

A general amnesty for Tamil political prisoners

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Many who defend democracy are appalled by the unfair and unjust 20-year jail sentence which a Colombo high court judge passed on journalist J.S. Tissainayagam on charges of supporting terrorism and inciting racial hatred in his articles. By this decision anybody who speaks for Tamil liberation could be jailed for supporting terrorism. Of course no democrat supports terror action against innocent people, especially against women and children. Also, military attacks on other liberation fighters merely because they disagree on some political issue, should be condemned severely. But armed resistance against national oppression is just and fair. Even the UN, the bourgeois "world parliament" has accepted this principle. In Lanka not only Keppetipola and Puranappu are considered as men who fought for Sinhala liberation, even Sardiel who shot the first policeman while in service in Lanka, is considered to be a hero of the Sinhala people. All of them were considered by the then courts, as criminals and, severe punishment was meted out to them. But, today those court decisions are considered as reactionary if not downright stupid. In other words, such decisions are not sanctioned by any form of natural justice but merely made on some conditional political basis. Clearly this judgment too falls in to that category. Thissa is also convicted for inciting racial hatred. It implies that any defence of Tamil right to self determination is an attempt to incite racial violence, and hence falls into the category of inciting racial hatred. So, the oppressed nation has no right to claim that it aspires for separation and independent existence. On the other hand, all chauvinist campaigns of Sinhala chauvinists that claim that Lanka belongs only to the Sinhala nation are protected by law. Even intimidation and discrimination conducted in the name of a unitary Sinhala state are just and fair.

I believe that this decision will harm the amity among all communities more than any human rights violation done by the armed forces. After all, the armed forces were engaged in military actions where the exercise of brutal power makes one a hero. The war is brutal and barbaric and naturally goes beyond the barriers of human decency.

Considered hoodlums

In the end, it is the victor who decides on the nature of the outcome. Generally, one who wins is correct and the other side is wrong, and will be considered hoodlums. This is official history. Fortunately, official history is negated by a few who have made unbelievable sacrifices, even sacrificing their lives, to correct this notion. Jesus, along with the bandit and terrorist who died on a Roman cross, is today believed by many to be the son of God. Peter, the first disciple and others, disregarded the power of the roman empire and the reactionary Jewish establishment, to convince mankind that Jesus who was killed as a criminal, actually fought for equality of man. Obviously as a Marxist I reject both the Christian belief as well as Tamil nationalism. But, just as much as I respect Jesus for giving us eternal inspiration to fight for what one sees as just, I respect the efforts of Tissainayagam ; for what he did to obtain freedom and liberty to his people.

This decision was made in silence within the grandeur of a higher court. It was not a sudden act, but a decision arrived at after careful deliberation. There was all the strappings of intellectual academy

in that decision. We have experienced the turbulence caused by armed conflict. We are debating about the future of the thousands of Tamils suffering in displacement camps, virtually living in hell holes. In this scenario we get this bombshell of a verdict, exploding the false sense of tranquility that prevails. Even the most compromising liberal Tamil is feeling the pain of dejection. I am sure that only a handful of Tamils, will take this as an honourable ruling of a court of law. Tamil youth of the future will say ' we could bear the suffering at the hands of military chauvinism but we can never forget the slashes we got by a court of law.' it is necessary that the President opens his eyes to this tragedy and immediately declares a general amnesty for all Tamil political prisoners.

P.-S.

* From lakbimanews column.