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For the right to self-determination of Ilankai Tamils

14 December 2006, by **Vickramabahu Karunarathne**



The right of self determination of the Tamil speaking people is the foremost issue in modern Lankan society. Though it is related to the Tamil vs. Sinhala conflicts narrated in various chronicles, the present form arises out of an inability to construct a democratic, plural, civil society. Though Sri Lanka (the Sinhala equivalent of Ilankai) is considered a nation by the United Nations, Sri Lankan nationality is yet to be recognized by the masses here. People in Lanka consider themselves as Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burger, Veddha, etc. and rarely as Sri Lankans. In that sense it is a Society of Nationalities. As a Marxist, I consider nations are really built on a capitalist market economy. I refer to a community as a nationality if that community of people is in conscious struggle to be a nation but not yet matured fully as one.

The word nation is loosely used to represent any group of people with a common language. But such a definition is not useful in understanding problems of nationhood in modern society. The identities Sinhala and Tamil were used in Lanka for a long period of time stretching as far back as 3rd century BC. But the

entity represented by the term Tamil or Sinhala is very different at different times.

For example, Sinhala was used in the Anuradhapura period to represent a Vansa, a clan of people associated with a particular agriculture based on a special irrigation system. These people were considered to be of Aryan descent. Aryans were the nomadic people who invaded India around 2000 BC and overran Dravidian clan societies clustered around the Indus valley and elsewhere. It is widely believed that around 500 BC some Aryan people came to Lanka and overpowered the Dravidian society that existed there. Thus there were Vansa clashes in that early period of history. These Vansa clashes continued until the end of the Rajarata Civilization and the emergence of semi-feudal society in the wet zone. In this society divisions were based more on trade caste groups.

When we look at the Kandyan kingdom before the takeover by the British, we see that the word Sinhala is used to represent the ruling elite. The Radala-Mudali elite referred to themselves as the Sinhala. In this scenario not only the other caste groups in the Kandyan areas were left out of the Sinhala identity, but also the entire community in the low country who spoke Sinhala Language

as their mother tongue. At this stage caste was more important than any other clan identity. The word jathiya, the Sinhala word used in general today to represent a nation, was used widely at that stage to represent caste. Even today if one asks a Kandyan villager about his jathiya he may assume that as a reference to his caste. In any case at that time and until recently people in Lanka were more loyal to their caste group than any other form of community. Sinhala royalty always thought it is better to marry some one from Tamil royalty than to a lower caste person from Sinhala kingdom. This thinking was not confined to the royalty but common to almost all caste groups. Even today such thinking exists in spite of Sinhala vs. Tamil national clashes.

I explain all this in order to show that the Tamil or Sinhala nation as we know today did not exist in the past. Nation building is a relatively new phenomenon. It means that a community with the same language and tradition will unite to work democratically. This is the positive side of an emerging nation, its ability to break down caste and other parochial barriers to unite a community with equality and fraternity. In the recent past we saw the emergence of several nationalities

in Lanka. Sinhala nationality emerged with the temperance movement under Anagarika Dharmapala. Parallel to this there were movements launched by Aarumuga Naawalar and Siddhi Lebbe. The Veddha community also asserted its identity under Thissahamy and others.

Thus when the British went away in 1948, Lanka remained a prison house of several nationalities. Power was concentrated in the hands of the English speaking elite that behaved like a separate nationality. A tiny community of less than one million fake Anglo-Saxons, who relished the chance to imitate Anglo-American upper classes, appropriated and held all economic, political and social powers in their hands.

Tamil upper classes consider themselves a part of this elite. In fact early leaders who collaborated with the then British rule were famous Tamils such as Sir Ponnambalam Ramanadan. It was in their interest to build a state power on the basis of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. This policy was started by D.S.Senanayake and continued with vigour by the Bandaranaiques. They de-franchised Tamil plantation workers and made the majority of the working class state-less. A consistent campaign of discrimination was aimed at Tamil speaking people. While English remained the language of the rulers, Sinhala was made the sole official language to be used as a device for discrimination.

Sinhala Colonization schemes were established in Tamil areas to create communal disharmony and fool the Sinhala poor masses. So called media wise standardization was used to discriminate against Tamil students. All this pushed the Tamils in to protest and rebellion. As early as 1930, even the Tamil elite had to break away and put separate demands to the British Raj. Then they demanded 50/50 in the legislative assembly, meaning that Sinhala majority should get no more than 50% of seats. Later the Federal Party was formed with the demand for Autonomy for the North and the East.

In the 1950s, the Marxist movement led by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party fought against this fraud and stood for

equality, democracy and socialism. The Communist Party in early 50s passed a resolution accepting the Right of self determination for the Tamils, but nothing was done to take this to the public. Tamils and other national minority groups showed much faith and expected fair-play from them.

Later, however, LSSP/CP leaders made a fundamental mistake and joined the capitalist government of Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike. Once in power they also became pawns in the hands of Sinhala chauvinism. In fact Dr. Colvin R de Silva, who once said "One language - Two nations" became the man who formulated the Buddhist theocratic constitution. This total betrayal led to much disillusionment among Tamil youth. The failure of the old left movement against Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism opened the stage for violence against the Tamil people. Racial riots broke out several times, the worst of which was in 1983. All this led to the liberation struggle of the Tamil people.

Today Lankan Tamil nationality is a complex entity. Firstly, so called native Tamils of the north and east have developed as Eelam Tamils with a recognizable homeland. Their national consciousness has developed to a high degree. They form the basis of the existing armed struggle for Tamil liberation. Though the Sinhala army of the Mahinda regime is in occupation of certain strategic areas of the Tamil homeland, it has failed to get the upper hand. Under the MOU signed by Ranil Wickramasinghe in 2002, more than one third of the Tamil home land was accepted to be under the direct control of the LTTE.

Secondly, the plantation Tamils of up-country, descendents of south Indian Tamil workers brought to Lanka by the British-raj, have not identified entirely with the Eelam liberation struggle. Certainly the youth is highly influenced by the struggle in the north and east. But their demands are different, being very largely socio-economic. Land and citizenship rights, greater autonomy for Tamil areas, and greater Tamil participation in local administration, are some of their demands.

Thirdly, there is a substantial Tamil community living in Colombo and its suburbs. They are a combination of native and Indian Tamils. Except for the recent refugees, others are more interested in getting equality and justice than supporting the liberation struggle. However, in spite of these divisions all Tamils are living under fear and repression. On the other hand, the war has its effect on all Tamils irrespective of their actual connection to the liberation struggle.

The Nava Sama Samaja Party, from its inception defended the Right of Self Determination of the Tamil speaking people. Before becoming a party, as a group within the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, in 1974 we came out with our analysis of the Tamil National Question. We explained that Tamil nationality is emerging fighting for its self determination. the only unity possible is the voluntary union of the two nationalities. For this, recognition of the right of self determination of Tamil people is a precondition. Acceptance of equality, autonomy and the Right of Self Determination is the only basis for a democratic unity.

Since 1974 we have been fighting for this position in all our political campaigns. In spite of many difficulties, we have managed to take this message among the Sinhala people. We have influenced the thinking of almost all political parties of Lanka. Concepts of equality, autonomy and the right of self determination are now very widely discussed. Understanding of the masses has increased tremendously. And now there is widespread resentment against the war efforts of the government.

In 1994 Vasudeva Nanayakkara and a few others broke away and collaborated with SLFP led governments. Though they pay lip service to the Tamil Liberation, in practice they have become a part of the treacherous group led by the CP and LSSP. This coalitionist left has become the cover for the killer regime of Mahinda Rajapaksa.

It is clear that the Western powers are now backing the chauvinist Mahinda regime. We explained all along that it is futile to expect the Global Capitalist

powers to intervene here to safeguard the interests of Tamil and Muslims or any other minority.

Many Tamil leaders believed that Indian Rulers would help them to achieve freedom from discriminations and oppression. In fact they appealed for military intervention. However, the Indian intervention became a nightmare for the Tamils. Today Sinhala chauvinist, such as Gunadasa Amarasekara openly claim that the Indian intervention was a god sent

chance for them and regret that it was not fully utilized to crush the LTTE.

Now, the same thing is repeated in relation to the Western powers led by the Americans. Tamils have to accept that it is foolish to expect support for the Tamil struggle from the West against the Mahinda regime that collaborates with the Development Programme of the West.

The Mahinda Regime while paying lip service to the peace project is hell

bent on crushing the Tamil uprising. On the other hand the LTTE appears to believe that suicidal attacks by the Tamil youth can achieve liberation. So far no efforts are made to take the issue among the left democratic forces internationally. Left Front (NSSP) will take the issue of Tamil Liberation among Left Democratic Forces both locally and internationally. We shall show that Mahinda Regime is a total failure not only on the Tamil National problem but also by becoming a vassal of Global Capital.

Discord in Rifondazione over confidence in Prodi

9 December 2006, by **Carlos Sevilla Alonso, Salvatore Cannavò**



Fausto Bertinotti with Romano Prodi

The provisional balance sheet of 200 days of the Prodi government could not be more discouraging. â€˜Deregulation', withdrawal from Iraq according to "technical timetables" (the troops are still there), voting of war credits for the "peace mission" in Afghanistan, shipment of troops to the Lebanon, arms sales to â€˜democratic' China.

The jewel in the crown has been the budget for 2007, fulfilling the Maastricht orthodoxy through cuts in spending on health, education (schools, universities and research), municipal services, increases in military expenditure and so on. A policy which is incapable of destroying the material and cultural bases of â€˜Berlusconismo': increasing deregulation of labour, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and institutionalised racism.

This situation has certainly been helped by the change in orientation of

the leading group of Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation - RC), once the spearhead of the European alternative left and nowadays trustworthy partner in the Unione, the government coalition which supports the ultra-neoliberal Romano Prodi.

This profound cleavage dates from the critical and negative balance sheet of the 2003 referendum on article 18 of the statute of labour (extension of union rights to companies with less than 15 workers) that was defeated because the turnout failed to reach the necessary threshold. This ended the priority orientation of RC towards the construction of the movements, after the "red bienio" of social mobilization between the G8 in Genoa in 2001 and the mobilizations against the war on February 15, 2003.

It was during this period that the 5th Congress of the party approved a critique of Stalinism (though not of the bureaucracy that is its material support) and decided on the investment of its political capital in the movements. At this time the famous "15 theses for the construction of a European alternative left" by

Fausto Bertinotti, now president of the chamber of deputies, were drawn up. After the setback of the referendum, the hypothesis of a coalition government with the centre-left to electorally defeat Berlusconi won the day.

The 6th Congress of RC in 2005 formally adopted this political direction, towards the constitution of the Unione and the Prodi government mark 2. From this congress the idea of the "Great Reform" also emerged, a coordination with those sectors of the "good bourgeoisie" ready to go "beyond neoliberalism" in "reducing the damage" of neoliberal policies to workers.

A project that has an important limit: "the Italian bourgeoisie does not have margins of redistribution or if it has, it prefers, nevertheless, a restructuring of "labour costs" and the cost of collective hiring, a revision of pension costs in favour of the development of pension funds and a plan of extreme deregulation. Reforms which are indispensable to keep up with the rest of European capitalism and international competition.

The Prodi government constitutes a privileged instrument for this project because it involves the unions in the theme of coordination and, thanks to the turn of the PRC, guarantees the absence of the only party that until now was committed to social struggle".

In this political conjuncture, Sinistra Critica (SC - Critical Left) has emerged around the magazine "Erre-Bandiera Rossa" (Fourth International), presenting an alternative motion to that of the majority at the 6th congress of RC in March 2005 which obtained 6.5% of the votes. The activists who make up this current had united in October 1998 with the PRC majority of Fausto Bertinotti, agreeing that the PRC should not support the 1998 budget of the preceding Prodi government.

Integration in the majority took place at the congress of 2002. A radically different interpretation of the results of the 2003 referendum (11 million votes in favour of the extension of article 18) in a context of great opposition from the main political, union and media forces of the left, marked the first confrontation between this current and the majority of RC. SC resumed its autonomy in 2005 when Bertinotti made a turn towards the centre-left coalition and the "Great Reform".



Protestors fight Carabinieri over TAV in Susa valley, Dec 2005.

The 3rd Congress of Giovani Comunisti, the youth organization of the PRC, held last September saw an increase in the internal influence of SC in the party, up to 10%, thanks to the opposition of SC in the Congress and Senate against the war credits in Afghanistan (unlike the rest of the party) and thanks also to a partial cycle of mobilizations that has opened against labour deregulation (the Stop Precarietà ! action on November 4), against big infrastructure projects - No Tav against the high speed rail link between France and Italy going through the Susa Valley, No MOSE [1] against the proposed sea barrier in

Venice, No ponte (against the bridge to Sicily) - and against Prodi's budget for 2007 (November 17) supported by RC.

The recent SC meeting in Riccione (October 2007) attracted more than 300 people from every region of Italy. The concluding motion of the meeting indicated an exit strategy from Rifondazione faced with the hypothesis of the party of the European left, a strategic project promoted by most of RC of a left government destined "to reduce the damage" and to maintain the "lesser evil".

The elaboration of a programmatic manifesto "Anticapitalista! A critical left for the 21st century" for the next meeting in January will seal the formal constitution of the association Sinistra Critica at a national level to give an alternative political way out from the crisis that traverses the Italian left and above all the RC.

Appendix: The left and the 2007 budget

The Cannavó/Giordano debate on the motion of confidence in the Prodi government

Debate on first reading in the Chamber of Deputies on the motion of confidence in the Prodi Government with respect to the state budget for 2007.

Chamber President Fausto Bertinotti asked deputy Cannavá² to speak in a personal capacity on his voting intentions.

Salvatore Cannavá² (PRC-Sinistra Critica).

" Mr President, representatives of the government, I don't like expressing my dissent on the handling of the budget, dissent that has nothing to do with that expressed by the Right,

eager for severe anti-social policies. My dissent goes in the opposite direction.



Salvatore Cannavá²

" The budget, beyond being sacrificed to the logic of "restructuring" and the Stability Pact, is distinguished by an enormous transfer of resources to the private sector, with a consolidated neoliberal logic. Fiscal rebalancing is neutralized by measures like the additional rate of personal income tax, an increase in indirect taxes, the introduction of the health ticket and cuts in funding for the city councils.

"In addition, that we await an increase in military expenditure, in a context of hard "re-cleaning", honestly seems to us scandalous. I will not vote in favour of this draft budget law and I will not vote for the confidence motion, not participating in the voting.

"I hope that this signal of alarm is received with a view to the discussion in the Senate. Among the people of the left, there is a widespread feeling of disappointment and disillusion, as was perceived yesterday [the November 17 actions against cuts in social expenditure in education, health, and so on] and November 4 [national demonstration against labour deregulation]. I believe that it is my duty to represent in this assembly, although in insufficient form, a part of these mobilizations. This is also a way to reduce the damage from an economic policy that remains distant from the hopes of those who voted Berlusconi out. "



Franco Giordano

Following this statement of voting intentions Franco Giordano, Secretary General of Rifondazione Comunista said that "Cannavó has chosen a trajectory incompatible with Communist Rifondazione". (18/11/2006)

According to Giordano, Salvatore Cannavá², announcing his vote against the budget, "evidently chooses

individually a way different from that compatible with Communist Rifondazione”.

Replying Salvatore Cannavà² said, “I am not incompatible with the PRC - I

am coherent. (...) I dissent from the handling, so I will not participate in the voting. I do not feel incompatible with the party. Mine is not a gesture of rupture with Rifondazione, this is not the intention. It is a gesture that I

think should maintain a coherent thread: in here as a representation of a part of the left that does not want this budget. With limitations and without presumptions I want to make this symbolic gesture”.

Correa's triumph is victory against oligarchy and neoliberalism

6 December 2006, by **Margarita Aguinaga**



Some years ago, after the fall of President Lucio Gutiérrez in 2003, it was said that there were two possibilities at that time of crisis of political representation in the state, an advance towards the most recalcitrant form of the crisis of neoliberalism, which would imply a strong right bloc and the harshest measures against the people to restore the situation of the model, or a turn to left and the possibility of reversing the neoliberal model in its fundamental aspects.

That change is now certain, it has taken shape and simultaneously a new correlation of forces has been opened and the possibility of a historic moment, favouring the proletariat and the oppressed of Ecuador.

The right did not manage to make the fall of Lucio Gutiérrez the arena to usher in neoliberal proposals, as happened in 2000, with Jamil Mahuad and dollarization, after the fall of Abdalá Bucaram in 1997.

Instead, democratic content and the confluence of struggles against the TLC [Tratado de Libre Comercio - the free trade treaty with the United States], fought mainly over the last two years by indigenous and popular organizations, have come together in the left alliance in favour of Rafael Correa. The course of history in favour of the people has been opened initially and this is reason not only to be happy, but to put an impetus into the

anti-capitalist processes.

It is evident that the right and imperialism have suffered a defeat, although the form of their counter-offensive can be foreseen, we can be guided by what has happened and continues happening against Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia; they will not remain quiet, the bourgeoisie is going to look to regain control of the government, under the political and military forms that it requires to do this, hoping to erode this government and the left, to turn the people against it. Rafael Correa won the elections representing, amidst weaknesses and errors, a quite radical discourse and set of proposals.

In addition, with a right wing congress dominated by right populism, which, by means of the Patriotic Society Party announcing that it will support the Constituent Assembly, seeks to disguise the fact that this same political force, along with the Social Christians and the PRIAN and PRE, was on the verge of surrendering the country's sovereignty to the United States by signing the TLC; this is no more than a strategy, because its social base could be weakened - the poor people that voted PSP in the first round, radicalised their position in the second round and went to the left.

It is preferable to trust the direct alliance between the people and the left, to make it stronger, this is the base that not only is going to maintain the new government, but will push for the Correa's campaign proposals to be

carried out so we can advance towards another situation of struggle, not only in Ecuador but in Latin America and the world.

Although Rafael Correa obtained a significant vote in the first round, in the second round, an articulation of left consciousness in the urban and rural sectors of the country was developed; a new encounter between the social and political forces of left, between all the actors who for more than two decades have fought openly against neoliberal globalisation.



We have many challenges: - to consolidate a government which fulfils the most important promises like not signing the TLC, creating the Constituent Assembly and improving the conditions of life, employment, health, education and housing, of the poorest people of the country; on the other hand, to consolidate the unity of the left that will be tested in the capacity to take ahead a Constituent Assembly, not only altering but pushing back the neoliberal model in its substance, that is, on privatisation and in relation to the foreign debt; to radicalise specific reforms and to harness the struggle for respect, human and collective rights, that benefit indigenous peoples, women, young people and so on, in the perspective of constructing a New Society; to affirm a process of unity and alliance with Venezuela, Brazil,

Cuba, Bolivia and other peoples in resistance in Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia; to promote new processes of organization and to strengthen the proposals of the popular and collective assemblies of struggle to allow the opening of a broad debate about where we want our country to go; also it is a time of revolutionary ideological reaffirmation that should not be lost.

It is a good time to recover and to advance, for a rethink on the new left. The political action of the political and social organizations, in addition, depends on reflection, because to build socialism we need to consider the contributions of history, to

strengthen and update it from our conditions, Marxism, feminism and other revolutionary theories that will help us to reconstruct the revolutionary utopia, starting from the historical struggles of our own people.

Times of greater respect, dignity and creativity are coming, some say the beginning of a revolutionary process, in this sense all must contribute in the perspective of maximising the impact the first left government that has existed in the history of Ecuador (there was also the presidency of Jaime Roldós, but this is the first presidency originating from the left and promoting the socialism of the

21st century).

If it represents a great step for one of the smaller peoples territorially, it has beautiful and combative referents next to Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia. It is time to gather the first part of the harvest, of the valiant struggles of the indigenous movement, impelled by the CONAIE, the FENOCIN and other indigenous organizations, by women, workers, young people, and the critical thinkers who are pointing out another way in history and another exit from the crises and defeats that we have experienced, challenging us to continue prioritising political objectives by the construction of popular power and socialism.

Spectacular Breakthrough for Socialist Party

5 December 2006, by **Koen Haegens**

The elections were a breakthrough for the SP, which won almost 17 per cent of the vote and 25 out of 150 seats in the lower house (up from 9 seats after the previous elections). The SP emerged as the country's third-biggest party, after Balkenende's Christian Democrats, who came out almost unscathed, and Wouter Bos' weakened Labour Party.



SP leader Jan Marijnissen

The extreme reactions about anarchists and Maoists from the right-wing liberals of the VVD, like long-time Finance Minister Gerrit Zalm, were no surprise. More shocking were attempts by many commentators to treat the SP as the twin of far-right MP Geert Wilders' Freedom Party, which had a smaller breakthrough with 9 seats, or the small Protestant Christian Union, which grew to 6 seats.

The Financieel Dagblad (Financial Daily) wrote, for example, 'Each in its own way is fighting against the open society being created by

European unification and the forces of globalisation. The SP is clinging to the old protective walls of the welfare state and the Christian Union to its own religious identity, while Wilders wants to defend Dutch culture by keeping out all non-Western immigrants.'

The people have spoken, was the prevailing analysis, and the people are conservative, nationalistic and backward. An even more extreme example came from the poet Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer, who voted for the Green Left party: 'The winners of this election share a repressive, provincial mind-set. They expect little from Europe, and are all too eager to sacrifice freedom of thought to their fear of terrorism.... The Randstad (the urbanised western Netherlands, including Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Hague) has lost. The peasants have seized power.'

The crisis of liberalism...

The truth is different, and simpler: many voters opted on 22 November to move to the left and oppose the attacks on social programmes. The combined 67 seats for Labour, the SP,

the Green Left party and the new green Animal Rights party are the biggest left contingent in Dutch parliamentary history. This result reflects the spirit of Amsterdam's Museumplein, where 300,000 people responded in October 2004 to the trade unions' call to resist government attacks on pensions, and of the May 2005 referendum defeat for the European constitution.

There is an understandable longing for security in the face of neoliberal chaos behind the shift to the left. But that has little to do with 'conservatism', despite what today's right-wing so-called 'progressives' claim. Since when is it 'progressive' to demand lower taxes for corporations and fewer rights for workers?

The real united left-right front in Dutch politics is not some imaginary SP-Wilders axis, but the neoliberal consensus that stretches from the right-wing VVD to parts of the Green Left party. Their goal is to marginalise resistance to neoliberalism. What they have achieved instead is alienating more and more voters from politics.

The established parties' overblown

reactions reveal the deep trouble they are in. The VVD lost six seats; the Labour Party lost nine, despite its position in the opposition and its commanding lead in the polls for much of the previous year.

Both parties have problems that go far deeper than a few seats' loss or a few leadership blunders. Both are in an existential crisis. They are no longer the automatic political expressions of two of the three dominant political currents in the Netherlands, liberalism and social democracy (Christian Democracy being the third).



The situation is particularly complicated on the right. The classical liberals are divided among several parties: besides the VVD, they are also in the once 'left-liberal' D66, the Green Left party, parts of the Labour Party and perhaps the Animal Rights party. Since the sudden rise of Pim Fortuyn's right-wing populism in 2002, liberalism is in any event no longer the glue that holds the Dutch right together.

Although Fortuyn's divided, quarrelling party disappeared from parliament in these elections, Wilders' success shows that right-wing populism has not lost its appeal. So does right-wing Minister of Immigration Rita Verdonk's success in winning the votes of almost half the VVD's members in the party's pre-election leadership contest, and her ability to continue to plague VVD leader Mark Rutte after the election. Verdonk, the VVD's number two, managed to get more votes than Rutte.

Cynics might say that liberalism has fallen victim to its own success. With so much of the welfare state dismantled, one may ask what central project this current can still have. Many liberals hardly seem liberal at all any more. They are animated instead by a bitter enmity towards anything even mildly leftist.

... and of Labour

But the Labour Party has its own problems. After these elections, the SP

has at least as strong a claim to embody the social democratic tradition. The SP's extraordinary growth creates an unprecedented situation in Dutch politics. For the first time in parliamentary history, the hegemony of the Labour Party - or its pre-war predecessor, the SDAP - is under threat.

A central question in the coming years will be who represents social democracy in the Netherlands. The SP, despite its origins as a Maoist organisation in the 1970s, may increasingly define itself, not as a current to the left of social democracy, but as the real Dutch social democratic party. Its movement to the right was visible in 1998, when it dropped the demand for the nationalisation of big companies, and even more this year, when withdrawal from NATO and abolition of the monarchy no longer appeared in its election manifesto.

When it comes to the struggle against neoliberalism, against Dutch participation in the US 'war on terror' and other key struggles, the party has consistently held true to its principles. After its breakthrough, however, the pressure for the SP to move to the right will increase, as Labour pushes SP leader Jan Marijnissen to join in a big coalition with Christian Democracy.

Even so, we must not underestimate the unique, short-lived ideological window of opportunity that now exists on the left. The question of what socialism means and who speaks in its name is now a subject for public debate. That opens up space for critical-minded socialists.

More is at stake here than seats in parliament, which can be won and lost from one election to the next. Roots in social movements are more enduring. The Labour Party has for decades occupied many positions in the trade unions, the universities, the media, the judiciary and the many commissions and advisory councils that are a big Dutch tradition; but in recent years Labour has been losing much of this ground. It is a big, open question whether the SP can fill the gap.

The stakes are high. As long as the

unions remain loyal to Labour in government, the possibility of strong social opposition to a pro-business government agenda is more limited.

There are at least initial signs that the SP is putting down stronger roots in civil society. More and more trade union activists vote SP or have even joined the SP. Antiwar groups, renters' associations and refugee organisations also increasingly see the SP as an ally. It is relatively weak among intellectuals, however. It still labours under the image of inward-looking party with little room for discussion.

Taking responsibility

Putting down roots in the movements is in any event a more promising strategy for changing Dutch society than grabbing the SP's first chance to join a coalition government and disappoint its electorate - however great the pressure. This is the implicit purpose of the comparisons between the SP and Wilders. Marijnissen supposedly has to prove his innocence by showing that he has the nerve to 'take responsibility' - meaning accept a ministerial post in Christian Democrat Balkenende's fourth government.

This is nothing less than a call to cheat the SP's voters. It is almost out of the question that the Christian Democrats will go along with such key points of the SP programme as rolling back this year's health care 'reform', renationalising the railways, raising taxes on the rich or withdrawing Dutch troops from Afghanistan.

If the SP gives up these demands, the voters that deserted the traditional parties this time will most likely abandon the SP next time. They will either cynically turn their backs on politics entirely or perhaps turn to Wilders' far right party - a prospect that apparently does not concern the SP's 'democratic' counsellors.

The voters will probably only give the SP one chance in the near future to prove itself in government. It should therefore wait until it has optimal conditions for translating a substantial part of its programme into policy: not only a strong parliamentary delegation

but also an overall left majority in parliament, and above all strong social movements and a society in ferment. None of this is impossible. Labour, SP and the Green Left had a majority in the polls for many months during the past year; and October 2004 showed that Dutch society is not doomed to eternal quiescence.

Tasks for the far left

The critical left in and around the SP will have more than enough work on its hands in the coming months. To begin with, it needs to defend the advances the left made in these elections and the confidence the voters placed in the SP. This means being vigilant for any course that would cheat the voters - and for the SP to join a Christian Democratic-led government would clearly be cheating the voters.

The SP called on voters to resist the temptation to vote 'strategically' for Labour with the argument that Labour leader Bos might well end up in Balkenende's next cabinet, while a vote for the SP would ensure kicking out Balkenende as prime minister. Furthermore, people who voted SP were voting against the traditional Labour wheeling and dealing with the Christian Democrats. If that's what voters had wanted, they would have voted for Wouter Bos.

Left activists inside the SP are also in

an ideal position to counter suggestions that the SP has anything in common with Wilders. They can do that most effectively by working to build an open, multicultural, democratic and internationalist SP, a socialist party that takes bold initiatives and offers a clear alternative vision for society. With this starting point, the debate about who really stands for socialism in the Netherlands can become a very interesting one. The VVD's nightmares are not about to become true anytime soon, but there could be some fascinating years ahead.

Appendix: The SP's 'right-wing nationalist voters', and other nonsense

Considerable nonsense was spouted about the SP before, during and immediately after the elections. To take a small sample of the wealth of examples:

- *"The SP is fishing in the same troubled waters as Wilders."*

A glance at the figures about the origins of each party's voters - easily available to all the commentators - is enough to dispose of this notion. The SP's new voters were almost entirely

people who did not vote in the last parliamentary elections in 2003 or who voted Labour or (to a lesser extent) Christian Democratic. Only a very small percentage of SP voters had voted for the Pim Fortuyn List in 2003. The situation is very different with Wilders: almost a quarter of his voters had voted for Fortuyn's party in 2003, and most of the rest had voted VVD or Christian Democratic.

- *"The SP capitalises on gut reflexes and nationalist sentiments."*

Strange then that so few SP voters mentioned nationalism, anti-European sentiments or discontent with immigration among their reasons for voting SP. The reasons they did mention: the future and affordability of health care - no fewer than 76 per cent said this was their primary motive - and the economy and poverty, which 31 per cent said this was one of their major reasons.

- *"The SP is a party of older white men."*

Too bad for the SP's hip critics: more than two-thirds of SP voters this year were women. In the shadow elections held in primary and secondary schools the SP came second, after Labour. The same applies to black and immigrant voters: the SP is the second biggest party among them, second only to Labour. Black and immigrant voters elected three of the SP's 25 MPs.

Pre-electoral turbulence in France

3 December 2006, by **François Sabado**



L to R: Marie-George Buffet (PCF), Oliver Besancenot (LCR), Noël Mamère (Greens) and Arlette Laguiller

On the radical left, the difficult process of trying to determine a unitary candidate on the "anti-neoliberal" movement continues with

votes in all the local collectives to determine which candidate each collective supports. This process should culminate in a national meeting on 9/10th September.

The global justice and peasant activist José Bové who was originally a "candidate to be candidate" has withdrawn. There remain in the running Marie-George Buffet, national secretary of the PCF (French

Communist Party), Clémentine Autain, deputy mayor and member of Paris City Council in which she is a member of the PCF group without being a party member, Yves Salesse, president of the Copernic Foundation, a left wing think tank which launched the original appeal against the European Constitution but who is also a high ranking civil servant. These are the three main contenders. There are 4 others of whom the best known is

Patrick Braouzec, PCF mayor of St Denis in the Paris suburbs.

Viento Sur: The possibility of a unitary anti-neoliberal candidate has awakened a broad interest in the European alternative left. But the development of the process and the position within it of the different political and social organisations and currents seems quite confused. And in addition it is a polemical subject, including within the LCR. We would like to know the position of the Ligue leadership and your own opinions on the questions in this process. To start with, could you summarise the general positions of the Ligue?

François Sabado: The starting point for this process was the NO victory in the referendum on the European Constitution on the 29th May 2005. For the first time in a long time there was a defeat of the economically liberal European project. It was thus completely natural that there was a continuation of this both on the level of a fight back against liberal attacks as well as the desire to build an electoral expression for the leftwing No forces. This did not pose major problems in action, in particular in the mobilisation against the Bolkenstein directive, or in solidarity with young people's fight against the CPE.

Although we should note that divergences appeared during the movement between, on the one hand, the left currents in the SP and the PCF who refused to challenge the rightwing government in power, and on the other hand, organisations like the LCR which, even with its limited forces, tried to direct the movement against the Chirac-Villepin government.

On the electoral level, there also this unitary aspiration, but there the things are complicated, because electoral and institutional questions pose, even on the parliamentary level, the problem of power, whether that is on the overall political level - what break with liberalism? - or in the form of the governmental answers.

That is why from September 2005 we said to the PCF that we were ready to discuss all these questions. In fact, we

wrote that the PCF was at a crossroads: either it could choose to continue the dynamics of the leftwing No by clearly refusing all new parliamentary and governmental alliance with a PS leadership that had voted yes to the European constitution. And in this case, we were ready to constitute an anti-liberal front with all the components of the left No, including the PCF, for the elections.

Or it could try to do a balancing act, discussing with the LCR but keeping its agreements with the PS at the same time and, in that case, it could not count on us to constitute a unitary political alternative of unit.

We were ready to discuss and from that point the discussion developed on two closely related questions:

First, does a consistent defence of an anti-liberal programme imply moves along the path of a break with capitalism? Does defence of public services require not only undoing rightwing privatisations but also what the left privatised, which implies recommending general solutions of forms of public and social property for transport, energy, telecommunications and other key sectors of the economy? The LCR answered these questions by arguing the need for a break with capitalism.

The PCF though defended the idea of undoing rightwing privatisations but not those carried out by the plural left government of 1998-2002, in which it had participated. On employment, we defend radical solutions like forbidding "stock exchange" dismissals. The PCF sticks to general formulas for the defence of employment without posing the problem of a confrontation with employers.

The second question under discussion is the question of government. We think that the defence of an anti-liberal programme in the continuity of the referendum NO cannot go alongside a parliamentary coalition or participation in a government with the SP leadership. Can one take part in a government that, in the current balance of forces, would be dominated by the social-liberal policy of the SP leadership? Can there be joint government between supporters of the

Yes and No on the European constitution? We answer no, unhesitatingly. The PCF explained to us that one could not rule out the possibility of a policy change by the SP leadership, of making it shift under pressure and then envisaging the possibility of forming a government.

But the PCF continued with a dual language, it proposed a series of more or less radical formulas to us but at the same time it took part in top-level meetings with the SP leadership to discuss a programmatic alternative for the whole "left" without the PS showing any sign of shifting under pressure. The PCF also made a joint list with the SP in recent local elections in Bordeaux, rejecting an anti-liberal unitary list. We made the proposal of such a list to all the components of the "left No" including the PCF, which refused. We had said that PCF was at a crossroads. It did not want to be released from its subaltern relationship with the PS.

From there the situation could lead only to a fragmentation of the anti-liberal forces. We do not want to allow ourselves to be drawn into a re-edition of the plural left government. This is not only a French question. It is posed in Italy with the current policy of Rifondazione, which supports the centre left Prodi government. It is posed in Berlin where the Linkspartei has just been sanctioned for having managed Berlin on a socio-liberal basis in alliance with the SPD leadership.

We do not stand fast on this position because we are sectarian. We are the systematic defenders of unity of action of the whole left - including the PS - in struggles and movements. But on the governmental question there are unavoidable fundamental delimitations that concern the question of the independence of the radical left, which are behind the problems posed in Italy or Germany: In a situation where there is a social and political fight back to liberalism, or there is the emergence of forces breaking with this liberalism, should the radical left remain independent of the centre left or social-democratic leaders or should it get involved in the mechanics of alliance with the centre left and social democracy?

We resolutely choose the first option, and thus we reject the policy of the PCF, which remains on the whole determined by its institutional alliances with the PS. From this point of view, we defend the perspective for unitary anti-liberal candidatures but on two conditions: a consistently anti-liberal programme and an independent perspective, in particular on the governmental level, from that of the PS leadership.

We even said that we presented a candidate to weigh on this discussion but we were ready to withdraw him provided that there is a political agreement on these questions. More precisely, we had a good formula that summed up our approach "what matters for us, is the scenario not the casting". But up to now, the organisers of these unitary collectives and the PCF leadership have not wanted to answer the political problems posed by the LCR.

There seem to be at least three significant political positions within the process: that of the PCF, that of sectors which support the candidature of José Bové and those which want a position on "non party" consensus. How do you characterise them?

José Bové did not like this situation and called on PCF leader Marie-George Buffet and LCR candidate Olivier Besancenot to withdraw and let him be the unitary candidate. For us the problem is not the people but the political basis and we have the same problem with Buffet and Bové on the question of the relations with the PS, even if it is in different forms. Fundamentally, there is an agreement by all the components of the left No, except the LCR, to discussing a programmatic and governmental alternative with the PS.



José Bové (microphone)

In fact the anti-liberal left No was an alliance of left reformists, Socialists or post-Stalinists, "anti liberal Europe" republicans, global justice activists, anti capitalists and revolutionaries. Once the unitary dynamic of that

movement declined the left reformist apparatuses returned to their traditional policy and in particular the PCF apparatus, whose priority was the management of its institutional positions.

José Bové does not have an apparatus and represents a sector of the global justice movement, with which we share many common struggles - involvement on the question of political ecology and the fight against GMs for example, but it remains trapped in a certain conception of "lobbying pressure" on social democracy or the dominant left parties. This sector of the global justice movement can be very radical on a practical question like the anti GM fight, but at the same time it does not think about politics without posing the question of parliamentary or governmental alliances with the PS. In the relationship of forces this leads it to positions subordinate to the PS on the big questions.

Thus, we ask the same question to both the PCF and to Bové on the question of alliances. For example, he declared that he would not stand if Laurent Fabius (former PS Prime Minister, who campaigned for the No) were the PS candidate. One sees the problems and the ambiguities that his positions pose.

What is the reality of the unitary committees?

The collectives, and in particularly the public meetings for the left No, brought together many thousands of people during the campaign. Today the unitary aspiration remains strong but the collectives no longer have the representativity and the strength they had during the No campaign. This is because of the effects of the left No on the political situation.

May 29 had a very strong dynamic against European liberal policy but it was not sufficiently strong to change the political relationship of forces, first of all between the popular classes and the dominant classes, and then within the labour movement between the PS, PCF, a series of left reformist currents and revolutionaries. One thing was the dynamic at the base in the meetings in the collectives in the full swing of the campaign; another is that of the collectives more than one

year after the campaign, which are now composed mainly of militants of a certain generation - fifty-year-olds.

What's more, the left No was pluralist from the socialist left to revolutionaries, but now many organisations or currents have returned to the fold: the socialist left has gone back to the PS, the different currents in the PCF have made an internal equilibrium their priority, rather than the dynamic of the leftwing No, and others have also returned to their origins.

On these political questions we have to recognise that we have lost the battle. The unitary feeling and the manoeuvres of the PCF leadership have been stronger than our arguments. The national meetings of the collectives have not wanted to clarify the questions asked. This has allowed the PCF leadership to position itself and continues its meetings with the PS leadership. Some people have begun to understand the orientation the PCF wants to impose on the collectives and this is creating a whole series of problems.

But this is where there is a second question, which is the specificity of the electoral terrain. Where there is a united front in action it is those who are the most determined and resolute in the action who win out, and in general the reformists are cautious about getting into united fronts in action because they see the danger of a radicalisation in the process.

For elections it is different, the strongest force is not the most determined for action or mobilisation but that which has the most institutional positions, the biggest apparatus and an electoral solution which is the most compatible with the electoral and institutional relationship of forces and that means to defeat the right, to have people elected, to get new positions an agreement with the PS that goes beyond politics or content.

In this game the PCF, despite its organisational and electoral weakening, still holds a number of aces. It claims more than 100,000 members, even on the most optimistic estimations there are not more than

5000 activists in the committees, many of whom are PCF cadres. Thus today the PCF leadership is determined to present Marie-George Buffet as the communist candidate and the candidate of the collectives and is using its relative strength to suffocate discussion in the collectives and to drag them all into supporting MGB.

Today we are continuing the discussion with a series of militants, currents or organizations in the collectives. But by refusing to clarify a series of political questions, the majority of the organisers of the collectives are refusing to map out a path that is clearly independent of the PS leadership. Thus the conditions for a unitary candidature do not exist. The PCF will have its candidate with its orientation. In this situation we could not allow the PCF to be the representative of the left No, so we decided to stand Olivier Besancenot as an LCR candidate but to withdraw him if there was a political agreement. Today this seems less and less likely so we are preparing the Besancenot campaign.

According to the press and some leftwing activists, including leading figures of the LCR, the Ligue is not fully participating in the creating the conditions for a unitary candidate and could pay a high price for what seems to be a demonstration of sectarianism. How do you react to this?

We are beginning our campaign now. It will be an anti-capitalist campaign. We place it in the continuity of the left No which, in order to present an overall alternative, must be anchored on class questions and independence

from social-liberalism. Our programme starts from a series of social and democratic demands: an increase in buying power, defence of the public services, the right to stable and guaranteed employment with a system of job security which in practice forbids redundancies, starting with those caused by buy-outs.

Olivier Besancenot is the only candidate who also has begun a campaign against police discrimination and violence against immigrants and young people. We do a lot of work with a series of youth associations and others of undocumented workers.

Our enemy is the capitalist system, the government, the right, and in particular its representative in the next election, ultra-liberal authoritarian Nicolas Sarkozy. But we accuse the left and in particular the PS of adapting to neoliberalism, not breaking with what the right did, of seeking conciliation with the employers. The PS leadership identifies with the acts of the plural left government under Jospin, it refuses to reconsider the privatisations made by the left in the early 2000s. These are the fundamental reasons for our rejection of any alliances with the PS leadership.

We want a radical break with the neoliberal policies that have been implemented by left and right in the last twenty years. The PS doesn't and the PCF subordinates anti-liberal measures to its agreements with the PS.

It is from this point of view that we constitute an alternative, with a

consistent anti-neoliberal stance based on the mobilisation of youth and workers. This stance has undoubted support in the population. For several months, the opinion polls have indicated an unquestionable popularity of Olivier, an employee - a postman - a young person, an anti-capitalist militant with whom millions of people can identify, a reference point that can make it possible, even on a very distorted electoral level to rebuild a perspective and a class consciousness against employers and the neoliberal capitalist system. The polls give Olivier Besancenot between 4 and 6 %, 3 to 4% for Arlette Laguiller of Lutte Ouvrière and only between 2 and 3% to the PCF candidate Marie George Buffet. In this situation, can understand better all the efforts of the PCF leadership to eliminate Olivier's candidature, but without success until today.

Of course, we are not fooled, and we do not confuse opinion polls with votes. The pressure for a "useful" vote for the PS will be very strong. Our campaign will be very difficult. But we think that in the current situation, with the hardness of the neoliberal attacks and the adaptation of the traditional left to neoliberalism, it is essential to build a strong alternative that can resist the pressure and counts in building the necessary balance of forces. We do not know if it there is also a "French exception" in the weight that the revolutionary left has in the situation. In any case is worth the effort to continue to defend this "exception".

Visit the [Olivier Besancenot campaign site](#).



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