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THE WAY OUT FOR THE TAMIL SPEAKING PEOPLE

**-THE MINORITY PROBLEM
AND THE CEYLON REVOLUTION -**

BY

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INTRODUCTION BY

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A YOUNG SOCIALIST PUBLICATION

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“.....Show not the *goal*
But show also the *path*. So closely interwoven
Are path and goal that each with other
Ever changes, and other *paths* forthwith
Another *goal* set up.”

(Ferdinand Lassalle in *Franz von Sickingen*. Quoted
by Leon Trotsky in *Their Morals and Ours*.)

A Young Socialist Publication

To

REGINALD MENDIS

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INTRODUCTION

“The categorical demand of Marxian theory in examining any social question is that the question be formulated within **definite** historical limits, and if it refers to a particular country (e.g., the national program for a given country), that the specific features that distinguish that country from others within the same historical epoch be taken into account.”—V. I. LENIN.

Comrade V. Karalasingham is known to many people in Ceylon, and particularly to those who are interested in the politics of the Jaffna peninsula, as the candidate of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party who polled over five thousand votes against the leader of the Federal Party, Mr. S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, in the General Election of March 1960. This was regarded as being quite an achievement at the time, just as was Comrade Edmund Samarakkody's polling of over ten thousand votes against the United National Party leader, Mr. D. S. Senanayake, in the first parliamentary General Election of September 1947.

The hundreds of thousands of Tamil speaking people in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, who turned away from the Tamil Congress of Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam in the General Election of April 1956, and have given their whole-hearted support to the Federal Party since, have now the opportunity to learn direct from Comrade Karalasingham why the politics of the Federal Party not only have been but had to be a failure.

Comrade Karalasingham is a true Marxist, whose revolutionary theory is so closely wedded to practice that it has carried him from the pre-war L.S.S.P. into the war-time “underground” movement against British Imperialism in India, where he was arrested and repatriated in 1945; thereafter it carried him into the British Labour Party, as a member of a Trotskyist “fraction”, and then back again into the

Lanka Sama Samaja Party, when he returned in 1958, after being called to the English Bar.

The Federal Party's failure, as Comrade Karalasingham points out, cannot be attributed to lack of support from the Tamil speaking people of and from the Northern and Eastern provinces, to whom it made its direct appeal. Nor can it be attributed to any lack of intelligence or integrity on the part of its leadership. The answer lies, as he shows from the actual experiences of the Tamil speaking people from the time of the "Sinhala Only" Act in 1956 up to the smashing of the Satyagraha movement in April 1961, in the concrete conditions pertaining to the Tamil speaking people as a national minority in Ceylon. But what makes his pamphlet a valuable contribution, not only to the struggle of this minority for national equality but also to the struggle for Socialism in Ceylon, is that he points out clearly **WHY** the struggle for the one **must be directly linked** with the struggle for the other.

The reader should bear in mind the fact that Comrade Karalasingham has confined himself to a study of the politics of the Federal Party and the experiences of the Tamil speaking people, who are citizens of Ceylon, but find themselves reduced to "second class" status, despite their mass support of that Party in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The problem of the mass of the plantation workers of Indian origin, who have been deprived of the franchise and are denied citizenship is also a problem of Tamil speaking people, but one that stands on a different footing, and consequently deserves of separate treatment. Its relevance to and relationship with the problem of which Comrade Karalasingham treats in his study should be borne in mind.

A specific feature of the problem facing the Tamil speaking people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces is that though they constitute an absolute and overwhelming majority of the population in those two provinces, they also include highly vulnerable pockets in other provinces in any flare-up of anti-Tamil racialist feeling. Taken all together even, they

constitute only a small though significant minority in the population as a whole, and so are doomed in advance to defeat in any "tribal" war between Tamils and Sinhalese. Comrade Karalasingham starkly makes this point when he says, "At this level the lesser tribe must meet inevitable defeat".

Another specific feature of the situation as Comrade Karalasingham points out, is that the two provinces in which Tamil speaking citizens predominate are economically backward. This is what makes them dependent to a considerable degree on public or private employment outside those two provinces, and makes even a mass action confined to those two provinces relatively innocuous against the central Government.

It is in this concrete context that Comrade Karalasingham explains how it is that mass parliamentary support for the Federal Party from the Tamil speaking people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces has proved futile in securing any kind of "bargain" with the Government **even when** it is supported by mass extra-parliamentary action confined to those two provinces. How fallacious it is, to try to equate a *satyagraha* by the Tamil speaking people in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Ceylon, against a Government, enjoying mass support amongst the Sinhala majority of the people of Ceylon, with a *satyagraha* of the Indian masses against a "hopeless minority of white sahibs", is what Comrade Karalasingham reminds Mr. Chelvanayakam and his co-thinkers.

An important aspect of the politics of the Federal Party, to which Comrade Karalasingham draws attention, is that it not only feeds and unifies Sinhala racist sentiment against the Tamil speaking people, with whom it is identified, but that it also damages their real allies amongst the Sinhala masses, namely the forces led by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Ceylon Communist Party. This is an aspect of the situation created by the politics of the Federal Party which its leadership is completely unconcerned about and probably even welcomes. It is something which every section

of the Tamil speaking masses of the Northern and Eastern Provinces however, must recognise, if they are to draw the true lessons of their failure to go forward under the leadership of the Federal Party.

It is in the concluding part of his pamphlet that Comrade Karalasingham enters into a theoretical analysis of the problem facing the Tamil speaking people, from a Marxist standpoint. In typically Marxist manner, he first reminds the reader that the minority problem is not "peculiar" to Ceylon, but is only a particular manifestation of the general crisis and decay of capitalist society. It is in this context that discrimination against and oppression of national minorities has become a feature of the life of all capitalist countries: It is for this reason, that the struggle for the democratic rights of national minorities, be they racial or religious, becomes inevitably linked with the world-wide struggle against the capitalist social order. It is for this reason, therefore, that the national minorities **must turn to the revolutionary vanguard of the working class for leadership** in their struggles.

Proceeding from this general theoretical proposition of Marxian theory on the minority question, Comrade Karalasingham gives the answer posed in the title to his pamphlet: The way **forward** lies along the **Socialist road and no other!**

It is necessary for every serious-minded supporter of the Federal Party to judge of its politics on the lines of Comrade Karalasingham's analysis. Without the advantage of a scientific theory, such as Marxism provides, and with a leadership that is wedded by its **CLASS outlook** to seeking a solution **within** the capitalist framework, the Tamil speaking people have travelled a tortuous and demoralising road. First they put their trust in solid backing for the Federal Party in Parliament. They only cemented a Sinhala racialist majority in Parliament. Next they tried mass action outside Parliament, but confined only to "their" provinces. They were beaten down with cold brutality and denounced as "traitors" to the nation. Then, with pathetic irony, the

Federal Party looked for mass support from outside the Northern and Eastern Provinces. It could only think of looking to the Tamil speaking **working class** of the plantations. Unfortunately, this mass is also under the leadership of organisations which are **essentially communalist in outlook** and which have led them into the blind alley of seeking for bargains with capitalist Governments rather than aiming for their overthrow in alliance with the rest of the working class. The result was that the pleas of the Federal Party for aid brought only **token** response. Now, the Federal Party is left to try to form its own "trade unions" on the plantations, whilst living in hope of some new bargaining possibilities after another Parliamentary general election. Those whose ties and interests in capitalist society make them hostile to or at the least alien to the working class, will be incapable of benefitting from a reading of Comrade Karalasingham's pamphlet. The leadership of the Federal Party is predominantly so. They are a **class minority within a national minority**. But the working class together with the rest of the working people of this country, as in any other country, encompasses the immense majority of the population. The **revolutionary socialist vanguard** of this mighty social force is being built and is inexorably developing its influence. Capitalist reaction counts more than ever before in Ceylon on the **racial and religious divisions** carried over from a different historical period and accentuated deliberately for the perpetuation of capitalist rule **over the masses of the working people of all communities**. When the masses of the Tamil speaking people realise this fact and turn from the Federal Party directly to the Socialist movement **and join it**, the day of national equality under a Socialist order will dawn the sooner, as it has dawned already in so many parts of this world. This little pamphlet of Comrade Karalasingham is intended to facilitate that realisation. There is no doubt in my mind that it will.

P. BALA TAMPOE

Ceylon Mercantile Union,
Colombo.
31st October, 1963.

I

THE PRESENT POSITION

IN the long and chequered history of the Tamil speaking people in Ceylon, never before have they faced so critical a time as the present. In rapid sequence successive governments of the UNP, MEP, and SLFP have taken decisive steps against them. It is no exaggeration to say that the Tamil speaking people have been reduced to the position of an oppressed national minority. This oppression is manifest in all fields—in open legislation, in concealed administrative actions and regulations, and finally, in the direct connivance at, if not active encouragement by these capitalist governments of pogromist activity against the Tamil speaking people.

In the legislative sphere the notorious acts of the Governments are (1) the passing of the Indian and Pakistani Acts of the UNP government which at one stroke deprived nearly one million Tamil speaking peoples employed in the tea and rubber plantations of their political and civic rights (2) the Sinhala Only Act of 1956 which denied to the Tamil language an equal status before the law and imposed on the Tamil speaking people the Sinhala language and (3) the Language of the Courts Act of 1961 which imposes on the law courts at all levels and in the wholly Tamil speaking areas of the Northern and Eastern Provinces the Sinhala language. In the administrative field the scarcely veiled effort of the UNP to pursue discriminatory land colonization policies in the Northern and Eastern Provinces is now the declared policy of the Government. The purpose, openly canvassed at less guarded moments, of such land colonization is the gradual reduction of the Tamil speaking people to a minority in these areas. Appointments to the public services and other public institutions are no longer on the basis of merit, and by an unwritten law a quota system has been introduced to the grave prejudice of the Tamil speaking people. And where no quota system operates, there is flagrant and open discrimination against Tamil speaking people in the matter of appointments to and promotions within the public services. Even

institutions of higher learning, as evidenced in the recent scholarship awards of the University of Ceylon, are not free of such discrimination. Development projects are determined not on economic considerations but are so formulated as to exclude as far as possible the Tamil speaking people from their benefits. Again, governments have not hesitated to introduce vicious disparity in wages between equally qualified Sinhalese and Tamil speaking persons for identical work—thus while a Sinhalese pundit is paid a graduate's salary, his opposite a Tamil pundit is paid on a much lower scale. The Tamil language (Special) Provisions Act, the so-called reasonable use of Tamil Act was intended to soften the harsh provisions of the Sinhala Only Act and was a sop to the Tamil speaking people. Even this admittedly show - piece legislation is proving irksome to the racialist elements, and accordingly the regulations framed under the Act completely negative even the limited objectives of the 1958 Act.

More ominous than legislative and administrative discrimination against the minorities is the resort to pogroms against them by the ruling class. The tragic events of 1956 in the Gal Oya valley and the communal disturbances of 1958 demonstrate that if necessary the capitalist class would even organize pogroms to further its reactionary aims. The dangers of pogroms lie not merely in the physical destruction and inhuman barbarities that inevitably accompany such action. Pogroms once used by the ruling class give rise among all minorities to a perpetual sense of fear and insecurity. Today all minorities, and in particular the Tamil speaking people live in terrible fear and uncertainty. They are haunted by the worst forebodings. The slightest political tremor sends them seeking safety in the nearest Tamil speaking area. And the tragedy is that the Tamil speaking people who reside in the predominantly Sinhalese areas do so out of economic compulsion. Whatever be the dangers to their lives and property they must necessarily maintain their employment or engage in other remunerative work since opportunities are so restricted in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The oppressed position of the Tamil speaking people is so generally recognised that it is needless to enumerate specific

instances. All parties which have any degree of popular support among them from the Federal Party and the Tamil Congress on the Right to the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party on the Left are agreed about the reality of the oppression. The recognition by the Tamil speaking people of their "second class" status is a step forward. In the words of Lenin, "a slave who has become conscious of his slavery and has risen to struggle for his emancipation has already half ceased to be a slave."* But to achieve full freedom and equality before the law is another matter, and it is to this question that the Tamil speaking people must find an answer.

* Lenin: Collected Works Vol. 10 Page 84 (Moscow Edition 1961.)

II

WHY HAVE THEY FAILED?

It is worthy of note that all the parties that have hitherto gained the confidence of the Tamil people have done so on the basis of resisting the chauvinism of the majority community and securing for their people their legitimate demands. Nay more, because to these just demands were added the most bizarre claims, e.g. fifty-fifty, federalism, etc., But the period of ascendancy of the Tamil Congress, and later of the Federal Party has signified to the Tamil speaking people not an increase but a diminution, indeed a sharp and precipitous decline of their fortunes. What heightens their tragedy is that their present plight cannot be attributed either to their apathy or their lack of support to the parties which at different times spoke for them. Apathy there never was on the question of minority rights. If anything the politics of the last 30 years in the Northern and Eastern Provinces has revolved round precisely this question to the exclusion of all others. The popular support for the traditional Tamil parties has been so enthusiastic and overwhelming as to incur the envy and jealousy of their rivals. Thus at the 1947 general elections, the Tamil Congress obtained 14 out of a possible maximum of 18 seats. At the 1952 general elections although the Federal Party now fought the Tamil Congress, the latter held its own conceding a bare 3 seats. The 1956 general election saw the virtual collapse of the Tamil Congress, and the emergence of the Federal Party as the political spokesman for the Northern and Eastern Provinces. This position was further strengthened in the Parliamentary elections of March and July 1960. At the last election in July 1960 the Federal Party won 16 of the 21 seats it contested. Impressive though these figures are of the wide support the Party has received from the Tamil speaking people, they are in a sense somewhat incomplete. To the Federal Party total of 16 seats must be added those of all other Tamil members of Parliament, including that of the sole representative of the Tamil Congress, since these men have not only voted with the Federal Party on every major question but have also no politics independent of the Federal Party. In the history of parliamentary democracy no other Party

anywhere could claim the support which the Federal Party enjoys. Neither has this support been limited only to parliamentary elections. The *Satyagraha* movement of January-April 1961 showed conclusively that the masses in the North and East were ready even to answer the FP's call for extra-parliamentary action.

The question inevitably arises why in the face of such overwhelming popular support, the actual experience of the Tamil speaking people is something altogether different from the promises held out to them. Indeed it would appear from the figures given above that the growth of the Tamil Congress, and later of the Federal Party is in inverse proportion to the actual gains of the Tamil speaking people—the more these parties gained in support the less were the real rights resting with the people they claimed to represent and fight for. It is at best but a partial answer to say that this period also marked the steady growth of Sinhalese communalism, the natural accompaniment of “fifty-fifty”, and federalism. In reality this is no answer at all since the very formation of the Tamil Congress, and later of the Federal Party, was sought to be justified on the ground that only organisations of this type could resist the communalism of the majority community, and secure for the minorities, their just rights. Where the *raison d'être* of a party is its claim to overcome the communalism of one group, it is an open confession of defeat to say that this communalism has grown to the point where it directly attacks the people on whom the Federal Party rests for support. The support of the people was given on the promises, assurances, and claims of the Federal Party that it was the best agency for defending the rights of the Tamil speaking people against the growing forces of Sinhalese communalism. To plead the fact of the undoubted growth of Sinhalese chauvinism as an excuse is downright evasion of political responsibility for the failure of the traditional parties of the Tamil speaking people to defend effectively the rights of the minorities or to hold out a clear perspective for the future.

The failure of the conventional Tamil leadership to arrest the steady deterioration of the position of the Tamil speaking people cannot be ascribed to the subjective weakness of indivi-

dual leaders. This is particularly so of the leadership of the Federal Party who are presently the undisputed political representatives of the Tamil speaking people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. They have resisted the enticements of ministerial office and have successfully withstood pressures from various quarters to deflect them from their declared goal. But good intentions and deep seated loyalties —essential qualities no doubt—are a poor consolation for the rapidly shrinking position of the Tamil speaking people.

We now come up against a strange paradox. The Tamil speaking people have been led in the last decade by an apparently resolute leadership guided by the best intentions, receiving not merely the widest support of the people but also their enthusiastic cooperation and yet the Tamil speaking people find themselves at the lowest ebb in their history. Despite all their efforts the people have suffered one defeat after another, one humiliation after another. How is one to explain this yawning gulf between the strivings of the people and the virtually hopeless impasse in which they find themselves?

In politics as in war it is not enough to have an honest leadership and a loyal following. While these are necessary, they do not win wars. The integrity of a High Command and the obedience of its ranks would ensure that there would be no surrender but they cannot assure victory unless the strategy of the commanding staff is superior to that of the enemy and the army itself is equipped with weapons adequate to accomplish the tasks before it. To put it simply, no army however brave its soldiers can win a war if it is equipped with bows and arrows, and if moreover, the strategic vision of the leadership is as myopic as the weapons are primitive it would be idle indeed to expect such an army to maintain morale let alone win a war under modern conditions. *And so it is in politics!* The strategic thinking of the Federal Party is so completely outmoded that any action on the lines of their plans is well nigh suicidal and the weapons which they employ are not merely antediluvian but are almost self-destructive. No wonder therefore a sense of demoralisation and frustration has now overtaken the people.

The fundamental flaw in the political strategy of the Federal Party is their conception that the fight for the rights of the Tamil speaking people is the responsibility solely of the Tamil speaking people themselves and that it is only the Tamils who can wage this fight and that they must do so as Tamils. Therefore it is necessary for the Tamils to build their own exclusive organisations to lead the Tamil people in their fight. There is of course nothing original in this view, since the Federal Party began its career as a splinter group of the Tamil Congress which really was the father of this idea. But in fairness to the Tamil Congress it must be said that when its leader Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam originated this theory there may have been some justification. All bourgeois politics of that period, including that of Mr. D. S. Senanayake and Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, was bargaining with the imperialist overlords for this or that concession and within that framework of capitalist politics where British Imperialism was the sole and final arbiter this method may have brought some crumbs. But to cling to this thinking under the conditions prevailing today where there is no overlord, a super-arbiter, holding the scales as between the different communities and dispensing favours now to one and then to another community is to lose touch with reality; and to base one's politics on it is to invite certain disaster which not even the good intention of the leadership can avert.

The basic weakness of the Tamil speaking people springs from the fact that they are a minority and this indeed is at the root of their problems. The strength of the forces arraigned against them derives from the fact that these elements are able to draw support from the community that is numerically more powerful. Besides the disproportion of numbers there is also the fact that a substantial number of Tamil speaking people live in isolated pockets in predominantly Sinhalese speaking areas. In this context it is obvious that to organize the Tamil speaking people under a communal banner like that of the Tamil Congress or the Federal Party is to expose them ultimately to unnecessary perils, and what is far worse, to sustain and strengthen the very forces which are opposed to their legitimate demands. But politics does not end with organisation.

Organisation of the people soon leads to some form of struggle for the attainment of even the most elementary demands and when this happens it must necessarily take place on a plane most disadvantageous to the Tamil speaking people. Under a Tamil organization and a Tamil leadership—the cry so dear to the Federal Party—the legitimate struggle for democratic rights is completely submerged and lost sight of and what comes to the fore and dominates the entire scene is primitive tribalism: Tamil vs. Sinhalese. At this level the lesser tribe must meet inevitable defeat. And as the principles of tribal warfare, and not the Marquis of Queensberry Rules and the Geneva Convention, regulate the struggle, defeat is also accompanied by humiliation and degradation. The bestial aftermath of May 1958 is the clearest proof of this. And the breast beating of the Federal Party hierarchy thereafter is of no avail since the whole course of preceding politics predetermined that outcome.

When the Federal Party next talked of extra-Parliamentary action at the beginning of 1961, the stress was on non-violence and *Satyagraha* as the means for achieving their goal. Although the first *Satyagraha* campaign has long since fizzled out, Gandhian posturing in the future is not ruled out and therefore it is worth examining whether *Satyagraha* is indeed the answer to the problem of the Tamil speaking people. Particularly because this word is so closely identified in the popular mind with the successful Indian Independence movement it is essential to examine its applicability to the specific conditions in Ceylon.

It is well-known that Mahatma Gandhi advocated and popularized in India *Satyagraha*, non-violence and civil disobedience as the means of achieving Indian Independence. Before doing so in India he had employed these means in South Africa and had attained a measure of limited success which however was short-lived. In due course the Indian National Congress which was in leadership of the anti-imperialist movement accepted the methods of Mahatma Gandhi and it was officially committed to *Satyagraha* non-violence and civil disobedience as the means for achieving independence.

Now it is a debatable matter whether Indian independence was finally achieved because of these means, although to be sure their employment did bring about the awakening of the Indian people from centuries of submission to foreign rule. It is a matter of debate because one must not forget the impact of revolutionary mass action on the course of the events leading to the passing of the Indian Independence Act of 1947. These events are briefly the basically non-violent mass action of August 1942, the strike wave of 1945-46 with the INA demonstrations of the same period, culminating in the mighty Indian Naval Mutiny of 1946. The recapitulation of these revolutionary events is not intended to detract from the importance of the Gandhian methods of struggle. What is sought is to set events in their proper perspective and when this is done non-violence, satyagraha and civil disobedience find their rightful place as the great awakeners of the Indian people to national consciousness. But the further movement from national consciousness to national liberation was achieved by revolutionary mass action.

Pre-Gandhian politics in India oscillated between the frustration of individual terrorism and the toadyism of the upper layer of Indian society, and each in its own way, strengthened the hold of British imperialism on the country. Thus it was that a civil administration of a few thousands backed by an army of occupation numbering not very much more, was in absolute control of over 400 million people. Mahatma Gandhi rightly sensed that if the people were but roused it would be impossible for an alien army of mercenaries to rule a country so large as India. Accordingly by the non-violent mass struggles and individual satyagraha campaigns of the twenties and early thirties he sought to awaken the millions who till then were outside the pale of politics. Thousands upon thousands responded to his call, defied the law, filled the jails, and patiently submitted to the savage *lathi* blows and machine gun fire of the imperialist Police and military. They did all this and many more acts of immolation because of their supreme confidence that it was impossible for a hopeless minority of white sahibs to keep over 400 million in sub-

jection. Even in the darkest period of repression this fact alone was sufficient to renew the courage of the weak and uplift the spirit of the faltering.

But what is the position in Ceylon? The struggle of the Tamil speaking people is not against an alien ruler resting only on his bayonets for support, as was the case in India. The Government of Ceylon, whether one likes it or not, rests on the support of a large section of our people and so long as this support is forthcoming, it would be the worst folly to adopt those methods which India had employed during one phase of her struggle against a regime imposed from above, completely isolated from the people and maintained and buttressed solely by the strength of its armed forces. The disregard of the fundamental difference in the nature of the regime in British occupied India and that in the Ceylon of today can only mean that *Satyagraha* in the conditions of Ceylon, far from achieving even the limited success it did in India, may well prove a death trap for the Tamil speaking people.

Even the Federal Party leadership has, at least by implication recognised that against a government enjoying a measure of popular support it is foolhardy to launch a *Satyagraha* movement, particularly in view of the experience of its own earlier "anti-Sri" campaign. That is why it restricted the *Satyagraha* movement of 1961 to the contiguous Tamil Speaking provinces of the North and East, but in doing so it made a parody of *Satyagraha*; and *Satyagraha* in its turn is but a parody of a genuine mass struggle. Such is the impotence of the Federal Party that what took place under its aegis as the "final struggle" turns out to be a parody of a parody.

If the struggle of the Tamil speaking people for basic democratic rights is to go forward, they must face the hard and unpalatable fact that no mass movement however broad and deep going it may be in the North and East is going to succeed if it is a movement only of the peoples of these areas. This is not to say that such movements involving only a part of a country are always doomed to defeat. The Bengali language spoken in East Pakistan attained parity of status with the Urdu language as one of the official languages of Pakistan

after a mass struggle confined entirely to Bengali speaking Eastern Pakistan. How was this possible in Pakistan and why is such a struggle futile in Ceylon? Besides the uniquely advantageous bargaining position of East Pakistan in relation to its Central Government arising from (a) its separation from West Pakistan by over thousand miles of Indian territory and (b) the linguistic identity and close cultural affinity of East Pakistan with the adjoining Indian Union State of West Bengal simple economic facts provide the answer. East Pakistan accounts for 85% of Pakistan dollar earnings, 65% of her exports and of well over 50% of her national income. Jute and tea, Pakistan's principal exports are entirely grown and processed in East Pakistan. These telling facts of East Pakistan's economic preponderance needed but the intervention of the Bengali speaking people to compel the Moghul rulers of Rawalpindi to accord parity of status to the Devnagri language of Bengali with the Arabic Urdu language of West Pakistan. However offensive it may be to the *amour propre* the no less simple economic fact is that the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Ceylon are economically the most backward and peripheral areas, receiving rather than contributing to the national exchequer and totally dependent on the country's general prosperity to soften the rigours of Nature herself. In this situation not even the most intense localized pressure from these Provinces can move a Government to making any concession. Although they answered a call of duty in participating in the *Satyagraha* movement of January-April 1961, instinctively the masses too have realised the hopelessness of their plight. That is why unlike in India where the first repression was but the prelude to greater effort on the part of the masses, the repressive intervention of the state also immediately brought to an end the *Satyagraha* movement itself.

It is not only in the fruitful field of extra-Parliamentary action that the political strategy of the Federal Party is completely barren of yield. The Party is no less sterile in the arena of Parliamentary politics. Its very character as an exclusively Tamil organisation renders it utterly incapable of fulfilling even the most modest obligations, let alone the more onerous duties, it owes the people on whose support it rests.

In terms of Parliamentary representation the Federal Party is restricted to a maximum of 21 seats in an elected House of 151 members. Even if all the Tamil speaking people rallied to a man round the Federal Party nothing can increase its Parliamentary representation. As a Tamil Party it cannot ever hope to win a seat in the Sinhalese speaking areas. So the hard facts of simple arithmetic—if nothing else—prevent the Federal Party from ever coming to power by obtaining a Parliamentary majority. It cannot even hold out the prospect of political power at some remotely distant date. But political power is the central question of all politics and in the case of the Tamil speaking people it assumes immediate urgency since only the wielding of state power can end racial and religious discrimination, restore the franchise rights of the Tamil speaking people of the plantations and introduce parity of status for the Sinhalese and Tamil languages. Clearly a Party which concentrates its agitational activity exclusively on these essential democratic demands but which by definition is incapable of ever acquiring power to realise its democratic programme forfeits its right to independent existence and becomes a parasitic organisation. The Federal Party is in this parasitic position since it sustains itself on the legitimate grievances of the people and is unable in its turn to give these very people anything by way of return.

The Federal Party sought to overcome its obvious Parliamentary impotence by an ingenious attempt at specious speculation. The issue arose at the Parliamentary election of March 1960 as to what it can accomplish through Parliament. The Party's spokesmen tirelessly explained that no party would get an over-all majority and that the return of Federal Party candidates in substantial numbers would enable the Tamil speaking people through the Federal Party to have a decisive say in the formation of the new government. Even though the basic aim of the Party, that of enacting a federal constitution for Ceylon cannot be realised—for once they showed the Tamil speaking people a studied modesty—at least a satisfactory bargain could be reached with one or the other of the parties vying for its support. If the formation of the new government ultimately depended on the precious votes of the Federal

Party, which is the party that would not promise any thing in order to secure the requisite Parliamentary majority to rule the country? In any event the subsequent failure to honour a gentlemen's agreement can always be met by withdrawing support to the government at critical times, and this would be a sufficient threat to the government to be "fair" to the Tamil speaking people. An exuberant Federal Party leader throwing caution to the winds summed up the vital Parliamentary role the Party was to play in the following words: "We can make or break Governments!" And all that was required of the voters of the Northern and Eastern Provinces was the demonstration of their unity behind the Federal Party—a Ceylon variation of an old disreputable and thoroughly reactionary slogan: *ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Fuhrer*.

The appearance of a number of mushroom parties at the General Elections of March 1960 enhanced the superficial attractiveness of the argument of the Federal Party. The middle classes, only too willing to clutch at any straw that came their way, provided it held the promise of enabling them to maintain their miserable social dominance in the village, could not resist the simplicity of the arithmetical calculation which was to bring them immediate relief. They not only spurned the Left but rejected even traditional Tamil politicians like Messrs. G. G. Ponnambalam, and C. Suntheralingam as, this was the price which the Federal Party demanded for asserting its effectiveness in Parliament. And true enough when the results of the March 1960 elections were known not even the most ardent supporter of the Federal Party could have desired anything better. The final line-up of the main parties was as follows:

U.N.P.	50	L.S.S.P.	10
S.L.F.P.	46	M.E.P.	10
F.P.	15	C.P.	3

The political prophecy of the Federal Party election campaign was fully confirmed but that very confirmation was soon to explode a long standing myth of traditional Tamil politics.

Even the Federal Party's finest hour which followed the General Election of March 1960 achieved nothing. Although here was the very situation which was to enable the Federal Party to play a decisive role in Parliament yet not even in the light of this uniquely favourable constellation could one discern even a glimmer of its much vaunted role. Desperate though the U.N.P. and S.L.F.P. were for support neither was willing to make any real concession to the Federal Party.

The UNP openly canvassed the support of the Federal Party and publicly admitted negotiations with its leaders. The life of its Government depended on the outcome of these talks and not even all the attendant risks of a second general election moved the UNP to find a common ground with the Federal Party. The maximum concession it made was a Delphic declaration of its leader, Mr. Dudley Senanayake, that he could be trusted to do the correct thing. Clearly the organiser of the opposition to the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakan Pact had not changed his spots.

The SLFP on the other hand was shamefaced about its talks with the Federal Party. To this day there has been no admission of talks between these organizations,* although it is now an open secret that about the time of the FP-UNP discussions or soon after, parleys commenced between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the Federal Party. Since the UNP bid for Federal Party support was so ridiculously low (a single ministerial portfolio and a delightfully ambiguous statement of its leader), the SLFP was no less contemptuous in its bargaining with the Federal Party. The failure of the discussions with the UNP and the fact that its scandalously low offer was a direct discouragement to others had already sharply reduced the initial bargaining strength of the Federal Party. The SLFP was merely required to be lavishly vague in its promises. This is what the SLFP in fact did and when the UNP dissolved the Parliament elected in March 1960 and forced another general election in July of the same year, the Federal Party was already neatly tied to the SLFP's apron strings.

* This was written before the recent disclosures in Parliament and the national press.

The Federal Party went into the second election taking the credit for the failure of the UNP to form a stable government. Borrowing the technique which the SLFP had used in its discussions with it, the Federal Party threw vague hints and suggestions of a secret *concordat* with the SLFP on the outstanding questions of the Tamil speaking people. This necessitated that the Federal Party must have the sole authority to speak for the people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces and, in any event, it must be in a position to "make or break" governments. Its Parliamentary representation increased by an additional seat but the line of campaign of the Federal Party, both in March and July, produced its inevitable reaction in the Sinhalese speaking areas. What according to the Federal Party was an impossibility was realised, and the SLFP was returned with an absolute majority. And therewith the plans of the Federal Party too collapsed like a house of cards.

Although in retrospect the experience of March and July 1960 is a study in frustration, it is not without important lessons for the Tamil speaking people. Indeed if these lessons are assimilated even that frustrating experience will be but a small price to pay for the future.

The *mystique* of numbers, particularly in Parliamentary politics, has always had a peculiar fascination for the petty bourgeois intelligentsia. The leaders of the Federal Party have developed this into a cult in that their one obsession is to work out a permutation or combination which they think is most advantageous to the Tamil speaking people. The sum total of their Parliamentary strategy is to attempt by, skillful manoeuvring, the quixotic task of fitting events into a preconceived combination. This required unified political representation of the North and East under their leadership and the exclusion of all nonconformist politicians from these areas. Preposterous though this demand was, the voters virtually conceded it in two general elections. But the total lack of even elbow room for Parliamentary manoeuvre which the deadlocked Parliament of March 1960 so amply revealed has blown sky high the insidious theory that political mono-

lithism under the Federal Party and a more or less evenly divided Parliament provide the ready talisman for the problems of the Tamil speaking people.

Political monolithism under the Federal Party is not only futile but positively dangerous. Its advocacy by a party whose political appeal and influence are wholly restricted to a minority is a direct and open invitation to another party with bases itself entirely on the majority community to adopt similar propaganda methods. Tamil political monolithism must sooner or later beget Sinhalese political monolithism and the first victims of the latter would be those parties and forces most sympathetic to the legitimate demands of the Tamil speaking people, just as the first victims of Tamil political monolithism were the Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party. Herein lies the greatest danger of the Federal Party's bid for political monopoly. Without taking the movement for democratic rights one step forward, it may yet succeed in unifying and cementing the presently divided forces which are opposed to the Tamil speaking people at the cost of eliminating their real allies. In doing so it would be inflicting a grievous blow on the very movement in whose name it claims to speak.

The very electioneering of the Federal Party proceeded, not on the basis of the Tamil speaking people entering as equals in the national political arena, but strangely, on the recognition of their essentially subordinate role. It is superfluous to mention that equality was completely excluded by the very nature of the Federal Party itself. Being a party strictly confined to two Provinces and accounting for a bare 21 seats it would have been ludicrous in the extreme for the Federal Party to have given even the appearance of equal participation in national politics. It had a more modest, or more correctly, a somewhat sordid aim, a satisfactory bargain with whatever party that was returned with a substantial number of seats. And this quest for a bargain represents the very quintessence of Federal Party politics. As though the Tamil speaking constituencies are so many items of merchandise at an auction available at the highest price to all comers! And significantly

nothing accentuates the political bankruptcy of the Federal Party so much as the fact that even at basement prices, no buyer was forthcoming.

The full import of the policy of looking out for potential patrons after every Parliamentary general election is truly disturbing since it signifies that the future of the Tamil speaking people is ultimately determined not on the strength or otherwise of the independent movement for democratic rights but on the vicissitudes of political parties and forces fundamentally opposed to the democratic movement of the Tamil speaking people itself. It is with these reactionary forces whose record in relation to the Tamil minority is most shameful that the Federal Party sought to consort. Although in the Parliamentary deadlock of March 1960, it commenced negotiations with the UNP, this did not prevent the UNP from carrying on a viciously racist propaganda against the Tamil speaking people during the general election in July 1960. The other claimant for the votes of the Federal Party was the Sri Lanka Freedom Party whose secret parleys and secret *detente* with the Federal Party in the halcyon days between March and July 1960 did not in any manner inhibit its Government subsequently from introducing the Language of the Courts Act 1961. It is with these wolves of chauvinism that the Federal Party lamb is driven, by the very logic of its position, to seek what is euphemistically termed a settlement. The Federal Party leadership is welcome to whatever masochistic satisfaction it may derive from an association with either the UNP or the SLFP, but the Tamil speaking people must no less be alerted to the true nature of the possible alliances inherent in the very politics of minority communalism. The dilemma of the Federal Party is that the alternative to such alliances is the wilderness of Parliamentary opposition.

The wilderness however is not the fate of other opposition parties in Parliament. Even in opposition these parties are in a position to record some progress which is denied to the Federal Party. The effectiveness of a party in opposition in Parliament is ultimately dependent not on the debating skill and talents of its personnel nor on the capabilities of its leaders but on the strength of the forces outside which it represents

in the national assembly, and on the party's capacity to bring to bear some of this strength on the government of the day. No Government anywhere in the world does anything because of a devotion to an abstract principle. Governments do not act because they are for justice or equality nor because they believe in injustice and inequality. They act, initiate policies, bring legislation etc., on the pressure of social groups, classes and parties and these acts may be just or unjust, fair or iniquitous to one or the other of the forces pressing on a government. The party which exerts the heaviest pressure is naturally the largest group in Parliament and, by and large, the government's legislative work is a fair reflection of the dominant party's programme. But even a government fortified by the largest Parliamentary majority does not live in a hermetically sealed chamber. There are other influences at work and in particular the pressures and pulls of opposition parties. These organisations too, bending to the pressure of the masses supporting them, press on the government, and invariably this pressure is from the opposite direction. Not infrequently in the life of any Parliament, there are instances when under the pressure of opposition parties, the government is compelled to make some concession, however half-hearted. But to bring this about the opposition party must not only respond to the pressure of the masses who support it, but also—and this is important—*be able to transmit this pressure on to the government* of the day. This imperative latter requirement the Federal Party in opposition has proved incapable of fulfilling and it is this incapacity which makes its life in Parliament so pathetic.

The tragedy of the situation is that the failure of the Federal Party to fulfil the elementary function of a political organisation, viz. to act as the transmission belt of mass pressure on the government is not due to any lack of effort on its part. What renders all its labours useless is the fact that all governments—whether UNP or SLFP—have been completely immune to the pressures of the Tamil speaking people. These governments had achieved this freedom by abandoning the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and concentrating their political activity in the remaining seven provinces where the

majority of the Tamil speaking people are denied their franchise and confining their appeal even in these areas to the Sinhalese speaking people. It is well known that except for an isolated constituency or two in the Eastern Province neither the UNP nor the SLFP even nominates candidates for any of the other constituencies in the North and East. There are not even branch organisations of these parties in these areas. The immunity thus achieved is doubly ensured by the fact that the Federal Party's influence is limited solely to the two provinces abandoned by these parties and in the other provinces exclusively to the Tamil speaking people whose support is not even honestly sought by either the UNP or SLFP. In consequence there is not even the semblance of a channel for communication to government of the mass pressure of the North and East. What exists between the Federal Party acting for the Tamil speaking people and the Government is a vast void. That is why under the leadership of the Federal Party even the otherwise formidable combination of Parliamentary opposition and extra Parliamentary direct action leaves the Government completely cold and indifferent. And that is why *under the leadership of the Federal Party* even the most sustained effort of the Tamil speaking people becomes nothing less innocuous than shadow-boxing.

III

MINORITY OPPRESSION—PRODUCT OF CAPITALIST DECAY

It is necessary to understand the true nature of the problem before the Tamil speaking people. An incorrect appreciation would lead to false conclusions. False conclusions result in wrong policies and wrong policies pave the way to disastrous adventures. If one were to believe the racial propagandists on both the sides minority problem is something peculiar to Ceylon. This has been repeated so often that even honest socialists some times see in this "bedevilling" question the only obstacle on the road to power. Actually the minority problem is present in one form or another in every capitalist country in the world. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that one manifestation of the decline of the capitalist system is the intensified oppression of racial and religious minorities in all capitalist countries. To be sure, at its birth the capitalist class was the great champion of freedom and equality. In its struggle against the feudal nobility the nascent capitalist class proclaimed all these principles and in fact achieved for the first time in man's history the equality of all citizens before the law irrespective of their racial origin or religious views. But the equality which it proclaimed in its constitution was soon a fiction, and later, in some capitalist countries, even juridically annulled.

Very early in its life the ruling capitalist class discovered that by skilfully playing on the racial and religious prejudices of the broad petty bourgeois and proletarian masses—prejudices which are themselves the indubitable products of the low level of culture which class domination imposes on the exploited—it could prevent the socialist movement against its rule from gaining cohesion and achieving unity. Hence it set up Protestant against Catholic, Christian against Jew, White against Black, Hindu against Muslim. To this day even in the most democratic country racism is part of the official ideology which the various agencies of capitalist

opinion like the press, radio, schools etc., subtly or crudely spread. Thus in the official catechism is embodied the myth of the superiority of the "race" to which the dominant section of the capitalist class belongs, while the minorities by necessary implication are inferior people, so inferior that they have even to be referred to as "Niggers", "Yids", "Chinks" etc. But so long as capitalism was an expanding economic system, the movement against capitalist class rule was contained within the system itself by substantial concessions. The super profits from the colonial countries enabled the capitalist class to make peace with its working class movement. It was therefore not necessary for capitalism in this period to resort to the more outrageous method of racialist disruption, and racism accordingly lurked in the shadows.

But with the definitive decline of capitalism on a world scale—the imperialist wars, the loss of colonial markets, the rise of national liberation movements in the colonies, the wrenching of whole continents from the capitalist sphere, the development of a war economy as a permanent feature of the industrially advanced countries of the West—the class struggle even in the "peaceful" Western countries assumed a sharp and explosive character. The whole capitalist system at its centre was in grave peril and the natural development of the class struggle would have led long ago to the defeat of the capitalist class. The organic process had necessarily to be violently disturbed. The racialist wedge was driven deep into the mass movement in an attempt to separate the petty bourgeois masses from the socialist proletarian vanguard. The conventional capitalist politician too closely identified with the *malaise* of the existing social order was unequal to this task. Only a new type of demagogue, without the burdens of the past to restrain him, could find acceptability among the petty bourgeois masses. The latter's general instability and known weakness to chauvinist appeals made the task of the new political adventurers feasible. Thus it was that, for all the differences in background and even methods, Mussolini in Italy, Pilsudski in pre-war Poland, Hitler in Germany and . . . Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in Ceylon had the same basic reactionary aim, namely the weaning of the petty bourgeois masses from the political influence and

leadership of the working class and their complete subordination to the capitalist class, even though this was accomplished under cover of the "independent" role of the middle class.

It was in Germany, where the economic crisis was deepest and the class struggle sharpest that the capitalist class developed the technique of racialism to near perfection in order to disrupt the anti-capitalist movement. Combining anti-capitalist demagogy and socialist phraseology with the crudest anti-Jewish propaganda and the glorification of Germanic tribal prehistory round the mythical legend of Aryanism, much in the same manner as racialists in Ceylon compound "anti-capitalism" with anti-Tamil propaganda, the National Socialist Party of Germany (this was the name of Hitler's organisation) carried out the foul work for capitalism. Although other European countries did not travel so far—neither did the class struggle assume such threatening proportions as in Germany—nonetheless in all the advanced countries, the ruling class today lays great emphasis on racialist propaganda and deliberately employs racialism to disorient and disrupt the anti-capitalist mass movement. Even in England the last bastion of capitalist democracy the insecurity of the coloured minority following the Nottingham race riots of June 1958 and the recent discriminatory immigration laws are the clearest evidence that capitalism cannot today exist without artificially creating a minority problem. Undoubtedly what impels the capitalist class to use racialism in a thorough going and systematic manner is the danger which arises from a united working class movement drawing in its wake the petty bourgeois masses and coming into head-on conflict with the capitalist class.

In periods of acute social crisis when the fate of the whole system hangs in the balance the minority question serves as a convenient diversion. Between crises the very health of the capitalist economy requires some form of minority discrimination and oppression. A stagnant economy poses new problems, in particular the question of the distribution of the available goods and jobs. The stagnation is masked in the advanced countries by the fact that there is an apparent

increase in economic activity but this increase is accounted for by an unproductive and exaggerated armaments and military expenditure. But the problem is transparent in a country like Ceylon where according to the authoritative Central Bank review the rate of economic development, far from even keeping pace with the rate of increase of the population, is in fact lagging behind. It has been estimated that 250,000 enter the labour market annually but the avenues of employment are not much wider than during the days of colonial rule. To use the felicitous expression of Mrs. Joan Robinson, Ceylon has a "primitive birth rate with a modernised death rate."* This, in the context of an underdeveloped and stagnant economy, must breed discrimination. The ruling class will seek to discriminate against those least able to make an immediate and effective protest—i.e., against linguistic, religious and caste minorities. This attack on a section of the masses chosen either on a religious, linguistic or caste basis gives the ruling class a further advantage—the benefit of a mass base among the majority community.

There is also another benefit which accrues to one section of the capitalist class. It has been found that the level of wages in those sectors of industry which are predominantly manned by members of an oppressed minority is much lower than that prevailing in the economy as a whole. This means that an oppressed minority is a source of cheap labour for the capitalist class. In all countries this is true. Even in Ceylon where statistical analysis is backward, a recent study in the *Bulletin of The Central Bank* establishes that the total earnings of plantation workers are much lower than those of workers in the rest of the country for comparable skills and grades.

One thing becomes crystal clear: discrimination against and oppression of minorities is inherent in the capitalist system in decay and that sooner or later the capitalist class must resort to it in an attempt to preserve its rule. The depth of the crisis alone determines the extent of the discriminatory measures. In comparison with the later efforts of 1948 and

* *Papers by Visiting Economists* (1958) Government of Ceylon Publication.

1956—62, the first conscious attempt in 1939 to divide the masses on racialist lines now looks a rather tame and amateurish affair. The indecently discriminatory measures of more recent times directly flow from the aggravation of the economic crisis of capitalist Ceylon. The crisis itself has its roots in the failure of the capitalist class or its state to carry out in Ceylon capitalism's historic role, namely, the development of the productive forces and therewith the economic expansion of the country.

Minority oppression has nothing to do with the good or the bad intention of individual ministers or even of the Government of the day. That is why even the Government's only accomplished spokesman, Mr. Felix Dias, must descend to the language, and even adopt the policies of a lump like Themis or an upstart like Rajaratne. As political representatives of their class they are compelled to employ racialism, however distasteful it may be to their individual sense of justice or fair play. Clearly an excrescence so malignant as minority oppression cannot be eradicated in isolation. Neither can it be excised by the primitive witchcraft methods of the Federal Party as these merely serve to feed the cancer within.

IV

MARXISM AND THE OPPRESSED PEOPLES

This survey of the nature of national and minority oppression has served both to emphasise the gross inadequacy of the Federal Party and to indicate the broad outlines of the solution itself. The Federal Party simply has not an understanding of the problem and devoid of this, there can be no successful action. It is not only in medical science that correct diagnosis is the prelude to rapid and effective therapy. The rule holds good in politics as well. National oppression being the product of world capitalist decline and decay, the struggle of nations and peoples for equality necessarily links up with the world struggle against capitalism. It is among the leadership of the latter struggle that the Tamil speaking peoples will find the elements who can provide them that new orientation which is indispensable if their struggle for democratic rights is to go forward.

The conception of the Marxist Left as the leader of the struggle against national oppression and for minority rights may appear somewhat startling, particularly because people have been long conditioned to the insidious propaganda of the enemies of Socialism that only a bourgeois or petty bourgeois (i.e. national) party could lead a national liberation struggle, or in the language of the Federal Party, that only a Tamil party can lead the Tamil people. And merely to underline the exclusive claim of the bourgeois to leadership of these movements, the petty bourgeois duly recognise and acknowledge the competence and claim of the Left to lead the anti-capitalist struggle. Even genuine friends of the Left fall victims to this deceptive line since the known internationalism of the Left is in their eyes a sufficient impediment in the way of Marxist consistency on the question of national oppression and discrimination. But this view whether put forward mischievously or held innocently is belied by the theory and practice of Marxism.

To begin with the historical record, it is a matter of common knowledge that the record of the LSSP in relation to the minorities in Ceylon is second to none. In the long years of its existence, the LSSP has consistently championed the just

rights of all religious, linguistic, national and caste minorities. This is part of the recorded history of our country and all attempts from *whatever quarter* to erase from the consciousness of the people the leading role of the LSSP in the legitimate struggles of the oppressed peoples are foredoomed to failure. The futility of such endeavour is underscored both by the history of the revolutionary socialist movement and the scientific theory which guides its revolutionary action.

The history of the LSSP bears ample testimony to the correct positions taken by the party in its attitude to the Tamil speaking people. The touchstone of principled politics in Ceylon is the attitude to the minority problem: specifically to the language rights of the Tamil speaking people and the citizenship rights of people of recent Indian origin. As far as the LSSP was concerned on these matters there never was any doubt.

Years before today's official leaders of the Tamil speaking people awoke to the realisation that the rights of the Tamil speaking people are as inviolate as those of their Sinhalese speaking brethren, the LSSP not merely recognised the legitimacy of the demand, but in fact first formulated it. The basic foundation document of the party issued in 1935 entitled *Fundamental Objectives* at clause 17 categorically stated: "The use of the vernaculars (i.e. Sinhalese and Tamil-Ed.) in the lower courts of law in entries and recorded statements at Police stations and the extension of this use to all Government Departments." Thus at its very birth the LSSP was pledged to equality of status of the two principal languages of Ceylon. In making this declaration in favour of the equality of status of Sinhalese and Tamil, the LSSP was merely giving effect to the principle enunciated by Lenin: "To the extent that the elimination of national oppression is achievable at all in capitalist society it is possible only under a *consistently democratic republican system and state administration that guarantees complete equality for all nations and languages.*"* Thus it will be seen that the demand of the LSSP to make Sinhalese and Tamil the official languages of Ceylon has an ancestry longer than the history of the LSSP itself.

* Lenin: *Selected Works* (Two Volume Edition) Vol. 2 page 53. (Moscow 1947)

On the question of the restoration of citizenship and franchise rights of persons of recent Indian origin, the position of the Left is well known. In 1948 when the Ceylon capitalist class disfranchised these persons, the Marxist Left resolutely opposed the discriminatory legislation, while the majority of the so-called leaders of the Tamil speaking minority in Parliament from the Northern and Eastern Provinces supported the UNP government in its reactionary measures against the plantation workers. On these and every other question that bears a discriminatory character against the minorities, and these questions have been many, the LSSP has not hesitated to declare its clear opposition. Mention may be made in passing of the Party's forthright protest at the racialist land distribution policies of successive capitalist governments, the discrimination in the public services, the exclusion of children of Tamil plantation workers from the benefits of the Free Education system, the use of emergency powers to suppress the extra-Parliamentary action of the people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, etc.

Impressive though the record of the LSSP is, this in itself would be an insufficient assurance for the future. What guarantees the future is the body of theoretical principles underlying the Party's programme. These are so inextricably bound up with the defence of the rights of minorities that the Party cannot abandon the one without at the same time rejecting the other. Indeed it is its very character as the revolutionary Marxist Party of the working class which, as shown below, inexorably compels it to oppose all oppression and discrimination and to support unreservedly all democratic movements of oppressed minorities, not on grounds of sentiment, but as the very axis of its own immanent development. That is why it can be stated as possessing the certainty of a Euclidian proposition that the best defender of the rights of the minorities is the revolutionary party of the working class.

The fundamental aim of the LSSP is the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry which regime alone in modern conditions can guarantee the transition to a socia-

list society. Such a regime can be achieved only by developing and sharpening the class struggle to the point of an open civil war when the organs of the old power would be overthrown by the new institutions created by the working class in revolt. This is the historic mission of the working class. And to accomplish this task the working class must be an independent and united force. Anything which weakens this unity and independence is a mortal enemy of the socialist movement. The biggest obstacle in the way of the socialist solidarity of the workers is the divisive ideology of the ruling class, its racialism, its jingoism, its religious *jihad* etc. As shown in an earlier section, the ruling class deliberately resorts to these devices in an attempt to disrupt the anti-capitalist mass movement. Hence any genuinely socialist party seriously interested in preparing the working class for its ultimate goal of capturing power must decisively combat all forms of racialism. Combating racialism means, in concrete terms, irreconcilable opposition to all forms of racial or religious discrimination by the ruling class or its government and the merciless exposure of all moves, manoeuvres and diversionist activities of the class enemy that have for their real purpose the distraction of the working class from its historic goal and the disruption of the solidarity of the toilers united under the socialist banner.

Further, for a Marxist party, support of a movement for democratic rights is something elementary. Revolutionary socialists advocate the overthrow of the existing capitalist order, however democratic and liberal the political set-up may be, because behind the facade of the "purest" democracy there exists the naked exploitation of the working class and toilers by the capitalists and landlords. Marxists therefore naturally go much further than the most liberal of bourgeois democrats since the socialist struggle transcends the limitations of bourgeois democracy. For all its importance the struggle of the minorities and oppressed nationalities is more limited since such a struggle only seeks to democratize the capitalist political structure. For the LSSP therefore the support to any movement for democratic reform is something inherent in its general socialist standpoint, and hence the support of the struggle of minorities becomes an elementary duty.

But it is not only a sense of duty that impels a Marxist party in a colonial and backward country like Ceylon to support the struggle of minorities for their legitimate rights. It is well-known that in the original *schema* it was the working class of the advanced capitalist countries of the West that was expected to seize power first, a task made possible and feasible because it constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population in the industrially developed European countries. But historical reality proved otherwise and the working class of the backward countries—Czarist Russia, China, Cuba—where it was numerically insignificant came to political power earlier than the working class in the capitalistically more developed countries. These were not happy accidents but the working out of an important historical law—a law which operates in all backward countries where the weak capitalist class has left unsolved numerous democratic problems. According to this law the leadership of the struggle for the solution of these problems passes to the other decisive urban class, the industrial working class of the cities. Even though a hopeless minority in a backward country, the prospect of power lies open to the working class by virtue of its direct espousal of the tasks of the democratic revolution and its leadership of the broad masses fighting for the fulfilment of their democratic demands. But once in power through the sweep of the democratic revolution, the working class is relentlessly driven to implement its own socialist programme, that is, the democratic revolution develops uninterruptedly into the socialist revolution.

An examination of the realities of the social and political scene in Ceylon against the background of the theory outlined above would reveal how vital it is for the predominantly Sinhalese speaking urban working class to espouse, support, organise and lead the numerous democratic movements in the country for the realisation of its own goal: the establishment of its socialist power. It is precisely the numerical insignificance of the urban working class which is concentrated in Colombo and its environs that brings home in the sharpest relief the tremendous motive force of the democratic movement and its immense value as a powerful

lever to raise the working class itself to power. The democratic movement embraces in the rural areas, among others, the struggle of the cultivators for full rights of ownership and of all oppressed castes for full equality.* And since the transference of political power to the native capitalist class in 1948, two other democratic movements have emerged both latent with enormous revolutionary potentialities. These are the movements of the people of the North and East for their language rights and the struggle of the Tamil speaking plantation workers for political and civic rights. On their own these movements can achieve nothing—even at their height they can but rise to the level of heroic local uprisings incapable however of seriously challenging the state power. They need the leadership of an urban class to centralize their scattered struggles and lead them in a determined onslaught against their oppressors. Neither can the urban working class on its own strength, notwithstanding its high degree of militancy, go beyond pure and simple trade unionism. For the overthrow of the bourgeois state, for the expropriation of the capitalist class, for the wresting of political power, for the creation of the new proletarian state and the suppression of the capitalist counter-revolution, the urban working class must clearly harness other forces to its aid. Where can it turn but to the tremendous reservoir of revolutionary energy that is the democratic movement of the oppressed peoples? Ineluctably two mighty historical movements converge—only under working class leadership can the movement of the oppressed minorities find adequate expression and only on their support can the urban working class itself reach out for political power in order to begin the task of the socialist reorganisation of society. The forging of this grand alliance which is the central strategic aim of the revolutionary vanguard organised in the LSSP will spell the end of the bourgeois order itself. Thus it will be seen that the very basis of the LSSP's claim to power rests on its capacity to unify under its banner the democratic movement of all the oppressed peoples and peasants and the socialist struggle of the working class.

* This is not an academic question as many would like to believe, vide Mr. Asoka Karunaratne's letter of resignation as Junior Minister of Justice.

SUPERIORITY OF MARXIST LEADERSHIP

The close inter-relationship, indeed the organic unity, of the socialist struggle of the working class and the struggle of the Tamil speaking people for their just rights must convince all honest elements among the latter of the deep and abiding interest of the Marxist Left in their fight for equality and against discrimination. Incurable imbeciles among them who determine their politics by reference to the linguistic origin of the leaders of organisations will of course remain unconvinced, and as nothing will ever convince them of anything, they need not bother us. Still others may despair that their immediate pressing problem is linked with the Party's ultimate goal of the seizure of power by the revolutionary masses. This is hardly an objection since the Federal Party which today speaks for the Tamil speaking people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces cannot even sketch a programme of action which could take it to its ultimate goal. The lack of such a programme means not merely that its ultimate goal is totally unrealisable but also that in the intervening period between the present and the promised future the Federal Party can offer nothing but frustration. But precisely because Marxism boldly outlines a programme that is realistic to the core in respect of the ultimate goal it is able even in the transitional period between today and the morrow to give the movement of the Tamil speaking people a purpose and direction, infuse it with enthusiasm and *elan*, and instil confidence and hope in the final success of their endeavour. A re-thinking is therefore indispensable—in fact an orientation in the direction of the Marxist Party. At the very least the first benefit of any new regrouping of their ranks is the casting off of the mill stones which the Federal Party leadership has placed round their necks.

The most burdensome of these is the communalism of the leadership. So long as the fight of the minorities is conducted under a leadership such as that of the Federal Party, their struggle is immediately given a communal character, however

loudly such an approach may be disowned. Not only is the freedom of action of the minorities severely handicapped but a communal taint to the legitimate struggle of the minorities directly and immediately strengthens and feeds the communalism of the majority community. There is no way of breaking this vicious circle at the level of Federal Party politics, and as long as the political leadership of the Tamil speaking people is in the hands of Tamil communalists. But the position alters completely when the voice of the Tamil speaking people is also the voice of the Socialist movement. Hence forth the agitation of the Tamil speaking people for their language and franchise rights becomes a direct political struggle between *the socialist movement and the capitalist class and its government*, and not as at present a dog fight between majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils. The struggle of the Tamil speaking people is then set in its proper perspective, namely as a struggle for democratic rights. Transcending racial considerations, the dividing line now is between *socialists and democrats on the one side* and reactionary chauvinists and capitalist agents on the other. Owing to the dominance of the Federal Party this important aspect is completely blurred and the issue conveniently misrepresented as a fight between Sinhalese and Tamils.

Once the leadership of the Tamil speaking people passes to the LSSP, the fight of the Sinhalese chauvinists against the legitimate struggle of the minorities must thereafter be directed against the socialist movement, if they are to strike at the minorities. This is no easy matter, it is certainly immeasurably more difficult than countering the Federal Party. The latter presents no difficulty because it makes no appeal whatever to the Sinhalese masses. Indeed between them and the Federal Party there is an unbridgable gulf which the crude propaganda of the Federal Party only succeeds in widening. But the revolutionary socialist movement, real and pulsating, is part of the political life of the Sinhalese speaking people. It is futile to attempt to assess its strength in terms of membership of parties, trade unions, youth leagues, general political influence etc—but it is sufficient to say that even though it is not the dominant tendency among them, the Socialist movement is the spokesman of a substantial section of Sinha-

lese opinion. Whatever be the ebbs and flows, there has been in every Parliament a fair representation of socialist members from wholly Sinhalese speaking constituencies. This is the best evidence of the strength of the movement. It is this movement that the chauvinists must overcome in order to combat the just struggles of the Tamil speaking minority. They must engage actively against the strongly entrenched socialist movement in the predominantly Sinhalese speaking areas—a battle ground decidedly disadvantageous to them and against a foe of remarkable resilience.

Again it must not be forgotten that when LSSP leadership of the Tamil speaking people is an established fact, the task of agitating for their just demands is made easier. So long as the Federal Party is the spokesman for the Tamils, there will always remain an impenetrable barrier between the Tamil and Sinhalese people. The effect of Federal Party propaganda is to alienate even those who are uncommitted among the broad mass of Sinhalese speaking people, and it is not surprising therefore that its propaganda can never hope to wean any section of people even mildly under chauvinist influence. Further the actions of the Federal Party—one is not talking here of their actions, however ill-conceived in relation to the demands of the Tamil speaking people—but their actions concerning wider national issues, even more than their propaganda, have widened the gulf. On practically every major question touching the people, the Federal Party has opposed the numerous measures of reform and in effect identified the mass of Tamil speaking people with the forces of reaction. Their opposition to the evacuation of British Naval forces from Trincomalee and other bases, the vote against the minimal agrarian reform represented by the Paddy Lands Act, and their open defence of Christian Missionary education in opposing the State take-over of Schools (a reform carried out by Catholic France as far back as 1789) are but a few instances of their political Rip Van Winklism, if not the clearest evidence of the capitalist character of the party. Is it any wonder that when the Federal Party is the spokesman for the legitimate demands of the Tamil speaking people, the broad mass of Sinhalese speaking people should be deeply distrustful

and on guard even in respect of demands that are fair and reasonable? But the position is otherwise when the LSSP is the spokesman for the Tamil speaking people in and outside Parliament. The LSSP has not merely been identified with every agitation for popular demands, but over the last 25 years has been the leader and organiser of the masses in their day to day struggles. It has won the confidence of the advanced elements among them and is therefore best able to put across the just demands of the Tamil speaking people among those who matter—the mass of Sinhalese speaking people. But until such time as the Party is the accepted spokesman of the Tamil speaking people, the LSSP will lack the moral authority to do so effectively.

Even more promising would be the new methods of struggle available to the Tamil speaking people. Today's squandermania of invaluable mass energy in farcical *Satyagraha* campaigns, purposeless exhibitionism, and futile "tar brushings" will be things of the past. Neither would the Tamil speaking people need to indulge in vain gestures like refusing to learn Sinhala as though this can ever solve *their* problem. A generation about to make its final exit and assured of its pension rights or living on the returns of investments made in traditional Sinhalese speaking areas can afford the luxury of such absurdities. But in relation to the new generation these stunts are criminal in that they bureaucratically deny it equality of opportunity in life's competitive struggle and arbitrarily ill-equip it to face the future, without in any way taking the struggle for the recognition of Tamil a step nearer the goal. The Federal Party must perforce sustain itself on such meaningless protests, while LSSP leadership will signify the proper utilisation of the resources of the Tamil speaking people in concerted mass action with the healthy and progressive forces of the rest of the country against the ruling class and its oppressive government.

Generally Parliament represents the Achilles heel of the Left. But the incapacity of the Federal Party in Parliament is so notorious that even in this thoroughly alien institution the Left, though a minority, is better able to defend and further

the interests of the Tamil speaking people. This is due principally to the fact that the Left in Parliament draws its strength from a mass movement based on the country as a whole and not from a territorially restricted area which is not even a sphere of government interest. Consequently the Left even in opposition as the spokesman for the Tamil speaking people, is sometimes able by the correct combination of Parliamentary and extra Parliamentary pressure to make the maximum of the limited opportunities which Parliament presents. But mass expectation through Parliament is not only that of the role of a watch dog. The wide-spread illusions in Parliament has necessitated the formulation of a programme capable of realisation through it. For this reason the LSSP has sought and reached agreement with the CP and the MEP on a *minimum* programme for a specific purpose. For all the limitations inevitable in such an electoral arrangement with other parties holding different views, the agreement marks an important step.

Undoubtedly on a number of matters including questions of language and citizenship the minimum programme of the LSSP-CP-MEP Parliamentary Bloc does not represent the traditional Marxist position. But what is of significance is that other organisations to the agreement have now taken positions which are an advance on the views advocated by them in the past. Even more important than the gain of drawing the MEP to support a formulation that goes some way to meeting the demands of the Tamil speaking people is the fact that the implementation of the minimum programme in respect of language and citizenship would mark a distinct advance from the actual existing situation. Thereafter the very dialectic of this limited reform must compel those who today lack the necessary theoretical understanding to take further measures towards the final solution of the minority problem. This would not be the first time in history when declared opponents of a particular solution were driven by the inner logic of events to adopt the very measures they had opposed. It is well known for instance that Abraham Lincoln who was not an abolitionist of slavery when he assumed office was himself compelled to abolish slavery by the very exigencies

of the fight against the Southern slave owners, although it was apparent to Marxists long before that the very development of American capitalism required the creation of a free labour market,. Similarly the very implementation of the economic sections of the minimum programme like the nationalisation of estates and banks and the resulting fight against the resistance of the capitalist class must necessarily create the conditions for the realisation of the legitimate demands of the Tamil speaking peoples since only on this basis is the socialist development of Ceylon possible.

What has been considered so far is the most favourable variant. But the evolution of events along this line is by no means assured. There are many counteracting factors not the least of which is that the solution is sought within the framework of Parliament which gives an undue weightage to hostile class influences and an exaggerated representation to backward areas. To these must be added the fact that the social base of the parties to the agreement is not wholly the working class at different levels of consciousness which is the case in the classical working out of the united front tactic. These alien, non-proletarian, and in some instances, even positively anti-working class elements will press on all or some of the parties to the agreement and seek to assert their interest through them, and to fashion them to serve their reactionary requirements. This *denouement* can be avoided only if the forces of the working class and the minorities, and of the latter, in particular the Tamil speaking people, throw their weight behind the Marxist parties. It is only to the extent that they rally behind the LSSP that they would be able to neutralize the reactionary opposing pressures and compel the the LSSP-CP-MEP Parliamentary bloc to carry out the promised reforms, and to get the bloc to go beyond its self imposed limits. If they remain aloof from the new regroupment, and specifically this means the LSSP, what they would in effect ensure is that the LSSP itself is but a prisoner in the bloc as far as their demands are concerned. It must not be forgotten that the ultimate effectiveness of the LSSP itself is directly dependent on the measure of support it receives from the working class and the Tamil speaking people.

Notwithstanding the potential danger—a danger let it be repeated which arises only if the Tamil speaking people are hesitant in their support to the socialist parties working among them—the Parliamentary bloc provides them yet another opportunity for direct participation in national affairs. Under the Tamil Congress they play second fiddle to the UNP, while under the Federal Party they roam the desolate expanse of despair. But under the Left they enter as equals with their co-thinkers in the rest of the country jointly to frame and formulate policy or unitedly to oppose the government of the day. Even while this would mark progress, the agreement also opens new possibilities in welding the broad mass of Sinhalese and Tamil speaking peoples in unshakable fraternal unity. The pursuit of a common objective—the defeat of the SLFP and the UNP—under the common banner of the Marxist Left will for the first time bring the Sinhalese and Tamil masses together. From the point of view of the genuine interests of the Tamil speaking people the unity thus achieved is incomparably more important than any other fact since the confidence and mutual sympathy established in a joint effort is the ultimate guarantee that finally the majority of the Sinhalese speaking people themselves would come round to supporting the just demands of the Tamil speaking people.

CONCLUSION : THE WAY FORWARD

For its own purposes, British imperialism accentuated the differences among the people of Ceylon—Low Country Sinhalese, Kandyan Sinhalese, Ceylon Tamil, Indian Tamil, Moor, Burgher, etc—and in the old Legislative Council gave limited representation on the basis of these highly refined distinctions. As the franchise was severely restricted and no power vested in the elected representatives, the centrifugal tendencies which were implicit in the official sub-divisions were slow to develop. But these received a powerful impetus with the introduction of universal adult franchise and the grant of limited powers under the Donoughmore Constitution. The native propertied classes, both Sinhalese and Tamil with that sure instinct which is the necessary accompaniment of their proprietary interest recognised in universal suffrage a powerful mass weapon directed against them and fiercely resisted the enfranchisement of the people. But this being a reform imposed by their own overlords they were powerless to do anything. However they have never reconciled themselves to it, and ever since 1931 their central political aim has been to prevent the cohesion of the masses as such cohesion is the precondition for the effective wielding of the new mass weapon. They have succeeded so far by exploiting the backwardness of the masses. In the first phase of universal franchise Sinhalese and Tamil vested interests in their respective electoral areas found in caste and religious cries a sufficient diversion from social and economic issues, and immediately, a convenient handle to beat their less fortunate bourgeois rivals who were competing for mass votes. But caste in particular was a double edged weapon in that it gave ideas to the oppressed castes. By the time of the second general election in 1936 Ceylonese Reaction found that the struggle against the "Tamil danger" in the Sinhalese electorates and the fight against "Pan-Sinhalese domination" in the Tamil electorates provided a wonderful overall unity of the capitalist front against the popular masses. The new slogans also had the advantage of involving the Sinhalese and Tamil petty bour-

geois masses in an earnest chase after rainbows, thus securing their big capitalist property from these very pauperised masses.

Intensified Sinhalese and Tamil communalism—these are but two sides of one bourgeois coin—was the capitalist answer to the dangers of mass enfranchisement. Undoubtedly it has paid good dividends to the capitalist class, and in the early period even the petty bourgeois hangers-on received their modest share. No wonder the middle classes found their new Messiahs in Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike of the Sinhala Maha Sabha and Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam of the Tamil Congress, the ideological precursors of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the Federal Party. But the historic process tolerates no Messianism and soon retribution overtakes all who attempt to violate her. The dead end of Federal Party politics and the helplessness of the Tamil speaking people, in particular of the petty bourgeois masses among them, in the face of repeated provocative measures against them are the historical penalties for their support of the unprincipled politics of Tamil vested interests over the last 30 years. If Sinhalese communalism now appears triumphant, this is no evidence of its viability since in the historic scale the successes of the SLFP are as illusory as those of the blue-eyed, blonde-haired Aryans of Hitler's Germany. Nemesis will overtake the one as it certainly overtook the other.

To hasten this end the Tamil speaking people must decisively break with the Federal Party. So long as they are tied to it, there is not even a perspective of hope for them. The following observation of Trotsky has a deadly relevance to the current plight of the Tamil speaking people: "When a soldier's hands are tied, the chief danger is not the enemy but the rope which ties the soldier's hands."* It is high time that the Tamil speaking people paid attention to the problems of method and leadership of their struggle as these are fast becoming the key questions. Indignation and denunciation of an openly discriminatory Government are no substitutes for a correct policy to fight such a

* Quoted by Isaac Deutscher *The Prophet Unarmed* page 361
Oxford University Press.

Government. The present leadership because of its close identification with the past will not encourage any discussion of these fundamental questions—it would rather see the Tamil speaking people burn themselves out in impotent rage and despair against the Government than permit a critical re-examination of its politics. In the twilight of its life the older generation which grew up under foreign imperialism and the Donoughmore Constitution and which bears its share of guilt for the present impasse can be indifferent to the many matters now pressing for a revolutionary socialist solution. But others, and in particular the youth can be anything but indifferent. Not only do they have no responsibility for the inglorious past of the last few decades but their own interests demand that they find a road out of the blind alley in which they find themselves, because of their fathers' and grandfathers' politics. They have a life to live and not only must they live as equal citizens but they must assure this inalienable condition to their children and their children's children. Individuals among them, because of the intolerable conditions at home may seek their salvation abroad, but the masses have nowhere to go but must remain here to fight it out with those forces which oppress them. And this means, above all, their integration with the revolutionary socialist movement—only then shall the tocsin sound for the final struggle.

And that tocsin shall also summon to a unified struggle, the majority of the Sinhalese speaking people, in particular the predominantly Sinhalese speaking urban working class, that class which in the words of the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 "holds the future in its hands." The leading role in this whole historic movement shall belong to the best elements from among the Sinhala educated intelligentsia. From their ranks will spring the genuinely declassed professional revolutionaries who shall carry socialist consciousness to the working class itself, just as from the intelligentsia of the Great Russian oppressors whose regime was a veritable prison house of subject nations and peoples there arose Vladmir Ilyich Lenin and his colleagues to lead the struggle against Czarism and Great Russian chauvinism. In today's putrid atmosphere which has even pervaded the most unexpected

precincts this confidence may appear to many as thoroughly misplaced. But as the very pollution is the result of an unholy conspiracy of conflicting forces to keep the Sinhala educated petty bourgeois intelligentsia in ignorance and obscurantism, the clearance of the air is but a matter of patient effort and time. In any event in the hard school of experience and revolutionary struggle, the honest elements who today cannot see the organic connection between the struggle for socialism and the fight of the oppressed peoples for equality will soon appreciate the significance of what Marx said in his fundamental work: "In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralysed so long as slavery disfigured the Republic. **Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the back it is branded.** But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours agitation, that ran with the seven league boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California."* And when they realise the indivisibility of the struggle against Reaction—and this they soon must—then shall Man on this speck on our planet, that is called Ceylon, leave prehistory and enter history.

* **Capital** Vol. 1 p. 301 Moscow Edition

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