

Pravāda

Vol. 1 No. 10

October 1992

SL Rupees Ten

Contents

NOTES AND COMMENTS	03
NAM IN A CHANGING GLOBAL CONTEXT:	05
<i>Saman Kelegama</i>	
LINGUISTIC ETHNO- NATIONALISM:	08
<i>Stanley J. Tambiah</i>	
WHITE WOMEN, ARRACK FORTUNES AND BUDDHIST GIRLS' EDUCATION	13
<i>Kumari Jayawardena</i>	
SCRIBES, PHARISEES AND JUDGES	17
<i>Corpus Delicti</i>	
MODERN SCIENCE - WESTERN, PATRIARCHAL MYTH? - Part II	19
<i>Meera Nanda</i>	
SENDERO LUMINOSO IN PERU:	26
<i>Jayadeva Uyangoda</i>	
LATIN AMERICAN MARXISM	31
<i>Cristobal Kay</i>	
NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR 1992	34
OBEYESEKERE'S COOK	35
POEM	36

Pravada in contemporary usage has a range of meanings which includes theses, concepts and Propositions.

AN OPPOSITION OPPOSING ITSELF

'Opposition in disarray' - an oft-repeated cliché, yet one that tells us the simple truth about an important aspect of the political crisis in Sri Lanka that has many and varied implications: that the opposition parties are in a state of confusion from which they have yet shown no capacity, or desire, to extricate themselves. A weak and politically misdirected opposition is perhaps the best asset that a regime, whose popular support is in constant decline, can dream of. Thanks largely to the opposition, Mr. Premadasa and the ruling UNP are sitting pretty; they may yet see Sri Lanka pass into the twentieth century under their unhindered stewardship.

Our concern about the plight of the parliamentary opposition does not emanate from any partisan considerations. Rather, we are mindful of the implications that a weakened and disintegrated opposition will have for the institutional basis of competitive, parliamentary democracy in Sri Lanka.

The problems with which Sri Lanka's opposition have been beset for the past fifteen years have been an extension of the various crises that the main opposition formation, the SLFP, has been going through. The SLFP under the Bandaranaiques represents the accumulation and condensation of all the contradictions that beset the parliamentary opposition in the South: a lack of a political program and direction; a feeble and ineffective leadership with a proclivity towards personal control of the party; an inactive, unenergised and therefore largely introverted second-level leadership; and finally a highly demoralized membership and support base. These are some visible manifestations of the decline of the SLFP

as a political party. The decline of the main opposition party has also extended to the entire parliamentary opposition, crippling its effectiveness. It may not be unkind to say that the SLFP has abdicated its right not only to be the alternative ruling party, but also to be in the opposition at all.

In a way, the present SLFP is a victim of its own electoral victory in 1970, and not necessarily of the crushing defeat in 1977. That victory made the SLFP, initially supported by the two Left parties, a truly authoritarian political formation with party power concentrated exclusively in the hands of Mrs. Bandaranaike and her immediate kin group. 'Family bandyism' was the term used in the mid seventies to describe this development, or rather the decay, in the SLFP. Even as a capitalist party, it could not broaden its capitalist class base and constituencies while in power, because of the highly regulatory state capitalism which it implemented for seven years. Its peasant and middle class social base was meanwhile encroached upon successfully by the UNP under Jayewardene and Premadasa while the JVP kept the educated youth away from the party that was held responsible for the bloody crack-down on the 1971 insurrection. The SLFP's professed socialism that never was—closely associated with food scarcities, bread-queues and enormous economic hardship for the masses—is still an unerased memory for a whole generation, an image which is diametrically opposed to the previously nurtured mother image of Mrs. Bandaranaike. The SLFP leaders in power from 1970 to 1977 in fact sowed the seeds of discontent among almost all social layers and minority communities



Pravāda

Vol 1 No 10
October 1992

Editors

Charles Abeysekera
Jayadeva Uyangoda

Pravada is published monthly by:

Pravada Publications
129/6A Nawala Road
Colombo 5
Sri Lanka
Telephone: 01-501339

Annual subscriptions:

Sri Lanka	Rs. 110
By Air mail:	
South Asia/Far East	U.S. \$ 20
Europe/Africa	U.S. \$ 26
Americas/Pacific countries	U.S. \$ 30

and they have not yet finished reaping the bitter harvest. An angry Ronnie de Mel thundered in parliament in 1977 comparing the Bandaranaiques to the Bourbons; he would find his historical analogy equally apt in 1992.

The bitter leadership crisis of the SLFP sometimes appears macabre and surreal; the dispute-drama is enacted by three members of the same family—mother and son, the mother being supported by a daughter. The mother-son/brother-sister rivalries have been surfacing, with devastating effect, from time to time ever since the SLFP lost power in 1977. The tenacious grip of this rivalry on the party has been so strong that it has not allowed any other leader to evolve, within or outside the clan, so that the quarreling Bandaranaiques could have been sent on compulsory retirement.

This is unfortunate for a political party that emerged in 1952 to break an existing mono-party system, ushering in a competitive two-party capitalist system of democracy into Sri Lanka's political arena. Although the left suffered as a result of the meteoric rise of the SLFP in the early fifties, the existence of two strong capitalist parties was the basis of the resilience that Sri Lanka's parliamen-

tary democracy could boast about for quite some time. More than the UNP, it was also an effective social shock-absorber in the sense that it successfully incorporated within its electoral program extremist social and ideological groups in Sinhalese society.

The disintegration of the SLFP that is now taking place is an act of self-destruction, not a result of being rejected by its constituencies. If the SLFP is rendered irrelevant by the very circumstances of politics, then it should logically create space for another bourgeois political formation. Meanwhile, the Democratic United National Front (DUNF) of Messrs. Athulathmudali, Dissanayake and Premachandra, which could have made political capital of the declining SLFP, has not yet been able to come out with any vision or programme which would enable it to become a force to be reckoned with. However, the UNP appears to treat its new rivals with grudging respect. Judging by the way the Lake House press has singled out the DUNF for attack, the Siri Kotha strategists no longer appear to think that the SLFP is the 'main enemy.'

There is however a larger, and more fundamental, question about the DUNF: to begin with, it is a party which does not seem to know why it ought to exist. The DUNF was created as the recognition of a blunder and failure to remove Mr. Premadasa from his high office and the party. Therefore this dissident party still carries its genetic trait—the pathological resentment of Premadasa. This is a singularly wrong reason for any political party to exist. It is true that the DUNF leaders talked a lot about democracy, clean politics and so on; but all these political arguments were just epiphenomenal to the subjective factor of politico-personal animosities.

Indeed, at the time when the DUNF was created, there certainly was ample political space as well as the need for an authentic bourgeois democratic party. Both the UNP and the SLFP, the two conventional capitalist parties, had moved away from being bourgeois-democratic political formations. In the objective political conditions in Sri Lanka, there was an urgency for a bourgeois-democratic **political** program to be brought to the fore of a reform agenda. A political

settlement to the ethnic question, democratic reforms of the state, corruption-free governance, dissolution of the recently emerged repressive organs of the state, protection of human rights, regime accountability, and an economic development programme with minimal social-dislocationary effects could have constituted the broad programmatic outline of a new political vision. Yet, schooled in the UNP under J. R. Jayewardene's authoritarian tutelage and forced to leave the UNP in the context of a power struggle, those who formed the DUNF stood well outside the main task of the day. Hence its continuing irrelevance as an authentic bourgeois opposition party.

Talking about the bourgeoisie, can Sri Lanka produce a bourgeois political formation of the classical mould at all? Probably not, because the recent changes in Sri Lanka's economy and politics have led to the expansion of a wide stratum of rentier capitalists whose lack of a political civic culture is as astounding as their ability to accumulate quick wealth. Paradoxically, bourgeois democracy in Sri Lanka is a project sans an authentic class backing.

The political confusion created by an opposition in disarray can also have other serious political implications for Sri Lankan politics. As we observed in the previous issue of *Pravada*, counter-state JVP violence is most likely to re-emerge in the context of a weak, disintegrated and fragmented opposition. In Sri Lanka, counter-state politics has always tended to launch its first assault on the opposition in order to impose its hegemony over oppositionist formations. There is hardly any reason for the UNP to rejoice over the SLFP's present predicament, because a fallen SLFP will be ideal ground for the next wave of JVP politics.

It is true that neither the SLFP nor the UNP will make their political calculations along these lines. Intra-party rivalries are so bitter that a Hobbesian state of nature is constantly re-enacted in the political debate. Both the government-controlled and opposition press give expression to the chaos they are in. The only saving grace of this crisis is that the polity is so fragmented that no 'adventurist on horseback' will dare to ride into the present quagmire of politics.

P