
Communist Federation of Britain (ML)

Ceylon

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"THE MASS OF MISINFORMATION on Ceylon that took place during the last year is so great that to explain all the problems is a formidable task."

This is how Comrade N. Sanmugathasan, General Secretary of the Ceylon Communist Party, began a series of meetings he addressed in London in June to explain the events of April 1971 in his country and draw people's attention to the severe government repression that followed.

Recent political developments in Ceylon (now "Sri Lanka") began he said with the sweeping victory in the elections of May 1970 of a "United Front" government led by Mrs. Bandaranaike and including Trotskyists and revisionists on a programme of lavish popular reforms, a programme which they were not long in demonstrating they had no determination or ability to carry out. Then in April of the following year an armed rebellion of young rural people led by an opportunist organisation called the J.V.P. provided the government with the opportunity to introduce massive political and economic repression as a way of getting out of their difficulties.

'PEACEFUL TRANSITION'

Until April 1971 Ceylon was supposed to be a model parliamentary democracy based on the British pattern, in which bourgeois politicians alternated with each other as nominal holders of power in the state, and Ceylon was said to be unusually blessed with political peace. In fact when Mrs. Bandaranaike's "United Front" government came to power it was hailed as an example of peaceful transition to socialism by the revisionists (Chile was not the first country to receive this honour, he pointed out!)

The repression that followed

the uprising was indeed exceptionally severe. 16,000 people were thrown in prison often on the basis of mere suspicion or false complaint and many have not yet been released. Many were subjected to brutal tortures. In the first two weeks no prisoners were taken and any person under 25 was liable to be shot on

literate and yet there is substantial unemployment.

The first point he made about the rebellion itself was that it showed the great revolutionary heroism of the young people involved: this gives the lie, he said, to the idea that the people of Ceylon are not revolutionary.

CEYLON

sight; certainly the dead must have run into thousands.

He explained that anyone who was critical of the government was arrested and put in prison, and many of the leading members of the Ceylon Communist Party suffered in this way although they had no connection with the J.V.P. - Comrade Sanmugathasan himself was in prison for 10 months.

The government in effect took the opportunity to try to wipe out the real movement in Ceylon by means of exceptional repression and sweeping emergency powers. This has been accompanied by a severely reactionary budget in which the price of foodstuffs and the cost of living has been substantially raised.

THE REBELLION

In assessing the causes of the J.V.P. rebellion Comrade Sanmugathasan explained that basically Ceylon is still very much tied to imperialism, with the tea plantations, the largest commodity producing sector of the economy, still foreign-owned; Ceylon's police officers still train at New Scotland Yard and her army officers at Sandhurst. It is a country in which half the population is under 25. The great majority are

Yet as for the leadership of the J.V.P. it had to be pointed out that they were counter revolutionary, setting back the real development of the people by their opportunist action. In their theory of "one day revolution", completely opposed to Mao's theory of protracted struggle based on the masses, they did no substantial work in uniting all possible classes for the battle and were particularly weak among the working class. They had no coherent political theory, never held a party conference (although this was quite possible at that period) and admitted people to the party who had attended a mere two or three study meetings. Their theoretical level was low and they even stopped to taking advantage of, and spreading, anti-Indian racial feelings amongst the plantation workers.

Above all they called the uprising prematurely before enough time had elapsed after the election for the mass of the people to see clearly that Mrs. Bandaranaike's government could not or would not fulfill its promises: most of the people were accordingly apathetic and the government was able to introduce a period of reaction.

Comrade Sanmugathasan showed

that in fact there was substantial evidence of government penetration of the J.V.P. An official report is now known to have been drawn up before the rising, which detailed the chief personnel of the organisation, their activities and centres of power and even the type of training they were having. Even more suspicious was the fact that this report was never placed in front of the security council and no arrests were made as a result of it.

CHINA'S POLICY

On the question of China's foreign policy he supported the policy of the People's Republic. So long as there were both capitalist and socialist states existing side by side in the world there had to be diplomatic relations and co-existence between them, and he said it was both realistic and necessary to unite all the forces that could be united against the main enemy even though this meant working for some time with certain states that had reactionary regimes.

The key fact in South Asian politics was the use Social Imperialism was making of India for her own ends. The People's Republic of China was correct to take advantage of contradictions between India and Ceylon to counteract this.

He pointed out the difference between state to state relations and relations between classes within states, and advised us to look once again at Mao Tsetung's article called "Some Points in Appraisal of the Present International Situation" written in 1946, in which Mao, speaking of the necessity of compromise with the capitalist states, adds the following:-

"such compromise does not require the people in the countries

of the capitalist world to follow suit and make compromises at home. The people in those countries will continue to wage different struggles in accordance with their different conditions." (quoted also the C.F.B.'s statement in M.L.Q. No.1).

Certainly this was the attitude of the Ceylon Communist Party:

ALL CHEQUES ETC., AND
OFFERS OF HELP SHOULD
BE SENT TO SENT TO:
THE CEYLON COMMITTEE,
24A ELM BANK MANSIONS,
LONDON, S.W.13.

and also, Comrade Sanmugathan said, there are in fact widespread warm feelings towards China among the people of Ceylon.

He explained that the loan that was offered to Mrs. Bandaranaike in the spring of last year was in fact at the request of the Ceylon government as a result of its economic difficulties and had already been agreed before the J.V.P. uprising took place. It was significant that the government had tried to suppress news of this loan for up to a month in their attempts to implicate the Marxist-Leninist forces in the revolt and thereby have an excuse to suppress them.

As for Chou En Lai's diplomatic letter to Mrs. Bandaranaike, which was published by various Trotskyist organisations in Britain, Comrade Sanmugathan said that if read carefully he could see nothing objectionable in it and nothing that the People's Republic of China has not always made clear. The statement of non-interference in Ceylon's internal affairs was in complete conformity with Lenin's principle directed against the reactionaries and imperialists who attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries and export counter revolution. It was also necessary to make it at that

particular time when the government of Ceylon was trying to use the J.V.P. rising as an excuse to finish off the Marxist-Leninist movement in Ceylon.

In fact Chou En Lai had a four hour interview with the Ceylonese ambassador in Peking at this time in which among other things he pressed the ambassador to see how much propoganda the imperialists were making out of events like the arrest of Marxist-Leninists.

As Comrade Sanmugathan summed it up: "diplomatic difficulties and compromises do not detract from the revolutionary stand of China".

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The leaders of the Ceylon Communist Party picked up the struggle again immediately they were released from prison, and as part of this have actively joined in the protest movement for the full restoration of civil rights.

Comrade Sanmugathan explained that one of his purposes in coming to Britain was to appeal for assistance in order to force the government to make concessions on these points. The three main planks in the movement are the following:-

1. Full restoration of civil rights.
2. The release or trial of all those still detained.
3. The ending of the state of emergency.

On these points, he said, he felt he had a right to ask for our assistance.

Although the situation is serious there are good aspects to it too: the bubble of bourgeois democracy has been burst and the government is now thoroughly isolated. As Comrade Sanmugathan put it, "there is no room for gloom or despondency".