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Sri Lanka

“President and Government should be held responsible for Easter Sunday carnage”

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At least 253 people were killed and 500 were wounded due to the suicide attacks carried out by religious extremists on Easter Sunday on three churches and three luxury tourist hotels in Sri Lanka. The Left Voice, an organisation of socialist activists in the trade unions and peoples’ struggles, unconditionally condemns this barbaric attack.

We express our sorrow to the families of the affected. It is disclosed that this attack was carried out by National Thowheed Jamath, an organisation based in Sri Lanka. In the meantime, Islamic State (ISIS) has claimed responsibility for this atrocity.

Full responsibility for all the damages to lives and property in this tragic violence should be taken by the Government of Sri Lanka. Even though intelligence information including the identity of some of the individuals who exploded the bombs were received by the police around 4 April. The government did not inform the public of this credible threat nor take any preventive steps to stop this disaster. The Secretary to the Ministry of Defense (who has since resigned following public outrage) confirmed that he was aware of this intelligence but didn't act on it, believing it to be exaggerated.

While the public is rightly criticizing the entire government for its criminal irresponsibility, the President and Prime Minister are passing the buck onto others including each other. The opportunity for Sri Lanka to become a bombing ground has been created by the unstable political situation for which both leaders are responsible.

It is necessary to understand the socio-economic roots of this type of extremism among young Muslims. Sinhala chauvinist forces which strengthened after the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009, considered the local Muslim community as its next antagonist.

The Muslim community, especially in the Eastern province, is economically disadvantaged. The post-war campaigns against halal food certification and the slaughter of cows as carried out by Sinhala racist forces were actually campaigns against Muslim commercial interests. The war-time Secretary to the Ministry of Defence (and brother to the former president), Gotabhaya Rajapakse protected the Bodu Bala Sena (‘Buddhist Army Force’) movement who led those racist campaigns. He aspires to be the next President of the country with the backing of those same forces.

The Muslim businessmen of Colombo city have been under threat from Sinhala racists who organize boycotts of their stores as well as attack them, with no protection from previous and present Governments. It appears that some of the suicide bombers were well-educated children of rich businessmen. The context of anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia has clearly helped ISIS and other reactionary groups to penetrate into the Muslim community in Sri Lanka.

The present opposition leader and ex-president Mahinda Rajapakse has stated that he too was aware of the possibility of terror attacks. He complains that the present government enabled this situation through arrests of a few intelligence personnel implicated in abductions and disappearances during his regime. Now all three parties, the President, the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition are committed to strengthening the security forces and police by introducing new oppressive laws. The President has declared a state of emergency which threatens democratic rights. Other authoritarian steps include blocking access to social media platforms and the cancellation of May Day rallies next week.

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The crisis in the present Sri Lankan Government (Ranil-Sirisena) which developed since 26th October 2018, has now shattered the Sri Lankan state. It is now an opportune moment to rally round all the forces to push this Government out of existence which is strongly echoing in the peoples' sentiments demanding the Govt. to resign. If we delay in the task of defeating this Government, a right wing coup will be hatched in the very near future.

A dangerous turn is that the government has requested the support of imperialist countries such as the United States, labeling them as international terrorist activity. At this moment operatives from FBI & Scotland Yard are active in Sri Lanka. We should not exclude the possibility of imperialist intervention in the name of crushing terrorism.

The most dangerous situation is the possibility of attacks against Muslims all over the island by racist forces. The Left forces should take the leadership to avoid this type of situation. One important step towards such activity is to hold the May Day despite the state ban. Further, progressive forces should come forward to defeat the government's open invitation to foreign intervention.

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Colombo, 26 April 2019

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