

Remembering Comrade Navam

by

Comrade SK Senthivel

[The following is a translation of the text of the address in Tamil by Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDP at memorial meetings held in Jaffna and Colombo on, 7.11.2004 and 4.12.2004, respectively.]

Comrade S Navaratnam, member of the Politburo of the Party died suddenly of a heart attack on 08.10.2004. His departure is a great loss to the New Democratic Party. It is not a loss that is easy to bear, since Comrade Navam was a revolutionary communist fighter who integrated himself so closely with the life and the history of the Party. The role played by Comrade Navam in building the Party on the basis of Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought and in carrying forward mass struggles outside the Party was exemplary, most commendable, and worth emulation by young communists.

Comrade Navam is a comrade who has completed forty years in the revolutionary communist movement. Comrade Navam who joined the youth movement of the Party in 1964 as a nineteen year old youth, gained membership to the Party an year later. Comrade Navam who joined the Party as a building worker, through his keenness in learning Marxism Leninism as well as putting it into practice, advanced to a position in the Party leadership.

The year 1964 was the time when revolutionary communist parties emerged anew from the older parties in Sri Lanka and other countries in the course of a fierce ideological struggle between Marxism Leninism and modern revisionism. In Sri Lanka, the new Marxist Leninist party took form under the leadership of Comrade Sanmugathasan. In the north comrades such as M Karthigesan, Dr SV Seenivasagam, and KA Subramaniam were in the vanguard of the revolutionary party. Comrade Navam was among the young comrades to join the party.

Following the founding of the new revolutionary Marxist Leninist party in 1964, a powerful youth organisation was built in the north under the leadership of the party. Similarly, the trade union movement became unprecedentedly strong. Against this background, through the 21st October 1966 uprising, the party made the historical declaration of the revolutionary struggle of the people against caste oppression and untouchability. Lawful and unlawful revolutionary mass struggles were launched on its basis. The people who were depressed by caste made new history through their armed struggle to shatter the shackle of casteism and untouchability.

The struggles against casteism and untouchability became a turning point in history and changed the course of events in society. It was the Marxist Leninist party that was the driving force of these struggles. The youth organisation and the Mass Movement to Eliminate Untouchability served the struggle through hard work among the people. Thus the revolutionary practice of learning from the people, serving the people and mobilising the people was further developed. Through it, party members and members of the youth organisations acquired a variety of experiences from the people and moulded themselves into honest communists. They became exemplary individuals who were at the forefront of struggle. Comrade Navam was one of the most important among them.

We could recall various characteristics that made Comrade Navam distinct. He imbibed the Marxist outlook together with class awareness and enriched it through reading and study. On that basis, he always emphasised the need for a Marxist Leninist party and worked hard to build it. Comrade Navam was an example to others in adopting the basic positions appropriate to a Marxist Leninist, in both theory and practice. He adhered to the principle of 'simple in living and severe in struggle' to his last breath.

Comrade Navam who was warm and friendly in his dealing with comrades and fiends at all levels of the Party and mass organisations, adopted a firm stand with no room for compromise on matters of ideology and dealings with reactionaries with a hostile stand.

The mid-1960s was a period, both nationally and internationally, when the forces of Marxism Leninism were on the rise and there was a revolutionary tidal upsurge. Several who joined the Marxist Leninist party and worked most enthusiastically during that time and were very close to the party turned out to be incapable of endurance during subsequent periods of inner-party splits and temporary setbacks for Marxism and socialism. Such individuals became lacking in will and incapable of facing the new national and international situations.

Many were led astray by the total disintegration and collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of socialist states in east Europe, and the subsequent changes in China, which once offered hope amid these setbacks, that propelled it along the road to capitalism. While at the same time, when a several forces were caught up in the net of globalisation cast by imperialism and confounded by it, and when ideologies of confusion such as postmodernism, neo-Marxism, neo-liberalism were being spread to wipe out Marxism Leninism, Marxist Leninists were actively involved in facing the new challenges. Comrade Navam was among leading comrades in combating erroneous tendencies. In that respect too, the loss of Comrade Navam has left behind a void for us.

Comrade Navam, who was at the forefront of the struggle against caste oppression and untouchability, adopted a firm stand based on a Marxist Leninist position in struggles against national oppression that arose subsequently. He worked actively to carry forward, at a level of consciousness as well as an ideological level, the stand of the New Democratic Party in defining self determination for the Tamil, Hill Country Tamil and Muslim nationalities and, on that basis, to stress the need for granting autonomy.

Comrade Navam joined hands with those interested in social welfare to carry out tasks of public interest such as setting up a community centre cum library in his surroundings with a backward community and through it the work of developing education, economy and culture. He was loved by the public as a comrade who worked with dedication to the people without seeking titles, position or fame for himself.

There cannot be a second opinion about Comrade Navam being an exemplary figure in finding harmony between his political life, family life and public life.

When the New Democratic Party, then Communist Party of Sri Lanka (Left), was founded in 1978, Comrade Navam was among the founder members determined to take the party forward as a party based on Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought. Memories of Comrade Navaratnam who lived as an honest revolutionary communist to his last breath without ever slipping up in his Marxist Leninist ideological stand and in the life he led will be with us forever. His life, work and struggle and the views put forward by him are of value today and will be of value in times to come to the new generation of Marxist Leninists.

The work of Comrade Navam was not confined to the Northern Region. He joined in Party work in the hill country and, Colombo as well. Based on that, he emphasised that the Party should strengthen itself by gaining new experiences and learning new lessons. Comrade Navam participated in the various campaigns and struggles that the Party carried forward on its own and jointly with other democratic and progressive forces against war and in support of a political solution based on the right to self-determination.

In Sri Lanka, over the past quarter of a century, nationalistic thought, ideology and practice have come to the fore against a background of chauvinist domination. At the same time, imperialist conspiracy and intrigue have been intensified and the illusion of globalisation is being spread among the people. Under these conditions, Marxist Leninists need to face strong challenges in carrying forward their programme. This requires unassailable faith in Marxism Leninism, determination to act, faith in the people, firmness and enthusiasm. Losing Comrade Navam who had all these qualities is a great loss to the Party.

Nevertheless, advancing by transforming the sorrow of his loss into strength and by holding firmly to the revolutionary contributions left behind by him is the revolutionary tribute that we could pay to him. It is worth recalling that Comrade Navam frequently reminds us of the advice of Comrade Mao

Zedong's to communist fighters, "Be firm, fear no sacrifice, and overcome all difficulties to achieve victory", and points to the need to act accordingly.

Therefore, let us work to further strengthen the Party and the mass organisations under it in the revolutionary memory of Comrade Navam.

We express our red salutes to Comrade Navam