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***Political Statement of
the Third Plenary Meeting of
the Fifth National Congress***

The Road Ahead for the Left

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A Lesson in Drawing

Nizar Qabbani

My son places his paint box in front of me
and asks me to draw a bird for him.
Into the colour gray I dip the brush
and draw a square with locks and bars.
Astonishment fills his eyes:
"... But this is a prison, Father,
Don't you know how to draw a bird?"
And I tell him: "Son, forgive me.
I've forgotten the shapes of birds."
My son puts the drawing book in front of me
and asks me to draw a wheat-stalk.
I hold the pen
and draw a gun.
My son mocks my ignorance,
demanding,
"Don't you know, Father, the difference between a
wheat-stalk and a gun?"
I tell him, "Son,
once I used to know the shapes of wheat-stalks
the shape of the loaf
the shape of the rose
But in this hardened time
the trees of the forest have joined
the militia men
and the rose wears dull fatigues

(continued on inside back cover)

From the Editor's Desk

The two incidents of serious violence in early August are clear warnings that the fascist threat is getting stronger with visible support from sections of the government and needs to be arrested before it engulfs the whole country.

The people of Weliveriya in the Gampaha District had been complaining to the authorities about the deterioration of water quality for some time, indicating that a large factory in the region manufacturing rubber gloves since 1998 caused chemical contamination. When complaints fell on deaf ears they resorted to mass demonstrations in protest which were orderly and non-violent amid police presence. The armed forces which arrived at the spot of the demonstration on 1st August first attacked the media and then went on a rampage killing three and seriously wounding more than forty. The government and its media claimed that the armed forces acted in self-defence against provocative attacks and there have also been suggestions of a terrorist conspiracy to destabilize the country.

The manner in which the public protest in Weliveriya has been dealt with is akin to the way the police dealt with peacefully protesting workers of the Free Trade Zone in Katunayake in late May 2011, killing one and injuring more than 200 and the fishermen in Chilaw protesting a fuel price hike in February 2012, killing one and critically wounding eight. The important difference this time is that the army was brought in to deal with a peaceful civilian protest. The use of armed forces to deal with civilian matters has been commonplace in the North and East, and a rising tendency since the end of the war four years ago. It has now happened in the South and ominously the army has stated its intention to intervene in the future as well.

The other, the attack on a mosque in Grandpass, Colombo North occurred nine days after the tragedy of Weliveriya, which on the one hand is part of a long-term programme of attacks by Buddhist fundamentalists on Mosques as part of a broader anti-Muslim agenda. Beside the attack on the mosque, homes and shops belonging Muslims of the locality had been vandalized and some Muslims have been seriously injured. The attackers were brought in from outside to Grandpass, a working class area with a strong tradition of religious and ethnic tolerance. It is widely believed that the ongoing attacks on mosques and Muslim businesses has patronage at high levels of government; and the timing of this attack suggests that it was designed to divert the attention of the Sinhalese public from the events in Weliveriya.

The emerging pattern of violence indicates the coming together of interests that could drag the country towards a fascist dictatorship with Sinhala Buddhism as a populist frontage. The security forces have thus far intervened only to protect the neo-fascist Sinhala Buddhist gangs during conflicts, provoked almost always by the latter, and in the case of public protests against injustice the police and the army have been ruthlessly brutal in suppressing the people. US imperialism and its European allies while expressing concern about human rights violations and war crimes by the armed forces of the government have shown minimal interest in the ongoing suppression of public protest, since such repression serves their interests.

Those in power in the country and foreign forces have cultivated animosity among ethnic and religious groups and have not hesitated to transform it into conflicts to protect their hold on power and to preserve their interests. They create and nurture appropriate racist and religious organizations as well as act as support base for them. Thus there is a strong likelihood of an alliance of imperialists, Sinhala Buddhist fundamentalists and a repressive state in the event of a rightist takeover of power.

The Sinhala public should be reminded that it is the very armed forces that took away the lives of people in the North-East demanding their national rights and their fundamental right to livelihood and, since the end of the war, killed two young Tamil detainees in July-August 2012 on the pretext of controlling riots in the Vavuniya prison that have now pounced on the Sinhalese to fire at them; and that the armed forces have not long ago been used to brutally kill Sinhalese youth. Thus the series of incidents of repressive violence against the public has to be seen in the context of violation of democratic rights, denial of human and fundamental rights, the suppression of the press, kidnapping and killing of dissenters, and the escalating crime rate and corruption about which very little has been done by the arms of law enforcement.

Issues of democratic and fundamental rights are beginning to take a central spot in the politics of the South while they continue to be closely linked with national oppression in the North-East. Chauvinist capitalism in Sri Lanka will always find an ally in imperialism in its march towards a fascist dictatorship. The fascist threat has to be challenged and defeated before it takes control of the state apparatus and all national institutions. It is only the genuine left backed by progressive and democratic forces that can take up this challenge by combining the struggles for democracy and against imperialist globalisation with the national question. Leaving the initiative in the hands of the bourgeois democratic forces will be to risk betrayal of the oppressed masses.

Political Statement of the Third Plenary Meeting of the Fifth All Sri Lanka Congress of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party

27th & 28th July 2013

Comrades!

We have gathered at the Third Plenary Meeting of the Fifth All Sri Lanka Congress of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party. The Fifth All Sri Lanka Congress of the Party that took place in June 2010 had clearly put forward its policies concerning its political stand and practice based on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. Subsequently, in the First Plenary Meeting of June 2011, the Party put forward its immediate and long term programmes. The Second Plenary Meeting that took place in June 2012 had as its theme "Let us build up the Party as a revolutionary organization and carry forward mass activities". The Central Committee believes that, since statements, resolutions and programmes are available for all of them there is no need to repeat or explain them. Hence, today's Plenary Meeting makes it its duty to discuss and debate views on the events and trends in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres of the country and arrive at conclusions. This political report is presented as a summary of the proceedings.

Comrades!

The current political situation of the country clearly and explicitly illustrates the worst anti-democratic dictatorial features of executive power. In the past year of the post-war period, the family rule of the Rajapaksa brothers has carried itself in the direction of total fascism. It is at the forefront of rejecting the trade union rights of workers and employees and suppressing trade union struggles. Following the enactment of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, the Rajapaksa family rule, armed with the consequent arrogance of power, is carrying out anti-democratic and anti-people activities. The weapon that it is using to achieve that is the two-thirds majority in parliament. The Divineguma Bill was passed in Parliament in total disregard of a Supreme Court ruling, in a way that strips the

Provincial Councils of the minimal powers that they have. At the same time, as an act of revenge against the 43rd Chief Justice who refused to do their bidding, they removed her from her post by passing a motion of impeachment against her. Amid strong opposition from those concerned with the bourgeois rule of law and the judicial system under it, they dealt with the matter in a high-handed manner and made appointments as they wished. It is in such dictatorial fashion that the rule of the Rajapaksa brothers is attempting to emasculate the 13th Amendment or eliminate it altogether. This is a chauvinistic oppressive activity directed against the Tamil nationality and other minority nationalities. The 13th Amendment and the system of Provincial Councils under it cannot be the solution to the national question. The 13th Amendment lacks devolution of power. Yet, even as a nominal feature that has been added to the political structure to address the national question, it is an acknowledgment of the national question. The decision to emasculate or eliminate it comprises a blatantly anti-democratic and dictatorial effort of chauvinist oppression driven by inability to bear that reality.

When the war raged intensely in its final months, President Mahinda Rajapaksa pledged to the people that his government will find a political solution to the national question which was the cause of the war. But that talk gradually faded away amid celebrations of war victory. During the past year, attempts have been afoot within the government and outside it to emasculate or eliminate altogether the 13th Amendment. Parliamentary parties such as the UNP, the JVP and the TNA, each from its own stand point, have expressed their opposition to these moves. The parliamentary left parties in the government have also expressed their bitter opposition; and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress too has joined in the opposition. The EPDP of the North and the CWC and others of the Hill Country keep aloof, unable to take a clear stand. Under these conditions, government ministers Champika Ranawaka and Wimal Weerawansa are expressing utmost opposition to the 13th Amendment. Entering the fray alongside them are the darlings of the government such as the Bodhu Bala Sena, the Sinhala Ravaya and the Patriotic National Movement, which uphold Buddhist fundamentalism and the primacy of the Sinhala race in neo-fascist fashion. Their fanatical aversion, animosity and activities directed against the Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils are undertaken in a planned way. The chauvinistic, fascist, oppressive hands of the Rajapaksa brothers are evident behind these forces. It is also believed that foreign imperialist forces are also concealed behind them.

On another front, steps are afoot to militarize the country. More than a hundred thousand soldiers and other armed forces are stationed in the North-East. In addition, the armed forces are being modernized and reinforced in every way. Leadership training is provided to university entrants in military headquarters. School principals are given training and military titles. Besides these, retired officers from the armed forces are placed in high governmental positions as well as employed in diplomatic services. In particular, Governors and some Government Agents in the Northern and Eastern Provinces are former officers of the armed forces. The annual budgetary allocation for the armed forces is dominant, even after four years since the war ended, and is on the rise. In the North-East, in particular, massive military camps are being made permanent, and air and naval bases are being modernized and expanded.

In addition, the family rule of the Rajapaksa brothers seems to be a regime that is renowned internationally and nationally for denial of democracy and violation of human rights. Murders, kidnappings and disappearances continue. They are being carried out by the armed forces and armed gangs with government patronage, and the government is earnestly concealing these facts.

Corruption, bribery and fraud are flying high under the present regime. Commission takes precedence in everything and everywhere. The very top levels of the government, ministers and high officials are thriving on corruption. Reports of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Public Establishments (COPE) expose corruption in public organizations at state level. Today corruption is open and the situation is that nothing is possible without it.

The UPFA government headed by the President with executive powers has in it many political parties in order to retain its two-thirds majority. The government is a jumble of right wing, left wing, religious and chauvinist forces. As a result, there are sixty five ministers with cabinet status and around forty deputy ministers; and there are besides a large number of Presidential Advisors. All of them live comfortably with massive salaries, perks of office and luxury vehicles, paid for by public funds. They include Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil ministers and high officials of the government. Another irony is that some who are said to have been in the top rungs of the LTTE and surrendered subsequently have ministerial and other posts and enjoy all form of concessions and luxury with full protection as guests of the government. These individuals

exemplify the final destination of any audacious movement and leadership without policy, principle or ideals and lacking in clarity and commitment regarding the liberation of the people.

Thus it is patently true that the Mahinda Chinthana government is not a government that is supportive of or benefitting the toiling masses comprising workers, peasants, fisher folk, state and private sector employees, women and youth. The regime of the Rajapaksa brothers which is implementing personal dictatorship at the peak of executive power is traversing the route of fascism. The Prevention of Terrorism Act is still in practice. Political prisoners have not been released for many years. Nothing is said of those who have gone missing. The freedom of the media is severely repressed in the name of the code of ethics for the media. Killing, kidnapping, attacks and disappearing of media personnel continue. As a result, many have left the country to take refuge in foreign countries. Today the media publish under repressive conditions that compel them to adopt self censorship

Demands for wage increase by workers and employees are refused and rejected. Discontent and acts of protest are emerging in all sectors as a result of inadequate wages and inability to cope with the cost of living. The only response of the government is repression. We see in today's government, in which the so called parliamentary leftists are partners, a government that is conducting itself in an appallingly anti-working class manner. Besides, the toiling masses including the peasantry, fisher folk and plantation workers are facing a decline in living standards owing to price increases of essential food items and consumer goods and increasing fares leading to harsh living conditions. We also see that university students as well as school students being affected by bad educational policies. It is common for the police and the military to unleash repression against protests demanding justice and fair play.

The family rule of the Rajapaksa brothers thus continues as a comprador bourgeois repressive regime heaping unbearable burdens upon the vast majority of the people of the country. The present rulers, in order to conceal their true form and to divert the attention of the majority Sinhala public so as to make gains in the Sinhala vote bank, pose off as the protectors of Buddhism. This is not confined to being an access to the vote bank but also linked to the chauvinist idea of making this country a solely Sinhala Buddhist country.

The national question of the country is thus viewed on that basis. There has been an unwritten rule that any parliamentary political party that seeks to come to power in Sri Lanka cannot retain a vote bank among the Sinhalese without adopting a Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist stand. This has become a political stand that has entered and got consolidated in all Sinhala Buddhist political parties in the South. The JVP is no exception. At the same time, the Frontline Socialist Party that has split from the JVP too is struggling as a result of its inability to break with this rule. Having interpreted self determination as secession, all of them are playing with words without understanding the depth of the issue or offering a suitable solution to the national question. It should be stressed here that the policy put forward by an honest left political party or a leftist on the national question — which is the main problem facing the country — is a measure of the leftism of the party or the person?

It is because of the above situation that no solution has been found for the national question under the parliamentary and executive presidential systems over the past sixty five years. Consequently, the national question was transformed into war and the lives of nearly three hundred and fifty thousand people of the North-East have been sacrificed. Sinhalese, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils too have been killed. Even today, the Rajapaksa family rule is unwilling to utter the phrase 'national question'. Intoxicated by the arrogance deriving from a military victory, it refuses to recognize the gravity and the hazards of the national question and counts on chauvinistic military oppression. It is dangerous that the so called Mahinda Chinthana regime of the Rajapaksa brothers refuses to find a just political solution to the national question which puts at risk the sovereignty, independence and autonomy of the country. To avert that danger, it is necessary to carry forward a policy and demand for a political solution. It is notable that the Party has put forward as its clear policy and demand that only an autonomous system based on the right to self determination within a united Sri Lanka can be a solution to the national question. Meanwhile, the reactionary leaderships among the oppressed nationalities act in ways that support the chauvinist oppressive rulers. The leaderships of political dominance among the Tamils that mouth Tamil nationalism, in the pretext of opposing chauvinism, are clinging to their conservative narrow nationalism. History has shown that such stands have been adopted from long past to this day. But the Tamil leaderships are still intent on projecting their elitist upper class interests.

Meantime, the Rajapaksa regime is implementing its chauvinistic oppressive schemes by continuing to retain the North-East under the control of the armed forces. In keeping with a plan to permanently station the armed forces in every district there, the regime is forcefully seizing lands belonging to the people. There is an increasing tendency to appropriate territory, residences, work places, agricultural land and coastal areas to various extents, according to region. In 24 Gramasevaka Divisions of Valikamam North in the Northern Province, people have not been allowed to resettle in areas such as Palali, Mayilitty, Kankesanturai, Veemankamam, Kurumbasitty and Vasavilan. People began to be expelled from Valikamam North in 1983 and were fully expelled in 1990 to live as refugees. The government has officially announced the acquisition of nearly 6400 acres (1280 hectares) of land belonging to seven Gramasevaka Divisions; and the displaced people, political parties and public organizations have continuously resisted this move. Meanwhile, symbolic of Sinhala Buddhist hegemony, Buddhist viharas and statues of the Buddha are established and strengthened in the North-East. Also, in the North-East, even today, it is the armed forces that decide everything. In the Eastern Province, it is the Governor, a former military officer, who takes all decisions. Chauvinist projects are undertaken by denying that the North-East comprises the traditional homelands of the Tamil and Muslim people and claiming that it belongs to all three communities. The village of Sampur has been appropriated by the state, and 540 acres (216 hectares) of land have been allocated for an Indian thermal power station, and 818 acres (327 hectares) to a large industrial estate. While the people of Sampur continue to live as refugees, schemes are afoot for planned Sinhala colonization in Sampur.

Like the Tamil nationality, the Muslim nationality too is oppressed by chauvinism. But such oppression is not spoken of by its leaders owing to their political line of securing concessions from the government. Nevertheless, objections keep emerging. The Bodhu Bala Sena, a religious fundamentalist organization backed by the state, is involved in a variety of anti-Muslim activities. Thus far, around 25 mosques have been attacked or vandalized. The government has remained silent and not taken steps against such deeds. At the same time, Muslim leaders too turn a blind eye to them. But disaffection, criticism and protests against the chauvinist regime are on the rise among the Muslims in various parts of the country.

Likewise, it is clearer by the day that the Hill Country Tamils continue to be oppressed on class as well as ethnic bases. The recently agreed wage increase under the collective agreement is being undermined in a planned way. The wages are being further lowered by a reduction in the number of working days per week. As a result, many plantation workers have been compelled to seek work in other regions and accept casual employment at low wages. Besides, the plantation workers and youth are being sidelined in the proposed government scheme to distribute 37,000 acres (18,800 hectares) of barren land to the public. Voices of protest are rising against such discrimination. Meanwhile, denial of basic rights of livelihood to the Hill Country Tamils continues in familiar fashion. What is most evident is the tendency of the so-called leaders of the Hill Country Tamils to collaborate with the government in parliamentary and trade union deception by securing ministerial positions in order to secure positions and concessions for themselves and those close to them. Thus a new situation is emerging where, besides demands relating to economic and livelihood issues, their rights as a nationality need to be further asserted in the context of their class exploitation and ethnic oppression.

The militarily oppressive and chauvinist regime of today that is focussed on comprador capitalism continues as a fascist regime that oppresses the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people based on class and ethnicity. In order to continue its rule, it is presenting different faces to the US and Western imperialist and Indian hegemonic forces and to China, Pakistan, Russia and Iran, and is indulging in direct and indirect collaboration.

Comrades!

The family rule of the Rajapaksa brothers is steering the economy of the country in line with its political stand that is in keeping with the neo-liberal programme of imperialist globalization headed by neo-colonial monopoly capital.

This is an extension of the economic policy initiated by the UNP and its leader JR Jayawardane who came to power in 1977. The prolongation and implementation of that policy through liberalization, privatization and globalization has remained unchanged to this day. Through it, a condition has been reached where a production economy was wrecked and a neo-liberal consumer economy was reinforced. Production of food items needed by the people has been abandoned to lead to a sorry state where

essential and subsidiary food items are being imported. As a result, peasants who have been producing food locally have been driven to a state of penury. The agricultural sector which was advancing towards self sufficiency in food through the production of rice and subsidiary crops has been undermined by liberal imports. Meantime, the prices of imported foods have risen to levels unaffordable to the ordinary people. The days when Sri Lanka was known as an agricultural country are gone and the country has become a market for foreign imports. In this respect, the family rule of the Rajapaksa brothers is realizing the dream of JR Jayawardane to transform Sri Lanka into another Singapore.

The so-called infrastructural development was undertaken to fortify the neo-liberal import-based consumer economy. It pays attention to the building of roads, super highways, airports and new harbours, harbour expansion, urban building reconstruction, urban beautification, modern building facilities, luxury accommodation and such matters. This infrastructure based development is for expanding the scope of the economic policy of neo-liberal imperialist globalization. A hundred years ago the colonialists developed infrastructure to serve their exploitative needs. Now the rulers of our country implement infrastructure based development to serve the exploitative needs of neo-colonialists. It is not in the interest of the people but entirely to serve the agenda of liberalization, privatization and globalization. Multi billion rupee loans are obtained from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, Chinese and Indian banks and others to carry out this development to facilitate unhindered import of goods, their delivery at speed in all directions across the country, and promote tourism and luxurious experiences. It is with this in mind that foreign investors are granted land and other resources in urban and rural areas. Among developments are five seven-star hotels and casinos in the capital, and agreements have already been signed for their construction. They are meant for tourists. The government of the Rajapaksas is looking for easy ways to generate income.

Likewise, capital is flowing in for massive buildings to house trade centres. Dwellings of ordinary people are destroyed and the locations granted to big business concerns. When such lands and resources are granted to foreigners, there is the hidden practice of persons at the highest level of government and at successive levels receiving generous brokerage and other inducements. Sleaze in this context occurs in many ways. It trickles down from the top as bribes and fraud. The saying that

“the way of the ruler is the way of the ruled” has now become practice. The practice of capitalist greed that dictates that it is all right to make money by any means is dominant.

Made garments for the European and American markets dominate the country's export economy. The industry is run by foreign and local investors in the Free Trade Zone and outside. The garment industry employs nearly 350,000 workers and other employees. Of them 50,000 are in the Free Trade Zone, and many are young women. Around 200 garment factories closed in mid-2010, and 20,000 people went out of work as a result. Of the garments manufactured, 59% go to countries of the European Union. Tea which held the top slot in export trade has been pushed to second place by the garment industry. Meantime, tea plantation companies present accounts to claim that they are running at a loss. Five hundred thousand workers are employed in the plantation industry, and half of them are women who continue to work under difficult conditions. Malnutrition, mother and child illnesses, and infant mortality are rampant. The wages paid to tea and rubber plantation workers is low and the Hill Country plantation workers are the lowest daily wage earners in the country. Also, many workers of our country have gone to the Middle East seeking employment to work under difficult conditions for low wages — although somewhat higher than at home.

In the above three categories of workers, women exceed men. Also in agriculture and in the state and private sectors women are employed in considerable numbers. Statistics indicate that the population of the country is 22.5 million, with 52% women. Yet, women face various problems and forms of oppression based not only on class and gender but also ethnicity and caste.

Although our workers, peasants and fisher folk are the productive forces meeting the food requirements of the country, they live in a state of neglect. As a result of the abandoning of the production bases and of the planning of a national economy, agriculture, fisheries and small industries are weakening. Even in the other sectors, it is clear that the country and the people are not being guided towards a national economic goal.

Overall, the state sector employs 1.3 million and the private sector 650,000 (inclusive of 500,000 plantation workers). The statistics are that there are 2,500,000 peasant cultivators. But agriculture contributes only between 12 and 13% of the gross national product. The youth comprising

25% of the population face unemployment in substantial numbers. Students coming out of universities and other institutions of higher learning annually do not have suitable employment opportunities. Meanwhile, the white collar workers employed in the sectors of modern technology and information technology are subject to exploitation. While there is a rise in their being exploited unknowingly in novel ways, they refuse to accept it. All of these are aspects of the imperialist globalization agenda.

Also the economic structure under the current scheme of globalization points to ways in which the people can be exploited in many ways as well as encourages them to resort to short cuts and deception. It creates the impression of greener grass on the other side and induces people to chase after mirages. Banks, finance companies and business centres tempt people to borrow, and collect the loans with interest. Consequently, ordinary people are burdened by loans. Thus it will be clear that ninety percent of the people are exploited and oppressed through the existing social structure and the dominant ruling class safeguards the system. The working masses are being subjected to problems and crises in every possible way.

Hundreds of thousands of men and even more women are working outside the country in the Middle East. They toil hard under the hot sun and in severely cold conditions, and the money that they remit is a blessing to the government. Tamils are the majority among the diaspora in Europe, North America and Australia. Their remittances and the consequent cultural degeneration are matters that need detailed attention. At the same time, it should be appreciated that a section of the diaspora remits money for humanitarian causes.

The social and cultural sectors of the country are being rapidly sinking into degeneration. Education and health standards have fallen to unprecedented depths. It is three decades since social and public welfare were removed from the agenda of the government. From the day that privatization was welcomed, education and health have drifted towards degeneration, which has now reached its depths. The government is itching to bring in private universities on par with state universities. The free education system of the country is today at the verge of death. It was for that reason that the Federation of University Teachers went on strike for a hundred days demanding the allocation of six percent of gross national product (GNP) for education. But the government defeated the struggle using a variety of tactics. The government which allocated 2.06%

of the GNP for education in 2011 has allocated only 1.86% in 2012, thereby worsening the crisis of education.

Similarly, in the health sector, government general hospitals have been allowed to deteriorate gradually. In 2012 only 1.31% of the GNP was allocated for the health sector. Significantly, the allocation declined to 1.05% in 2013. A regime that neglects the education and health sectors of the country is an anti-people regime. Meanwhile, private hospitals and medical practitioners are harvesting vast sums of money from patients. A situation persists where only those with money can be rescued from illness while those without are doomed to die. A good illustration of state policy on health is its indifference towards eradication of the dengue. It is the toiling masses that are hurt by the privatization of the health sector. Cancer, heart diseases, kidney diseases and tuberculosis are affecting the people. Diseases are on the rise in the country as a result of environmental pollution, and the modes of production, distribution and consumption driven by imperialist greed for profit form the basis of environmental pollution. They affect nature, and people need to be awoken to this reality.

It is claimed that Sri Lankan culture thrives through the Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Christian faiths of the people of the country. But the country is facing severe decadence in the name of culture. The infiltration of noxious cultural values under globalisation is readily captivating all. Proudly boasted religious values reconcile with noxious cultural values to absorb all manner of decadence. There is a rising tendency for the toiling masses, especially the youth, to be sucked into such cultural decadence. Noxious values are served up plentifully by the cinema, television, internet and the print media. Consumption of drugs is on the rise as are rape and sexual abuse of women and children. Despite regulatory laws, alcoholism and smoking are increasing, and the younger generation are affected by them. It is a severe challenge facing us to rescue the people from these evils and to take the initiative to instil new cultural values to counter cultural decadence.

The International Situation

Comrades!

The current international situation is developing very much as in our assessment at the Fifth All Sri Lanka Congress. The US and its NATO allies are directly and indirectly waging wars of aggression. They conduct

destructive wars to preserve their imperialist economic interests by plundering the resources of countries. Besides manufacturing weapons of mass destruction that can decimate humanity, they promote wars within and between countries to make huge profits by selling weapons. From behind the scenes, they transform internal issues of countries into conflicts and induce civil wars. The war resulting from the national question in Sri Lanka is a good example. The US and NATO countries that waged a war of aggression against Iraq on false pretext wrecked the country to make its oil resources theirs. Besides, they have paved the way for conflict and mutual destruction between religious sects in that country. In Afghanistan the US-led war of aggression and the struggle against aggression by the Taliban are still on, while the country and the people suffer destruction. Nevertheless, the US continues to receive blow upon blow in both countries.

US activities targeting Iran are most wicked. The imperialist intention is to tear down everything that stands in the way to its access to Middle East oil and its domination over the region. Protecting Israel, created as its vicious ally for the above purpose is another innate desire. In accordance with its agenda for the Middle East and North Africa, Libya was plunged into a civil war and the government of Gaddafi was overthrown, and Gaddafi himself was murdered. Along the same lines, it has interfered in Syria and is struggling to overthrow its head of state. In Asia, it is using the pretext of possession of nuclear weapons to harass North Korea. It has succeeded in deflecting the mass uprisings of North Africa and the Middle East to its direct and indirect advantage. The US is acting to obstruct the benefits of the popular uprising in Egypt from the people by acting in collaboration with the leadership of the Egyptian armed forces to subvert the return of democracy to Egypt.

The US also keeps close watch on countries that pose a threat to its global economic domination and moves to diminish the challenge. Russia, a former socialist country, and China, now moving away from socialism, are specific targets in this respect. Having made the Indian ruling elite its strategic partner, the US is developing economic and military tactics to encircle China in collaboration with India. The Asia Pacific strategic plan is one such move. China is no more a country taking the socialist road, and conducts itself in ways that advance its national development and economy. Its economy has grown tremendously in the past 35 years by attracting foreign capital and through that it is expanding its production and

global trade. Its trade and investment in Asia, Africa and Latin America too have grown immensely.

While the Chinese economy has stabilized and strengthened, the economies of the US and the West face decline and fall. China's economic growth has triggered global trade competition and is advancing towards capitalist rivalry. China's economic development cannot be called socialist. China, which has taken the capitalist road, is not in a situation to support or assist anti-imperialist struggles or liberation movements of the people of the world.

Yet we see many countries and people of many countries opposing and struggling against imperialism. Latin American countries are at the forefront in this respect. The example set by the little nation of Cuba in anti-imperialism is being followed in Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Brazil and Argentina to the point of being a worrying challenge to the US. The political awareness of the people in these countries and the actions of the governments provide, to differing degrees, a basis for exposing and resisting US imperialism.

The US is still at the forefront in dominating the global economy, in possessing a mighty army to defend that dominance, in the manufacture of weapons and in committing armed aggression. Countries of the European Union, Australia and Japan are its partners. India, which claims to be the biggest democracy, is implicitly and explicitly bonding itself with that alliance. Through that India is strengthening itself as a regional hegemonic power in the South Asian region, while Indian regional hegemony faces contradictions with its South Asian neighbours of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Nepal and their people. India is also in conflict with China and seeks dominance in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Vietnam and the Indian Ocean region.

As far as our country is concerned, US imperialism and the West want to bring it under their control. Meanwhile, India wants Sri Lanka to be firmly in its grip. However, India is unprepared to openly antagonize the US in this matter while the US desires that its strategic partner will not turn against it. Hence the US is constantly on the move to keep the Sino-Indian contradiction on eternal boil. President Rajapaksa is taking advantage of this climate to strengthen the long standing ties that he and the SLFP have had with China and reinforce his rule. China too uses trade, investment

and credit facilities on a massive scale as a tactic to keep Sri Lanka on its side.

Amid this international climate, anti-imperialist struggles and Marxist Leninist movements of the world are making advances based on confidence in Marxism and socialism. Therefore, we too should be part of that spirit of confidence to carry forward anti-imperialism and the Marxist Leninist movement in our country with greater vigour than before to fulfil our international duty; and let us carry forward these tasks in firm spirit.

Comrades!

The aforesaid is a short outline of the current political, economic, social and cultural realities of in the Sri Lankan context and the international trends, as concluded on the basis of our stand of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. Detailed explanations can be found in the Report of the All Sri Lanka Congress of 2010 and the Party Programme of 2011. Let us carry forward the work of the Party, bearing in mind that what has been said there will remain our political stand until the next All Sri Lanka Congress of the Party due in 2015. The Party has always faced various challenges and tests in carrying out its political work among the people, politically as well as organizationally. Let us face them with dedication and commitment and carry out mass political work among the toiling masses along the path shown by Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. Let us act through mobilizing the people and launching mass struggles against the current political system and against the comprador capitalist, chauvinist, fascist regime with executive power headed by the Rajapaksa brothers, making them our immediate targets. Let us declare this goal as the revolutionary resolution marking the 35th anniversary (03.07.1978-03.07.2013) of the Party.

- **Long Live Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought**
- **Greater growth to the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party**

SK Senthivel, General Secretary
V Mahendran, National Organizer

The Road Ahead for the Left

S Sivasegaram

The 17-year UNP misrule, which introduced the 'open economy' and privatisation and transformed the national question into armed conflict and war, was ended 19 years ago. But its policies have not been defeated, and persist despite change of government. The role of the armed forces in the affairs of the state is growing at a frightening pace. Corruption and abuse of public resources have reached new heights. Power is concentrated in the hands of a few, and democratic rights and freedom of expression face unprecedented threat, especially in the North and East. The economy is a shambles with Sri Lanka among the most indebted in the world and its sovereignty challenged by imperialist and regional hegemonic powers. Thus several issues remain to be resolved for the country to regain control of its economy and free itself of foreign domination.

The end of the war has not resolved the national question which, if at all, has been aggravated, and remains the most important contradiction in Sri Lanka. Thus its early and satisfactory resolution is a precondition to duly address the fundamental and other pressing issues that confront the country. The ruling Sinhala elite, as a class, and their Tamil counterparts have been instrumental in exacerbating the national question and transforming it into a war of mass destruction. The past six decades have demonstrated the incapability of the ruling classes to find a lasting solution to the national question, especially in the context of majoritarian electoral politics, and the executive presidential system. Thus, it is up to political forces that genuinely represent the interests of the toiling masses to take the initiative to find a lasting solution.

The left has therefore to take the initiative in the process reconciliation among the nationalities and communities in order that reactionary forces and vested interests are prevented from again take advantage of the genuine grievances of oppressed nationalities and communities. The Sri Lankan left, to lead the way in solving the national question, needs to restore its credibility among the oppressed and toiling masses. It has to learn from past mistakes, and honestly review and reassess its past and

present roles in the national question. There can be no room for opportunism or dogmatism in this matter.

Matters that need immediate attention are firstly the recognition of the existence of minority nationalities and communities and the assertion of Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society. Next is the acceptance in principle of the right to self-determination, which is the Marxist Leninist answer to secessionist tendencies, but intentionally misinterpreted as licence to secession, by both secessionists and advocates of a rigid unitary state. Irrespective of one's stand on self-determination, the question of devolution of power has to be addressed with a sense of urgency, based on the issues that led to the call for devolution.

The national question has for too long has been viewed purely in terms of the language problem which, despite its dominance of Sri Lankan politics in the mid-20th century, was not the real issue. Many Sinhala and Tamil narrow nationalists who once gave centrality to the language question, before long, became worshippers of English; and much of the advances which Sinhala and Tamil made in education and public affairs in the early decades of *swabasha* education have gone to waste. Nor is culture, religion or any other aspect of identity the issue, although every difference is used by chauvinists and narrow nationalists to divide people and promote conflict.

The disenfranchisement in 1948 of the Hill Country Tamils (who had severed links with India at least a century ago) had an ethno-political dimension to it, but it was the class dimension that mattered most to the UNP which disenfranchised them and to the section of the Tamil leaders who went along with that unjust legislation. In contrast, the left took a principled stand. Again, in 1956, on the issue of official language, the left (with the exception of the VLSSP which became a coalition partner of the SLFP) was firm on parity of status for Sinhala and Tamil. Once "Sinhala Only" became law, the left, especially the Communist Party, accepted the reality and actively encouraged and unconditionally supported every serious move by the SLFP to restore the language rights of the speakers of Tamil.

How the left went astray to lose its moral high ground since is a matter for serious reflection and rectification. Nevertheless, the lone voice of Sarath Mutthetuwegama in parliament in the mid-1980s, when the Tamil opposition was effectively shut out by the UNP government led by Jayawardane is still gratefully remembered by an entire generation of

Tamils, but somehow that spirit has not been sustained by the left in subsequent years despite its stronger presence in parliament. Thus there is cause for serious soul searching.

The emergence of the JVP (which used a blend of narrow nationalism, populism and empty left slogans alongside adventurist politics to appeal to the youth) at the expense of the left eventually helped to strengthen the role of the armed forces in the affairs of the state and assisted the UNP to push forward its reactionary agenda and 'liberal' economic policies leading to the re-colonisation of Sri Lanka by globalised imperialism. The escalation of the national question into war by the UNP was by design and was intended to facilitate the transition of the country from one struggling to build a national economy into one that exported labour to feed rampant consumerism. A section of the left forces takes UNP into confidence in their search for an alternative to the current dictatorial tendencies; but to give the UNP the initiative in the campaign to restore democracy is plain folly. These leftists need to be reminded of the lessons of 1977.

Addressing the national question requires the rectification of past mistakes by successive governments in matters of education and employment, planned colonisation designed to alter regional ethnic identity, military presence in ways that threaten civilian life and livelihood, and denial of democratic rights. While these are essential preconditions, what is most needed is the building of faith among the minority nationalities and communities that discrimination and oppression will not recur.

In addressing the national question, it is important to recognize the Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils as distinct nationalities and ensure that any proposed solution assures them of their national rights and an end to encroachment of those rights. While recognition of the principle of the right of nationalities to self determination is an essential ingredient to a lasting solution to the national question, in the present political climate, the concept of self determination could, however wrongly, be associated with secession by a vast majority. Thus there is a need for political education of the masses for them to fully appreciate its meaning and purpose and eventually accept it. But there is no reason why a broad united front led by a genuine left cannot, in its minimum programme, insist on true devolution of power. Regional autonomy and devolution when implemented in their true spirit will empower the people at every level and could be an effective safeguard against attempts at foreign control over

the natural and human resources of Sri Lanka. The SLFP and the UNP, each when in power, have at different stages accepted devolution in principle but acted to undermine devolution when out of power. It was their cynicism that has brought the country to its present national crisis, and they have no moral grounds to oppose devolution and regional autonomy.

One weapon that imperialism now has to subdue the Mahinda Chinthana regime is the alleged war crimes and violation of human rights. Evidence is strong and crude denials have only strengthened the hands of the imperialists. Yet it is not the imperialists but the people of Sri Lanka who have the right to know what happened in a war that cost the country heavily in human lives and wrecked its economy. The left should courageously demand an independent inquiry into the violations by all parties to the conflict not only during the final stages of the war but also in the preceding years and after the war. Identification of major offences and offenders is important to the restoration of national unity and a whole range of democratic and human rights. Only a genuine left can courageously face the truth, and it is urgently necessary for the left to recapture its moral high ground.

The left should by now have realised that there is no parliamentary road to socialism. That is not to deny parliament a role in carrying forward the struggle for social justice. The SLFP was a progressive force with an anti-imperialist content for three decades since its founding. But as a party of a section of the capitalist class it could not be relied on to deliver the goods for the left. Collaboration with the SLFP had to be conditional and on an equal footing and that is hard to sustain in a coalition led by the SLFP, as its left partners learned to their dismay in 1970-76. Thus there is a need for the left to redefine its relationship with the SLFP, assert its independence and reassert left ideology. Without it, there is no useful parliamentary role for the left.

What is needed in the immediate future is the building of a broad based mass movement with a minimum programme having at its core opposition to imperialism and hegemony, a just and peaceful resolution of the national question, and restoration of democratic and human rights.

[Invited article for the *Attha*, Sinhala political weekly of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka, resuming publication in July 2013, published in Sinhala translation in *Attha* 14 July 2013.]

NDMLP Diary

Statement to the Media

12th August.2013

Condemning attack on mosque

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party on the attack of 10th August on a mosque in Grandpass.

The attack of 10th of August on a mosque in Grandpass has been carried out as part of a long-term programme of attacks by Buddhist fundamentalists on Mosques of the Muslim public. Besides, homes and shops belonging to people of that locality too have been smashed up and some Muslims have received serious injuries. It is believed that behind the ongoing attacks on mosques there is the patronage of those at high levels of office in the present regime. Hence the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly condemns the above attack and the climate of panic among the people that has been created thereby. At the same time, there is suspicion whether the attack on the mosque in Grandpass was launched to deflect the wave of protest against the attack on Sinhalese on 1st August in Weliveriya.

In the present situation, those in power in the country as well as foreign forces protect their continuation in power and preserve their interests through cultivating animosity among ethnic and religious groups and transforming them into conflicts. They create and nurture appropriate racist and religious organizations as well as serve as support base for them. This has been proven by the wicked deeds of attack on more than twenty five mosques in recent times by Buddhist fundamentalists and their organizations. Bringing in violent mobs from outside for the attack on the Grandpass mosque is a clear illustration. It is doubtful that the government will take appropriate action against this attack or earlier attacks. Likewise, it cannot be expected that the leaders of Muslim political parties will be forthcoming for firm action. Hence, the Party urges the Muslims to come forward to join hands with the Sinhalese and Tamil people in united actions to secure justice and fairness for them.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

Statement to the Media

4th August 2013

Condemning military attack on the public

The Politburo of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement denouncing the attack of 1st August on the people of Weliveriya.

The people of Weliveriya, Rathupaswela in Gampaha who mobilised to demand clean water for drinking were rewarded with bullets by government military firing. It is the very army that took away the lives of people in the North-East who were demanding their national rights and fundamental right to livelihood that has pounced on the Sinhalese to fire at them. In this attack a seventeen year old youth shuddered to death on the spot. Over forty persons were critically wounded. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party very strongly condemns this brutal attack and killings in the combined action by the army and the police on 1st August. The Party also supports the demand of the people that the rubber goods factory that polluted and poisoned the wells and water sources of the region should be closed permanently.

Chemical effluents that have been discharged from a factory producing rubber gloves in this area since 1998 are the main source of this problem. Industrial waste water from the factory which has been functioning in the Weliveriya region with the backing of the highest levels of the government has affected wells and waterways and poisoned drinking water in 12 villages in the Weliveriya Rathupaswela region. The people demanded clean drinking water and had already held a series of awareness campaigns. But neither the government nor its ministers listened to the protests. It was under these conditions that on 1st August around six thousand people mobilised to demonstrate to urge their demands. Unwilling to tolerate the protest, the police and the army launched a cruel attack on the people.

Pollution of drinking water in Weliveriya is an example of how the daily lives of the people are sacrificed for the sake of exploitation and making of fat profits by local and multi-national companies. This is a consequence of neo-liberal economic destruction through liberalisation and privatisation under imperialist globalisation. Such environmental pollution and problems of livelihood are spreading across the country. The Party points out that there is no way other than for the masses to mobilize in protest in the way that the people of Weliveriya did.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

News Reports

29th July 2013

Third Plenum of the Fifth Congress of the NDMLP

The Third Plenum of the Fifth All Sri Lanka Congress of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party was held in Colombo on the 27th and 28th of July 2013. The Plenum was addressed by Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary, Comrade V Mahendran, National Organizer, and Comrades S Thevarajah, K Thanikasalam, S Panneerselvam, K Selvam Kadirgamanathan and T Sriprakash, members of the Central Committee and Comrades S Thavarajah, N Pratheepan, P Suren, Mohanraj and R Ranjan of the Party's Youth Front, among others. The text of the political report of the Plenum is presented as full text in translation from Tamil to English in this issue of New Democracy.

The plenum was followed by a public meeting to mark the 35th anniversary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party chaired by Comrade V Mahendran, with Comrade SK Senthivel as the main speaker.

Address by Comrade SK Senthivel at the 35th Anniversary Meeting of the Party

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, who announced the decision of the Party not to participate in any of the forthcoming Provincial Council elections, made the following observations in his special address at the meeting held in Colombo on 28th July 2013 to mark the 35th Anniversary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, chaired by Comrade V Mahendran.

The economic crisis of the country is worsening and ascending towards a climax. Solution is denied to the national question which is the main issue facing the country. People on all sides remain dissatisfied and disgusted as a result. Unable to face the problems, the regime of the Rajapaksa brothers conducts elections from time to time with the help of state power, vast sums of money and chauvinism, and thereby ensures the survival of the capitalist, chauvinist, dictatorial, fascist regime. Elections are being held now for three Provincial Councils to strengthen the regime. Especially in the North, the army decides everything amid the absence of democracy, normal conditions and civil administration. In the Hill Country, there is no benefit for the plantation workers from the Provincial Council. The Provincial Councils do not fulfil even the minimum basic requirements. Under these conditions, the parties of the government and the opposition and the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil

political parties are showing a keen interest in these elections merely to secure posts in the Provincial Councils for the leaders and their allies and thereby make personal gains. In such an anti-people climate, the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party has decided not to contest any of the forthcoming Provincial Council elections.

The economy of the country is being directed along a disastrous route. The lands and resources of the country are being given away to multi-national and big business organizations. The manufacturing economy is in misery while consumer economy dominates. These are the consequences of the policies of liberalisation, privatization and globalization led by comprador capitalism. They have led to daily increases in the prices of foods and consumer goods. As a result, the toiling masses who comprise the majority in the country are gravely affected by unbearable economic burdens.

As the same time, in the absence of a political solution to the national question, a chauvinistic agenda is being carried forward, through which the government sustains itself in power. The regime of the Rajapaksa brothers who introduced and implemented the 18th Amendment to the Constitution is now seeking to get rid of the 13th Amendment. This is the continuation of a wholly anti-democratic, fascist, dictatorial trend. The comprador capitalist, chauvinist ruling classes have continued to be in power by dividing the people based on ethnicity, religion, language and region and creating conflicts among them. This journey initiated in 1977 by JR Jayawardane is continued without change by Mahinda Rajapaksa and brothers through the dictatorship of the family. It is a salient feature of the present regime that, while it denies the rights of the toiling masses of the country and subjecting them to class oppression, it also carries forward cruel oppression of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities. But the situation continues where the Tamil political parties and the leaders of the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils do not have policies or programmes that could confront that trend. The Tamil political parties that claim to oppose chauvinism and chauvinist rulers are keen to rely on narrow nationalism to continue their politics of elitist dominance. To them, it is adequate to contest elections and secure posts in Provincial Councils, Regional Councils and local authorities. They are unable to transcend it to mobilize the people through putting forward new policies and programmes by learning from the negative experiences of the past. The reason for this is their conservative ideological thinking and elitist upper class attitudes.

Policies and programmes that give prominence to the toiling masses based on the notion of an oppressed nationality need to be carried forward to the exclusion of conservative ideology and upper class elitism. A new political climate should be created in which the Tamil people would be mobilized

towards an alternative political forum to determine their own destiny. It is through that the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities will be able to secure the right to autonomy within a united Sri Lanka based on the right to self determination. It is essential to link the toiling Sinhala masses oppressed by the state with this initiative for struggle. The stand put forward by the Party is that it can be achieved only through the mobilization of the people in the political sphere of mass struggle beyond the bounds of electoral politics.

NDMLP Statement to the Media

1st July 2013

Tampering with the 13th Amendment

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party, following a meeting of the Central Committee which among other issues discussed the current disputes relating to the 13th Amendment to the Constitution.

Moves by the President and the UPFA Government to undermine the 13th Amendment constitute an anti-democratic dictatorial measure of a chauvinistic regime. The regime of the Rajapaksa brothers is acting in this manner in the hope that it could thereby gratify Buddhist fundamentalists and Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists, distract the toiling Sinhala masses, and thereby sustain forever their chauvinist, capitalist, fascist dictatorial rule and corrupt regime.

The reason why, at the same time, despite the failure to solve within the framework of the 13th Amendment the national question which has developed into the main question facing the country, the President and his brothers are preserving to revoke it or amend it is to continue with the chauvinistic oppression of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly denounces the anti-democratic moves to revoke it or amend the 13th Amendment which seek to lead the country and the people along the path of ruin. The left, democratic and progressive forces of the country should come forward to register their firm protest and to carry forward people's campaigns.

The 13th Amendment was put in place in 1987 based on the claim that the solution to the national question, especially for the people of the North-East, lies in the 13th Amendment and the system of Provincial Councils. But neither the national question nor the aspirations of the people of the North-East have been resolved. Attempts made during the past 66 years of parliamentary and

executive presidential governments have at every stage been thwarted by Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists. Only the attempt at a solution under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord became legislation as the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. But the 13th Amendment and the system of Provincial Councils under it failed to be a solution that met the aspirations of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party has drawn attention to this from the time of the passing of the Amendment. However, there was scope to develop on the 13th Amendment — which entered the Constitution under special historical circumstances and pressures — to expand on the sharing and devolution of power. The best solution to the chauvinist oppression faced by the oppressed nationalities can only be autonomy based on the right to self determination. Only a solution within the framework of a united Sri Lanka with autonomy for the traditional homelands of the Tamil and Muslim people comprising a merged North and East with autonomous internal units can be a lasting solution. Likewise, only a system of autonomy that suits the long-term habitation of the Hill Country Tamils can be a solution to the national oppression faced by them.

While such a solution is for the long term, an immediate solution and the unity of the working people averting splits on ethnic lines requires maximum devolution of power. It is through that the entire people of Sri Lanka could free themselves from the forces of local and foreign ruling elite and foreign domination, and advance along the road to prosperity. Therefore, the Party strongly denounces and opposes the moves to revoke or to amend the 13th Amendment on the basis that it is a manifestation of oppressive Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist arrogance.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP Political Seminar in Matale

16th June 2013

The Hill Country Tamil Nationality should take an alternative political path to win its fundamental rights

A seminar titled “Socio-Political Problems of the Hill Country People and the Future” organized by the Matale Branch of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party was held in Matale on 16th June 2013. The seminar was chaired by Comrade P Suren.

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDMLP, addressing the seminar said: “The government has announced that it will acquire 25,000

acres of uncultivated land in the plantations and distribute it for cultivation among unemployed youth at the rate of 2 acres per head. Priority should be given to the unemployed youth among the plantation worker population in such distribution of land in the plantations. In the meantime, Hill Country Tamil political parties and other organizations that are members of the governing coalition should take up the issues relating to the above land distribution by putting forward the case for the livelihood of the plantation workers. In addition, the demands for ownership of land and housing should be extended as mass movements. The only way to achieve these is through the political awakening of the youth and their advancing with a firm grip of alternative political principles. Without it, there is no prospect of overcoming enslavement by capital.

Comrade Senthivel further added: It will be nearly 200 years since the Hill Country plantation workers were brought into the country from South India. Workers who have toiled in the Hill Country plantations for over seven generations still remain the lowest daily wage earners in the country. At the same time, the cruelty continues of their living in the same old 'line rooms', without a square foot of land or a house to call their own. Originally the British capitalists, then successive Sri Lankan governments and now once again capitalist plantation companies are fattening themselves by squeezing the plantation workers dry. All their rights to life with dignity continue to be denied.

The leaders who came forward to serve them politically have earned for themselves great comforts through trade union subscriptions and parliamentary and other electoral political positions. Meanwhile, Hill Country plantation workers, in a state of poverty and without living rights, are compelled to live as a people exploited and oppressed by capitalist and chauvinist forces. Even at the present stage in which the Hill Country Tamils have developed into a nationality, they remain a people facing adverse experiences not only on the fronts of class and ethnic oppression but also in relation to oppression of women. In this context, it is not possible for the Hill Country Tamil people and plantation workers to attain salvation through their trade union leadership alone or by parliamentary electoral politics. Instead, the Hill Country Tamil people, especially the younger generation, must come forward to awaken politically and take the path of mass struggle.

Comrade V Mahendran, National Organizer of the NDMLP, addressing the seminar said: There are spontaneous struggles taking place in many parts of the Hill Country. This is a healthy sign that echoes the militant characteristics of the workers of the Hill Country during the early stages of their mobilisation for struggle.

He added that the Hill Country Tamil people are being treated as third class citizens and questioned how the so-called Hill Country Tamil leaders who are yes-men and stooges of the government would solve our problems. He pointed out that we are at a stage when we are under compulsion to think about our condition and that there is a need to build an alternative front.

Comrades S Panneerselvam, member of the Politburo of the NDMLP, and S Mohanraj, representing the New Democratic Youth Front, also addressed the Seminar. The talks were followed by a session of constructive discussion.

NDMLP Statement to the Media

19th May 2013

Denouncing Child Rape and Police Neglect

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement condemning the rape and sexual torture of a 7-year old girl in the village of Senaippulavu, Nedunkeni in the Vavunia District.

The cruelty of subjecting a seven-year old school-going child to rape and sexual torture has taken place in the village of Senaippulavu in Nedunkeni. Those who committed this heinous crime could only be demons in human form.

Yet, five days after the incident, none of the cruel criminals had been arrested. The girl, following admission to the Vavunia Government Hospital where she was given emergency treatment, made a statement. But no arrest was made of any of the suspects based on her statement. There is great anxiety among the people about this indifference.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party very strongly condemns this act of rape and sexual torture by demons in human form. The Party urges that any suspected offender should be arrested and produced before law.

The Party, while participating in the protest demonstration organized by the Mass Organization for Social Justice on Monday 20th May, opposite the Divisional Secretariat, Vavunia calls upon all members of the public who condemn this evil act that not even a beast would dare to commit to join in the awareness campaign of condemnation and protest.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

Sri Lankan Events

Tampering with the 13th Amendment

Demands from various quarters of the ruling alliance in the past few months seeking to dilute if not get rid of the 13th Amendment reflect the regime's negative attitude towards resolving the national question. Commendably, its three left partners opposed these moves. Whether their resistance would have endured to the bitter end remains an open question as the government has decided to leave the matter alone for the moment.

The timing of the rumblings raised questions about motives. One possibility was that it was a ploy to defer elections to the Northern Provincial Council, at least until the Provincial Councils were formally deprived of police and land powers provided under the 13th Amendment. It was also said to be a tactical move to ease Indian pressure on Sri Lanka to solve the national question based on the 13th Amendment, at a time when the Indian government was fast losing credibility with only an year of its term remaining. While it seems that the Indian government has prevailed upon Rajapaksa to hold off moves to maim if not kill the 13th Amendment, the Rajapaksa regime has not committed itself to anything on resolving the national question.

The Sri Lankan government is under strong external pressure, on the pretext of implementing the LLRC Report, and investigation of war crimes and human rights violations. The 13th Amendment has, however, not been a concern of the 'International Community' which would, in all probability, be placated by a few gestures that seem to address its declared concerns, provided that the government yields further to imperialist domination over the country.

Yet, Tamil nationalists, especially among the diaspora, continue to daydream that they will one day persuade the International Community to apply pressure on the Sri Lankan government to implement not only the LLRC but also the 13th Amendment in full. Consequently, they show little interest in seeking allies among other oppressed nationalities and the Sinhala masses who are increasingly feeling the heat of state oppression.

Weliweriya: a taste of state terror

On 1st August, a brutal attack by military personnel against unarmed protesters at Weliweriya, around 30 km north east of Colombo, killed three youth and wounded many including journalists who were covering the protest by local people seeking clean drinking water. The troops started with threats

against media personnel, assaulting some and damaging their equipment, and then fired on the demonstrators. The attacks which started around 5.30 p.m. went into late evening under cover of darkness. Houses, churches and other public places were raided by the soldiers who dragged out people, including women and children, and beat them mercilessly.

Mass demonstrations started on 28th July in Rathupaswala in Weliveriya since the authorities had not kept their promise to address the problem of chemical contamination of ground water by a rubber glove factory in the area. Even as the protest grew in strength, it remained orderly and non-violent amid police presence. The use of the armed forces seems to be a calculated move meant to intimidate the general public against launching such demonstrations.

The government, to quell public anger following the military rampage, offered compensation to the victims' families, without admitting guilt. The government, its media and a section of the pro-government media went to the extent of claiming that the army acted in self-defence against those who had fired at the security forces. The army command claimed that the forces acted to control violence instigated by saboteurs and that there is a terrorist conspiracy involving locals and foreigners to destabilize the country and warned the people against subscribing to such schemes.

The President on 13th August offered to investigate the matter and close down the factory if it had operated wrongfully and to relocate it in a BOI zone if it had acted within the regulations. His offer did not even hint at punitive action against the factory if found guilty of causing chemical pollution or making it compensate those affected by the pollution or taking steps to prevent the location of high environmental risk factories in heavily populated areas.

So far, neither the company responsible for the crisis nor the government and the armed forces responsible for the unprovoked attacks have apologized to the people, while the media and the main opposition party have criticized only the way the matter was dealt with but not cracking down on mass protests.

Mosque targeted in Colombo

A more than 150 strong mob of Sinhala Buddhist extremists led by Buddhist monks attacked a mosque in Grandpass in Colombo North during evening prayers on 10th August. Several homes of Muslims were also attacked and at least 12 people were seriously injured. It should be noted that, although no Sinhala Buddhist neo-fascist group was identified, Sinhala Ravaya monks had demanded from Muslim clerics a week earlier that they should close down the

mosque, which was completed about two months ago, following a government order to demolish nearby mosque under its urban development plan.

Grandpass is a predominantly working class area where Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people have lived together with no history of communal violence. The assault was obviously planned and the miscreants were brought from outside; and residents accused the police of just watching the violence without acting to prevent it. The government deployed riot police and an elite special police task force only after Muslim youth started to retaliate. The police imposed 13-hour curfews on the nights of the 10th and 11th.

On the 11th, President Rajapaksa persuaded some of his ministers to discuss the issue with Muslim government ministers and Muslim and Buddhist clerics; and Minister Champika Ranawaka, General Secretary of the JHU — which is still in the forefront of anti-Muslim campaigns — announced that the matter has been amicably resolved with the Muslim clerics relocating the mosque at the old location that had been earmarked for demolition.

This attack is not an isolated incident as more than 20 mosques have been attacked in the past two years and two Muslim-owned businesses at the outskirts of Colombo were attacked in March this year. Sinhala-Buddhist neo-fascists continue their anti-Muslim campaign with impunity under government patronage. During the 250-kilometre anti-Muslim march from Kataragama to Colombo organised by Sinhala Ravaya in June, marchers set ablaze a Muslim-owned beef stall at Tangalla while the police watched on.

While the attack on the mosque in Grandpass is part of the ongoing neo-fascist anti-Muslim campaign, it is also a desperate move by the ruling class to divert the attention of the Sinhala public from the events of Weliveriya on 1st August exposing the brutally repressive nature of the state acting in the interest of the capitalist classes.

Avoidable deaths at sea

The storm that struck the south western coast on 8th June killed least fifty fishermen. While damage to immovable property may have been inevitable, the loss of lives could have been averted if an early warning system was in place. The fishing communities were bitter and expressed their anger towards the government through a series of demonstrations.

The responses of the government and the Department of Meteorology were pathetically inadequate. The government denied all responsibility by blaming the latter and appointed a committee to investigate whether lapses occurred in the Department, and made face-saving gestures such as offering measly

sums as compensation to the families of the dead. Meanwhile the Department blamed the failure on its lack of sophisticated technology.

Ravages of nature are not new to the country, and despite the government's pledge following the tsunami of December 2004 that early warning systems will be installed and recent promises to modernise meteorological services, life at sea is as risky as it has been for decades. Successive governments have shown callous disregard for the wellbeing of working people. Proper safety measures for fishermen, including a storm warning system, are long overdue and safety is not a priority in the IMF-driven government policy of curtailing public spending on essential services.

Politics of desperation in the North

Fear of political humiliation was a likely factor for the government to find all manner of excuses to defer elections in the North in contrast to its haste to hold elections for the demerged Eastern Provincial Council soon after the end of the war. The embarrassment caused by the Supreme Court verdict on the Divineguma Bill was a further factor in the government's reluctance to hold elections for the Northern Provincial Council. Direct and indirect external pressures seem to have influenced the decision to hold the long overdue Provincial Council elections in the North. Despite the people's lack of faith in the Tamil political parties and the heavy military presence that would facilitate abuse of state resources and electoral manipulation, it is even harder now for the government to secure a respectable vote percentage in the North. Thus disruption of the elections on some pretext cannot be entirely ruled out.

Meanwhile, the Tamil political parties, especially the five parties in the Tamil national alliance once again exposed their political bankruptcy by bickering over who the chief ministerial candidate should be and about seat allocations and candidature for a body which has been denied its only meaningful powers granted under the 13th Amendment and has even less financial clout than a regional or municipal council. The TNA which is desperate to capture the Northern Provincial Council for no reason other than to maintain its claim to be the main representative of the Tamils has yet to put forward a political programme to secure the national and democratic rights of the Tamils in the post war era dominated by chauvinism backed by military force. Even more shameful was its persuading CV Wigneswaran, a respected public figure and former Supreme Court Judge with no declared political affinity as chief ministerial candidate merely to bring an end to the bickering within its ranks. The TNA even after declaring its list of candidates has nothing to tell the people except to ask them to vote for it overwhelmingly.

World Events

ASIA

India

Maruti Suzuki struggle gains strength and support

The International Commission for Labour Rights (ICLR), having investigated the incidents leading to the summary dismissal of over 500 permanent workers and over 1800 contract workers at the Manesar plant of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd, reminded the Government of India in its preliminary report of 31st May 2013 that, under well-recognised international and domestic principles, “justice delayed is justice denied.” (<http://kafila.org/2013/06/03/workers-in-maruti-suzuki-manesar-plant-justice-delayed-is-justice-denied-iclr/>). At least 147 workers have been languishing in jail since August 2012. Arrests were also made in connection with protests early this year.

The ICLR observed that the management of Maruti Suzuki had engaged in significant violations of law with respect to the right to freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining and the right to equal pay for equal work; that the Labour Department had been ineffective in ensuring the rule of law; and that the Police has transgressed its powers in ways amounting to interference in industrial disputes and yet failed to act when it should have.

The report recommended (i) Granting of bail to the arrested workers and the police refraining from arbitrary arrests to terrorise workers and their families; (ii) Immediate impartial inquiry into the circumstances of the incident of 18th July 2012 as well as the custodial torture of the workers; (iii) Immediate reinstatement of all dismissed workers; (iv) The Labour Department ensuring through tripartite machinery that the Maruti Suzuki management negotiates in good faith with the union of the workers’ choice. The report also urged the Government to create an industrial relations mechanism that places an adequate firewall between the state’s labour department and its police force and seek technical assistance from the ILO to make its labour administration and adjudication processes comply with international standards.

On 24th July 2013, the nine activists detained in the Kaithal District Jail, Haryana in connection with protests early this year were released on bail after months of intense pressure by the movement and other solidarity efforts. The fake cases foisted on them by the police — ranging from attempt to murder to

possession of illegal weapons — to break the demonstration by over 2000 people in Kaithal on 19th May 2013 will, however, continue. But even after these targeted political arrests, the Maruti Suzuki workers and their supporters are determined to continue with their struggle.

The Economic and Political Weekly in its 27th July 2013 issue carried an insightful comment by Ranjana Padhi, a Delhi-based activist. She drew particular attention to the mainstream media totally ignoring police brutality against the workers and their families, led by the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union who demonstrated in Kaithal on 19th May.

Her comment gives in full detail how the struggle of the Maruti Suzuki workers has gathered support in the region and it was against the background of growing support for the struggle across Haryana and the country that the Haryana state government initially resorted to threats including holding back of state grants to the 85 panchayats that participated in a protest on 8th May. Imposing of Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code to prohibit 'unlawful assembly' from 5.00 pm on 18th May until midnight of the next day and preemptive arrests failed to dampen support for the protests, and it was in this context that the police resorted to brutal violence.

Padhi, in her article, significantly, notes that "The struggle of the MSWU is not simply a revival of the trade union movement at one of its bleakest moments in history. It is an awakening of an entire new generation of workers that dares to question the coercion and violence of capitalist development".

Recommended additional reading: PUDR Report "Driving Force: Labour Struggles and Violation of Rights in Maruti Suzuki India Limited" (May 2013) at <http://www.pudr.org/?q=content/driving-force-labour-struggles-and-violation-rights-maruti-suzuki-india-limited>.

[Sources: <http://www.kractivist.org/press-release-nine-workers-and-activists-released-on-bail-the-struggle-continues-mswu/>; <http://www.epw.in/authors/ranjana-padhi>]

Uttarakhand: a tragedy of capitalist greed

Warnings were there for decades about the fragility of the Himalayan range and poor soil stability of its steep slopes. Yet, Indian capitalist governments have pursued their agenda of "development" regardless of environmental consequences. Severe flooding of the Ganges in state of Uttarakhand caused by heavy rains led to the death of an estimated 5700 people in June. Over 80,000 people, mostly pilgrims, were stranded by the floods.

Unabated expansion of hydro-power projects and construction of roads to accommodate ever-increasing tourism, especially religious tourism, are among major causes for the unprecedented degree of devastation. Vehicular transport, mostly for tourism, has increased drastically in less than a decade. Movement of heavy vehicles and rampant construction of roads too have affected soil stability. This was evident in the rising frequency of landslides in the past few years, but little was done to remedy the situation. The price has been very heavy this time, but will the ruling classes ever learn?

[Sources: <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/07/15/313938/6000-presumed-dead-in-india-floods/>; <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/man-made-reasons-uttarakhand-disaster/>]

Nepal: CA Elections Hanging in the Balance?

While the interim government of Nepal says that the long overdue constituent assembly elections will be held on 19th November 2013, the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist, wants the elections to be deferred until essential conditions were fulfilled. In a statement issued on 25th July calling for a boycott of the elections [<http://maoistroad.blogspot.com/2013/08/info-from-nepal-election-boycott.html>], the CPN-M declared that “Under the leadership of the non-party government led by the sitting chief justice, a drama of the second constituent assembly election scheduled for November 19, 2013 has been staged according to the master plan and diktat of imperialism and expansionism and the initiation of four party syndicate by pushing aside the agitating twenty four parties out of thirty two parties present in the dissolved CA.

“We are not opponents per se of the CA election in an absolute sense, however, this election is not being held to write a peoples’ constitution, rather it is based on the design of taking the country towards Sikkimisation. So, our party, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, has decided to actively and vigorously boycott this so-called second election. This decision is based on the interest and opinion of the people. We earnestly call upon the respected masses of the people to make the boycott movement effective and a grand success.”

CPN-Maoist Vice Chairperson CP Gajurel, speaking at a party programme on 19th August, argued that the November election cannot be a reality even if the government manages to address 18-point demand of the CPN-M led alliance because accommodating the demands will necessitate change in the election schedule which will result in postponement of the poll, and warned that if the government moves ahead with its proposed poll programme without accommodating the demands, it will trigger a conflict that will halt the poll.

Japan: A Communist Comeback?

While Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Liberal Democratic Party tightened its grip on power with a victory in the upper house elections on 21st July, the only other party to gain electorally was the Japan Communist Party. The JCP representation in the House of Councillors rose from six to eleven seats, giving it large enough representation to propose legislation in the upper house with 242 members. The gain had been at the expense of the Democratic Party of Japan, the main left-of-centre opposition party which was in power at the time of the 2011 earthquake and now a state of disarray. Support for the JCP also derives from its being the only party that can credibly challenge the nationalism of the LDP under Abe and its plans to amend Japan's pacifist Constitution. Although the JCP is a long way from securing sufficient seats to form a government, its success is an inspiration for anti-nuclear power campaigners in Japan who have started their protests against the Abe government's moves to restart nuclear power stations.

AFRICA

Egypt: Return of the Generals

The bloody massacre and imposition of emergency rule carried out on 14th August by Egypt's military rulers not only testifies to the ruthlessness of the Egyptian ruling class, but also puts to ridicule the hypocritical claim of the US that that its Middle East policy is based on democracy and human rights.

The coup of 3rd July that deposed President Mohamed Morsi was also pre-emptive action against mass protests by the working class which, if allowed to continue, would have cost the army its grip on power. As expected, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) is now unashamedly seeking to restore the military-backed dictatorship that existed under Hosni Mubarak.

It is true that SCAF made it hard for Mohamed Morsi to be elected President and after his election delayed his swearing until a US-brokered deal was concluded between Morsi and the SCAF. Although Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood were not against imperialist globalisation or continuing with the disastrous liberal economic policies of Mubarak, the relationship between the two sides was strained as the army resented an elected president seeking to assert himself. The US was resentful of Morsi's policy of friendship towards Iran, but appreciated his cooperation on matters concerning Syria and Israel.

As for the Egyptian public, they hoped that there would be democracy and economic recovery under Morsi. But, within an year, his popularity slumped

amid poor economic performance and his efforts to consolidate his power and strengthen Islamist politics rather than democratize the system. Protests began to grow, and on 30th June millions demonstrated across Egypt demanding his resignation. The SCAF seized the opportunity to stage a coup and arrest Morsi. The SCAF chief General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is now the de facto head of state in Egypt despite the appointment of an interim government with a president, prime minister and a cabinet of ministers. Although the cabinet seems to include a diversity of social and political identities excluding the Muslim Brotherhood, members of the cabinet including those with left and liberal identities, having compromised themselves by not only welcoming the coup but also accepting positions in the cabinet, are unable to denounce military repression. Commendably, interim Vice President El Baredai resigned from the government in protest at the military crackdown that killed 600 Morsi supporters on 16th August.

The US would have preferred a compromise between the SCAF and the Brotherhood but, like the SCAF, it too realized that the surging anti-Morsi protests could lead to a genuine mass struggle led by the increasingly militant working class. Thus it gave its blessing to the coup removing Morsi in the name of popular demand. The US did not anticipate the turn of events following moves by the military and its liberal bourgeoisie supporters to settle accounts with the MB, and certainly not the massacre of 16th August which has destabilized Egypt and undermined US strategy in the region. The attitude of the US will be just as hypocritical as it has been with the coups not long ago in the Honduras and Paraguay, where too it refused to denounce as coups the military overthrow of legitimate governments. The US along with the EU will threaten the Egyptian junta with punishment while doing everything possible to consolidate the military dictatorship.

The events of July and August have lessons for the left within and outside Egypt. One concerns the identification of the main enemy. The SCAF represents forces that have been loyal to the US and militarily controlled Egypt and repressed its people for decades. With the country under the control of the SCAF, Morsi cannot be the main enemy, unless he integrated himself with the military establishment.

Another concerns the call for Morsi's resignation when the masses were still politically unprepared to seize power. Irrespectively of Morsi's inability or even unwillingness to meet the expectations of the people, it would have been prudent to press demands for democratic change, secular government, fair wages and steps to put the economy on the right track. Mass demonstrations for such demands would have pushed Morsi to take a stand which would have made him to either rely on the armed forces or be with the masses. Either

way, the SCAF would have been exposed as an enemy of the people while the people of Egypt could have been politicized and prepared for a revolutionary struggle to achieve genuine democratic change.

The writing on the wall for the left, progressive and democratic forces was clear when on 29th July the interim prime minister was empowered to declare a state of emergency and to crackdown on religious and secular activism of all kinds. Ominously enough, the interior ministry followed up by reactivating several police units notorious for their secret detentions, torture, and extrajudicial killings. On the pretext of cracking down on the Brotherhood, protests and dissidents are subjected to crackdown. Palestinians are made scapegoats for Morsi's support for Hamas, and the tunnels to Gaza are being destroyed and the border crossing at Rafah has been closed.

It is time that the sections of the left, progressive and democratic forces that sided with the coup regime realized their folly, distanced themselves from the regime, and demanded an end to military repression and the restoration of the elected government.

Tunisia: Continuing Turmoil

The assassination of opposition leader Mohamed Brahmi on 25th July has deepened Tunisia's political crisis. This is the second political assassination of a left leader this year since the prominent opposition MP Chokri Belaid was shot dead on 6th February. Massive protests followed the shooting and on 8th February a general strike called by the 600,000 strong Tunisia's main union, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) protesting political violence brought Tunisia to near standstill. Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali resigned on 19th February after failing to form a non-partisan government to end the political crisis and on 14th March Ali Larayedh of the Ennahda replaced him.

Brahmi's killing on 25th July outside his home near Tunis led to mass demonstrations across Tunis. While the families of Belaid and Brahmi accused the ruling moderate Islamic party Ennahda for the killings, the government accused the radical Sunni Muslim Salafist movement. Faced with protests demanding his resignation, Larayedh said that the government will stay in office until a general election on 17th December.

Tunisia has since been rocked by pro-and anti-Islamist demonstrations and pro-government demonstrations and ones renewing the call for its resignation with the elected National Constituent Assembly remaining suspended until the government and opposition open negotiations. If the stalemate continues, there is a risk of the military being tempted to intervene on the pretext of

ensuring stable government to help it to fight Islamic terrorists operating near the Algerian border. It is thus important that the secular forces while mobilizing as a united force do not lose sight of the real enemy, namely imperialism and its potential ally, the armed forces. The Tunisian working class, which is in a stronger position than the Egyptian working class, should maintain the initiative so that obsession with Islamic fundamentalism will not drive the secular opposition into the hands of imperialism

[Sources: <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/afp/130806/tunisia-murders-fuel-six-months-political-crisis>; <http://www.globalresearch.ca/an-egyptian-solution-for-tunisia/5344472>]

Zimbabwe Elections: Bad Losers

The people of Zimbabwe voted overwhelmingly to re-elect President Robert Mugabe to another five-year term. Mugabe had 61% of the vote and his opponent Tsvangirai 34%. Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) also won the parliamentary election in a landslide, making gains and solidifying its majority. The real losers, however, were not Morgan Tsvangirai or the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) but their sponsors, namely the US and the UK.

Imperialist arrogance seldom accepts the results of any election in Third World countries unless they yield a government to their liking. True to form, from the outset, the British and American mainstream media ran stories derisive of the election process in Zimbabwe and rejected the verdict of election monitors from African Union countries that the conduct of the elections was free and fair. They had throughout been unmindful of the role of foreign powers (the US and UK) in backing Morgan Tsvangirai and, interestingly, ignored the findings of the US-funded elections monitoring body, the Zimbabwe Elections Support Network — the main source of allegations of vote rigging cited by the media in the run-up to the election — that in 98% of the polling stations there was intimidation or attempts to influence election officials during counting or disruption of the counting process. The media also chose to ignore pre-election opinion polls, including ones by organizations hostile to Mugabe, all of which found that support for Tsvangirai had slipped severely since 2008 and doubted his ability to win. Thus, the Western media conducted themselves in the same way they did when Chavez and later Maduro won in Venezuela and when Ahmadinejad won in Iran four years ago.

The mainstream media ignore the fact that free and fair electoral contest also implies that no party to the contest breaches the rules of fair play by

courting favour with imperial powers. There is incontrovertible evidence that the US through the “Feya Feya campaign”, the UK through the “Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition”, and the EU through two NGOs had funded the MDC. But they are furious when a state with limited resources seeking to resist imperialism is thereby compelled to deny certain liberties that liberal idealists insist should be universal, regardless of context. It is hard for imperialists to accept Mugabe’s victory because he is anti-imperialist and determined to rid Zimbabwe of the legacy of colonialism. Above all they resent the decisive election victory for ZANU-PF as it makes it all the more difficult for outsider meddling in the affairs of Zimbabwe than it was under the power-sharing deal between ZANU-PF and the MDC that lasted until February 2013.

Zimbabwe paid dearly for decades for having a government which, more than any other in southern Africa, acted to dismantle vestiges of the colonial past. The country endured hard times with galloping inflation and shortage of even essential goods, but came out well. Western powers failed miserably in their bid to subdue her through economic strangulation by imposing sanctions. That does not mean that they have given up. The struggle must continue.

[For more information: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/zimbabwe-robert-mugabe-reelected-zanu-pf-calls-for-trillions-in-mining-and-foreign-assets-to-be-turned-over-to-zimbabweans/5344929>; <http://zeroanthropology.net/2013/08/10/encircling-empire-report-23-obamas-scramble-for-africa/>]

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

Latin America Denounces US Espionage at UN Security Council

Foreign ministers of Mercosur nations (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela) met UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon on 5th August to denounce alleged US spying on both allies and foes in the region with secret surveillance programs. The foreign ministers issued a joint statement after their meeting citing documents leaked by former US intelligence analyst Edward Snowden. Charges of espionage surfaced one week after South American nations were outraged by the diversion of Bolivian President Evo Morales' plane in Europe for suspicion that Snowden was on board.

During the afternoon session of the Security Council meeting of 6th August, the Argentine Presidency of the Security Council used the opportunity to publicly denounce espionage in the service of the resurgence of neo-liberal capitalist imperialism. In an expression of solidarity and support, Argentine

President Cristina Fernandez Kirchner was present throughout the session, and speeches by the Foreign Ministers of Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, Venezuela and Ecuador exposed in succession the global menace posed by the American NSA programs of surveillance and denounced US plans for global espionage, posing a lethal threat to democratically elected governments of Latin America.

In Brazil, the leading national daily *O Globo* published data provided by Edward Snowden that the American NSA used *Prism* and *Boundless Informant* programs to spy in virtually all Latin American countries, with particular attention to Mexico, Brazil and Colombia. Argentina, Ecuador, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Paraguay, Chile, Peru and El Salvador also fell under the surveillance. The wiretapped data had to do not only with military aspects, but also trade secrets, especially with regard to oil reserves and energy security. Regional leaders called for a tough response to the alleged espionage that *O Globo* said included satellite monitoring stations based in Brazil's capital.

Following the exposure by Snowden, nearly all Latin American governments demanded from the US an explanation on its intelligence activities. The visit of Secretary of State Kerry in the second week of August to Colombia and Brazil caused indignation. President Dilma Rousseff, in a muted response to the demand by enraged Brazilian parliamentarians for the cancellation of her scheduled visit to the US in October, removed from the agenda of the visit the item on the purchase of thirty six F-18 fighter jets costing over \$4 billion.

Even in Colombia, a close US ally, which Kerry visited before Brazil, he faced a demand for explanation from President Santos as to whether the information gathered by the US intelligence was beyond the joint actions of the two countries to combat drug trafficking and illegal armed formations.

President Nieto of Mexico, the largest Latin American business partner and southern neighbour of the US, said that it would be totally unacceptable if it was revealed that the US had spied on Mexico, but added that the relations between the countries are cordial. It is well known that the CIA, DEA, FBI and other US espionage agencies are active in Mexico, which also is part of the Echelon system that keeps under control 90 percent of the world communications and is capable of intercepting at least 3 billion phone calls.

[Sources: <http://www.ntd.tv/en/news/world/north-america/20130806/82038-mercosur-countries-denounce-us-espionage.html>; <http://www.globalresearch.ca/latin-america-condemns-us-espionage-at-united-nations-security-council/5346120>]

Mexico: Demanding State Accountability for Increasing Numbers of Disappeared

The last week of May 2013 marked the sixth anniversary of the disappearance of Edmundo Reyes Amaya and Gabriel Alberto Cruz Sánchez in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. They were alleged to be members of the guerrilla group Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR), and were last seen detained by military forces. Civil associations and activist organizations joined in a week of action to demand clarity around this matter and thousands of similar situations where people are disappeared for political or non-political reasons. On 30th May, several thousand people marched from the Mexican offices of interior affairs to the central plaza of Mexico City.

Amnesty International reported on 4th June (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/mexico-relatives-disappeared-deserve-more-promises-2013-06-04-0>) that while the federal government admits that at least 26,000 people were reported disappeared or missing over the last six years, the Interior Minister, despite the lack of full investigations, suggested that the real number was much lower.

State inaction has let a climate of impunity flourish, putting people at risk of further disappearances, and subjecting relatives who inquire about the disappeared to threats, stigmatization and mistreatment. In the face of official collusion or apathy, people have had to conduct their own investigations, often at great personal risk.

Even though the government has now partly recognized the magnitude of disappearances, it has yet to acknowledge the involvement of federal, state and municipal agents in many of the cases. Official involvement in such cases makes them enforced disappearances, a violation of international law. It should, however, be noted that since Mexico counts among the closest allies of the US alongside Colombia in Latin America, no international action is likely against the offenders even if involvement is proven.

(For details see “Confronting a nightmare: Disappearances in Mexico” at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR41/025/2013/en/d7198cc0-93d1-4021-a6b8-b098805ddeaf/amr410252013en.pdf>)

Colombia: Peace Talks with FARC

One million Colombians marched in the capital city of Bogotá and other cities and towns on 9th April in support of ongoing peace negotiations between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army

(FARC-EP) in Havana, Cuba. Given the heavy repression faced by popular organizations from the state and from paramilitary organizations, the scale of demonstrations showed the extent of popular support for the negotiations amid strong opposition by Colombian reactionaries led by Álvaro Uribe, former president and friend of the landowners. Uribe and many before him relied on the flow of cash and weapons from the US for their unsuccessful bids to crush the FARC-EP for more than half a century at the cost of 70,000 lives, the displacement of millions from their homes, and the isolation of whole villages by land mines.

When the Marxist FARC-EP began its campaign in the 1960s against the US-backed regime dominated by landowners, most of Latin America was under US-backed dictatorships and revolutionary Cuba was isolated from most of the countries of the hemisphere. Much of this has been reversed in the past decade, and considerable credit is due to Colombia's neighbour, Venezuela, led by President Hugo Chávez who demonstrated the social gains possible from an anti-imperialist government dedicated to the welfare of the people. It was in this climate that talks were initiated between the government of Colombia and the FARC-EP, with Cuba playing a major role in initiating and facilitating the negotiations.

On 26th May, the two sides announced a major breakthrough in the talks with consensus on land rights and distribution and on other key issues. Serious differences remain, however, on the land issue owing to the technical nature of the subject and the historical context; and, even if the matter is resolved on paper, implementation is quite another matter since the narco-paramilitaries and landowners will resist with violence. Repossession of land will require robust intervention by the state, which is unlikely under the current legal-military order. Thus a serious land reform programme to succeed will require a shift in rural political power from the land owning elite to the peasantry.

The main interest of the Colombian government and the US is to disarm of the FARC-EP. Recent strains in Venezuela-Colombia relations have led to fresh anxieties across Latin America. The re-emergence of the US-Colombia-Venezuelan right axis following the narrow victory of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela has alerted progressive leaders in the region. The prospects of the peace talks leading to a peace settlement will be bleak if conflict is revived between Colombia and Venezuela.

FARC-EP also needs to be mindful of its past experience, when as part of the peace process in the mid-1980s it created the Patriotic Union party to enter electoral politics without disarming. Yet, as many as 3,000 of the party

members including two presidential candidates were murdered. On the other hand, Colombian President Santos who faces re-election in May 2014 is pressed for time and would like to seal a final peace deal by November. His regime badly needs Colombia's trade with Venezuela worth \$10 billion dollars annually as well as peace with the FARC-EP — even at the cost of marginal social reforms — to retain popular support at home. But the US has another role in mind for Santos — as its proxy to destabilize Venezuela.

EUROPE

TURKEY: Protest and Repression

A peaceful sit-in in late May to protect Gezi Park, one of Istanbul's last public parks, led to massive protests against an increasingly authoritarian government. Resentment has been building over the past several years and the planned felling of trees in Gezi Park triggered the protests, which are nowhere near the international media hype of a “Turkish Spring”. The ruling Justice and Development party (AKP) wanted to turn the park into a shopping centre to attract foreign investment and tourism, as part of a “gentrification” plan for Istanbul and a continuation of the privatization policies that have impoverished many Turks.

The seeming spontaneity of the protests and the political diversity of protesters — including those who had voted the AKP to power — are no basis for doubting that something has been wrong in Turkey. Demonstrations that started in Taksim Square in Istanbul spread to 60 cities, including the capital, Ankara, following brutal police repression in Istanbul and have continued into August. They expressed an outburst of accumulated anger against the grim authoritarianism of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and his government encroaching upon basic rights and freedoms of the people, and escalated further as Erdogan turned abusive towards the protesters.

The neoliberal economy of Turkey under the AKP government is marked by crony capitalism, corruption, increasing inequality and worsening poverty as well as the ruthless political repression and social oppression that accompany a cruelly exploitative economic system. The domestic recession in 2009 that followed the global financial crisis of 2008 has led to wage reduction, rising unemployment, now standing at 16%, and repression of trade union rights with a hundred union activists detained under anti-terrorism laws. Press and civil rights violations have been commonplace under Erdogan. Free speech and free media are repressed, with Turkey imprisoning more journalists than any

other country, and writers and artists are hauled up before courts, accused of insulting the nation or religious values.

Last year, the AKP passed legislation restricting further the freedom of the press. The major TV channels and newspapers in Turkey are owned by Turkish corporations, which profit from government contracts, and at the height of the protests, when police forces ran riot, the TV channels broadcast entertainment programmes and the newspapers, when not silent on the matter, fabricated wrongdoings by the protestors. Not a word of blame was uttered against the government.

The government's accumulation of excessive power and authority along with the lack of an organized and effective opposition to channel the views of the public; the lack of transparency and arbitrary imposition of social restrictions; and the denial of freedom of speech and press, and the loss of credibility of the media have added to public frustration. But these are also factors that prevent the public protests from growing into a mass political force and risk their being subverted by adventurists and opportunists. Still, what had started in Gezi Park and spread across Turkey is an ongoing struggle that cannot be easily put down.

Meanwhile, the coup in Egypt that ousted President Mohamed Morsi has thrown a lifeline to Erdogan at a modest price to Turkey's relations with the US. Demonstrators waving Islamic flags and chanting anti-US slogans took to the streets in Ankara and Istanbul on 16th August to protest at the bloody security crackdown in Egypt. With Erdogan strongly critical of the coup, the riot police in Ankara, unlike in Taksim Square two months earlier, stood watch nearby without intervening except to keep the crowd away from the Egyptian embassy. In Istanbul, protesters gathered in the conservative district of Eyup, shouting pro-Morsi and Islamic slogans and waving Egyptian, Palestinian and Syrian opposition flags.

[Sources: *workerseducation.net*; *theguardian.com*; *anticapitalists.org*]

UK: Her Majesty's Surveillance State

The role of the GCHQ

The name Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), with no hint of surveillance or espionage sounds more innocuous than National Security Agency (NSA). But according to Edward Snowden it is far worse than the latter. GCHQ alongside the Security Service (MI5) and the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6) is one of three UK intelligence agencies, and has the

potential to tap global communications cables carrying 600 million daily 'telephone events'. It can thus, if it so wishes, record phone calls, read email and Facebook postings and review website traffic; and access entire web use histories on individuals. Although the GCHQ is allowed to store certain data for 30 days, the Guardian on 22nd June claimed that the practice is subject to little scrutiny. The capabilities and activities of the GCHQ were revealed alongside reports of the NSA spying on US and international citizens via the metadata held on them by telecommunication companies and secret data-sharing agreements between the NSA and consumer-web giants. GCHQ and NSA analysts sift through communication data to identify items relating to security, terror, organized crime, and economic well-being.

The Five-Eyes intelligence sharing agreement founded by the US and the UK in 1946 was later enlarged to include Australia, Canada and New Zealand; and the agencies concerned are NSA (US), GCHQ (UK), Communications Security Establishment (Canada), Defence Signals Directorate (Australia) and Government Communications Security Bureau (New Zealand). The US and UK are rapidly perfecting the system to let them capture and analyse a large volume of international traffic comprising emails, texts, phone calls, internet searches, chat, photographs, blogposts, videos and the many uses of Google. The Guardian reports that 850,000 NSA employees and private American contractors have access to the information gathered by GCHQ.

The British public was, for long, misled to believe that governments in western liberal democracies act with benign intentions, and that the loss of liberty and intrusions into personal privacy are small prices to pay to ensure their safety in a sea of alien hostility. Snowden's revelations could not have come at a worse time for the empire of today and that of yester year, amid the economic meltdown, austerity, increasing public awareness of corporate crimes, disillusionment with mainstream politics, escalation of wars and taking away of civil liberties. It is clear that social control is no more possible on the seemingly benign level of the past, and the liberal democratic mask has now slipped.

The British security establishment has since acted in ways that added to the fears aroused by Snowden's revelations. Following revelations based on Snowden's material, it has threatened the publishers of the Guardian. Alan Rusbridger, editor-in-chief of the Guardian, said that, after talks with the British government, two "security experts" from GCHQ visited the London offices of the newspaper and that the agents from GCHQ oversaw the destruction of drives with material provided by Snowden. The disclosure by Rusbridger followed the detainment under British anti-terrorism laws of David Miranda, a Brazilian national and domestic partner of US journalist and Guardian writer

Glenn Greenwald, at London's Heathrow Airport on 18th August while in transit from Berlin to Brazil. Miranda was released without charge after nine hours of questioning, but his laptop, cell phone and memory sticks were confiscated. His offence was his relationship with Greenwald who had met Snowden in Hong Kong and wrote or co-authored many articles about US surveillance of global communications.

Rusbridger, writing in the Guardian of 19th August, said that he informed British officials that owing to the nature of "international collaborations" among journalists, it would remain possible for media organizations to "take advantage of the most permissive legal environments" and that the Guardian does not have to do its reporting from London. This meant that British authorities were on notice that the Guardian was likely to continue to report on the Snowden revelations from outside British government jurisdiction.

Miranda's detention was really a warning to journalists about consequences of revealing the dirty secrets of the state. While the British authorities confirmed that the detention was under an anti-terrorism law without further explaining their actions, the government of Brazil took exception and complained in its statement of 18th August that the use of the British anti-terrorism law to detain Miranda was unjustified.

[Related articles: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/21/legal-loopholes-gchq-spy-world>; http://voiceofrussia.com/news/2013_08_20/British-government-force-Guardian-to-destroy-Snowden-material-3996/; <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/16/gchq-intercepted-communications-g20-summits?view=mobile>; <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/21/gchq-mastery-internet-mastery-everyone>]

Greece: SYRIZA as Party Movement

On 5th August, SYRZIA, the main opposition alliance of the radical left in Greece, following its First Congress of 10-14 July, released its Political Resolution (<http://left.gr/news/political-resolution-1st-congress-syriza>), which recognizes the challenges facing the people of Greece and the need not only to reject the regime imposed on Greece by the Troika Memoranda (a reference to the IMF, the EU and the European Community Bank collectively imposing their 'austerity' on the struggling economies of Europe to serve the interests of the Banks and other international lending agencies) but also reverse the changes imposed in the name of austerity in recent years and sweep away the old political system. Its awareness of the growing ultra right threat and its unqualified rejection of Greek chauvinism targeting immigrants

and nurturing historical hostilities are further positive aspects. While the prospect of SYRZIA being a viable left alternative to the centre-left and other opportunists in confronting the right, criticism exists that SYRZIA is already compromising on a number of issues relating to dealing with the economic crisis and the class enemy.

The urgency of transforming SYRIZA into a party-movement arose from the need to offer a credible alternative to the Greek electorate in the next round of elections. While keeping the right-centre left alliance at bay and out of power is an attractive option, over emphasis of the parliamentary process poses serious threats. Given the diversity of views within SYRIZA on several key issues, SYRIZA will be vulnerable to pressure from interest groups from within and to splits, besides external pressures obstructing delivery of pledges

The Communist Organization of Greece (KOE), a Marxist Leninist partner of SYRIZA, in its statement of 5th July has endorsed plans to transform SYRIZA into a party-movement able to unite with the people and to contribute in the building of a big political current that will sweep away the old political system and the regime imposed by Troika's Memoranda. The KOE has also consented to suspend its autonomous public presence, as a necessary step for strengthening SYRIZA and its unified expression. This measure, short of dissolving the KOE, is a strong expression of confidence that SYRIZA will become a true left alternative.

Broad based alliances are often historical necessities of the left movement, but when a Marxist Leninist party risks its political identity by dissolving into an alliance with forces with class interests that differ from those of a proletarian party and with agendas that stop short of the next stage of the revolution, what is at stake is not only the political future of the party but also the gains that people made through years of struggle. It will therefore be prudent of the left allies to be cautious in their approach to parliamentary politics, and defend and develop their revolutionary identity while working with SYRIZA to prevent it from degenerating into a social democratic organization that will strike deals with imperialism.

North America

The US: a State of Espionage

Edward Snowden and Bradley Manning, two young working class Americans who voluntarily joined the state security service to protect the country were soon disillusioned in their belief that their country was run by laws designed to

protect freedom and democracy at home and abroad. Their realization that their fellow citizens were lied to and spied upon made them blow the whistle on the security establishment, and it took exceptional courage to do it.

Spying on lawful citizens has been there for long but reached great heights under Obama, assisted by new technology and the pretext of 9/11 so that the state now has the means to collect and process private information on nearly anyone in the world and thereby monitor, control and target the world's entire population.

What is important to realize is that American state surveillance is not confined to criminals or 'terrorists' and is systematically used to track dissidents and minorities, and that electronic surveillance has greatly empowered the state to entrap, imprison and defame any organization or individual posing a threat to the capitalist system.

Revelations by Snowden, Manning, Assange and others have shown how private contractors carry out surveillance without due oversight and how social networks have been made part of the surveillance network. Their revelations have also revealed that private corporations that are unaccountable to the public, besides making enormous profits through their role in making war and gathering intelligence, act in concert with the state and are effectively an integral part of the state apparatus.

Despite the harsh pursuit of Assange and Snowden by the state, and the systematic vilification of Manning, who had been abused and tortured by the state before being tried and found guilty of 'stealing' state secrets, it is heartening to know that there are, in Snowden's words, "Citizens with a conscience are not going to ignore wrong-doing simply because they'll be destroyed for it: the conscience forbids it". They will keep coming forward to protect the right of the people to privacy and information. Thus the whistleblowers who risk everything to bring to light the lies and criminal misdeeds of the state are the true patriots of the US; and it is they who are hunted down by the state which has a record of protecting capitalist criminals who have brought the country's economy to its present sorry state.

In the wake of the exposure by Snowden, the Obama administration promised reform in intelligence gathering, but that 'reform' will be to develop means by which the same anti-people espionage will be conducted in more sophisticated ways. While the Obama administration threatens journalists with imprisonment if they not reveal their sources, spokespersons for the administration continue to lie to the Congress without facing due consequences.

Virtually every day brings new revelations of pervasive spying programs. According to a recent CNET report telecommunications providers have been pressured by the FBI to install “port reader software” enabling real-time interception of internet metadata, including IP addresses, e-mail addresses, identities of Facebook correspondents, and sites visited by government surveillance agencies. CNET noted that “The US government is quietly pressuring telecommunications providers to install eavesdropping technology deep inside companies’ internal networks to facilitate surveillance efforts.”

Besides these revelations, the levels to which the US and its European allies have descended in their efforts to arrest him confirm that the US is now a global security state with scant regard for the fundamental rights of its citizens. In the process, the US has globalized its mechanism of surveillance to levels unprecedented even during major wars. The sheer size of the information gathering ability of the National Security Agency is frightening and the countries targeted most include, among ‘threats’ like Iran, strategic partners like Pakistan, Egypt and India.

Recommended additional reading:

“Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden Working class Americans to be proud of” by Richard Mellor (<http://weknowwhatsup.blogspot.in/2013/06/bradley-manning-and-edward-snowden.html>);

“Mass Surveillance in America: A Timeline of Loosening Laws and Practices” by Cora Currier and Justin Elliott for a timeline of state surveillance in the US since the creation in 1978 of a secret surveillance court under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. (<http://www.globalresearch.ca/mass-surveillance-in-america-a-timeline-of-loosening-laws-and-practices/5338282>; also <http://projects.propublica.org/graphics/surveillance-timeline>).

Terrorist threat as last refuge of Empire

Amid escalating denunciations and threats against Edward Snowden and Russia, which granted him temporary asylum on 1st August, the Obama regime lost no time to issue a “global travel alert” on 2nd August closing in total 22 US embassies and consulates on supposed threats of Al Qaeda attacks, quoting an unnamed source in Yemen —a country under US drone bombing for years— indicating the possibility of terror attacks against US embassies. The US mainstream media uncritically repeated the story of the threat despite lack of evidence, merely to stoke public anxiety.

The reason for creating alarm was none other than evidence of growing popular support in the US for Snowden, witch-hunted by the regime for leaking details of secret surveillance programs that violate the privacy and fundamental rights millions of people including Americans. As retaliation against Russia granting asylum to Snowden, the Obama regime cancelled a planned meeting between Obama and President Putin following the upcoming G20 summit due to be held in St. Petersburg on 5th and 6th September.

The Russian decision to give asylum to Snowden should be seen in the context of US plans to intercept Snowden before he could arrive in South America where he has been offered asylum by several countries. US obsession with Snowden went to the point of persuading its European allies to refuse entry to the aircraft carrying Bolivian President Evo Morales returning home on 2nd July after visiting Moscow, because of suspicion that Edward Snowden was on board. The presidential aircraft had to make an unscheduled stop in Vienna. This was seen as an open provocation toward a continent and the 12-nation South American bloc Unasur denounced the action of European countries as "unfriendly and unjustifiable".

The furore was the latest twist in a saga that has raised debate over the balance between privacy rights and national security. Accusations of U.S. surveillance on European countries have also strained transatlantic relations.

The Obama regime which had threatened foreign governments that letting Snowden land on their territory could seriously hurt their relations with the US believed that its pressure tactics persuaded countries to avoid offering asylum to Snowden; and on 2nd July, of the twenty countries approached by Snowden, five had refused asylum, seven would consider a request if made on their soil and eight were undecided or had not received a request. But the Morales aircraft fiasco changed the picture with several Latin American countries defying explicit threats by the US to offer asylum to Snowden.

Thus the alleged security warning declared by the Obama regime is a piece of fiction designed to divert attention from the loss of face it has suffered internationally as well as loss of credibility at home.

For further information: "Global terror alert inconsistent with U.S. portrayal of weakened al Qaida" [<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2013/08/05/198581/global-terror-alert-inconsistent.html#storylink=cpy>]; "The US terror scare" [<http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-us-terror-scare/5345026>]

The poor are no longer with us

Marge Piercy

No one's poor any longer. Listen
to politicians. They mourn the middle
class which is shrinking as we watch
in the mirror. The poor have been
discarded already into the oblivion
pail of not to be spoken words.
They are as lepers were treated once,
to be shipped off to fortified islands
of the mind to rot quietly. If
poverty is a disease, quarantine
its victims. If it's a social problem
imprison them behind high walls.
Maybe its genetic: how often they
catch easily preventable diseases.
Feed them fast garbage and they'll
die before their care can cost you,
of heart attacks, stroke. Provide
cheap guns and they'll kill each
other well out of your sight.
Ghettos are such dangerous places.
Give them schools that teach
them how stupid they are. But
always pretend they don't exist
because they don't buy enough,
spend enough, give you bribes
or contributions. No ads target
their feeble credit. They are not
real people like corporations.

[Marge Piercy is the author of eighteen poetry books, most recently *The Hunger Moon: New & Selected Poems, 1980-2010* from Knopf.]

Courtesy: Monthly Review

(continuation from inside front cover)

In this time of armed wheat-stalks
armed birds
armed culture
and armed religion
you can't buy a loaf
without finding a gun inside
you can't pluck a rose in the field
without its raising its thorns in your face
you can't buy a book
that doesn't explode between your fingers."
My son sits at the edge of my bed
and asks me to recite a poem,
A tear falls from my eyes onto the pillow.
My son licks it up, astonished, saying:
"But this is a tear, father, not a poem!"
And I tell him:
"When you grow up, my son,
and read the diwan of Arabic poetry
you'll discover that the word and the tear are twins
and the Arabic poem
is no more than a tear wept by writing fingers."
My son lays down his pens, his crayon box in
front of me
and asks me to draw a homeland for him.
The brush trembles in my hands
and I sink, weeping.

[Nizar Qabbani, born on 21st March 1923 in Damascus, Syria, served on the Syrian diplomatic before turning to full time writing. His works include two dozen volumes of poetry and regular articles in the newspaper Al Hayat.]

I Conquer the World with Words

Nizar Qabbani

**I conquer the world with words,
conquer the mother tongue,
verbs, nouns, syntax.**

**I sweep away the beginning of things
and with a new language
that has the music of water
the message of fire**

**I light the coming age
and stop time in your eyes
and wipe away the line**

**that separates
time from this single moment.**

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