

On issues in debate in the Sri Lankan NSSP - Four articles

Sunday 20 July 2014, by [KARUNARATNE Vickramabahu \("Bahu"\)](#) (Date first published: 16 April 2014).

We have published a declaration of leading members of the NSSP explaining why they are forming a public faction and the nature of their disagreements with the policy followed by the main public figure of the organization, Vicramabahu "Bahu" Karunaratne [1]. We are publishing below four articles from him, expressing his outlook and which a part of the ongoing debates.

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False assumptions and erroneous theorisation

There is a school of thought that believes that the common action programme of the Left with the UNP was a meaningless exercise, to say the least. They go on to claim that it was helpful to the UNP leader to stabilise his leadership within the party, but brought discredit to the left leaders. On the other hand they believe that the collapse of the mass support of the government, shown in the recent elections, was an outcome of the policies of the government. Also it is not such a setback for the government. Especially, they accuse the NSSP of betraying the policies of the founder of Fourth International, Leon Trotsky. Their thinking is based on false assumptions combined with erroneous theorisation. In the first place they have not understood the stage we passed after the ruthless devastation of the Vanni district. In order to defeat the Tamil insurgency the government used systematic crushing and insurgents were eliminated with a large number of people who were virtual prisoners of the situation. This victory was used to mobilise the Sinhala village masses to install a fascist-style regime in the country. It went beyond a Constitutional dictatorship by mobilising chauvinist masses to undermine the state structure; thus becoming an illegitimate rule. From 2009 this regime that manipulated chauvinist masses, expressed the idea that they will rule for years to come and this is an apex of Sinhala history. Even though opposition and protests were there at the beginning, fear was widespread. Killings, disappearances and political victimisation brought fear into the masses. Organisations including trade unions were scared to come out. Media suffered by assassinations and disappearances.

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agreements for mass action, for purposes of struggle, are always useful to the revolutionary party

It is in such situations that we have to remember what Trotsky said about fascism. It is true that what we have is only a Homo habilis version of fascism. Not racism but only the style of fascism, but we have to study the basic characteristics. Trotsky said "Theoretically, the victory of fascism is undoubtedly an evidence of the fact that democracy has exhausted itself; but politically, the fascist regime preserves democratic prejudices, recreates them, inculcates them into the youth, and is even capable of imparting to them, for a short time, the greatest strength. Precisely in this consists one of the most important manifestations of the reactionary historic role of fascism." This is a magnificent explanation of the behaviour of the fascist type. The Mahinda regime displayed a populist democratic attitude to the Sinhala Buddhist petty bourgeoisie. Its influence flowed into the proletariat as well. However these bonds were utilised to hunt out leftist as 'Tigers' even in workplaces and to bash the media people. In particular NGO workers connected to peace and human rights campaigns were threatened with death. With all these for a short time of a few years Mahinda showed great strength. But with the struggle launched by the protest of the opposition, Mahinda was exposed. Elections showed that the blows were severe enough to break the back of the fascistic regime.

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This is what Trotsky said of those who failed to see the difference between popular fronts for Parliamentary coalitions and action fronts against fascist mass mobilisations. "The trouble is that in the Central Committee of the Communist Party there are many frightened opportunists. They have heard that opportunism consists of a love for blocs, and that is why they are against blocs. They do not understand the difference between, let us say, a Parliamentary agreement and an ever-so-modest agreement for struggle in a strike or in defence of workers' print shops against fascist bands. Election agreements, Parliamentary compromises concluded between the revolutionary party and the social democracy serve, as a rule, to the advantage of the social democracy. Practical agreements for mass action, for purposes of struggle, are always useful to the revolutionary party. No common platform with the social democracy, or with the leaders of the German trade unions, no common publications, banners or placards. March separately, but strike together! Agree only on how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! Such an agreement can be concluded even with the devil himself and his grandmother - on one condition, not to bind one's hands."

Dr. Vicramabahu Karunaratne

* 16 APRIL 2014 09:2:

<http://www.dailymirror.lk/opinion/172-opinion/45902-false-assumptions-and-erroneous-theorisation-.html>

Fusion of Gandhism and Marxism

There is an interesting discussion going on about the validity of radical liberalism in the present context of political crisis. Ranil Wickremesinghe says he is for a mass struggle which may be akin to

what Gandhi did. In any case, issue of non-violence is a relevant point to discuss.

As far as I could see the conflict between Marxism and Gandhism or any kind of radical liberalism is not really about the methods of struggle, but about the political perspective of the movement. Ranil's project is a liberal social project and not an anti-capitalist one. It is about freedom, self-rule and democratic participation. True, there is concern for the poor and the marginalized, but there is no class struggle angle. In fact this is where non-violence is really been emphasized. Private property is ok, if there is compulsion to look after the less fortunate.

This is, as I understand, Ranil's social project. As Marxists, we are not against such reforms of the system if these are really introduced. But certainly, we do not see that as a solution to the social crisis. Still, we are for freedom, for self-determination, for autonomy, for democracy and we are against chauvinism in any form. So, there is a wide area in which we can work together with consistent liberals in the course of our struggle for freedom and democracy. But our experience in the last century is that we are the only consistent democrats left! That is why Trotsky and Lenin both said, that the proletariat or the left should lead the democratic revolution. Anyway, still our doors are open, for common struggles with Gandhians.

Method of struggle

Our method of struggle is non-violent and democratic. Strikes, demonstrations, hartals and other mass actions are democratic and non-violent. It is the reactionary rulers, chauvinists and their 'running dogs' who are violent. I entered politics in 1962 and in this entire career I took to arms when JVP started shooting at us. Why, because we stood for defending equality of languages, citizenship rights for plantation Tamils and the right of self-determination of Tamil people. When we started collecting illegal arms for our defence, JR's regime offered to sell some arms and of course we bought them. Later, everybody under threat was given arms from the state. Today, I see very important 'Gandhians' moving around with a truck load of soldiers to protect them from whom I do not know.

In 1992, still I was campaigning against state terror aimed at suspected youth while on the other hand we protected ourselves from the rebels. We were protesting against abductions and lawless killings since early 1989. On 1 July 1992 we organized a Janagosa with Mahinda and others. In Kandy with other Sama Samajists, I led a procession of about 500, largely parents and family members of the disappeared. Eight of us were taken into custody by Kandy police. One of them was Upali Lewliyadde, then a police officer given to me for protection against Sinhala chauvinist killers! Kandy police officers did not know how to deal with him.

Dilemma of non-violent struggles

This I believe is the dilemma of non-violent struggles. Trotsky said once that in a mass struggle what is important is not one's ability to kill others, but the ability to sacrifice one's life for the struggle. This is the essence of non-violence. However, one has to fight back even with arms against unjust inhuman killers. If a ruthless killer is attacking a child, then even with violence one has to restrain the attacker. One may not use arms but if you are going with the protection of STF, then you are ready with instruments of violence.

Furthermore, if the oppressive killers are attacking not only the leaders but also the masses behind, then at one point the masses will resort to armed reaction. So, there is legitimacy, under certain circumstances, for armed insurrection. I believe even the UN charter accepts that possibility. This is what Karen Parker says. What is not accepted is violence against the innocent, particularly women and children. Also attacks against dissenting voices. This has become a debating point in the Geneva

sessions. What is the legitimacy of Tamil insurrection in Lanka? The legitimacy of the Tamil national insurrection lies on the pogroms launched, with connivance of political leaders from '57 onwards and state terror released on protesting innocent masses.

Dr. Vicramabahu Karunaratne

* April 17, 2014 2:00 am:

<http://www.ceylontoday.lk/90-61776-news-detail-fusion-of-gandhism-and-marxism.html>

Sama Samajism is all about people's participation

Sama Samaja means 'same society' or 'equal society'. Thus, though it was used to represent socialism, it had a broad meaning that attracted even bourgeois radicals. Sama Samajism was introduced at a time where liberal democracy in Lanka was in crisis. The Ceylon National Congress (CNC) which vaguely represented liberal democratic thinking in Lankan society could not cope with the rising majoritism among Sinhala leaders. The CNC failed to demand independence or democracy and became an arena for communal conflict. The demand for territorial representation had come to stay and was accepted by the ruling power as the main principle of Parliamentary representation. Nationality representation - through which the Tamils wanted to uphold their identity and minority rights was given a severe beating by certain Sinhala leaders. In this background, even Sir P. Arunachalam thought the only road to salvation for the Tamils lay in a return to the pre-Western order of things, in which the Tamils had a separate identity and a separate sovereignty. Thus he founded the Ceylon Tamil League to safeguard Tamil interests as a distinct nationality.

In an address to the league, Arunachalam said, "The league was brought into existence by a political necessity. But politics is not the *raison d'être*. Its aim is much higher. The committee and those responsible for the league consider that our aims should be to keep alive and propagate the Tamil ideals, which have through the ages, and in the past, made the Tamils what they are.

We should keep alive and propagate those ideals throughout Ceylon and promote the union and solidarity of what we have been proud to call 'Tamil Eelam'. We desire to preserve our individuality as a people, to make ourselves worthy of our inheritance. We are not enamoured of the cosmopolitanism that makes us 'neither fish, flesh, fowl nor red herring.'

After this, the politics of Lanka began to polarise into two feuding groups - the Sinhalese represented by the CNC and the Tamils, Muslims etc. represented by different community organisations. Instead of a plural movement for independence and democracy, the CNC became an arena for communal conflicts. It became neither an independence movement nor a struggle for democracy. Thus there was a vacuum to be filled by a radical movement for freedom, liberty and equality. Sama Samajism was introduced to fill this space with the broad aims of Independence, Democracy and Socialism, by a group of young people who had gathered together with a common vision.

Thus Sama Samajism did not fall from the sky but had been maturing for some time. The group of people who formed the idea did not suddenly gather together from nowhere. It was a grouping that had collected as the result of some patient work over a few years. They had followed the history of the European democracies; they were also aware of the struggle of Russia for modernisation and the new turn it took with the Bolsheviks playing the role of Jacobins.

They were thus committed to democracy as much as they were committed to the idea of social revolution. Not that they wanted to stop at achieving democracy but they were committed to go through the people's participation in their struggle for Sama Samajism. This is where they sharply differed from the JVP liberationists who were committed to the 'one party socialism'.

Though the old Sama Samaja leaders were criticised for becoming Parliamentary bourgeoisie at the end of their careers, JVP leaders too finally ended up taking positions in Chandrika Bandaranaike's Cabinet. What Sama Samajism wanted to establish was the necessity of the people's participation in the struggle for power and the necessity of the people's participation in elected councils based in different places of work.

Sama Samajists rejected the democracy based on electorates that did not represent the social category of the elector. They always wanted priority for mass participation in governance through workers' councils, peasants' councils, fishermen's councils and various professional councils. Universal franchise should work through the elector's social connection in the society.

"Efforts in the general political field were more successful. With that experience, the Suriya Mal Movement was launched in November 1933. Emblazoning the words "Peace" and "Freedom" on its banner, the new Suriya Mal Movement came into being. It became a movement against the war as well as a movement for freedom"

With this in mind they tried to build mass organisations in several fields. Efforts were made to break into the working class field, by participating in trade union work. In the trade union field the group came into a head-on clash with Mr. A.E. Goonesinghe, the reformist Labour leader who was also involved in Parliamentary politics. He was a mass leader linked to the British trade union movement. It was necessary to challenge him in the political field. Efforts in the general political field were more successful.

With that experience, the Suriya Mal Movement was launched in November 1933. Emblazoning the words "Peace" and "Freedom" on its banner, the new Suriya Mal Movement came into being. It became a movement against the war as well as a movement for freedom. Young men and women sold Suriya flowers on the streets on November 11 in competition with the Poppy sellers, yearly until the Second World War. The purchasers of the Suriya Mal were generally from the poorer sections of society and the funds collected were not large. But the movement provided a rallying point for the anti-imperialist- minded youth of the time.

Youth leagues were started in various places having as their aim the winning of complete independence for Ceylon. Anti-imperialist propaganda was carried on under the aegis of the youth leagues. This is how Sama Samajism replaced the crisis-ridden liberal democracy in the struggle against imperialism and reaction.

Today we are faced with a similar situation. We are challenging a fascist- type reactionary power backed by the IMF and global capitalism. Liberal democracy is divided and Ranil's leadership is arrested by internal troublemakers.

These troublemakers want Ranil to compromise with Sinhala chauvinism. Sama Samajists today should take the responsibility to raise the banner of unity with power sharing and to fight in the forefront against the reactionary Mahinda regime.

Dr. Vicramabahu Karunaratne

* 22 JANUARY 2014 00:00:

<http://www.dailymirror.lk/opinion/172-opinion/41926-sama-samajism-is-all-about-peoples-participatio>

AUGUST 14 OPPOSITION PROTEST Struggle vs. Fascism

The SAMAGI BALAWEGAYA or FORCE for UNITY led a protest on a very worthy cause on August 14, at the Fort Railway station. Going by those who have fallen ill with anti Ranil phobia, it seemed to have been a little underwhelming. A foreign news agency in its report on the protest said “among one thousand People...demonstrated”. Another report on a hardly pro-government website but certainly anti N SSP, said: “...According to eyewitness accounts, the Opposition rally managed to garner a crowd of between 800 and 1000 protesters.” With such misinformation those who are committed to defend the regime could easily conclude that the rally billed ‘Enough is Enough’, did not appear to have gathered enough people.

So, the Forces for Unity couldn’t get anywhere close to the lowest five digit figure! According to their estimate the JVP or the FSP supported by the university students and workers would have mobilised a far higher number. But these phobia men are unable to understand why the organisers of the protest did not or could not secure their participation as shareholders of this rally.

Forces for Unity have come together as a mass movement based on ten point programme which includes implementation of LLRC recommendation. Even a child in politics knows that the JVP and the FSP do not agree with this proposal. They are still opposed to the 13th Amendment; leave alone going beyond that. In the light of that political reality it would seem that only political idiots could conclude that the JVP (and even the FSP) did not join the August 14 protest for some subjective reason. One such person has concluded that the JVP and the FSP did not participate because they could not bring themselves to be seen as participants under the leadership of Ranil Wickremesinghe.

I do not agree with the politics of the JVP or their breakaways, but it is silly to think that these organisations make political alliances based on subjective reasons. Good or bad, they have consistently done things for political reasons. JVP once shot me in the belly and was hunting to kill me. Then we campaigned together for Nandana in the presidential elections. We do not have any personnel disputes or agreements; we never had. I am sure they treat Ranil or any other UNP leader in the same vein.

Once Lal Kantha said that he would like to speak to Ranil because the latter is knowledgeable and always prepared to answer question; a proper gentlemanly bourgeoisie. On the other hand, on that day Sajith and Karu were there in a big way. Sajith made a thundering speech while emphasising the necessity to win the forthcoming PC elections.

He appealed passionately to the masses for an electron defeat of the degenerate government. Karu was busy in the streets to my surprise and he led the petition project. Not only the complete array of UNP leaders, but also all oppositional leaders were present. As announced in the media TNA leader Sumanthiran, DPF leader Mano, NHU leader Manamendra, UPF leader Sirimasiri, Mawbima leader Hema and others were there actively participating.

“Once Lal Kantha said that he would like to speak to Ranil because the latter is knowledgeable and always prepared to answer questions; a proper gentlemanly bourgeoisie.”

In my speech I referred to the brutal attack on Muslim mosque and I got a huge response from Muslims who were there in large numbers.

Today, if the Force for Unity which includes the UNP as the major partner cannot mobilise more than a few thousand - if that—for a demonstration on a highly emotive issue on the UNP's home turf, Colombo then the reason cannot be Ranil. With all these leaders getting together to mobilize masses, we could get less than ten thousand.

“The entire country is subjugated by this fascist styled repression in one way or another. Against such a background, the opposition protest that rallied several thousands of people on August 14 was a great enough achievement, in all practical realities”

If that is so, then blame should come on all including Sajith. Am I mistaken? Is the argument that Sajith and Karu deliberately worked against mobilising people? Such an accusation will be very unkind to say the least.

The reality is that August 14 was a great success against a government that uses fascist type methods to suppress people. On one hand, The Sinhala masses are duped in to believing in Sinhala Buddhist dominance, and continued suppression of minorities. On the other hand, all minority communities are terrorised using para military gangs and underworld thugs.

The entire country is subjugated by this fascist styled repression in one way or another. Against such a background, the opposition protest that rallied several thousands of people on August 14 was a great enough achievement, in all practical realities.

Dr. Vicramabahu Karunaratne

* 21 AUGUST 2013 01:13:

<http://www.dailymirror.lk/opinion/172-opinion/34116-august-14-opposition-protest-struggle-vs-fascism.html>

Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF (article 32558), [Debates in the NSSP: Why we formed a public faction in the Sri Lankan section of the FI.](#)