

INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION BULLETIN

August, 1966

DOCUMENTS ON CEYLON

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(Published as a fraternal courtesy
to the United Secretariat of the
Fourth International)

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THE BALANCE SHEET OF THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE

OF THE L. S. S. P.

- 1) The LSSP began in 1935 as a radical petty bourgeois party led by a group of intellectuals who had come under the influence of Marxism. This party evolved in a few years into a party of a working class character with pronounced anticapitalist outlook. In 1940 the party eliminated from its ranks a group of avowed stalinists. In 1942 the party adopted a new program and entered the Fourth International as a section of the BLPI which was a unit of the Fourth International.
- 2) The party gained a reputation as Revolutionary Marxist and became integrated among the working class and wage-earners. Through trade union work the party was fully in the class struggle and succeeded in winning the confidence of a very large section of the working class including a section of the plantation workers. (Agricultural workers of Indian origin)
- 3) The party stood for complete national independence and remained throughout intransigent in its opposition to imperialism. The party generally took a leading part in the movement for democratic rights. Concretely, the party fought to abolish the Head-man system or the Kachcheri system (the colonial and semi-feudal conditions in government administration). The party fought against the oppression of peasants by the land owners and also against police oppression. The party did not fail from the outset to raise the problems of the urban petty bourgeoisie.
- 4) The party was able to gain a base for itself in the coastal areas of the Western and Southern provinces and in certain parts of the rubber growing areas of the low country. This support for the LSSP movement in the urban and rural areas in these regions was reflected in the parliamentary strength of the movement as early as 1947. Both sections of the LSSP obtained 16 seats in a parliament of 95 members. And where the party had won parliamentary seats the party also succeeded in winning seats in several local bodies in the urban and rural areas.
- 5) The party fought discrimination against and oppression of the linguistic, caste and religious minorities. The party's intransigence on the question of support for minority rights helped the party to win support from these minorities.
- 6) In 1939 the LSSP opposed the imperialist war. This led to the incarceration of several leading members and the illegalisation of the party for the duration of the war.
- 7) Despite the efforts of the Stalinists who systematically sought to use their connection with the USSR and socialist countries to attract the working class and the radical petty bourgeoisie and the youth, the LSSP remained the strongest influence among the working

class and the radical petty bourgeoisie and the youth till recently.

- 8) In the 1953 Hartal (August) the LSSP was clearly in the leadership of a mass uprising against the UNP government. The party organised and functioned in the principle of democratic-centralism. Freedom of discussion and criticism existed, and more or less regular party congresses were held and election to office was generally fair and democratically conducted.
- 9) When the language issue was raised by Bandarnaik in 1955 the party suffered an erosion in large sections of its petty bourgeois support to the SLFP both in the urban and rural areas.
- 10) In the 1956 general elections the party entered into a no-contest pact with the SLFP. As this was only an electoral pact without any programmatic agreement or mutual support the political positions of the party remained unchanged.
- 11) In relation to the first Bandaranaike government (M.E.P.) the LSSP attitude was defined as "responsive co-operation" and in parliament the party remained in the opposition.
- 12) Between 1956 and 1958 the outbreak of communal conflict and riots between Sinhalese and Tamils there was a further erosion of the party's petty bourgeois support in the urban and rural areas. The party nevertheless remained intransigent on the question of the rights of the minorities and on the grant of citizenship to the so-called stateless persons of Indian origin.
- 13) In the strike wave that commenced in 1957 and which continued up to 1959 the party was on the side of the workers and generally in the leadership. But the party participated in these strikes in a tailist fashion due to the attitude of "responsive co-operation" to the MEP government.
- 14) After 1958 the party stepped up its opposition to the MEP government but still functioned within the framework of "responsive co-operation."
- 15) In March 1960 the LSSP entered the field of parliamentary elections making a bid for a majority of seats on a program of an LSSP government (Anti-Capitalist Program). An attempt to arrive at a no-contest agreement with the MEP of PHILIP and the CP did not materialise. The LSSP remained opposed to both the SLFP and the UNP.
- 16) Election results showed only 12 seats for the party out of 151 seats. A UNP minority government remained in power for 33 days.
- 17) In July 1960 general elections the LSSP entered into an election agreement with the SLFP with mutual support. The party campaigned for an SLFP government. The international strongly disapproved of the election agreement with mutual support and the call for an SLFP government. The position of the International was that only a

no-contest agreement with the SLFP was permissible.

- 18) With the formation of the 2nd SLFP government led by Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike the LSSP sought to openly support the government through a proposal of entering the SLFP parliamentary group. As the government disapproved of the proposal, the LSSP parliamentary group remained in the opposition benches functioning within the framework of support of the Sirimavo government.
- 19) With the worsening of the mass situation in relation to the SLFP government, and with the maturing of the class-struggle situation in 1961, the party supported the movement for trade union unity around the 21 demands.
- 20) In 1963 the party appeared to adopt the perspective of the United Front of the working class parties and organisations (LSSP, CP, MEP, CWC, & DWC) for struggle against the SLFP government and the capitalist class.
- 21) But the further evolution of the perspective of the United Front led to the United Left Front between the LSSP, CP and MEP, on a purely parliamentary reformist program.
- 22) The United Left Front kept the door wide open for alliance with "progressives" within the SLFP. The LSSP leadership (N.M. Perera) took the initiative in coalition talks with the SLFP.
- 23) At a special conference of the party held in June 1964 the LSSP by majority vote decided on coalition with the SLFP. Party split took place leading to the formation of the L.S.S.P. (Revolutionary).

SUBJECTIVE & OBJECTIVE FACTORS IN THE COLLAPSE OF THE LSSP MOVEMENT AND THE LSSP AS A REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST PARTY

- 1) From 1935 to 1942 the party during this period was anti-imperialist and generally reformist.
- 2) Between 1940 to 1945 (the war period) the incarceration of a large number of leading members, illegalisation of the party, and also the party split in 1942, seriously restricted the functioning of the party. The migration of the party leadership to India in 1942 brought the party activity to a virtual halt. In this context the adoption of a new program and the entry into the Fourth International in 1942 did not result in an organisational or ideological growth of the party.
- 3) The decision of the LSSP to function as the Ceylon unit of the BLPI only exposed the party to chauvinist attacks and gave the party an alien character without creating any living links between the Ceylon masses and the workers and the toilers in India in the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle.

- 4) When the split took place in 1942 principled or programmatic differences were not revealed. But the further evolution of the N.M. Perera wing showed a marked petty bourgeois orientation. The unification should have been preceded by re-establishing the basic Trotskyist positions on fundamental questions relating to the Ceylon revolution. But as it happened the unification took place with openly reformist perspectives and motivated by an election defeat in a parliamentary by-election. Thus the unification led to the dilution of the Bolshevik wing by a mass of alien elements of a petty bourgeois character. In the situation the unification effected in 1950 did not lead to consideration of party perspectives in the light of political changes in the country and the new political scene in South East Asia.
- 5) The party failed to make a study of Marxism Leninism-Trotskyism. Very early in its history the party was in a state of ideological stagnation which was to block the party in its revolutionary orientation. The rank-and-file of the party remained practically starved of knowledge of marxism-Leninism. No serious attempt was made to undertake the education of the party. The translation into Sinhalese and tamil of selected Marxist literature was not seriously undertaken. Production of suitable journals for the party remained unorganised and without perspective.
- 6) In the context of the virtual ideological barrenness of the party no serious attempt was made to understand the dynamics of the Ceylon revolution although the party generally accepted the theory of the Permanent Revolution. The problems of a backward country under imperialist domination and the concrete conditions of Ceylon's economy and its social and cultural setting failed to impress the Party. Within a more or less Parochial milieu the party failed to develop any relations with the anti-imperialist movements in India and the countries of South East Asia. Nor did the party seek to ascertain the concrete forms in which the colonial revolution was unfolding in these countries.
- 7) Without realistic perspectives and without appreciation of the problems of the Ceylon revolution the party moved more or less empirically in the political scene. The paramount questions of the concrete forms of the process of the democratic revolution and its passing over to the socialist stage failed to engage the attention of the party.
- 8) Failure to understand the process of the democratic revolution led to the failure of the party to develop concretely the anti-imperialist struggle. The party did not progress much from the stage of slogans like "complete national independence." The party did not seek to mobilise the masses in the perspective of the anti-imperialist struggle through appropriate concrete issues.
- 9) In 1936 the LSSP entered the election struggle on a slave consti-

tution (the Donoughmore Constitution) in the context of protests by the Tamil minority. The central issue of the 1936 situation was the Constitution and the demand for complete independence could have been concretized through the slogan and demand for a Constituent Assembly. This was also the means for raising to the forefront all questions relating to national independence, minority rights and other democratic freedoms.

- 10) The war period between 1939-1945 brought to the surface the anti-imperialist currents in India and the countries of South East Asia. The "Quit India" movement led by the Indian National Congress took place when the LSSP leadership was in India in 1942. Even their physical presence in the scene of anti-imperialist struggle could not bring home to the leadership the reality of imperialism in Ceylon and the relevance of the anti-imperialist struggle in this country.

While the party opposed the war activity in furtherance of the attitude to the war was not undertaken as the party was not guided by the aim of mobilising the masses for anti-imperialist struggle.

- 11) At the termination of the war the party merely looked on at a deal what was being arranged between the native Ceylonese bourgeoisie and the imperialists in the form of the Soulbury Constitution.

Despite the party's position on the question of the Soulbury Constitution and the deal between the native bourgeoisie and the imperialists the party leaders came out of the imperialist jail only to concentrate on the task of winning parliamentary seats, and not to mobilise the masses against the deal between the local bourgeoisie and the imperialist through an attack on Dominion status and the Soulbury Constitution and through a call for a Constituent Assembly.

- 12) The failure of the LSSP to take the favorable opportunity during and after the war to mobilise the masses in an anti-imperialist perspective led to a virtual vacuum for the native bourgeoisie to begin their manoeuvres for the deal with imperialism. Thus it happened that a native bourgeoisie without even a real political party to call their own and divorced from the masses reaped a harvest when they got for Ceylon the so-called independence in 1940.

- 13) The reaction of the LSSP to the deal between imperialism and the native bourgeoisie through the Soulbury Constitution was in the nature of criticism of and opposition to the deal as "fake independence". But the LSSP apparently did not base its policies on this evaluation of the deal as the party proceeded to participate in the elections to the new parliament according to the Soulbury Constitution without raising the issue of the Constitution.

14) The new political status of independence of 1947 and the resulting new political situation should have called for a re-assessment of the political scene in Ceylon and a fresh approach to the problems of the Ceylon revolution. This was not done in 1947 or after.

15) The problems of the Ceylon revolution after 1947 were related to:

(a) the completion of independence and the solution of minority problems and the elimination of colonial and semi-feudal forms in the economy and the administration;

(b) the guaranteeing of the leadership of the working class in the democratic struggle and the development of the anti-capitalist struggle.

16) As it happened, after 1947 the party functioned as if the democratic tasks were completed. While emphasising the anti-capitalist struggle the party took up the democratic issues as and when they came to the surface.

17) The disfranchising of the plantation workers of Indian origin in 1949 was a rude reminder to the party not only that the native bourgeoisie had turned reactionary in relation to these tasks but also would oppose the completion of the remaining democratic tasks. What the imperialists granted by way of democratic rights were withdrawn by the native bourgeoisie as the means of maintaining their class-rule.

The mergens of the FP and the rallying of the Tamil masses to this party was also a warning to the party that the Tamil minority problem was looming large in the political horizon and that the native bourgeoisie would intervene only to suppress minority rights and to distort the democratic movement to channels chosen by them to further their own objectives.

18) From 1947 the party's main pre-occupation was in the parliamentary field. Extra-parliamentary struggle remained more a theoretical concept than strategy in the living movement. In any event the extra-parliamentary action did not take the party a more acquiescence in class struggle when it appeared. The party did not in fact take the leadership in the class-struggle but sought to place itself at the head when the class-struggle had come to the surface. The Hartal of 1953 August was more a spontaneous direct action of the masses than the result of conscious preparation by the party. The Hartal struggle would have reached a much higher level of organisation and militancy if the LSSP functioned in the perspective of mass direct action against the capitalist state.

19) If the parliamentary arena was the center of the activities of the party it could have been expected that the party was concerned to

maintain and extend its support among the petty bourgeois masses.

- 20) The movement of the petty bourgeois masses towards Bandaranaike and the SLFP had begun after the 1952 general elections.
- 21) The intervention of the petty bourgeois masses in the political scene and the growing influence of the SLFP and the consequent coming change in the political situation was reflected very sharply in the party crisis of 1953. One third of the LSSP membership led by Henry Peris and William Silva split from the party. The section of the party led by Henry Peris and William Silva split on the issue of supporting the SLFP, led by Bandaranaike. This group categorically stated that revolution was not possible in Ceylon as there was no real working class and as a tactic it was necessary to "use Bandaranaike as a gun rest to shoot the bourgeoisie". This perspective led this group to call for support of a Bandaranaike led government. The LSSP leadership fought this tendency as naked Stalinism and Menshevism and the split was recognised as a removal of a petty bourgeois grouping from within the party.
- 22) The split way of the Henry Peris led group was only a temporary solution of the crisis that manifested itself in the LSSP in 1953. That was the occasion for a thorough investigation into the reasons for the emergence and growth of a strong Stalinist group within the party. If the crisis arose through the Bandaranaike question then it was time for the party to take up the SLFP question and deal with it. This question was none other than the question of the so-called national bourgeoisie and their role in relation to imperialism and the uncompleted democratic tasks.
- 23) Here was also the whole question of the application of the theory of the Permanent Revolution to Ceylon. The party failed to probe into the roots of this crisis. The urgency to understand correctly the burning issues that reared it - self within the party and the imperative need to educate the party on the basic Trotskyist positions in relation to a revolution in a backward country did not seem to bother the leadership. It was also the failure of the International that it did not intervene in the ideological-arming of the party at a opportune and favorable conjuncture.
- 24) Thus the LSSP ideologically unprepared for the change in the political situation which paved the way for a parliamentary majority for the Bandaranaike led SLFP.
- 25) It followed that the LSSP was in a state of uncertainty on the correct attitude to the 1st Bandaranaike government -- The MEP government. The policy of "responsive co-operation" was the fig-leaf to cover the support for a government of the "so-called national bourgeoisie". "responsive co-operation" did not mean mere critical support of progressive measures. It meant much more. It meant criticism within the framework of support.

The ideological confusion in the party leadership was unconcealed. This was again the time for the intervention of the International with the aim of collectively considering the new situation and tactics of the party.

26) With the policy of "co-operation" to MEP government, the party took a step back in the class-struggle. The strike wave that commenced at the end of 1956 on the question of a cost of living allowance saw the party tailing behind and not in the real leadership of the working class. In a tailist fashion the party lined up when the working class was moving into strike action. A bold policy of leading the working class into action against the capitalist class would have raised the class struggle to higher level. But the party found itself wedged in between two forces-- the movement of the working class and the movement of the petty bourgeoisie. While the working class traditions of the party tended to take the party with the working class, the strong parliamentarist perspective that was gaining in the party leadership took the party along the road of winning the petty bourgeois masses and not through establishing the leadership of the working class through struggle.

27) With the end of the 1st Bandaranaike government in 1959 the parliamentarist illusions had strengthened and the perspectives of the party were parliamentary reformist. The decision of the party to bid for a parliamentary majority by contesting a majority of seats followed logically. It was true that the election program of the party was anti-capitalist in character. The call for a Sama Samaja government was a call to the voters to elect an anti-capitalist government.

The results could by no means be a surprise. The elections registered only the parliamentary strength of the party -- 12 out of 151 seats. But in the situation the election results could not help the party to see reality and dispel illusions. And clarity on the question was hardly possible when the International itself supported the LSSP election policy in March 1960 and the decision to bid for a parliamentary majority.

28) From March 1960 to July 1960 was but a step, from a bid for a parliamentary majority to form a Sama Samaja government to an alliance with the SLFP to form a "progressive" anti-UNP government came naturally to the party. Hence the party's election agreement with the SLFP with mutual support and the call for a Bandaranaike government.

The International correctly intervened and opposed the election agreement with mutual support and the call for an SLFP government.

29) The party conference of June 1960 which decided on the election agreement with the SLFP with mutual support revealed that the party was at the brink of the precipice. Despite the clear state of degeneration of the party leadership the conference also

revealed that there was strong opposition to the openly rightist course led by N.M. Perera and the desire of a minority to protect and defend the program of the party. If the International took the opportunity to intervene on the side of the opposition in the perspective of organising a Left Opposition on a revolutionary platform there might have been positive results.

- 30) Beside registering their disagreement on the 1960 July election policy the International sent Comrade Livio to Ceylon after the elections. Comrade Livio met the CC of the party more than once and he had discussions with individual members of the CC and with others. Comrade Livio could not have failed to take note of the serious state of degeneration and desorientation of the leadership of the party. Comrade Livio could have noted the openly contemptuous attitude of N.M. Perera and Doric regarding the International. Further Comrade Livio would have known that an idea of forming a faction to fight the rightist course of N.M. Perera was mooted by several members in the CC.

In any event since July 1960 it was known to the International that an N.M. Perera trend -- a trend clearly alien to Marxism existed within the party and remained the largest influence in the party.

- 31) The decision of two comrades of the Parliamentary Fraction Edmond and Meryl to defy the party whip at the voting on the Throne Speech amendments was indicative that a Left Opposition within the party was articulate in their disapproval of the party line. In fact it is noteworthy to recall that the party leadership was willing to take the parliamentary fraction into the parliamentary group of the Sirimavo government if the P.M. was agreeable. In this situation the International functioned in the expectation that the degenerated LSSP leadership would correct itself and enter on and return to the road of revolutionary Marxism. There was no basis that this expectation could be realised.

- 32) Far from indulging in any self-criticism the LSSP leadership opportunistically resorted to oppositional activity in relation to the SLFP government whenever the working class and the toilers showed disapproval or resentment against specific actions of the government. And when the SLFP government was clearly becoming unpopular the LSSP leadership sought to prepare for election as dissolution of parliament was a possibility since the beginning of 1963. It was in the perspective of winning a majority at the parliamentary elections that the LSSP leadership introduced a proposal for a united front between LSSP, CP and MEP. The real motivation of the leadership was revealed in the formation of the United Left Front (LSSP, CP and MEP). The ULF program clearly left the door open for a political alliance between the ULF and the SLFP, as the opposition in the CC expressly pointed out. This ULF finally received the approval of the International even though it was essentially a parliamentary reformist and opportunist front without any

perspective of a mobilisation of the masses against the SLFP government or of a development of the class struggle. The CC opposition of 14 members had fought for United Front of the LSSP, CP, MEP, CWC and DWC and other working class organisations for struggle against the capitalist SLFP government and the capitalist class. The CC opposition consistently opposed a mere parliamentarist front and voted against the ULF agreement in the CC. The support of the International for the ULF agreement in this context amounted to a blow struck at the crystallisation of a Left Opposition in the party to the now completely reformist and degenerate leadership of the LSSP.

- 33) From the ULF (Parliament Reformist Front) to coalition with the SLFP was but another step. The further evolution of the LSSP leadership to open abandonment on the program of the LSSP and the betrayal of the revolutionary movement and the working class through acceptance of Ministerial portfolios in a bourgeois government was became irreversible.

PART II

- 1) The LSSP by majority vote at a special Conference held in June 1963 decided to accept office in the SLFP government on the basis of 14 points programatic agreement. The so-called 14 point program was a list of reforms which the SLFP government was able to accept within the framework of its own program. Thus this agreement, without taking the SLFP out side its own program led the LSSP to surrender its own anti-capitalist program. Specifically, the LSSP changed the former position on the language question and on the question of the citizenship rights to plantation workers.
- 2) The minority of the LSSP opposed the proposals for coalition of the N.M. Perera led group and of the Leslie, Colvin led group on the ground that it constituted abandonment of Revolutionary Marxism. After the resolution of the N.M. Perera led group on coalition was accepted by the Congress the minority separated itself from the majority and left the Congress.
- 3) The LSSP minority organised itself as the LSSP (R) and since then has been accepted as the only section of the Fourth International.
- 4) The entry of the LSSP into the SLFP government on a so-called 14 point program did not change the class character of the SLFP. The policies of the new government in the First Throne Speech aimed at obtaining as far as possible a popular basis for the maintenance of capitalist class rule in Ceylon. In relation to the working class the coalition government pusued the wage-freeze policy and the LSSP Ministers publicly called upon the workers to work harder than before.
- 5) In the Throne Speech debate that concluded on the 3rd of December 1964 the parliamentary fraction of the party voted against the government on an amendment of an opposition MP --Dahanayake which

expressed "no confidence in the government as it has miserably failed to solve the pressing problems of the people such as unemployment the high cost of living and housing". The coalition government was defeated on this vote.

- 6) The defeat of the government was consequential to a split in the SLFP-led by a Minister.
- 7) On the question of December 3rd voting of the parliamentary fraction of the party the International was of the opinion that the voting on the amendment of MP Dahnayake was wrong as that action could have helped our political enemies to identify the party with the Rightists who voted for the same amendment. Nevertheless the International held this view that it was correct to have decided to vote against the government even though that meant the defeat of the coalition government.
- 8) The general election situation was a contest for a parliamentary majority between the SLFP-LSSP-CP alliance and the UNP alliance. The FP appeared to campaign independently. The LSSP (R) intervened independently in opposition to both the SLFP-led alliance and the UNP-led alliance.
- 9) In the case of the UNP in the election struggle the SLFP, LSSP and CP directed its propaganda principally to win the Sinhala Buddhist voter while the UNP sought to use Buddhist religion not only to win the Sinhala Buddhist but sought to discredit the coalition for alliance with so-called Marxists.
- 10) The LSSP (R) had 4 candidates in the field. In its election policy document the party stated that the "Party is and will not directly or indirectly support or sustain a government of the SLFP or any combination of the SLFP with the other parties. The party will patiently explain that the election struggle is between the SLFP and their allies and the UNP and their allies as a contest as to which of them is to be in control of the capitalist state machine in the interest of the maintenance of bourgeois property relations in alliance with imperialism. There cannot be any question of the party supporting the SLFP candidates just as there can be no question of the party supporting the UNP candidates." We stood for the "independent intervention of the working class and toilers in the election struggle." The party called for a United Front of all working class parties and organisations in association with and at the head of the radical sections of the petty bourgeoisie that are capable of being mobilised on an anti-capitalist and democratic basis"

In regard to the support of the party to the candidates of the LSSP (Reformists), CP(Moscow) and CP (Peking) CWC and DWC the party will determine the positions after nominations in the line up of these parties in the elections" (election resolutions)

- 11) The election results gave the UNP 66 seats; SLFP 41; LSSP 10 out of 151 seats. The LSSP (R) lost deposits in all four seats and failed to create any noticeable impact in the election.
- 12) The UNP formed a government with the support of the SLFP, MEP, FP, TC and JVP.
- 13) The post-election policies of the SLFP-LSSP-CP was and is remains openly communalist. The SLFP propagandist of the anti-Indian and anti-Tamil line is non other than the notorious and rabid Sinhala racialist R.G. Senanayake who has taken the place of racialist Rajaratte. The LSSP Sinhala journals have been accusing the UNP of seeking to grant the demands of the Tamils, and the plantation workers. The CP (Moscow) through its paper "TRUTH" (Aththa) excelled all others in its crude and open comunalism.
- 14) The SLFP-LSSP-CP alliance is pursuing a common policy in relation to the working class. Far from seeking to mobilise the workers for action against the UNP-led government these parties are seeking to perpetuate the division within the trade union movement. They have no struggle perspective even in relation to the economic demands of the workers.
- 15) The SLFP-LSSP-CP alliance has no anti-imperialist perspective although they seek to be critical of the pro-omperialist moves of the UNP-led government.
- 16) The SLFP-LSSP-CP alliance is functioning on an election perspective. They could in a limited way associate themselves in working class struggle.
- 17) The contest of the mass situation is the disorientation and disunity of the working class movement in the context of the collapse of the anti-capitalist movement coinciding with the achievement by the bourgeoisie of a fair measure of unity and a high degree of class consciousness.
- 18) The present is an unfavourable climate for the growth of the revolutionary tendency and therefore unfavourable for the development of the Revolutionary Marxist Party.
- 19) In the context of a line of continuation of the politics of coalition by the SLFP-LSSP-CP alliance it is imperative for the party to seek and being about an anti-capitalist orientation of the working class and toilers by consistently exposing the treacherous Stalinist theory of the so-called progressive or opposition role of the so-called national bourgeoisie of Ceylon in relation to the democratic tasks facing CEYLON.

A NOTE ON SOME SPECIFIC SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS THAT CONDITIONED
THE EVOLUTION OF THE LSSP MOVEMENT.

- 1) The working class of Ceylon included the plantation workers in the tea and rubber plantations and other workers and wage-earners in the government and the private sectors. While the plantation workers had been long ago cut off from their rural moorings in South India and had undergone a process of forced proletarianisation through the conditions of regimentation in recruitment and later through settlement in virtual labor camps in estates, the rest of the Ceylon workers, and wage earners who were generally Sinhala workers had unconcealed links with the land remained for a long time in the milieu of petty property owners.
- 2) It was among the latter category that the LSSP had its base although the party had connections with the plantation through very limited trade union work. The party was, from the outset, thus exposed to petty bourgeois pressures through its own working class base. If the party had succeeded in establishing a strong base among the plantation workers it might have been possible for the more proletarian influences of the plantation workers to act as a counterforce to petty bourgeois and alien pressures on the party.
- 3) With the disfranchising of the plantation workers in the context of the opening of the parliamentary arena without the advantage of living links with the more proletarianised workers which would have to some extent helped the party to resist Sinhala chauvinism. As it happened, with the party becoming completely parliamentarist the party jettisoned the principled position of the party concerning the rights of plantation workers and the minorities.
- 4) The fact that the largest concentration of workers in the most developed capitalist sector i.e. the plantation had a working class that appeared alien to the toilers of Ceylon in that they not only were recruited from India but have up-to-date been segregated from the rest of the workers and the rural population created from the outset a split situation in the working class movement in Ceylon. In the situation the working class of Ceylon has not so far been able to assess its own strength. Thus the impression has gained to some extent that Ceylon's working class cannot mobilise sufficient strength for a confrontation with the bourgeoisie.
- 5) Very soon after the commencement of British rule Ceylon's economy was an economy of advanced capitalist property relations. The Portuguese and the Dutch had during their occupation of the coastal regions and certain parts of the interior of the low country struck a blow at the feudal system that prevailed in the country. With the superimposition of capitalism by the British through the opening of the plantations what still remained of the feudal economy of Ceylon was largely destroyed. Quite early there were capitalist property relations in the countryside. The peasants were

largely free-holders of land. These were congenial conditions for the growth of the native land owning bourgeoisie. Hence the basis for a viable anti-feudal movement did not exist. Hence also the meagerness of the anti-feudal aspects of the democratic movement that appeared belatedly and in distorted forms.

Central Committee LSSP (R).

THE COALITION AND AFTER
By V. Karalasingham.
(Submitted to the World Congress)

The United Secretariat had invited the Ceylon Section to submit a document on "The whole LSSP Experience." The experience of the last 18 months is so rich and varied that the political lessons of this period would undoubtedly be of profit not only to the movement in Ceylon but also to the International Trotskyist movement. Clearly what the International intended was that the Ceylon leadership should submit a detailed report including, it is needless to say, an evaluation of our prognosis in the light of experience. The document adopted by the majority of the BP evades the central purpose. The greater part of the official document is devoted to the history of the LSSP from the foundation to the formation of the coalition government, the facts of which are familiar to all sections of the International. The period after June 1964 is dismissed in a few pages, and what is worse even then no attempt whatever is made to re-examine in the light of experience the general line of the party in the period under review. What the official document does is mainly to restate either by way of extracts or by condensation earlier documents and resolutions of the positions taken by the party in the period after the formation of the Coalition government.

The formation of the Coalition government in June 1964 while it undoubtedly represented a complete betrayal on the part of the LSSP leadership nonetheless constituted evidence of the growing radicalisation in the country. This latter fact was not taken account by the party and the Coalition was looked upon purely in terms of the LSSP's abandonment of its program. The entry of the LSSP into the government and the constituting of the LSSP (R) required the latter to determine its tactics in relation to the Coalition government. The denunciation of the old leadership for its betrayal could never be the substitute for the correct tactics in relation to a Centre Left Coalition. Of course having regard to the circumstances of the formation of the Coalition government and the enormity of the betrayal by the old leadership it was inevitable that in the early weeks at any rate the party's propaganda should have been concerned with the exposure of the old leadership. Looking back it is now clear that a grossly disproportionate time and energy were expended on this work while the party completely neglected to work out the tactics which a revolutionary party of the left must adopt towards a Centre Left Government.

This situation in which the party found itself was not something altogether unfamiliar although as far as Ceylon was concerned this was the first time that the recognised party of the working class was collaborating in a bourgeois government. Such participation always without exception generates widespread illusions in the masses. In Ceylon this was increased a manifold times because the working class party that was drawn into the Coalition represented in the minds of the masses the most revolutionary formation in politics, despite all its admitted short-comings. The party's main task should have been to help the masses to shed these illusions so as to enable it to assume leadership of the mass movement and to take it beyond the artificial limits imposed by the bourgeois Coalition. The accomplishment of this presupposed the recognition of the clear fact that in the initial period of the Coalition government mass sympathy and enthusiasm was with the government. In fact this should have been the point of departure for the determining of the party's tactic.

For a number of reasons the entrenched capitalist interest in Ceylon representing primarily the interests of the plantation owners and imperialist comprador interests organised in the UNP immediately welcomed the formation of the Coalition government. The absorption of the LSSP into the government immediately strengthened the weak capitalist government as the threat of the struggle for the 21 demands was definitively removed. The LSSP leadership were now in the role of the traditional reformists, and this represented a long term gain to the capitalist class as a whole. Further the entry of the LSSP cleared the road for the UNP as the only serious alternative to the government.

However, following the first budget, these sections who represented the decisive interests of the property owning classes in Ceylon abandoned their earlier policy and openly declared their active opposition to the Coalition. While the party correctly assessed the overall purpose of the Budget as providing an incentive to native industrial interests it failed to fully appreciate the extent to which the older property owning interests were adversely affected, e.g. the moratorium on the Export of Dividends, the higher incidence of the Wealth Tax, the Penal Tax on residential property etc. The Budget also envisaged the relaxing of one of the Excise Regulations imposed in colonial times which would have permitted wider tapping of Toddy (Coconut Wine). Capitalist reaction in Ceylon mounted an offensive against the coalition ostensibly against the proposed indiscriminate tapping of Toddy but in fact to safeguard its property interests which were seriously threatened if the budget proposals were made law. The coalition like all good reformist relied not on mass awakening and mobilisation to meet the growing offensive of reaction, but on bureaucratic and contradictory measures and manoeuvres at the top to take the wind out of the sails of the right wing. On the one hand it withdrew its proposals for the free tapping of toddy and on the other declared its intention to take over the Lake House Group of Newspapers, the principal propagandist institution of the comprador interests of Ceylon. The latter proposal along with an earlier decision of the Coalition government to take over the printing and

publishing of school text books which affected another powerful group of native property owners (M.D. Gunasena & Co.) soon created a veritable front of powerful native capitalist interests against the government. In fact the big bourgeoisie of Ceylon gave public notice that it had no confidence in the executive committee, then managing its affairs, that is, the Coalition government.

In this situation the party continued to be obsessed with the betrayal of the LSSP leadership and failed to take stock of the new situation which was rapidly developing. The editorial board did however focus attention on the mobilisation of the right wing forces (vide articles by comrade Kamal Wickramasekera and others). But this was not the result of the analysis of the changing political situation made at higher party level but rather the reactions of individual members of the editorial board. In fact the majority in the governing body of the party was so strongly wedded to the views that the main task of the party was the unmasking of the LSSP leadership that even a proposal to seek a joint meeting with the LSSP on the occasion of the 12th anniversary of the Party was turned down. This attitude persisted even as the offensive of the right gained in the intensity. As was to be expected the preoccupation with the task of unmasking the new traitors to the working class steadily distorted the party's political perspectives and rapidly led to a deplorable situation wherein the party could not even sense in time the new co-relation of class forces.

The subjectivist approach was soon to catch the party on the wrong foot when the question of the Press Bill of the Coalition government came up. The party negatively opposed in particular the Final Press Bill which sought to take over the Lake House Group of Newspapers in language and in terms not altogether different from that used by the Press Barons and the right wing opposition in general. It failed to assess objectively the full implications of this bill and in particular how to utilise in a revolutionary direction the mass awakening following the agitation for the take over of the Lake House Press. This would have required of the party at the very least that it accept in principle the need and justification for measures against the capitalist owners of the newspaper industry. The difference between the party and the broad left supporting the Coalition would thereafter have continued on what is the best and the most effective way in which the power of the capitalist press could be broken in the interest of the working class and the left generally. But unfortunately the party simply refused to take any position which would have implied support for any measures against the power of the capitalist press. It waged its campaign solely under the abstract slogan of the freedom of the press which in the concrete conditions of Ceylon meant the freedom of the capitalist press. The proposal that the party advance its own slogans to fight the press monopoly was firmly turned down as this would have implied even indirectly support to the action contemplated by the Coalition government. But here precisely was that pre-eminent situation, which imperatively called for the advancing of transitional slogans. The failure of the party to vigorously campaign on a realistic program

which would strike at the power of the Press barons but maintain unfettered the democratic right of a free press prevented the party from staking a serious claim to leadership of the masses following the LSSP-CP reformists. It also alienated the party from these sections. And, what is worse more errors of greater magnitude followed with the regularity of a recurring decimal.

The unqualified defense of the "Freedom of the Press" i.e. the failure to agitate for alternative measures to break the power of the private press magnates was relentlessly driving the party into the lap of the right wing opposition. It was not surprising therefore that two of the POB should propose that the party vote for the common right wing amendment to the Second Coalition Throne Speech. Although the proposal was defeated by a bare majority in the POB the sponsors on the same day conveniently found a way out of the difficulty created by the POB's rejection of the proposal to support the common amendment of the ultra-right. The parliamentary group along with one of the sponsors of the proposal committed the party's vote to an amendment proposed by a right wing independent Mr. W. Dahanayake, An ex-Prime Minister.

Accordingly on 3rd December 1964 when this amendment was voted our parliamentary fraction too voted for it along with the UNP-led ultra-right wing opposition and the SLFP right wing which on this day broke away to join the UNP. The error of the vote of December 3rd is so obvious that it is not proposed to go into this aspect here. (See also "The Lessons of December" by Comrade Nimal Vitharana in the Party Internal Bulletin.) Indeed the United Secretariat very rightly dissociated itself on this action. But what must be stressed is that the party was presented with a unique opportunity to correct so flagrant an error and that this went abegging. All the party need have done was to refuse ratification and to issue a full and frank statement to the country, explaining the party's own decision on the question of the common amendment and disowning responsibility for the action of its parliamentary fraction since it did not conform to the spirit of its earlier decision. However when the POB met within 24 hours of the vote on Mr. Dahanayake's amendment the proposal to refuse ratification was defeated with only one member voting for. Not even the lapse of a whole day could awaken the POB to the gravity of a Himalayan blunder.

Within a few days the error of the vote was brought home in the sharpest manner possible. The masses at first stupefied by the conspiracy of forces which defeated the government soon awakened to the danger of the combination and on the 9th of December there was held the biggest mass political demonstration in Colombo. It is true the leadership of this demonstration placed very restricted objectives in keeping with its own outlook and gave essentially parliamentarist and constitutionalist perspectives. But the party by voting in the way it did and thereafter not repudiating this action completely cut itself off from this demonstration. Its voice naturally was not even heard or its own slogans raised.

The isolation was now complete and the party went into the election not with a policy which flowed from any known principle but determined entirely by the need to justify an ad-hoc, improvised, impressionistic and capitulationist vote. One must look to the literature of the Third Period under Stalin to find anything comparable to what the party said and did in this period. Here was an election where the united ultra-right was in full cry having already tasted blood in its parliamentary coup-de-tat of December 3rd, and not even the open and defiant anti-Marxist crusade of these sections could move the party to summon the masses to defeat these forces. Instead the party operated with generalities. The capitalist character of the leading partner of the Coalition the SLFP was sufficient in their eyes to treat the compradore UNP and the Coalition on an equal footing.

The party completely ignored the real disposition of class forces and sought to find justification for its policy in purely formal similitudes between the UNP and SLFP leadership. What the party forgot was that once the SLFP had succeeded in taking the CP and the LSSP with it, it assumed leadership of the mass movement against the UNP; Neither the severe limitations of the bourgeois leadership nor its treacherous character could in any manner justify the party's abdication from the fight against the UNP. Indeed the task of restoring the leadership to the revolutionary party of the working class demanded that the party be in the fore-front of the struggle vested with the usurpers of the coalition. For all its ultra-left phraseology the party at the very best adopted an abstentionist attitude in the struggle against the UNP. It neither joined in it nor did it place before the masses the revolutionary program to defeat the UNP.

The dogged persistence in the errors of the past has now compelled a section of the party to revise certain fundamental propositions of our movement. The distinction between the compradore and the liberal bourgeoisie has not only a long ancestry but is an important distinction. True in terms of history this difference has no bearing since both the compradore and liberal bourgeoisie are counter revolutionary but the former is the direct agent of imperialism while it is well known that under certain circumstances, the latter plays an oppositional role in relation to imperialism. The difference has an important bearing on the tactical problems of our movement.

Rome

27th November 1965.

THE CEYLON QUESTION AND THE EIGHT WORLD CONGRESS

A report by V. Karalasingham

The Eight World Congress of the Fourth International lasted only five and a half days and this time proved inadequate for a full discussion of the many matters that came up before the Congress. I myself arrived only after the Congress commenced. The day after my arrival the two delegates from Ceylon were summoned to the meeting of the Credentials Committee. The Chairman of the Committee raised the question of the allocation between the delegates present of the total votes of the Ceylon Section. Promptly Comrade Edmund Samarakkody stated that he was entitled to exercise the votes of the two absent delegates from Ceylon. While making it clear to the Credentials Committee that my interest was in politics and not in votes, I nonetheless expressed my surprise at the presumptuous claim of Edmund Samarakkody for the votes of the absent delegates, particularly because the election of the four delegates was on the basis that these comrades represented four distinct currents within the C.C. of the party and that Edmund Samarakkody himself on several occasions had characterized one of the delegates as an agent of Healy. I stated that it was unprincipled for Edmund Samarakkody to exercise these votes. I told the Chairman that I was not insisting on a ruling and accordingly Edmund Samarakkody exercised the votes of the absent Ceylon delegates. I have no doubt that had I not been present he would have exercised my vote too.

According to the agenda of the congress the whole of the Thursday session was earmarked for a discussion of Ceylon and England but, unfortunately it was not till late Friday evening that the Ceylon question was taken up for discussion. The discussion on the International political resolution however gave an opportunity for the examination of some aspects of the problems of the movement in Ceylon. Unfortunately, this resolution was distributed to the delegates only a few hours before the discussion which commenced on Thursday. In the third part of this resolution under the section the crisis of leadership of the Colonial Revolution the following is stated:

"In Ceylon, the unions, embracing one million members, had expressed enthusiastic agreement for a program of "21 points". A campaign should have been launched behind the slogan "power to the United Front of the Workers Organizations" (including the Unions in order to bring in the Tamil plantation workers) in order to carry out the program. This campaign should have sought to mobilise the masses outside of parliament. Instead, the reformist leadership of the Kanka Sama Samaja Party engaged in the shameful operation of joining a coalition government with the party of the national bourgeoisie. This operation could only divide, demobilise and desorient the masses, ending in returning the United National Party to power, the party of the comprador bourgeoisie. The pro-Mocow Communist party, which had promulgated this very line for years, obviously

ly

also shared the responsibility for this betrayal."

Comrade Edmund Samarakkody moved an amendment which among others sought to delete the characterization of the United National Party as the party of the comprador bourgeoisie of Ceylon. I opposed this amendment. In fact, this is the first occasion the International in an authoritative document had made this characterization and that the S.L.F.P. is the party of the National bourgeoisie. The old leadership of the LSSP had never drawn this distinction and was satisfied in labelling the United National Party as the party of the capitalist class while, in its best days, called the SLEP the alternative party of the capitalist class, and later, the party of the lesser capitalists. The lack of precision in the class definitions of the SLEP and the UNP is at the root of much of the confusion in the Trotskyist movement in Ceylon over the last decade or so. The clarification on this point is an important gain.

Else where in the same section one paragraph made the following important observation: "In Ceylon the mass movement is on the political defensive for the first time in years due to the victory of the United National Party". This one sentence is a downright condemnation of the political line followed by the Ceylon Section since December 1964. It was not surprising therefore that the person responsible for this line should move an amendment in the following terms: "In Ceylon the mass movement is on the defensive for the first time in years due to the disruption and disorientation of the working class and toilers arising from betrayal of the LSSP consequent to their entry into the bourgeoisie SLEP Government which strengthened the forces of capitalist reaction". With this alibi Comrade Edmund Samarakkody sought to exculpate himself from responsibility for the disastrous consequences of his policy which ensured that the party was not in the forefront of the fight with its own program and slogans to prevent the victory of the UNP." In fact the party did not even make up the rear of the fight, since under the leadership of Edmund Samarakkody it stood in the sideline. I opposed this amendment. The final section of the International resolution defined the tasks of the Ceylon section as follows:

"In Ceylon, the LSSP (R) after organisational consolidation, will resolutely orient toward recruiting and politically educating young workers and towards patient work in winning the best former Trotskyist element who have been disoriented by the political opportunism of the LSSP (Reformist) leadership. The elaboration of a specific program of transitional demands corresponding to the pre-occupation of the urban and rural proletariat and the poor peasantry and giving concrete form to the slogan for a workers and peasants government will constitute the principal weapon for attaining the objective."

Comrade Edmund Samarakkody moved an amendment to the following effect: "In Ceylon the LSSP (R) will function in the perspective of building an independent revolutionary mass party. In its general line the Party will be guided by the recognition of the need of a united

front of working class parties and organisations in the perspective of action in defence of the class positions of the working class against the Government and the capitalist class".

The time allotted for discussion on the political resolution was inadequate. In this time I could only outline my opposition to the first two amendments. Comrade Germain who had moved the resolution in his reply stated that the first two amendments were totally unacceptable and in regard to the third amendment he suggested that it be referred to the I.E.C. I then requested that I be permitted to attend the I.E.C. discussion on this since I had no time to present my views on this amendment. This was agreed to.

Late on the following evening, the World Congress discussed the Ceylon situation. During the preparation for the World Congress it was proposed to the Ceylon Party to prepare a document on the whole L.SSP experience and it was further suggested that a rapporteur would as usual introduce it. This would have signified that the document prepared by the P.O.B majority carried the virtual authority of the World Organisation but when this item was finally taken up someone proposed that the congress hear the two delegates from Ceylon who held opposing views and because of the lack of time, the questions arising be the subject of an international discussion. The proposal had one merit in that it saved the world congress from stultification. It would indeed have been scandalous for an official rapporteur of an international congress to have presented so puerile a document as the one prepared by the P.O.B majority. Implicit in the proposal to hear the opposing views from Ceylon was an equal division of time between the speakers but as Comrade Edmund Samarakkody protested the Chairman agreed to give him more time. But this raised almost unanimous opposition from the delegates and the praesidium reconsidered its decision and ruled to allocate equal time to the two Ceylon delegates.

Comrade Edmund Samarakkody spoke first and conveniently used his allotted time to trace the history of the LSSP up to the formation of the Coalition in June 1964. He had nothing to say on the controversial questions.

My speech followed the lines of the document which I had submitted to the congress entitled "The Coalition and After" and is annexed to this report and drew particular attention to the fatal turning point, viz., the failure of the Party to advance a suitable transitional demand when the Coalition proposed to take over the Lake House group of papers. Comrade Edmund Samarakkody obtained permission to reply. As far as I was concerned even had he been granted the rest of the night I was absolutely confident of his inability to meet the essence of the argument presented by me. His reply evaded the issues raised by me. He however, made an absolutely false statement of fact at which I proposed but was not given an opportunity to reply. Since in his report he states "when Comrade Karlo wanted some alternative proposals to be put forward regarding press monopoly the Party printed and distributed a leaflet on the subject prepared by Comrade Karlo"

I take this opportunity to characterise this statement for what it is - a lie .

When the Coalition Government first mooted its proposals on the Press I wrote a series of articles in the Party's Sinhala Paper and in the final instalment entitled "How to break the monopoly of the Press" (see World Outlook 6.11.64), I proposed five specific measures which could be implemented by any Government seriously concerned in breaking the private monopoly of the press. As the question of the Press gained political importance in the ensuing weeks, I urged in meetings of the P.O.B that the Party should agitate along the lines indicated in the final instalment of my articles though not necessarily in identical terms. Only one member of the P.O.B (Com.Prins Rajasuriya) and Osmund Jayaratne who was present at one meeting saw any merits in the proposal while most of the others including Edmund Samarakkody were opposed to any transitional measures against the Press since this implied an attack on the 'Freedom of the press'. Since the P.O.B could not be persuaded, a group of comrades on their own initiative and responsibility issued the articles which appeared under my name as a separate pamphlet, not it is needless to say in the name of the party, but in the name of 'International Publishers'. And for the purpose of the record I sent the English original to the World Outlook when the P.O.B. at a meeting late in October 1964 finally refused to adopt the proposals.

The I.E.C. met at the morning session on the next day but it was clearly pressed for time since the building had to be vacated. At this hurried meeting I spoke very briefly as Comrade Pierre who presided said I had five minutes for my views. There was no proper discussion and I am not aware of the final form of the section dealing with tasks in Part VIII of the international resolution. I said that the projection of the slogan of a united front of working class parties at the present time in Ceylon was ultimatumist in character and completely ignored political realities. Our point of departure is the existence of the coalition and we must not hesitate to engage in united front activity with the coalition as a whole, whenever an issue presents itself. There is nothing in principle which should inhibit us. As an example I cited the oil companies compensation issue and the accompanying secret clauses to the agreement between the Ceylon Government and the foreign oil companies and said that the party at least should have called for a joint meeting with the coalition to protest at the compensation payment, and demand the abrogation of the secret agreement which gave fresh concessions to the oil companies. In this instance the Party missed an opportunity and lost the initiative because the leadership had no conception of Leninist united front activity. I reminded the I.E.C. that one member of the Editorial Board (Comrade Famal Wijesekera) did in fact suggest this line but Comrade Edmund Samarakkody opposed it. When I said this Comrade Edmund Samarakkody at the I.E.C went to the defensive, did not meet the argument and merely said that I should have raised the matter in the P.O.B. Comrade Germain intervened to propose a compromise formula to take in anti-imperialist action of this nature but I stated earlier

I am not aware of the final formulation. In this connection, I may add that almost at the time the I.E.C was discussing this question of united front activity with the coalition as a whole, our youth comrades at Peradeniya in Ceylon gave an object lesson in the working out of the tactic which not only enabled the entire student body of the Ceylon University to engage in action but gave to our comrades the virtual leadership of the movement - the first major action of students in Ceylon's history.

It is most unfortunate that the problems of the movement in Ceylon came up for discussion only incidentally viz., for a few minutes at the I.E.C, for 30 minutes during the discussion on the international resolution and for a little longer time in the general discussion in Ceylon on Friday night. In fairness to the world leadership it must be stated that when it proposed the appointment of a Commission to report on Ceylon at the I.E.C meeting before the world congress it showed an awareness of these problems. It is however a sad commentary on the conduct of affairs in the International that the source of my information that it intended doing so is the following priceless passage in the report of comrade Edmund Samarakkody: "I happened to be at a meeting of the Secretariat (US) held the day before the Congress where the questions of commissions was discussed. Apparently it had been the intention of the Secretariat to set up a Commission of the Congress to report on a so-called (sic) Ceylon question. When this question was mentioned at this meeting I inquired the purpose of such a Commission. The idea of a commission on Ceylon was then dropped without further comment". One can understand comrade Edmund's sensitivity in the matter since no bureaucrat anywhere voluntarily submits his conduct to examination, although the self same individual would show no hesitation to probe the trivia of another as comrade Edmund Samarakkody did when he sat on the British Commission. But as far as the international leadership was concerned there is clearly no justification for its abandonment of its original proposal, however irksome this may have been to Comrade Edmund Samarakkody and whatever may be the majority he claims is behind him. Marxist politics has nothing in common either with the game of diplomacy or the art of numerology and whatever the opposition from comrade Edmund Samarakkody the leadership should have set up a political commission on Ceylon and thereafter had a full and frank discussion at the plenary session. At all times an international is primarily a political leadership - this is doubly so in the case of our international in the present phase - and therefore it should never have accommodated Edmund Samarakkody who for very obvious reasons was shy to discuss the political problems of Ceylon in an international commission. The errors of the Ceylon party - the attitude to the press take-over, the vote in parliament, general election policy, united front etc., have brought revolutionary politics to resemble closely the grotesque caricature which our enemies have made of Trotskyism in the past. But fortunately these grievous blunders are the errors of the Ceylon Party. The energetic political intervention of the world party could salvage much, particularly to restore the image of Trotskyism in the eyes of the advanced workers and militants of Ceylon.

Colombo - 6th April - 1966

3. TWO LETTERS FROM THE U.S. TO THE LEADERSHIP OF THE
CEYLON SECTION. (EXCERPTS).

The excerpts are from the correspondence of the U.S. of the F.I. written in the beginning of 1965 (February 10 and April 26). They both concern the problems the Ceylon section of the F.I. faced at the time of the Coalition Government, before the parliamentary elections, and immediately after the elections which brought the coalition down. These problems are discussed in the documents of the Central Committee and of Com. V. Karalasingham.

In a forthcoming bulletin we shall publish the positions of the ceylonese comrades and the U.S. about the problem of the United Front today.

x x x

February 10, 1965.

The IEC had a long discussion on Ceylon, in which comrade Upali intervened and took firmly the stand of the LSSP (RS). I want to give you here the gist of the long discussion the IEC held on Ceylon. Opinions of the members were more or less unanimous, except the representatives of the Pablo tendency, who have now made a turn towards the Leslie-Colvin group, and have voted against above-mentioned resolution.

We understand completely your primary duty towards the Ceylon working class, and especially its vanguard: irreconcilable defence of the immediate material interests of the workers against the employers and the state, and patient propaganda for defending socialist class consciousness against the desintegrating effects of the LSSP leadership's betrayal through entering the coalition government with the bourgeoisie.

For these reasons we think it correct for the LSSP (RS) to participate in the election campaign with its own independent candidates, even if the chance of winning a seat are slim. We also liked your statement opposing the idea of a United Front of all working class parties to the coalition bloc between the LSSP, the CP and the SLFP.

Two important tactical matters are however not solved automatically, once you took this correct stand. We should like you to give careful consideration to these matters, especially because the history of our movement (and of the revolutionary movement in general) has always in danger of falling into the opposite danger of sectarianism. The leadership should be conscious of that danger and react sharply against it.

The first tactical matter is that of making the independent stand of the Party crystal clear to the masses. Our opposition to the coalition government springs from diametrically opposed reasons to that of the UNP. We must prevent by all means a situation to be created in which the masses could confuse our opposition with that of the UNP.

We think therefore that it was been a mistake to vote the for the no-confidence motion which brought the government down in Parliament, and which was presented by the right-wing.

The fact that the formal contents of the motion was not incorrect seems to us of secondary importance. The important thing is that the Party's MPs voted together with the UNP, the extreme right-wing communalists and even the nominees of British imperialism. This gravely endangere the independent picture of the Party in the eyes of the broader, politically less conscious masses. This in turn helps resolutely anti-capitalists of the LSSP (RS) as "objective" allies of right-wing reaction.

The correccy thing to do, in our opinion, was to abstain on that motion, and to prasant your own motion of no-confidence, with such a clear anti-capitalist contents as to make it impossible for the UNP and the nominess of the British imperialism to vote for your motion.

There is a classical historical precedent of a similar situation with we think you to be familiar: this is the case of the co-called "Red Referendum" in Prussia, in 1931. Prussia was governed by a coalition government between social-democrats and middle-of-the-road bourgeois parties. This government, under the pressure of the big economic crisis, took a series of highly unpopular measures like eduction of income of state employees etc. After their great victory at the general elections of 1930, the Nazis launched a referendum to have new regional elections in Prussia, in order to eliminate the coalition government which, they said, was now a minority government, and highly unpopular. The CP, under influence of its ultra-left "third period" line, supported in fact the referendum (i.e. called upon the workers to vote "yes", while telling them that by acting in this way, they would turn it into a "red referendum" against capitalism and fascism). But in the eyes of the broad masses, this objectively meant that fascist and communists had acted together against the social-democracy. Trotsky condemned this as a very great tactical mistake, which practically dealt a dead blow at any prospect of a united front between the social-democracy and the communists.

The similarity of the situation lies in the fact that, being a minority party, you can only hope to achieve a real breakthrough towards anti-capitalism in Ceylon if you succeed in mobilising the LSSP and CP influenced masses in favor of a united front based upon a anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist platform. This must be considered your main strategical goal for the whole period ahead. Any tactics which, instead of bringing you nearer to that goal, puts additional obstacles on the road towards attaining is, must be considered incorr-ect. And it seems obvious to us at least from the facts in our possession, that your vote mingled with those of the UNP and extreme-right wing reactionaries in Parliament, has enlarged the gulf between the Party and not only the LSSP leaders, but also the LSSP influenced broader masses.

In general, your aim must be to prevent the impression to

be create that you are primarily anti-LSSP. The stress of your action and declarations should constantly fall upon anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, and your line of approach towards the LSSP rank-and-filers and especially the LSSP-influenced (and CP influenced) broader masses should be that of presenting them with a prospect of a more efficient fight against the UNP and the right wing in general, a more efficient fight against imperialism, by linking the fight against capitalism with the fight against imperialism.

The second tactical matter is never to forget the fact that Ceylon is still a semi-colonial country (and not an imperialist one), that liberation from imperialism remains the immediate task, that any form of mass mobilisation for anti-imperialist goals is highly progressive, even if it done under guidance or at least tolerance of the coalition government. You know of course of the general marxist rule that it is necessary to support all anti-imperialist measures of the colonial bourgeoisie, however hesitant or contradictory they may be. We understand from your publications and communications, as well as from comrade Upali's intervention at the IEC that there is no disagreement between us on this matter.

However, you should not be taken by surprise if at some turn of events, the coalition government is forced to take some anti-imperialist steps, as the SLFP-government itself was forced to do e.g. in the matter of the US oil companies. It is not excluded that measures of such a kind, or even more spectacular ones, could be taken at some time, as reaction against the pressure of imperialism.

You should not forget that Ceylon is not an isolated island, but is part and parcel of a South-East Asian area, where tensions between imperialism and anti-imperialist forces are growing stronger and stronger, both as a result of the South-Vietnam civil war (and its possible and probable overspilling towards Thailand), the conflict between Indonesia and british imperialism around Malaysia, the overall tension between China and the US imperialists (which is slowly creating a new wave of struggles in the Philippines e.g.), and the Sino-Indian conflict. At any moment, a sudden twist of events can place the Ceylon government before a choice either to buckle under before British imperialist pressure (e.g. a demand for establishment of military basis or for use of airfields, if it comes to open war between Indonesia and British imperialism) or to strengthen its resistance towards imperialism. In this last case, we should have to support without reservations any anti-imperialist step, and press for the maximum of mass mobilisation, as the best guarantee against the imperialists' and their agents taking over.

In such an event, the bourgeois nature of the government would not be changed (in this we differ strongly from the Pablo faction, which sees a change of nature of that government as a result of the LSSP and CP support), and you would be correct to maintain a position of principled opposition towards that government. But your duty would be to support any progressive anti-imperialist measures it takes,

and clearly to consider imperialism as the first and main enemy of the Ceylon masses. Any other position would be suicidal for the party.

April 26, 1965.

Thanks for your letters of February 24 and of March, posterior to the elections. We have preferred to answer you only after the burden of the election was off your shoulders, so that we could continue our discussion in a manner not influenced by the burdens of current tasks.

We can answer the question posed by your letter of February 24 squarely: the LSSP (RS)'s MPs should of course have voted against the resolution approving the Throne Speech of the coalition government. But it would be pure formalism to see no difference between such a vote and a vote in favor of a motion of censure of that same coalition government, tabled by the right wing.

In your opinion, the criticism advanced by Trotsky against the "Red Plebiscit" tactics of the "third period" stalinists does not hold in your case, because in Germany, there was the danger of immediate overthrow of bourgeois democracy by a right-wing dictatorship, whereas in Ceylon no such danger existed at the moment of the Throne Speech debate. May we point out to you that no such immediate danger existed in Germany 1930-31 likewise? In Trotsky's detailed polemics on this question ("Lessons of the Red Plebiscite"), the main point made by Trotsky was the impossibility of convincing the social-democrat workers of forming a united front with the CP, if the CP supported a legal move by the fascists to overthrow the coalition government in which the social-democratic leaders participated. The parallel with the situation in Ceylon in 1964 fits completely here.

We say that coalition governments, far from stopping the danger of right-wing reaction, help to bring about the victory of the right-wing; in fact, we made that argument at the very moment when the coalition government was formed in Ceylon; and events have confirmed our prognosis. For that very reason, it is illogical and inconsistent, both from principle and effectiveness, to vote any confidence motion in such a government. But for the very same reason, it is impossible to vote for a motion which wants to bring down that government in favor of a more reactionary one.

You draw the parallel with Lenin's attitude at the time of Kornilov's putsch during the Russian revolution. But the parallel is, in our opinion, a wrong one. We never proposed to you to make a united front with the coalition government against the UNP (in fact, Lenin proposed just such a united front with Terensky against Kornilov!). What we said was, in fact, that long before there was any Kornilov threat, the Bolsheviks would never have voted for a motion, say, of the cadets, or of a more right-wing formation, to bring the coalition

government down. Their slogan was: "Throw out the capitalist ministers." It was not at all: "it is indifferent to us whether the coalition government is replaced by a government of workers parties, or by a government composed only by bourgeois ministers". You'll easily note the difference.

The trouble starts, we presume, because you are caught in the correct but insufficient formula characterizing the SLFP as a capitalist party, and the coalition government as a bourgeois government. We have no dispute with these definitions. We fully approve them, and we fully approve the conclusions which should be drawn from them, to wit that collaboration with such a government equals class collaboration and betrayal for an organized working class movement as that of Ceylon.

But this correct formula does not answer all aspects of the situation. Just to give one example: when the SLFP government seized the US oil companies, you were not against coming out in critical support of the measure. You were also in favour of supporting the huge mass demonstration against the imperialists' sanctions in answer to that measure. In other words: you cannot forget that Ceylon is not an imperialist but a semi-colonial country, and that in a semi-colonial country the national bourgeoisie can take some progressive measures of an anti-imperialist character, under certain circumstances, even if basically, it continues to act as an agency for imperialism. The duty of revolutionary Marxists is to give critical support to such measures, without abandoning one moment their principled opposition to the bourgeois government and their independent class stand in favour of the proletariat.

Do you believe that the UNP will ever undertake anti-imperialist measures - limited ones, of course, but real ones! - as the SLFP took? We don't think you do. Therefore it is incorrect to say that there is no difference at all between the SLFP and the UNP. In fact, while both are bourgeois parties, are we wrong to assume that the first one represents the (very weak, wavering and ineffective) industrial entrepreneur class, mainly supported by the Sinhalese speaking petty-bourgeois masses of Ceylon, where as the second one is the classical representative of a compradore bourgeoisie? Even "The Newsletter" states that the victory of the UNP constitutes a "swing to the right". But how could one speak of a "swing to the right" if both parties were practically identical as for their political outlook?

We think that such an analysis is not only in closer conformity to the reality of Ceylon, but also puts you in better position to fight for winning the LSSP (reformists) rank-and-file to the party. You can accuse their leadership of having objectively helped the UNP to win (as we predicted from the beginning). You will admit, that this argument would have been more convincing). You will admit, though, that this argument would have been more convincing in the eyes of the LSSP rank-and-filers, had the LSSP (RS)'s MPs taken more independent a stand on the "no-confidence" motion of the right-wing in Parliament.

For the rest, we generally agree with your election platform. We

have only remarks to offer on two points.

We would have advised paying greater attention to Ceylon's social nature as a semi-colonial country, and to its geographical situation in the Far East, in the throgs of the colonial revolution. The old LSSP always took to insular positions, isolating Ceylon from its international context. At the moment when the Vietnam revolution is confronting the whole world with its realities, and every social class is aligning itself with one of the camps present according to its class interests, it is unfortunate that the election platform of the Ceylon section of the IVth International had nothing to say either about the colonial revolution in general, or about the Vietnam civil war in particular. You give the pro-Chinese CP a free field on those issues, which are due to become increasingly popular among the students, the unemployed youth and generally radicalized circles. We can easily understand that today, only a minority of people are ready to interest themselves with these issues. But for a revolutionary party, an election campaign is not just to win votes, but also to make its program known. And solidarity with the colonial revolution, with the fight against imperialist intervention in Vietnam, Malaysia, etc., is an important part of your program, which should have appeared in your election platform.

Secondly, although we note the parts of your program relating to nationalisation of paddy land holdings, granting crown lands to landless peasants and expropriation of private land in favor of those peasants, we are not sure whether these points are sufficient to influence the huge mass of the rural poor and unemployed villagers, which are the natural and necessary allies of the urban and agricultural working class, if it wants to capture power in Ceylon.

Another of the basic weaknesses of the old LSSP in Ceylon, which incidentally was an important source of its degeneration, was insufficient attention paid to the peasant question in general. Unable to get a strong foothold among the village poor, it looked for a shortcut towards establishing the workers-peasants alliance, and naturally came to see the SLFP as a "peasant" party, and the alliance with this party as an alliance with the peasantry (a classical opportunist mistake made in semi-colonial countries, by centrist or neo-reformist currents). In this field also, the LSSP(RS) should correct and overcome the old weakness of the LSSP, and devote itself to a thorough analysis of the question in Ceylon, ending with the elaboration of a serious program of conquering the village poor.

The results of the elections will certainly have caused a big crisis in the old LSSP. It was a correct idea to address an Open Letter to its rank-and-file, and you should vigorously pursue that course. The election results have shown that the Ceylon section only influences a small part of the old LSSP's mass basis. Conquest of the larger part of this mass basis remains your central task, without which no real alternative leadership for the toiling masses of Ceylon will be built. For to build such a leadership, it is insufficient to proclaim oneself as leaders; one has to be accepted by at least a significant minority sector of the masses as well.