

NDP Political Seminar

The New Democratic Party organised a seminar to discuss the current political situation in the country. The seminar was conducted in the evening of 11th September 2004 at the Jayasinghe Hall of the Dehiwela-Mount Lavinia Municipal Council.

The Seminar was chaired by S Thevarajah, Attorney-at-Law and Member of the Politburo of the NDP and was addressed by Comrades SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDP, E Thambiah, National Organiser of the NDP, and Comrade Siva Rajendran, Educationist and Senior Lecturer at the Sri Pada College of Education. Their talks are summarised below.

Comrade SK Senthivel

It is now four months since the UPFA government took office. But every evening people take with them to bed their concern and fear about two matters. One is the soaring cost of living rising with each day. The other is the prospect of war breaking out again. It is under these conditions that the government is conducting the economic and political affairs of the country. Without the correct and far-sighted political awareness of these matters and a concurrence of mass struggles to question the handling of the issues, the country faces the prospect of the rapid development of conditions that carry the threat of great dangers and destruction to it.

Under this government, there is not an iota of evidence for the resumption of peace negotiations with the LTTE. While the President constantly assures that she will be negotiating with the LTTE and will under no condition go to war, she has not taken any meaningful step to match her words. The President is in the sad situation of being unable to achieve consensus within the ranks of her own UPFA government about the negotiations. It is under these conditions that an impression is being created that she will be discussing with all the political parties about talking with the LTTE and be setting up a National Advisory Council on that basis. These are ploys to play for time and not ideas for concrete action. Meanwhile, the UNP wants to give the impression that it is speaking with honesty and sincerity about the negotiations. But what is at the bottom of its heart is not a desire to solve the national question but its interest in using the stalemate in the peace process to return to power. Its entire interest is in the next presidential election, and it is actively involved in manoeuvring and working out strategies to that end.

Similarly, the JVP, a major partner in government, is acting with the long-term objective of capturing state power by eroding the base of the SLFP and emerging as a major political party in the South representing the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist aspirations. It is for that purpose that it is at the forefront of opposing the negotiations and rejecting the proposals of the LTTE for an interim self-governing authority.

When we look closely at these matters, we could see that the major political parties are dealing with the matter of negotiations for a political solution that could free the people from the dangerous climate of impending war related to the national question, which is also the main problem facing the country, as mere manoeuvres in their gamble for political power. Consequently, there is the likelihood that the cruel war that lasted nineteen years could return with even bigger destruction accompanying it. Those who will be affected by it will, as in the past, be the Tamils of the North-East and the Sinhalese. However, the influential and the wealthy, irrespective of their race and religion, will not lose or suffer. Instead they will gain from it in many ways. Forces of foreign domination will join them in gaining from it.

The only way to avoid the danger of war, therefore, is to start negotiations with the LTTE, immediately. After nineteen years of war, the LTTE has put forward proposals for an interim self-governing authority. The Tamil people and all peace-loving people want the starting of peace negotiations on that basis and the setting up of the ISGA through mutual concessions and understanding. The NDP is also emphasising the same. By organising this seminar, the NDP has initiated action to carry forward, in collaboration with other leftist, democratic and progressive forces, a campaign among the Sinhalese for that purpose.

Comrade E Thambiah

The increase in cost of living today is choking nearly 90% of the population. The endless rise in prices and fares is creating havoc in the process of obtaining the daily needs of food and other essentials. The two capitalist parties have demonstrated that one is as good as the other in increasing the cost of living while in power. What is amusing is that, when in opposition, they condemn the rise in prices, as if they really feel sorry for the people. But their true interest is in coming to power. The people should recognise the causes for the current increase in prices and fares. The real reason is that the two parties submitted to the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO, which persuaded and advised the governments to adopt policies of liberal economy and privatisation. Thus it has become necessary for the entire working people of the country comprising the workers, including the plantation workers, and the peasants to carry out mass struggles demanding the control of prices and the award of increase wages.

Siva Rajendran

Siva Rajendran drew attention to the variety of difficulties faced by the Hill Country plantation workers. He pointed out that the rise in the prices of rice and wheat, which are the staple food items of the people, has pushed them to conditions close to starvation, while the private sector plantation companies and the unions continue to debate whether the wages should go up by two rupees or three. He pointed out that the dominant political leadership is not opening its mouth on the state of ruin of education in the Hill Country.

He also drew attention to the adverse effects that the proposed Sedhu Samudra scheme will have on the economy of Sri Lanka as well as its geography.

Comrade S Panneerselvam delivered the vote of thanks on behalf of the party at the conclusion of well attended seminar.

Press Release of 29th September 2004 Condemning Police Attack on Members of the Human Right Commission

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party made the following observations in his statement to the media:

The incident where senior officials of the Human Rights Commission were assaulted two days ago inside the police station raised the question whether law and order are being implemented on the basis of democratic and human rights in the Jaffna peninsula? If such was the plight of persons with authority and social acceptance, one could imagine the kind of disgrace and suffering that ordinary people would have to face in the police stations in their everyday life. The New Democratic Party deplores this attack and calls upon the President and the Inspector General of Police to treat this matter seriously take the necessary action.

The statement further added that the persons who were abused and attacked by the officer at the Police Station, Jaffna were none other than Ruwan Chandrasekera and his fellow Inquiring Officer of the Human Rights Commission (both senior officers of this organisation that has the authority of a High Court in defending human rights) and the UN Human Rights Advisor, Patrick. The three acted within their powers when they went in course of their duty to the Police Station to inquire about a person who had been arrested. The police, instead of giving a fair reply to the inquiry, acted high-handedly and spoke in a racist manner. This has happened at a time when people are made to believe that there is some change in the practices of the time when law and order and human rights were trampled underfoot in the North. This incident has frightened the people and caused concern about the prospects of complaining about future human rights violations.

Hence the New Democratic Party emphasises that the incident where members of the Human Rights Commission were attacked by the police should be inquired at a higher level and action taken on it.