of the actions of the US and its partners.

Let us look at the five salient characteristics of imperialism as identified by Lenin:

i. Monopolies dominate in the economy and society
ii. Bank capital merges with industrial capital to form the finance oligarchy
iii. Export of surplus capital acquires pronounced importance over export of commodities
iv. The world economy divides among blocs of capitalist trusts, cartels and syndicates
v. Complete division of the globe among the biggest monopoly capitalist powers.

Even if these are considered as criteria for imperialism, the US and its allies on the one hand and Russia, China or India on the other differ qualitatively on each count. Accepting for sake of argument that Russia, China or India is imperialist on some basis, let us compare on the basis of salient features of modern imperialist conduct, such as

i. Sector wise monopoly of trade
ii. Manipulation of markets
iii. Conditional foreign aid and loan traps
iv. Exploitation of labour and extraction of natural resources
v. Armed aggression and war

China has been accused of "loan traps" and Russia of expansionism in Georgia and Ukraine. Both have been accused of oppression of minority nationalities (or national minorities). Sadly, these charges are based on imperialist propaganda dished out by the mainstream media, and uncritically repeated by 'Marxists' to attack China or Russia or both.

The 'Chinese loan trap' myth included the handover of the Hambantota Harbour in Sri Lanka to a Chinese company, the reported takeover of Uganda's Entebbe Airport, likelihood of Kenya's Mombasa Harbour and state businesses in Zambia being taken over by China among others have been exposed as unfounded distortions. But they are repeatedly recycled regardless of their credibility. The "Debt Trap" campaign approached its

peak near the end of the last decade in the context of China finding new partners in Africa for its B&R project.

African countries increasingly distinguish between China's interest in Africa and that of the West. China is in Africa for access to minerals for its industry and for trade. But it also offers development to Africa on fronts such as infrastructural, industrial and agricultural development, something that Africa's colonial masters and the US did not offer since almost the whole continent went under colonial control. Freedom from colonial rule did not change things very much for Africa's development. The US has been keener to increase its military footprint than to develop Africa. Recent changes in the attitude of the West are in response to the headway that China has made in Africa.

Developments in Francophone African countries are the outcome of post Cold War French meddling in West Africa that mark the beginning of the end of French neo-colonialism in Africa. But Africa has some way to go as many heads of state rely on the US for political survival. The US is still able to threaten heavily indebted countries with economic sanctions if they dare to choose their own path to development.

The global anti-imperialist struggle should aim at the US-led imperialist alliance. But at the same time no Third World Country can turn a blind eye to any foreign power that imposing unfair trade deals, manipulating markets, using aid for political control, or indulging in acts of hegemony.

Expansionist motives including restoration of the Tsarist Empire have been attributed to Russia under Putin. But Russia has only reacted to moves to encircle it. Russia's break with the West occurred when it refused to be the docile follower of the US which it was under Yeltsin. The break-up of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union have lessons to offer. US imperialism sought more than the fragmentation of these states.

Serbia was punished with further fragmentation as well as economic and political isolation for its assertion of sovereignty. Revival of Russia as an

economic and military power was always a concern for US imperialism which did only expand NATO to include former Warsaw Pact countries but also poached on former member states of the Soviet Union, in breach of its pledge to Gorbachev that the NATO will not expand to include former members of the Soviet Union, Russia, Stung by reality in 2008 when NATO promised to consider Georgia's bid for membership, Russia reacted promptly by recognizing the self-proclaimed Republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and following it up with military intervention to defend the republics against Georgian attack. That arrested Georgia's NATO bid. The turn of events in Ukraine were similar in substance, but for that the US and NATO were better prepared, although still reluctant to confront Russia directly.

Western induced anti-Russian activity and revival of Russia-hating Neo-Nazis as a force in the Ukraine began well before the CIA-guided Maidan Coup of 2014. Whether one reading imperialist rivalry in the Ukraine ignoring the core question of territorial expansion by NATO to encircle Russia is misled by subjective thinking or willingly backs US imperialism is hard to say. The failed 'rebellion' of 2020-21 opposing the re-election of President Lukashenka in neighbouring Belarus cannot be isolated from the developments in the Ukraine.

The tragedy of the 'imperialist rivalry' thesis is that its believers ignore the array of misdeeds designed to wreck the Russian economy, including economic sanctions by the US and its EU partners and the blowing up of the Nordstream 2 gas pipeline, all of which failed to subdue Russia. Countries other than the US imperialist alliance and a few neo-colonies either support Russia and China in their conflicts with the US or refuse to take sides. The US policy of defending Israel's genocidal war in Gaza and its arming of Israel has further isolated the US from the rest of humanity.

US-led imperialism is in crisis on many fronts: the failing dominance of the US dollar, rising indebtedness, China's challenge to the primacy of US as the world's leading economy, failing political influence in Latin

America and Africa, and loss of credibility as military power in the face of increasing assertiveness of China and Russia.

Unfortunately, global resistance to US imperialism is not driven by mass revolutionary action. Its forfeiture of position as the sole global super power is more the price it pays for its over-assertiveness than the outcome of organized anti-imperialist resistance. Countries standing up to the US and refusing to collaborate with it are, with a few exceptions like North Korea and Cuba, are all capitalist.

To stand aside and idly criticize those standing up to bullying by the US is not the style of Marxist Leninists who need to capture the initiative in the growing anti-US imperialistic trend. To do that, they need to identify progressive forces and work in unity with them to fight US imperialism.

Challenges of the United Front

Anti-imperialist united fronts can be at provincial, national, regional and global levels. Although their purposes vary with context, they need to concur with the general purpose of global mobilization of anti-imperialist forces. The common denominator for a united front at any level will be the most viable union of forces to defeat the main enemy.

The masses do not recognize neo-colonialism and imperialism and their impact on their livelihood the way they recognized colonialism. The task for Marxist Leninists is to help them see the link between their economic and political plight and neo-colonialism, and use that understanding to see imperialism and its agents as the common enemy. This will, besides reinforcing anti-imperialist movements, help to build fraternal links among them.

If Marxist Leninists are dogmatic and negative towards potential allies they cannot lead an anti-imperialist movement. That is not to reject criticism of an ally, but to call for criticism that is measured, contextual, and constructive. In other words, Marxist Leninist partnership in a

united front is not to the exclusion of the guiding ideology or stated principles of party, and never an opportunist alliance.

The international left has been hurt by a combination of subjective and objective factors in the post-colonial era. But that did not mean victory for imperialism which is drawn into suicidal crises by its own logic. However, the failure of the global left and progressive forces to seize the opportunity to mobilize the masses and carry forward to anti-imperialist struggle has allowed the far right, often racists and fascists, to capture the political space which should have belonged to the Left.

Among weaknesses of the Left in handling anti-imperialist struggles are sectarianism and dogmatism which obstruct correct recognition of the principal contradiction in issues demanding mass mobilization. Often ideological and interpretational differences that are not central to the issue at hand get exaggerated to distract attention from core issues.

We see harsh attacks on Russia and China in statements on issues in which the culprit is US imperialism or a proxy. Reference to Russia and China is by name or by the term 'imperialisms'. Russia, China, India or any other capitalist power should be strongly denounced if its actions hurt oppressed people, especially if meant to hurt the people. Identifying a state as imperialist alone does not justify naming it as an offender in issues where the only seeming justification is an imperialist label.

Besides attacks on alleged imperialists, we also hear condemnation of Third World governments even when what matters is subversion and military threat by imperialism, so that criticism of sanctions and of meddling in internal affairs get smothered.

A neo-colony deserves unconditional defence against aggression and bullying by an imperialist power. But such defence cannot be at the expense of solidarity with struggles against oppression of the masses directly by their state and indirectly by neo-colonialists.

Marxist Leninists also need to be awake to imperialism and its agents exploiting grievances of the people, both genuine and contrived. A recent instance in Sri Lanka was in 2022 when public resentment of economic mismanagement by the state (already colluding with India, the regional hegemon and US imperialism) was hijacked by agents of foreign interests including NGOs to achieve a regime change even more favourable to the US. Addiction to parliamentary politics blocked the development of the protest into an anti-imperialist mass movement.

While Marxist Leninist leadership is essential to ensure anti-imperialist revolutionary direction, leading a united front demands dedicated work. Unconditional opposition to imperialist aggression and subversion and support for resistance to imperialism should be the guiding light of Marxist Leninists. Thus the case is strong for building and participating in international organizations of anti-imperialist solidarity. But without a strong Marxist Leninist party at home such solidarity is worthless to anti-imperialist unity at home.

Flexibility and tolerance are essential to a united front. If a Marxist Leninist party looks at a united front only as a means to expand the party, it will neither unite the people nor build the party as people are attracted to a party based on its mass political work.

A united front is about collaboration of people with different political outlooks. Marxist Leninists should therefore be humble, ready to learn from others, and willing to admit and correct any error when recognized. We often find greater intolerance in dealings between Marxists than between a Marxist and a non-Marxist. One must realize that differences in views arise from differing experience, perceptive, and priorities. They are best resolved by discussion and debate on an equal basis guided by a will to reach common ground for a united struggle.

A united front is no end in itself. A Marxist Leninist sufficiently confident in the Marxist Leninist goal and clear about the short term without losing

sight of long term objectives can consciously join a united front knowing its limited goals but working on the potential for a longer term alliance. For a broad-based alliance to succeed, all partners should sincerely adhere to the agreed principles and programmes. An alliances is doomed when partners nurse a private agendas.

Quarrels about terminology are often futile. If the partners agree on the content of a phenomenon and the way it is to be dealt with, it is possible to draw up a programme and act according to. Agreeing on terminology without appreciating the substance will lead to confusion.

Contradictions among partners of a united front are necessarily friendly and hostility should be averted under any condition.

Joining a united front is a calculated risk and misunderstandings and mistakes are always possible. A Marxist Leninist, more than any other, should display the humility to correct mistakes rather than seek to be "always right"

Let us never forget that dogmatism, authoritarianism, conspiracy and hidden agendas are enemies of a United Front.

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Summary of recent statements of the NDMLP

14th May 2024

Denounce Police Attack in Sampur

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the Marxist Leninist New Democratic Party in a statement issued on 14th May on behalf of the Party strongly denounced the police attack on a group of women who were making porridge in memory of the 150,000 people killed by the time of the conclusion of war at Mullivaikkaal.

The statement pointed out that sharing of Mullivaikkaal commemorative porridge is a mark of tribute to the people who were killed in Mullivaikkaal. The attack by the police on women making porridge in Sampur (Trincomalee District) and arresting them was part of the series of high handed acts by the police, and such violent acts by the police should be strongly condemned. By turning a blind eye to such police conduct, the Wickremasinghe–Rajapaksa regime is silent endorsement of continuing police anarchy. The Party strongly opposes the police attack and arrest of the women.

The statement added that Mullivaikkaal commemoration is not an event that belongs to a specific political party or movement. It is a sorrowful remembrance of the hundreds of thousands of Tamil people who were destroyed during the thirty years of the chauvinist war of oppression and its climax in Mullivaikal.

The right and duty of the entire Tamil people to remember their dead relatives is their fundamental human right. There is no justification for the police or the armed forces to interfere or to disrupt it by intimidation. Besides, actions like their disruptive intervention, bullying and arrests are expressions of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist arrogance.

The Party urges the entire people to stand in protest against such highhanded actions and carry out their commemoration.

26th April 2024

May Day Statement of the NDMLP

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the Marxist Leninist New Democratic Party issued the Party's May Day Statement on 26th April. The statement drew attention to the unprecedented rise in price of essential food items during the past three years and an eye wash of a reduction in fuel price while the price of electricity was repeatedly increased so that a million users forfeited their electric power supply.

It also pointed to the severe rise in the cost of public services including transport and the imposition of VAT on many goods as well as imposition of other direct and indirect taxes that have forced the vast majority of the people struggling to fulfil their daily needs to skip meals or even starve. Wage increases have been refused to private sector employees while plantation companies flatly reject the fair demand for a 2000 rupee daily wage for plantation workers.

The education sector is being wrecked to accommodate private schooling so that parents suffocate to meet educational cost of the children. The ruining of the health sector has led to overcrowding in hospitals and shortage of drugs. Women are not only exploited economically but also are subject to gender oppressing and sexual harassment.

Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism is whipped up in order to divert public attention from these issues by way of planned encroachment on land and water resources, and stirring up of communal tension in the hill country and the North–East. These are the handiwork of the neo-colonial stooges represented by Wickremasinghe–Rajapaksa alliance who reject the demand for ethnic rights and devolution of power and

selling out the resources of the country to MNCs and corporate capital of the US, India and other countries.

The statement drew particular attention to the promotion of war by US-led imperialism and its finding expression in the genocide in Gaza. In such context, US-led imperialism constitutes the common enemy of the people of the world.

On the May Day observed against such background, the Marxist Leninist New Democratic Party is marking the occasion as revolutionary processions and rallies in Jaffna, the Hill Country (Matale), and Vavunia. The Party is also participating in the May Day parade held in London.

The party calls upon all working people and oppressed nationalities to join in the Part's May Day events.

15th April 2024

A Just Protest Campaign in Ponnaveli

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the Marxist Leninist New Democratic Party in a statement issued on behalf of the Party said that it was totally unacceptable that Ponnaveli, a region in Poonahari where fields and sea together offer livelihood to peasants and fishers, is offered to the multinational company Tokyo Cement to mine for limestone.

He added that during the past 45 years the national economy has been wrecked and the people made slaves of neo-colonialism under the executive presidency by surrender through sale and lease the resources of the country to MNCs and global corporates.

The Wickremasinghe-Rajapaksa regime is determined to carry the task to completion during their time in power. One aspect of it is giving away the fertile lands of Ponnaveli to Tokyo Cement.

The country's economy and the living standard of the people are ruined as never before and eight million people have been pushed into poverty owing to the giving away of the country's resources to foreigners under attractive names like development programmes and economic restructuring. But the ministers and officials who sold out he resources have amassed crores of wealth.

The statement declared that the Party has supported the just demands of people of Ponnaveli and taken part in their Satyagraha protest campaign that has been on for the past 140 days, and that it has become necessary for the entire people to mobilize against the seizure of our fertile regions by foreign forces.

22nd March 2024

A Just Hunger Strike by Jaffna Fishers

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the Marxist Leninist New Democratic Party in a statement issued on behalf of the Party said that the hunger strike held jointly by the Federation of Jaffna District Rural Fisheries Organizations and the Federation of Fisheries Cooperatives in the vicinity of the Indian High Commission Office, Jaffna protesting the arrogant trespassing by bottom trawling fishing boats owned by Indian fishing tycoons that plunder their marine wealth and putting forward their fair demands is fully justified and deserving of public support.

He also drew attention to the loss of livelihood of the fishers in the seas off the coastline stretching from Mannar to Mullaitheevu during the 30 years of war and the fifty years that followed. During the war they lost lives, livelihood and abode owing to attacks and denial of access to the marine zone by the armed forces. In the fifteen years since the war trespass by thousands of Indian fishing trawlers has denied them the right to earn their livelihood, ad their fishing equipment is from time to time damaged and destroyed wilfully. Fishers have in the past launched various forms of campaign to emphasise their demands. But the Indian

government with a hegemonic attitude and the Sri Lankan government out of submissiveness to Indian hegemony have continued to ignore their problems. It is in this context that fishers from the four northern districts have launched their present struggle including the current hunger strike that has been on for the past three days.

He asserted that the Party which has always supported all just struggle by workers of the fishery sector is once again affirms its support to the just hunger strike campaign and pledges cooperation.

3rd January 2024

People should show opposition to the President

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the Marxist Leninist New Democratic Party in a media release issued on behalf of the Party on 3rd January 2024 asked the people to show their opposition to President Ranil Wickremasinghe during his forthcoming visit to the North from 4th to 7th January, the same way people elsewhere are doing.

In his statement he drew attention to the wrecking of the economy and the burdening of the people during the past 45 years by the ruling class which also killed hundreds of thousand people in the name of fighting separatism, terrorism and extremism. He added that the Wickremasinghe–Rajapaksa alliance is delivering the commands of the IMF, the World Bank and the ADB in its budgets and financial legislations.

The International

Eugène Pottier, Paris, June 1871

Arise ye workers from your slumbers
Arise ye prisoners of want
For reason in revolt now thunders
And at last ends the age of cant.
Away with all your superstitions
Servile masses arise, arise
We'll change henceforth the old tradition
And spurn the dust to win the prize.

Refrain:
So comrades, come rally
And the last fight let us face
The Internationale unites the human race.

No more deluded by reaction
On tyrants only we'll make war
The soldiers too will take strike action
They'll break ranks and fight no more
And if those cannibals keep trying
To sacrifice us to their pride
They soon shall hear the bullets flying
We'll shoot the generals on our own side.

No saviour from on high delivers
No faith have we in prince or peer
Our own right hand the chains must shiver
Chains of hatred, greed and fear
E'er the thieves will out with their booty
And give to all a happier lot.
Each at the forge must do their duty
And we'll strike while the iron is hot.

Registered as a Newspaper in Sri Lanka

Ballads of Lenin

Langston Hughes, 1940

Comrade Lenin of Russia,
High in a marble tomb,
Move over, Comrade Lenin,
And give me room.

I am Ivan, the peasant,
Boots all muddy with soil.
I fought with you, Comrade Lenin.
Now I have finished my toil.

Comrade Lenin of Russia,
Alive in a marble tomb,
Move over, Comrade Lenin,
And make me room.

I am Chico, the Negro,
Cutting cane in the sun.
I lived for you, Comrade Lenin.
Now my work is done.

Comrade Lenin of Russia,
Honored in a marble tomb,
Move over, Comrade Lenin,
And leave me room.

I am Chang from the foundries
On strike in the streets of Shanghai.
For the sake of the Revolution
I fight, I starve, I die.

Comrade Lenin of Russia
Speaks from the marble tomb:
On guard with the workers forever —
The world is our room!

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