

# Mauritius: Class Struggle Towards Socialist Revolution

Wednesday 17 August 2022, by [TBC](#) (Date first published: 16 August 2022).

## First two Days of LALIT 6-Day Congress

The first two days of the LALIT 6-day Congress entitled “Class Struggle Towards Socialist Revolution: Let’s put our Minds to Work!” were held at the Mother Earth Hall at Grand River North West, Port Louis. From 9 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon, each day, members from all branches, all over the country, were enriched by profound discussions on each half-day’s topic, as participants said in their evaluations at the end of each day. Young members were enthusiastic, older members thrilled by the return to focusing laser-sharp on the issues of the Congress. (Everyone brought their own lunch - with tuna and baguette for anyone who had not managed to bring food. There was tea, coffee, juice and biscuits available all day - with some gato pima brought for sharing. There was a mini-exhibition of books, and of our documentation centre.)

The opening talk was by Lindsey Collen, who situated the moment we are in in history, in terms of the Covid-19 pandemic hitting a world already on the edge of economic, ecological and militarist free-fall, while extreme right-wing politics is taking root in many places, feeding off anti-party rhetoric that abounds, allowing caudillos of all ilk to take the lead of the mass movements that rise up in response to the crises. She said that, at the same time, there is a very high level of expectation from working people world-wide on the level of democracy they expect in the modern world. And we have learnt from the Arab Spring that it does not suffice to “desann dan lari” and hope for the best. We need organization, she said, around clear ideas. Thus our 6-Day Congress.

She gave Mauritian examples of the crises here. There is the MSM-led government’s constant reliance on repression, even as it simultaneously enables the capitalist class to fatten itself, while dispensing a flimsy safety-net for the so-called “poor” and “extremely poor”. Faced with a Government in perpetual difficulty - scandal after scandal, and crisis after crisis - there is a Parliamentary Opposition in even more perpetual difficulty, unable and unwilling to galvanize even the most modest program based on issues affecting the broad masses of workers’ lives, tail-ending any far-fetched movement or leader that raises its head, while the extra-parliamentary “emerging parties” flail around, drowning in their own lack of understanding of society, history or politics, let alone class reality.

“We are reaching the limits”, she said, “both in Mauritius and world-wide of the bourgeois democracy that the capitalist class has been forced to grant to the working class after the bourgeois revolutions 200 years ago, and then conceded in the wake of the ‘scare’ the capitalist classes world-wide suffered from the Russian proletariat having taken power for some three or four years from 1917 onwards one hundred years ago.” “Bourgeois democracy is failing, even as the rich capitalists get richer and the poor working people become poorer. “Now is the time,” she said, “to organize in structured political parties around a clear and precise program; now is the time to rely on the world’s working class, which has, over the past decade or two, become the vast majority class for the first time in human history.” She said we must bear this in mind because we know that we have been

in a relative down-turn in working class struggles since the rise to power of finance capital, led politically by Reagan-and-Thatcher, then enforced world-wide by the IMF-World Bank and the World Trade Organization - and that has led to the working class being on the defensive for the past half a century now. "But now, the working class is huge. And technology is highly developed so that democracy can be imagined now more than ever before. Now, the broad masses of working people expect more democracy, and get less".

Alain Ah Vee later said, from the floor, that the working class used to be aptly referred to in popular speech as "the proletariat", referring to the whole of the class that sells its "kuraz" (the accurate single Kreol word for the English "labour power", the part of oneself that one sells to the boss\*), not merely a summation of individuals. He said this is still today the most useful way of seeing the working class as a whole, as it stands in perpetual opposition to the capitalist class, on almost every issue. This is true, as one member put it, speaking from the floor, even when many in the new proletariat are sitting at home on their beds with their laptops in front of them "working from home", or alternatively working as part of the "gig economy" as many musicians always have done.

Throughout the coming debate people would refer again and again the importance of remembering the huge class struggles in Mauritius - especially those around the general strike movement of August 1979 and September 1980 - the country's two biggest mass movements, which the capitalist class was so shell-shocked by, and which gave birth to LALIT. Again and again, members referred, at a world level, to the fact that the world capitalist class remained stunned and shocked by the power of the Russian proletariat, from when it rose up and took power in October 1917 onwards - and that this was what kept the Soviet Bloc countries' working classes protected from unemployment and covered by social security, pensions, child care, free health care and so on for 70 years, and what kept the western nations' working classes with some degree of social security - e.g. in Europe, and even in the US after the mass movements that led to the Roosevelt "new deal", as well as what enabled the working class in so-called third-world countries like Mauritius to gain Independence and sometimes even to maintain a certain level of welfare-state benefits. We recalled again and again our indebtedness to working class uprisings of the past.

## **Class Struggle**

Ragini (Kisna) Kistnasamy presented the introduction to the first session that was dedicated to "the class struggle", and to "class- struggle political parties", like LALIT, and "class-struggle unions", that flourish during upturns in the struggle. She contrasted the dynamic view of classes-in-conflict as they fight for their interests, compared with the bourgeois description of classes by income and status. It was pointed out that the capitalist class is not even included in the State's 10-yearly census "description-style classes", the State thus successfully masking, hiding, evacuating altogether, the economic reality that exists: a small class actually buys the "kuraz" of a vast class. The understanding of "class" as "class struggle", by contrast, exposes, includes the capitalist class, and thus makes clear, through a political lens, who the enemy actually is. The plenary debate ranged widely over "class" as a concept.

Then Kisna Kistnasamy intervened again at one point and guided us through the history of LALIT as a party, formed around a monthly "tribinn lib" publication called "Lalit de Klas" or "Class struggle" and how many of its members were also part of a tendency in the MMM called "klas travayer an avangard" (working class in the vanguard), a nickname that came from the very phrase in the MMM's Constitution that said the party united three classes, the working class, petit-bourgeoisie and middle-bourgeoisie against the big bourgeoisie, but with the working class in the vanguard. This line made it possible for socialists, like Lalit de Klas members to be a tendency within the MMM. As the MMM leadership consciously deviated away from class struggle, towards what it by 1981 called its "Nouveau Consensus Social", Lalit de Klas provoked a Delegates' Assembly, put the issue to the

vote, and then left to found LALIT. "So, we were born as a class struggle party," she said.

Some time was spent on how the MMM had another defect in its class analysis – not just hoping that three contradictory classes could have the same interests – but also that it failed to understand the particular mechanism of the "state-propelled bourgeoisie", typical of post-colonial States challenging the monopoly capitalists left over from slavery and indenture – and instead just called it "mwayin burzwazi" as if it were a descriptive category, not unlike "nouveau riche". In fact, the state-propelled bourgeoisie is an actual bourgeoisie, but it gets a kind of political sheen on it of being like an antidote to the old colonial bourgeoisie, and so it pretends this way to be "progressive" even when it means using rule-of-thumb differences in terms of race and/or community, which are neither true nor useful.

The issue of class consciousness was touched on, but there was not time to have long discussions. (The issue came up in some detail the next day during the third session on "Internationalism".)

Ram Seegobin, from the floor, said it was our aim to change society, to do away with the rule by a tiny class, not just to "describe" classes. This linking of political theory and the practice of class struggles, and the articulation of these with other progressive struggles, is what makes a party like LALIT different from other parties.

Rajni Lallah, from the floor, pointed out how the Covid-19 pandemic was a moment that had suddenly exposed, before our very eyes, many of the class realities that often remained so masked, so hidden and so "evacuated" from public discourse, and that we should use this moment. She referred in particular to the way even the big bourgeoisie was reduced to being dependent, like the state-propelled bourgeoisie, on the state, giving the Mauritius Investment Corporation as an example. She also said how the State's claim to "not have enough money" was also dubious, because they could suddenly, it turned out during the epidemic, have access to that kind of money!

## **The Bourgeois State**

Alain Ah Vee, together with another member, presented an analysis of the bourgeois state in the afternoon session. Taken together with the class analysis in the morning session, it became clear that the "state" is what allows so tiny a minority to take all the decisions on the economy and to use this power to expropriate part of the wealth created by the workers' labour power – whether physical or mental power – while the vast majority of people are left without a voice in decisions about how we all survive economically, not even on how land is used, and, having had our right to any land expropriated by previous generations, we now have part of what we produced confiscated from us, fattening up the minority. The state was shown to have two sides: the one is persuading people that, as things are, so they must always be, and the other was, if people are not persuaded, to use repression against them. The other member on the panel said it was as though the State is a barrier, a kind of wall, that prevents a vast majority of people confronting directly a tiny minority who dominate them in order to exploit them.

From the floor, Ram Seegobin and other members pointed out how the state is best seen as all the institutions that uphold this unequal class system, that allow so tiny a minority of capitalist to dominate and exploit a vast, vast majority of working people. He said education, religion, the press, the family made up the back-bone of this "state". Together, all these institutions allow a more smooth way to exploit and dominate the oppressed classes than to rely on repression. Repression is a last resort. We must remember, he said that capitalism relies, for its dynamic, on relentless and pitiless competition intra-class, meaning within the bourgeoisie, so it tends to cause instability by its very nature. The State is concerned with keeping the whole of the bourgeoisie in power. This depends on the balance of forces between classes, and even between parts of classes. He said how a

part of the surplus produced by workers and not used for their wages, nor for re-investment, nor for fattening up the capitalists, but for taxes, then support a whole “codification” of the capitalist classes’ needs – ideologically and by brute force – in order to perpetuate so unjust a rule.

There was debate about the need for a proletarian state for one task, and only one task, to expropriate the expropriators. And after that, how the state – the machinery for a tiny class dominating in order to exploit a vast majority – would be able, in its present form, to wither away. True freedom will, for the first time, since social classes emerged, become possible again.

During discussion, these concepts were tested against present-day reality. Members thought that the development of communication technology, used as profit-making data by capitalist, will permit a kind of democracy in the future that we have not yet dreamed of, if we can only get rid of the class system that is capitalism that is propelled by nothing but the profit motive.

### **Internationalism**

The next day Kisna Kistnasamy introduced us to the concept of the whole world now having a huge working class, a proletariat that is in opposition to the ruling capitalist class, world-wide. This is important for all our struggles. She said how LALIT had all its existence been integrated into an international perspective, as well as a class perspective. She showed how in the struggle over Diego Garcia (and the whole of Chagos), for example, LALIT had articulated the anti-colonial struggle, the anti-imperialist struggle, the anti-war and anti-militarism struggle, the struggle of working class people forcibly removed from Chagos, who were together with the rest of the working class in the vast nation-wide movements of 1979 and 1980. The proletariat of the USA and of the UK are our allies in this struggle against their state, and most often against ours. And though the state, as an institution is not an ally, it can be forced by a strong enough movement in its country to act: this way LALIT forced first the Labour Party to go to the UNCLOS and then the MSM to go to the ICJ – and win at both international institutions. The victory was because the memory of the anti-colonial struggle is still alive in the state in the entire African, Latin American and Asian continents – as a result of past class struggle. And small victories can change the balance of class forces.

In the plenary, “internationalism” was approached from all sides imaginable – wars, militarism, occupation of Mauritius by the UK-USA, occupation of Palestine, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and how the USA now wages war against its own enemy, Russia, through furnishing arms and munitions while the people of Ukraine give their lives and livelihoods, and during this war the USA succeeds in weakening its enemy Russia, weakening its competitor, Europe, now on its knees.

Members spoke of how the pollution caused by capitalist pillage and fossil-fuel poisoning, poses the need for an internationalist consciousness with new urgency. Things like species collapse do not know national boundaries. Nationalism is a present danger in the face of environmental degradation. What is needed is a proper program for the entire working population of the world to support, to overthrow this rapacious capitalist rule.

### **Dangers of all this Nationalism, “Morisyanism”, “patriotism”**

In an exceptional presentation, Rada Kistnasamy, who had relied he said on the fantastic LALIT documentation centre to understand the times when he was a child, explained how when the working class became strong, the bourgeoisie and its press, would inevitably pump up (fer travay ponpaz) parties or groups that would, in turn, inflate various kinds of “mauricianism” or “patriotism” or “nasyonalism”. He gave the early examples of the MMMSP and then the mis-named “Lel Gos” of the MMM, that was nationalist, and how taking this line made them disappear. The MMMSP disappeared into the labour Party in 1982. The Lel Gos disappeared, and a series of other Bizlall-led

parties have faded away or disappeared. The MMM, when it went into its “social consensus” politics, thus uniting “all Mauritians” from all classes, went into the very decline that it is now finally suffering in extreme form.

Today, Rada said, there are all manner of new “emerging parties”, each more “morisyanist” than the next, and many including “blood-line Mauritians” from abroad, the diaspora. These parties unite people, never on class, always on “citizenship” (which poses additional problems of xenophobia as well as of anti-internationalism) and on the basis of being part of “civil society” (whatever that is) and sometimes there are even contests as to who is more authentically “Mauritian”. He referred to Linyon Citoyen Morisien of Bruneau Laurette that had dissolved into the Linyon Pep [sic] Morisien (LPM). Also dissolved into the LPM were the “100% Citoyen” party (again the competition as to who is more Mauritian, in its very name) and the Mouvement Patriotique of Jean Claude Barbier and the Grup Refleksyon Emmanuel Anquetil of Rama Valayden. Meanwhile, after a few months, Bruneau Laurette, for no politically clear reason, just ups and leaves the LPM, just like that, high and dry. In this same vein, at the last election, the two big alliances in electoral combat were: the Alliance Morisien (again Mauritian), and the Alliance Nationale (again national)! They are “all-class” common fronts. All these are forms of struggle that keep the bourgeoisie hidden out-of-sight, or melted gently into the “rest” of the “citizenry”, the rest of the nation, the rest of Mauritians – authentic and less so, 100% and less so. Rada continued, “It is the same,” he said, “for Rezistans ek Alternativ”. They go into a general election in a common front so broad, called the “Blok 104”, that it includes representatives of the bourgeoisie, even of finance capital itself, as actual candidates in a general election. And right now, they call for an alliance with the MMM and the Labour Party and the PMSD that are all parties that overtly protect nothing but bourgeois interests. Rezistans is constrained to ally with these traditional parties simply because it has painted itself into a political corner: it is an electoralist party that cannot stand as candidate for general elections without betraying its misguided and dangerous tactics (in its unprincipled attempt to oppose the Best Loser System). So, it allies with the traditional bourgeois parties that, even when they criticize the MSM, manage to do so on the basis of the bourgeoisie’s program against the MSM e.g. against the CSG tax, offering too much money for old-age pensions, and so on. Of course, all these parties also dissolved themselves into the 29 August mass demonstration after the lockdown and after Wakashio spill, behind the caudillo, Bruneau Laurette, and listened to a speech by Patrick Belcourt based on the hotel bosses’ immediate demand: “open the borders to tourists!” And that night, we had the Press Conference spectacle of Laurette and his three acolytes saying how they were frustrated MSM agents in the general elections of the previous year.

Also on the LALIT panel on the question of “mauricianism”, a member explained how he had been in the midst of the working class struggle when he was in the MMM, and during the 1979 strike, he had when he was young heard Ram Seegobin speak at a neighbourhood meeting, and that when the MMM began to represent the capitalist class more openly, he left and joined LALIT, which continued the working class struggle. On the panel, another member gave an analysis from his own personal experience, of the work done by NGOs and of its patronizing nature, its being unaccountable in any way, and as part of an apparent strategy towards the NGO-ization of parts of the working class struggle. He noted that, as the state has felt free to restrict its role in providing welfare, so it has engendered a host of NGO’s – some close to government like the NEF which is part of the state, and others further afield like Lovebridge, a private group that uses government money to pair-off a well-off family with a very poor one, with all the risks of abuse that this poses. Members spoke of the expansion of this “NGO sector”, and how we must see it for what it is: part of the State, if an unaccountable part.

The Congress continues in a fortnight’s time, further deepening debate amongst members, as we sharpen our understanding of the way history is moving in Mauritius, and world-wide, so that we can

change society and build socialism.

\* In Marx's German original, "arbeitskraft", and in French, "la force de travail".

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**TBC**

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