

The crisis in The JVP



An exasperated JVP leader Somawansa Amarasinghe gesticulates at yesterday's press briefing. He is flanked by JVP MPs Vijitha Herath and Lal Kantha. Pic Kamal Bogoda

By Nalin de Silva

Except perhaps for a few Trotskyite parties there have been no Marxist parties in the true sense of the word Marxist, in the whole world. The Stalinist parties which are based on Leninism are not Marxist parties as Lenin had revised Marxism to such an extent that Leninism could not be called Marxism or even a variant of Marxism. Lenin deviated from Classical Marxism and replaced the proletariat with the proletariat and peasants knowing very well that there was no industrial proletariat as such in Tsarist Russia at that time. He also decided not to wait for the development of capitalism in Russia, which is a pre requisite for the proletariat revolution in classical Marxism, as without a developed capitalism there cannot be a proletariat to lead the revolution. Without a proletariat Lenin had to depend on Russian nationalism rooted in the Greek Orthodox culture and the idea of party of the proletariat that acted in

the name of the dear proletariat had to be introduced. In China under Maoism this was further revised and a variant of nationalism introduced into the so called class struggle by Lenin was further strengthened. Those who are interested in the revision of Lenin, and weaknesses in Marxism, may read *Marxvadaye Daridhrathavaya* (Poverty of Marxism) which is available free on line at the website www.kalaya.org, and *Apohakaye Rupikaya* (Formalism of Dialectics).

However the Trotskyite parties do not score over the Stalinist (Leninist) parties as the former have not been able to capture state power anywhere in the world speaking volumes for the poverty of Classical Marxism. Even Leninism has gone into that famous place in history very often quoted by Marxists, Leninists, Maoists and others, but still there are parties that are prepared to follow the *gurus* illustrating that the members of these parties have not imbibed the western scientific tradition even though they claim

that their doctrine is scientific socialism. They are no better than Phlogistonists who would cling to the phlogiston theory even after it had been sent to that place in history.

The JVP was born as a Maoist party and claimed that they had been able to adopt Marxism into the Sri Lankan conditions. In other words they had an *achcharu* ideology based on Marxism and nationalism which remained as a mixture and not as a compound in the sense of elementary Chemistry taught at schools. Marxism with its so called class struggle never made a compound with nationalism and remained a mixture in the above sense and described aptly by the Sinhala aphorism *ya deka noratha ratha samaga peheemak netha* (the two ends one red and the other not red would not fuse with each other). Mixtures are bound to separate unlike compounds though some pundits who have recently returned from the west advocate a cultural mixture as if cultures could mix. What has happened in history is that either certain parts

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of one culture have been absorbed into another culture thus invariably changing the second culture or some sections of a population imitating parts of another culture. The imitations, if they remain so without being absorbed die a natural death after some time. The *halantha* words (ending with the "consonant" as in *nil katrol mal* in Sigiri graphics) imitating the Pallawa tradition were dropped within two centuries and constructions such as *gedige* imitating the same tradition were not continued within the Sinhala Buddhist culture, contradicting the masters of mixtures who perhaps do not know anything of the fate of the mixmaster universe in Cosmology.

The mixing of Marxism with nationalism did not last even that long. Within a century the project of Lenin collapsed in the Greek Orthodox countries, and in Sri Lanka we are about to witness the mission of all sorts of Marxists coming to an end. The JVP followed in the Maoist tradition and tried to mix Marxism with nationalism. From the very beginning the party oscillated between Marxism and nationalism, and one of the two doctrines dominated from time to time. Even the first split of the party when GID Dharmasekera and his group were ousted before 1971 could be attributed to this domination by one of the parts of the mixture. The mixture has not worked well in Sri Lanka from the days of the LSSP, VLSSP, CP and other splinter groups and JVP has survived so far due to its appeal to the Sinhala rural educated youth, the so called *ugath gemi tharuna parapura*, who have been abandoned by the very education that they have received.

It has become fashionable to blame Sinhala, the medium of instruction of these youth for all the ills in the society. However, it is not a question of having their education in Sinhala and not in English as the previous generation had, but of the expectations and aspirations that their education has cultivated in them. What has the generation that was educated in English prior to that of the JVP youth given to the country? Absolutely nothing and as a person in the transitional period I know that both these groups are the same in spite of the difference in the medium of instruction, and that they all want to live on the society rather than giving something to the society. It

is the imitative education that all of us are subject to in the schools and universities that is the cause, and there is no point in blaming Sinhala for the problems that have been created. In fact it is the education (and western Christian modernity that has been imposed on us) that has made us uncreative and it is due to this fact that the English educated generation blame the change of the medium of instruction being unable to think of anything else. It speaks volumes for the education that they have received. Content wise I know that my students know very much more than what my teachers knew when they graduated, by comparing the question papers of the past fifty years or so. Certainly my students know much more than I did in Mathematics and modern Physics, when I graduated but they fail to find a "suitable" job, though they have a better knowledge than I had. They may not be performing well at the interviews as most of them are intimidated by the swaying *kaduwa* but if one has a cordial chat with them in Sinhala one would be surprised to find the depth of their knowledge.

When the education was restricted to a few (in English) it was possible to meet the aspirations and expectations of the educated youth but when the numbers became large having been given the same third rate education (in Sinhala) the system could not meet the aspirations and the expectations of the young people. As a person who had the (mis)fortune to grow up during this period I saw how first it became a problem of the Junior School Certificate holders, then that of the Senior School Certificate holders and finally of the graduates. Though many are unaware there is a problem of local post graduates who are being produced in thousands in the humanities and the social sciences. The only solution that the English educated can come up with is going back to English as the medium of instruction thus restricting the numbers and "solving" the problem. In any event the frustrated educated youth were attracted to the JVP that had the magic wand of Marxist socialism. The Sinhala educated youth had been uprooted from their Sinhala Buddhist base, just as much as their predecessors by the western Christian education that they themselves had received. (To be continued)

Nepalese Election

by Gwynne Dyer

Unless the early election returns are completely misleading, Nepal will soon have the first freely elected Maoist government in history: 42 of the 75 seats declared so far (Sunday) have gone to the Maoists. This poses a considerable diplomatic problem for the United States, which still lists the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) as a terrorist organisation and refuses to talk to its leaders, but the crowds celebrating in the streets of Kathmandu don't see it as a problem at all. One hopes that they are right.

The Maoists were certainly terrorists five or ten years ago, at least in the sense that almost all rural guerilla movements routinely employ terror to force the peasants to obey them. But Nepal's Maoists seemed to be at the extreme end of the spectrum, using rhetoric that got them compared to Peru's Sendero Luminoso or even to Cambodia's Khmer Rouge.

But it doesn't feel a bit like Year Zero in post-election Nepal. After a ten-year guerilla war that killed about 13,000 people, the Maoists accepted a cease-fire in 2006 and promised to enter the normal democratic process - or rather, the new democratic process that people hope will become normal, because until 1990 Nepal was an absolute monarchy. Popular demonstrations then forced the king to permit a

form of democracy, but it was so corrupt and ineffective that the Maoists took to the hills in 1996.

The monarchy then proceeded to self-destruct. The crown prince, enraged by the fact that his parents would not let him marry the woman of his choice, machine-gunned nine of his relatives including the king, the queen, and his only brother and sister in 2001 and then killed himself. The late king's brother Gyanendra, a widely disliked man who had never expected to ascend the throne, became king and failed at almost everything he tried, including most importantly the suppression of the Maoist rebellion.

In 2005, in desperation, King Gyanendra mounted a royal coup and resumed absolute rule, but he was forced to surrender his control of the government and the army by massive popular protests in 2006. It was at this point that the Maoists came in from the hills. They agreed to join an interim government with the established political parties, and to abide by the results of a democratic election. Their only non-negotiable demand was an end to the monarchy - and the other parties agreed to that, although it hasn't happened yet.

So the shooting stopped, the bulk of the Maoist fighters gathered in camps to await incorporation into the army, and last week, after various delays, the promised

election was finally held. Local political pundits, foreign diplomats and the large foreign aid community all expected the Maoists to do moderately well, but nobody thought they would actually win. It looks like they have.

They have promised to join a coalition government with the other parties regardless of the election's outcome, and because of the complex voting system they may not get an absolute majority of the seats in parliament. They will almost certainly win a majority of the 240 winner-takes-all constituencies whose results will be known by the end of the week, but 335 other seats are decided by proportional representation and will take longer to decide.

One imponderable is the third of Nepal's 29 million people who live in the Terai, the plains on the country's southern fringe. They are in the midst of a powerful political backlash against the highlanders who traditionally monopolised all official positions - and even the Maoists are mostly highlanders. To complicate matters further, half of the proportional seats are set aside for untouchables or for "oppressed and indigenous peoples." (Sixty different ethnic minorities make up a third of the population.) But the Maoists have special appeal for the excluded and downtrodden, so they will probably get their majority. What then?



Nepali police stand guard at a vote tally center Friday April 11, 2008, in Katmandu, Nepal. Authorities began the arduous task Friday of tallying votes in Nepal's first election in nine years, a historic vote meant to secure lasting peace in a land riven by communist insurgents and an autocratic king. (AP)

The Maoist founder and leader, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, formerly known as Comrade Prachandra ("the fierce one"), now says that democracy is not "an alternative to armed struggle but a logical conclusion." He even follows the Chinese Communist line that creating wealth is the priority, promising to raise annual per capita income in Nepal from \$300 to \$3,000 in ten years, and he accepts that this requires the "capitalist mode of production."

In an interview with the Guardian earlier this month, Prachandra insisted that his conversion from "people's war" to the ballot box was permanent. "Look at all the great revolutions and counter-revolutions in the last century. We came to the conclusion that multi-party competition is a must for a vibrant society, even a vibrant socialist society." There's a reasonably good chance that he really means it, but old habits die hard. Nepal is picturesque, but it has

always been a desperately poor and grotesquely unfair society where most people led lives of grim misery. It certainly needs a social and economic transformation, and it was unlikely that the existing political parties, drawn from the same narrow elite who have dominated the country for centuries, were ever going to bring that about. So the poor majority have voted for the only group in sight that seriously wanted to make that transformation happen.