

SITUATION REPORT from the south

The political crisis of Sri Lanka has now reached a decisive turning point. It presents two sharply antagonistic and extreme alternatives: civilisation or barbarism. Tragically, the forces representing civilisation - democracy, socialism, national reconciliation and peace - are in danger of being submerged by a rising flood of Sinhala chauvinist sentiment, masquerading as patriotism. Their position has also been considerably weakened by a campaign of armed terror, unleashed by fascist forces in the South of the country. Scores of socialists and trade union leaders, working class and peasant activists, have already been gunned down and many more are being threatened with death by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP - Peoples's Liberation Front) which is planning to capture state power through a mobilisation of the chauvinistic petty-bourgeois forces of Sinhalese society. Ironically, socialist forces are being crushed not by the bourgeois state, but by emerging fascism of the JVP.

Meanwhile, impending political barbarism has more than one protagonist. Two equally destructive and reactionary political forces might utilise the current political impasse. The first is the JVP which now appears to have gained almost total control of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) - the main Parliamentary opposition to the ruling United National Party (UNP) which might resort to Martial Law or some similar military option, in order to avoid a disastrous electoral loss to the JVP-SLFP alliance in the Presidential elections, scheduled to be held on December 19th, 1988.

Neither of these forces, once in power, would tolerate even the remaining pockets of either bourgeois democracy or socialist politics in Sri Lanka. A Martial Law regime of the UNP will have, as a priority on its agenda, the task of not only the destruction of both the SLFP and the JVP, but also the repression of vast sections of rural petty-bourgeois forces mobilised by them in their bid to overthrow the UNP regime. In the generalised repression of the opposition, the working class and socialist organisations would not be spared either. A JVP-SLFP alliance, on the other hand, in the event of their winning the Presidential elections in December, is likely to unleash the forces of state terror against the UNP, the left-wing and socialist parties, left-wing trade unions, peasant unions and the progressive intelligentsia.

Extreme scenarios

The above are, of course, extreme scenarios which, nonetheless, cannot be ruled out in the context of the profound political crisis which appears to worsen with every passing day. Even if Sri Lanka is fortunate

enough not to succumb to Martial Law or fascism, possibilities for the stabilisation of whatever remains of bourgeois democracy, for the restoration of social peace and ethnic reconciliation seem rather remote. Under normal circumstances, one could have expected the Presidential election in December and the Parliamentary elections a little later to at least reduce the intensity of political tension which usually arise towards the end of the term of any regime. Yet, the crisis in Sri Lanka today is not a 'normal' one in the conventional sense of the word. Society is antagonistically divided into a multiplicity of factions. While the ethnic question has virtually separated the Northern and Eastern parts from the rest of the country, the (Sinhalese) society in the South is sharply polarized, suggesting different political combinations and permutations. The ruling UNP and its opponents led by the JVP-SLFP alliance, represent one such polarisation. The JVP's bloody antagonism to socialist and leftist forces represents another.

The Presidential Elections

Presidential elections will now be held against the backdrop of militant agitation by the JVP opposing the Indo-Lanka Accord, the presence of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces in the North and East and the recently introduced Provincial Councils. The main mobilising slogan of the JVP is 'Save the Motherland'. Its militantly anti-Indian stand, Sinhala chauvinism and its ruthless use of violence against political opponents appears to have enabled the JVP to considerably expand its support among school children, university students, unemployed youth, Buddhist monks, the nationalist intelligentsia and intermediate layers of rural Sinhala society. It is now in a position to call a general hartal and have its orders obeyed. On the 27th of July 88 and the 10th of October 88, all shops were closed, banks were shut, public transport was reduced by about 80%, schools, factories and other workplaces were forced to shut down and this was effective throughout the country. It is now also able to mobilise students in the junior and secondary schools. In many schools students have come on the roads, stoned and tried to stop public transport, under the slogan which was popular first in the universities and has now spread down: 'Motherland first, studies second'.

The UNP, which has been in power since July 1977, has nominated its Prime Minister, Ranasinghe Premadasa as its Presidential candidate. Mr. Premadasa has built up grass-root support bases among the rural and urban poor through his highly publicised housing programmes

and the effective use of political patronage. Yet, particularly in a situation of deeply hostile and divisive political polarisation in society, he will be forced either to align himself with the forces of chauvinism and fascism or to confront them militarily. His clandestine links with JVP over the past few years suggest that a political accommodation with the JVP, in order to fight sections of the bourgeoisie that are opposed to him, may not be impossible to work out. His populist demagoguery has lately begun to emphasise the evils of competitive party politics. He is already suggesting the virtues of a party-less democracy, which in effect would be the imposition of one-party rule. He has also moved much closer to certain JVP positions particularly in agreeing to ask for the total and immediate withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force and the replacement of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord by a Treaty of friendship. In either case, the state under continuous UNP rule is likely to be acutely repressive and singularly authoritarian.

Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, ex-Prime Minister and leader of the SLFP, meanwhile, has come forward as the common candidate of a seven-party alliance. She is no longer the candidate of the SLFP alone, but of the seven-party alliance founded barely a month ago. That the seven-party alliance put up a common anti-UNP candidate under a common banner and a common symbol was a demand of the JVP. Having won this point, it has now entered into negotiations with the seven parties on a common manifesto and a common platform. While the SLFP is the leading constituent of the alliance, the JVP, through its powers of intimidation, appears to be its dominant component. The other parties involved are all rather miniscule and unimportant.

The alliance between the SLFP and the JVP is not yet fully cemented. The preparation of a common programme will create certain problems. However, if it were to materialise in a substantial way, this alliance presents frightening prospects for democratic and socialist forces in Sri Lanka. To understand the nature of this danger, a brief account of their politics in the recent past would, we feel, be helpful.

Frightening relationship

The relationship between the SLFP and the JVP, following the armed insurrection launched by the JVP in 1971 to overthrow the United Front regime, led by Mrs. Bandaranaike, and its further ruthless suppression was really antagonistic. It was the UNP government that, in 1977, granted an amnesty to the leaders of the JVP, sentenced to long prison terms by Mrs. Bandaranaike's regime. Despite this, the post-1983 period saw a political understanding gradually developing between the SLFP and the JVP. This occurred against the background of two developments.

The first was the metamorphosis of the JVP from a left-oriented radical youth party to the armed organi-

sation of the chauvinist Sinhalese petty bourgeoisie.

The JVP came into being in 1967 as a radical youth group within the Maoist left in Sri Lanka. It quickly developed an appeal among students and educated youth in the rural areas of the country as the revolutionary alternative to the Parliamentary left. Its advocacy of a Cuban-type revolution and its teachings of what was understood to be a sort of Marxism - a mixture of Stalinism, Maoism, Castroism and nationalism - enabled the JVP to spread the message of armed revolution among the youth - mainly Sinhalese, rural, educated and unemployed.

In April 1971, the JVP attempted to capture state power through an armed insurrection, but failed due to serious lack of popular support and weapons. The electoral defeat of Mrs. Bandaranaike in 1977 changed the fortunes of the JVP. The new UNP regime granted the jailed JVP leaders an unconditional amnesty in 1977. Enjoying its legal status and bonhomie with the UNP regime, the JVP embarked on a path of electoral politics. It contested the Municipal Council Elections in Colombo, the District Development Councils in 1980 and the Presidential elections in 1982, where its leader, Wijewera, received a little over 400 000 votes. At the Referendum to extend the life of the then Parliament, in which the UNP held a majority of 5/6ths of the seats, the JVP did not campaign enthusiastically against the UNP. It was perhaps still settling its political scores with the SLFP. The not-so-hidden political understanding between the UNP and the JVP seems to have broken down in August 1983, when Jayawardena proscribed the party, blaming it and two left parties for the anti-Tamil violence of July 1983, in an attempt to protect his own party men whose involvement in the riots was only too well known at the time.

A decisive shift in the JVP's politics, its strategy and mode of mobilisation appears to have occurred in the subsequent period. All these changes centre on one fundamental theme: The emergence of the JVP as the main force of militant Sinhalese chauvinism. In this process of change, it reverted to the strategy of armed struggle, revived the emotionally charged call for the 'Defence of the Motherland', organised more and more students and unemployed youth as its active constituency and abandoned whatever little commitment it had earlier had to socialism and Marxism. All this emphasised a determined will to capture power through the clever manipulation of the general atmosphere of insecurity in Sinhalese society, which had arisen in the context of the bloody ethnic war in the North and the inability of the Jayawardene regime to defend the Sinhalese civilians against attacks of Tamil guerillas.

The JVP, in its early days too, had a component of Sinhalese chauvinism in its ideology. In the pre-1971 phase of its history, its Sinhala chauvinism remained

somewhat subdued because it had to operate within the framework of left-wing politics and this was particularly so in a brief period around 1979-80. However, the growth of armed Tamil separatism in the North and East after 1980 seems to have had an impact on the JVP in that the latter quickly re-discovered the efficacy of 'nationalism' as a political weapon.

The JVP's swift growth as a powerful Sinhala force should be placed also in the context of the rather paradoxical political vacuum created by the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987. The Accord envisaged essentially an end to the ethnic war through an Indian sponsored truce between the Tamil guerrillas and the Sri Lankan armed forces. It provided for a considerable degree of political autonomy to be granted to the Tamils through a system of Provincial Councils. The Accord also brought in the Indian Army as a peace-keeping force to supervise the surrender of weapons by the Tamil militants and to facilitate the restoration of normalcy in the Northern and Eastern provinces. By agreeing to grant political concessions to the Tamils, Jayawardene, in a way, abandoned his Sinhala nationalist constituency, whose loyalty he had maintained through a militaristic public posture. Jayawardene has accepted Rajiv Gandhi's terms in his move to restore badly strained Indo-Sri Lanka relations. In doing so he summarily let down the anti-Indian Sinhala Buddhist forces that he himself had promoted until just two weeks before the Accord was signed. After Jayawardene's sudden and unanticipated act of 'treachery', the militant Sinhala Buddhist forces expected Prime Minister Premadasa to provide them with leadership. Mr. Premadasa had a history of 'India bashing' and his public disassociation with the Accord provided him with the necessary credentials to lead the frustrated mass of Sinhala Buddhist forces. However, he eventually let down the Sinhala chauvinist constituency by not only accepting the Accord, but also by presenting the legislation pertaining to it in Parliament. The disgruntled Sinhalese Buddhist forces then found its committed, trustworthy and uncompromising leadership in the JVP, which had already mobilised its mobs in street riots to oppose the 'betrayal of the Motherland'. Patriotism became the mobilising slogan: in this context, it meant the refusal of any political concessions to the Tamils and the assertion of Sri Lanka's independence vis-a-vis India.

The Accord was seized by both the JVP and the SLFP to mount a systematic campaign against the Jayawardene faction of the regime. When then Indian Prime Minister Gandhi and President Jayawardene were placing their signatures to the Accord on 29th of July, 1987, violent street demonstrations and riots were organised by the JVP with the blessings and even the active participation, in some cases, of the SLFP, in Colombo and many other towns. The central theme of this campaign was the protest against Jayawardene's purported 'betrayal of the Motherland' to India. At the state farewell ceremony in Colombo immediately

after signing the Accord, Gandhi himself narrowly escaped an assassination attempt when a naval rating in the ceremonial Guard of Honour hit him with the butt of his gun. A few days later, the JVP again demonstrated its uncompromisingly violent opposition to any political settlement to the ethnic question, when one of its hired killers threw two grenades into the Committee Room where President Jayawardene was explaining the Accord to the Government Parliamentary Group, killing a junior Minister and severely wounding several others. The SLFP's political complicity with this rather unorthodox method of oppositional action was only too obvious when it gloated over the Jayawardene regime's inability to protect its own President and Minister of Security and other Cabinet members even inside the Parliament. Subsequent developments saw the solidification of these 'patriotic' forces in a programme of systematic terror against the UNP, the left parties and the organisations and individuals who had welcomed the Indo-Lanka Accord and campaigned for its speedy implementation.

The Forces of 'Patriotism'

When the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the main Tamil guerrilla group, refused to accept the Accord and surrender its weapons, and, after several attempts at negotiations, India decided in October 1987, to capture the weapons held by the LTTE, the Accord appeared to be in tatters. While war was again raging in the North, the Sinhalese 'Patriots' in the South were busy stigmatising not only the supporters of the ruling UNP, but also the leaders and cadre of the left-wing parties and trade unions. In the new political terminology of patriotism, the left is branded as 'traitors to the Motherland' and 'agents of Indian Imperialism' for the simple reason that the Left consistently advocated the proper implementation of the Accord. The increasing deployment of Indian troops in the North and East, numbering well over 50000 soldiers with heavy weaponry, and the long-drawn out military campaign against the LTTE, could only contribute to this 'patriotic' hysteria whipped up by the JVP, the SLFP and other Sinhala chauvinist organisations. The media in the South, ranging from the major English and Sinhalese language dailies to the newly sprung-up periodicals financed by Sinhala-Buddhist traders and Buddhist organisations of questionable credentials, provided an effective medium to propagandize for the new crusade of 'Patriotism', round the rallying cry "send out the foreign forces".

The formation of the Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya (DJV - Patriotic People's Front) occurred against the above background. The primary function of the DJV appears to be to carry out a campaign of intimidation, dealing out death sentences to those who are 'adjudged' by the 'patriotic masses' to be 'traitors'. In its undeterred campaign of chauvinist terror, the range of victims has been quite wide. It includes leaders and supporters of the ruling party, the UNP, policemen and other belonging to the armed forces and



Campaign of murder and intimidation

According to the figures presented by the Government in Parliament once a month, as the justification for the extension of the State of Emergency, there have been hundreds of political murders since January 1988. The rate of politically motivated killings in Sri Lanka is accelerating in an unprecedented manner.

The majority of these killings so far can be laid at the door of the DJV (Patriotic Peoples' Movement) who, in the immediate aftermath of the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord in July 1987, launched a campaign of protest against the Accord which, very soon, grew into this mad rampage aimed at all those, who could be termed 'traitors to the Motherland' by these 'patriotic forces'.

It is clear that the group that is most clearly under threat for the moment is that consisting of members of the ruling party, the UNP. It is also worthwhile placing on record that a large number of the village and regional level officials and administrators who have been murdered have also been members of the UNP. The threats to all members of local government bodies, and the subsequent implementation of the 'death penalty' was so effective that in November 1987 one saw a spate of resignations from Urban Councils, Municipal Councils and other regional and provincial bodies.

The next group to be targetted is that of members of the Armed Forces. The third group consists of all members of left and progressive circles who supported the Peace Accord and contested the Provincial Council elections.

As the campaign of terror and intimidation has grown in scale and in intensity, the targets of this campaign have also become increasingly broadbased, to the point that whoever dares criticise or hold a different opinion is ruthlessly gunned down and eliminated. Newspaper agents who sell 'blacklisted' newspapers, state lottery sellers and even those persons who attended the funeral of an assassinated person, have all fallen prey to this unmitigated violence.

There is an aura of vindictiveness that marks many of these killings, which must be especially mentioned here, since they seem more suited to Mafia-type vendettas than to political campaigns. On several occasions, when attacks have been launched on homes, there has been no regard for innocent bystanders. Old persons, infants, children, stray visitors, all have fallen in the hail of random bullets. Victims have been burned to death, stabbed, hacked, decapitated. The common practise at present is to shoot and then to stab. The 'patriots' also introduced the infamous 'lamp-post' killings to the south of Sri Lanka. They often leave behind posters or leaflets acknowledging their hand in the killing and stating reasons as to why, in their opinion, the person deserved such a fate. On many occasions, they simply label people

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Do you really think so ?

You, the youth of Sri Lanka, have the right to fight for your beliefs. But whatever your struggle, whatever your cause, should you give your country and your education the same priority ?

Think about it.

After all, you can strive for what you think is right - while acquiring an education. But will your effort be effective, successful without an education ?

That was how generations of young Vietnamese looked at it. They fought against their aggressor without sacrificing their education.

Get your perspective right.

And don't thoughtlessly throw away your birthright. Your youth and your chance to learn, during the vital years of your life

Your Motherland needs an educated YOU, whatever cause you espouse

**YOUR EDUCATION : FOR YOUR SAKE
AND FOR YOUR COUNTRY.**

Anzeige der Regierung in: Daily News, 15.10.1988

'traitors' with no cause other than their support for the Provincial Council elections; in fact, several persons whose only crime was to cast their vote, were dealt summary justice by the 'patriots'. The 'patriotic forces' have also been known to 'deal with' petty thieves, distillers of illicit liquor etc. This is a way of gaining acceptance among especially the rural people, since few tears are shed at the passing of those who are a cancerous and parasitic drag on society.

In recent times, as their powers of intimidation have grown, the brutal act of annihilation is carried on even beyond death itself. Those persons killed by the DJV are deemed not worthy of being paid last respects. Accordingly, the 'patriotic forces' insist that the body should not be laid to rest in a coffin; nor should the body be embalmed, but buried instantly, with scant ceremony; undertakers who have dared to violate these orders have been punished, in one instance by being ordered to supply all coffins free for a period of one week. There is an instance that no funeral, as such, be held. Reports from all over indicate that in the majority of cases, poor villagers are helpless in the face of the intimidation of armed 'patriotic' gangs and so have no alternative but to comply. In one case, in a small village of Kekirawa, in the north central province, the family of the dead man had to put up posters begging to be allowed to bury the body of their breadwinner, while in Anuradhapura town, a trader who had been heard to offer his condolences to the family of a murdered Police Constable had to put up a banner in front of his shop asking for forgiveness from the DJV. In Kurunegala, even lawyers

who had signed a petition condemning the murder of a member of the Provincial Council for the area had to display a banner on the Court premises declaring the error of their ways.

The attitude of the state and the armed forces has also not been at all conducive to seeking solutions to this trend of escalating violence in the south of the country. The terror unleashed by the state on the people of the south, especially against the youth, has assumed unthinkable proportions. In April 1988, SLFP member of parliament, Lakshman Jayakody stated that there were 184 'missing' persons in the south; by July 1988 there were 325 cases of Habeas Corpus related to indiscriminate arrests and detentions in the South, before the Courts.

The newspapers too have occasionally reported deaths of so-called subversives, in 'confrontations' with the Police or the armed forces. At the same time, one has seen the appearance of death-squads which seem to operate with state, or at least, quasi-state sponsorship; the name 'Green Tigers' was coined for them, on the basis of a leaflet circulated very early on in this campaign.

The result of this situation of terror and counter-terror has been the general state of fear which now pervades the entire society. Phenomena such as the appearance of badly burnt and mutilated bodies in public places, bombs and deaths while in custody of the security forces, have all become a part of everyday life in southern Sri Lanka today.

their families, government officials and other state functionaries, members of and even candidates for the recently formed Provincial Councils, Left and trade union leaders and whoever dares to disagree with the politics of the JVP and disobey its 'orders'.

Meanwhile, the demonology of the DJV excludes the SLFP and its chauvinistic allies from these acts of extermination. Though the JVP disavows any links with the DJV a study of their policies, actions and statements reveal a close connection. The JVP also denies having any arms.

To place the DJV/JVP campaign of terror in its proper political perspective, it is essential to note that neither the SLFP nor any of its allies have so far condemned the use of armed terrorism for political purposes. Indeed, the SLFP has more than one reason to condone and even encourage JVP/DJV terrorism. Jayawardene, since he came into power in 1977, has continuously harassed Mrs. Bandaranaike, his arch-rival, and her party; he deprived her of her civic rights for six years for alleged abuse of power during SLFP rule from 1970 to 1977 and this prevented her from contesting the Presidential election of 1982. When Jayawardene won a Referendum to extend the life of his Parliament for one more term in 1983, instead of holding General Elections, he took away another crucial electoral opportunity from the SLFP. Beset with internal schisms and utterly demoralised, the SLFP could not mount an effective challenge to the UNP, which was manipulating parliamentary institutions and electoral processes in an authoritarian mould of its own. Now the armed and ruthlessly determined JVP/DJV gives the SLFP the necessary backing to settle its own scores with its rivals, the UNP and the Left. The physical elimination of a fair number of UNPers at the leadership levels and the terroristic intimidation of its grass-root level supporters is obviously assumed to secure the SLFP's victory at the coming Presidential and Parliamentary polls (provided they take place at all). And the physical elimination of Left and trade union leaders in the midst of the current patriotic insanity may give a sense of relief to the bourgeois SLFP leadership which has committed itself to carry out, with greater enthusiasm, the same disastrous strategy of the 'open economy' initiated by the UNP in 1977. Besides, the SLFP will have no significant challenge coming from the Left at the forthcoming elections. As the recent Provincial Council elections indicated, the United Socialist Alliance (USA - a grouping of the Left consisting of the Communist Party, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, the Nava Sama Samaja Party and the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party) enjoys a considerable degree of electoral support in a number of districts and its elimination would certainly be welcomed by the SLFP leadership.

More reasons

There is a second, yet no less important, reason for the SLFP to maintain a deafening silence over the the JVP's campaign of terror. There is evidence to con-

clude that the SLFP is deeply infiltrated by the JVP; SLFP branches in some provinces have become 'front' organisations of the JVP. This is particularly so in the Southern Provinces, where the JVP is most active, and in other provinces to varying degrees. The process of infiltration has been helped by the political inactivity of the SLFP leadership for the past ten years. The SLFP cannot oppose the violence of the monster which it has nourished. If it does, the same gun which has already sent to the grave nearly 500 men and women for the simple 'crime' of being members of political parties or holding political beliefs which the JVP does not tolerate, would then be turned against them (as from the end of October 88, there is evidence of increasing tensions between the SLFP and the JVP).

The most prominent, and perhaps the most celebrated victim of the JVP/DJV murder campaign is the actor-turned-politician, Vijaya Kumaranatunga, the founder leader of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party (SLMP - Sri Lanka People's Party). When he was gunned down in February 1988, he was tipped to be the leader of the newly formed United Socialist Alliance and its Presidential candidate. Kumaranatunga, the son-in-law of Mrs. Bandaranaike, had earlier on been with the SLFP. In 1984 he broke away from the SLFP, taking a sizable section of left-leaning members of the SLFP with him, to form the SLMP.

Kumaranatunga commanded immense popularity as a film idol and great respect as a young and charismatic political leader who constantly stood for a just political solution to the ethnic question. Kumaranatunga had created considerable anxiety and even jealousy among his political rivals in Colombo when he visited Jaffna and Madras to meet Tamil guerilla leaders in order to secure the release of some Sinhala hostages and to deliver a message of peace and goodwill to the Tamil people. This he did at a time when other Sinhalese politicians in the South were debating how best to exterminate the Tamil separatist movement. Kumaranatunga's popularity among both the Sinhalese and Tamils, his political status as a socialist and a democrat and his personal charisma secured for him the leadership of the Socialist Alliance. Under his leadership, the USA could have become a formidable challenge, particularly to the SLFP and the JVP, because he represented a vision of ethnic reconciliation through reforming the existing political structures to accommodate the reasonable demands of ethnic minorities. However, the chauvinistic terror of the JVP/DJV combine silenced him just five days before the United Socialist Alliance was to publicly announce its formation. The DJV proudly took the credit for carrying out the death sentence on a 'traitor'. Among the crimes alleged to have been committed by Kumaranatunga, as listed in the DJV statement, two stand out: **Firstly, by establishing links with Tamil militants, Kumaranatunga took part in a 'conspiracy to divide our Motherland'. Secondly, by**

breaking away from the SLFP, he weakened 'the anti-UNP and patriotic force of Sri Lanka'. No wonder the SLFP did not go beyond expressing 'sadness' over Vijaya Kumaranatunga's demise.

His assassination only illustrated the extent to which the JVP has gone in its vicious campaign of political terror, without being condemned by the SLFP and its smaller allies. Now, about 10 murders are being reported daily; members and activists of the USA are among the prime targets of what has now become a part of the day-to-day parlance: The T-56, the Chinese made automatic gun. The SLFP leaders have begun to say lately that the JVP has promised to surrender its weapons on the day that Mrs. Bandaranaike is elected President. On the other hand the JVP denies that it is armed. In a way, the terror and fear psychosis created by the JVP may help the SLFP in another way, by showing that the SLFP alone will be capable of restoring law and order.

Growing discontent

The growing discontent under the 11 year rule of the UNP has, meanwhile provided a great deal of legitimacy to the terror politics of the JVP. The decade of the "open economy", supported by the world Bank and the IMF, has created serious income disparities between the rich and the poor, particularly because of the dismantling of the state welfare structure which could otherwise have lessened the economic pressures of the low and fixed income groups. The escalating defence expenditure has badly affected the state investment programmes resulting in a current unemployment rate of 22-25 %. The liberalised economic strategy sought to attract large scale private foreign investment to the urban manufacturing sector; yet, the chronic political instability in the country deterred foreign investors.

Meanwhile, the authoritarian practices of the Jayawardene regime throughout the past decade were meant to create a sense of political stability which was otherwise absent in the body politic. Although democratic opposition by trade unions, political parties, students and professionals were ruthlessly suppressed, the state all the while shamelessly claimed that Sri Lanka was an example of a 'vibrant' and 'five star' democracy. The policy of frontal attacks on the trade union movement was epitomised by the regime's determined suppression of the General Strike of 1980. Having broken the back of an organised working class movement of the Left, the regime deployed its own groups of gangsters to intimidate the unions. The regime's determination to silence any pockets of democratic opposition in the South was further demonstrated by its repeated assaults on the student unions in the universities and other higher education institutions. In short, the authoritarianism of the UNP effectively silenced democratic and legitimate voices of opposition and dissent. It is against such a backdrop that the JVP today finds itself the centre of attraction

among students, unemployed youth and other social layers that are easily drawn into extra-parliamentary and clandestine modes of mobilisation. By undermining the democratic structures of society, the UNP only helped counter-democratic opposition to secure legitimacy and support.

Formidable force

The JVP, whether one likes it or not, has developed itself into a formidable political force within the past one year. It's avowedly anti-socialist and chauvinistic stand had made itself useful not only to the SLFP, but also to sections of the ruling UNP. Until the last week of September, the SLFP and the Premadasa faction of the UNP were competing with each other to secure the JVP's endorsement of their respective Presidential candidates. Such an endorsement, if not open support, by the JVP is thought to be crucial for any Presidential candidate to assure victory in December. Indeed, over the last few weeks, both candidates have moved very close to the JVP positions on the Accord and on the presence of Indian Forces.

This has created an unprecedented situation of danger and threat to Left-wing, progressive and democratic forces, linked with the electoral imperatives of Mr. Premadasa and Mrs. Bandaranaike. The Sri Lankan electorate today is sharply factionalised. The Tamils in the North and East, comprising about 15 % of the total electorate, may not vote at all for either candidate. The plantation Tamil vote, another sizable bloc of votes which has a decisive say in determining political fortunes in the country, will be decided upon by the Minister S. Thondaman, whose political loyalties are not known for their consistency at times of elections (however, he has announced, that he would support the UNP-candidate). Therefore both Mr. Premadasa and Mrs. Bandaranaike are compelled to seek the support of the Sinhalese chauvinist constituency of the JVP. In their stiff competition to woo the JVP, both of them have gone to the extent of publicly exonerating the JVP from blame for the current campaign of terror. In early October, Mr. Premadasa stated in a widely publicised interview in Hongkong that the JVP was not responsible for political killings. He took up this position only three days after the assassination of one of his own Cabinet colleagues by JVP gunmen, the Minister of Rehabilitation. Premadasa offered to take 'personal responsibility' for the safety of the JVP leaders if they came out of the underground and support the Presidential candidate of their choice.

Meanwhile Mrs. Bandaranaike has agreed to the JVP condition that she contests as the 'common candidate of the patriotic masses'; she is also said to have given an undertaking to the JVP that once elected to office she will grant an amnesty to the JVP. Thus both Presidential candidates are virtually promising immunity to the JVP/DJV for its murderous campaign. Indeed, encouraged by the prospect of sure immunity,

the JVP has intensified its killing spree. And the majority of those being killed today are understandably the local leaders and activists of the United Socialist Alliance. One wonders whether the Bandaranaike and the Premadasas are using the JVP for their own sinister purposes, or whether it is the other way around.

While the opportunistic dealings of the two Presidential candidates with the JVP are taking place, there is no effective deterrence to the reign of violence intensified by the latter. Its brutal execution of the political opponents have come to a new stage as of recently: almost ritualistic execution of individuals by mobs of angry youth. This new mode of killings is perhaps a response to a few attempts by potential victims to resist when the killers were just two or three individuals. The latest reports we received from the Southern Province indicate that large mobs of 'patriotic' youth are being deployed to storm the houses of 'traitors' and to kill them so as to give the impression that 'patriotic masses' are administering popular justice. This new development had to be viewed against recent directives, issued by the JVP's Politbureau. In one such directive, the JVP asks the 'patriotic masses' to 'carry out the maximum punishment' against members and supporters of the United Socialist Alliance, Members of Provincial Councils, those who supported the Indo-Lanka Accord, and other 'enemies of the Motherland'. This means, in effect, that no political force, opinion or even an individual holding views other than those of the JVP will be tolerated in this atmosphere of patriotic and fanatic frenzy. Like the fascistic youth mobilisation in our own country and in Italy, the JVP has appealed to school children to provide information to the 'Regional Committees of the Patriotic Armed Forces' about 'traitors'.

Amidst the unfolding orgy of 'patriotic' terror', one thing is clear: the JVP is relentlessly pursuing a strategy to capture state power. In the event of success, Sri Lanka will be reduced to another Pol Pot Cambodia. This militarised organisation of students and unemployed youth has no programme, socialist or otherwise, for the reconstruction of society. A regime based not on the peasantry, but on a vast mass of the youth will be extremely unstable, and such a regime could exist even for a brief period only by resorting to generalised terror and repression. The JVP has already demonstrated its ruthless will to exercise any measure of brutality to come into power. In any case, demagogic slogans that arouse only patriotic frenzy could produce only a state of unmitigated authoritarianism.

Other developments are possible. The prospects of the JVP's rule have already sent shock waves among the bourgeoisie and the ruling elite. In a situation where the two Presidential candidates have demonstrated an astonishing degree of capitulation to the JVP, some sections of the ruling class might attempt, in colla-

boration with local groups in the armed forces, to try out the Martial Law option. It is true that Sri Lanka is already a tattered democracy; yet, military rule is one alternative which has not yet been resorted to by the ruling class.

Latest events do not rule out an understanding between the ruling UNP and the SLFP. On November 5th, a 'historic meeting', as described by the Colombo press, took place between President Jayawardene and Mrs. Bandaranaike. The main subject of the discussion was how to get the JVP to what is now described as the 'mainstream of politics'. Things are happening so fast that it is not yet easy to formulate a cohesive framework of analysis.

This new situation has started after the JVP banned some propaganda rallies of the SLFP in the Central Province. The SLFP's initial reaction was to blame the UNP, particularly the Premadasa faction. However, when JVP posters appeared in the South and the North Central province banning SLFP propaganda meetings there too, things became clearer to the SLFP. From there, the opposition alliance, of which the SLFP is the main component and which includes the JVP too, was gradually breaking-up. Reports are that the JVP has presented also certain demands to the SLFP which the latter has turned down. There are varying reports about these demands. One such demand was that the SLFP, if it were to fight the Parliamentary elections in alliance with the JVP and other parties, should get only 60 % of the seats with 25 % for the JVP and the rest to the other alliance members. Another reported demand is that the JVP should be given all seats in Matara, Hambantota and Monaragala districts, plus the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs. Obviously the SLFP was not in a position to grant these demands, because it would have meant an effective weakening of the SLFP's position vis-a-vis the JVP in a future government.

Thereafter the SLFP has been ordered by the JVP to suspend its election campaign in several provinces. Further, Mrs. Bandaranaike has now decided to go the elections alone and not as the common candidate for the seven-party alliance. She informed the alliance, that she would run as the SLFP candidate under the party symbol and colour.

Meanwhile the four Mahanayake Theros (the incumbent chiefs of the four main chapters of the Buddhist clergy) presented a four-point proposal to President Jayawardene. Their demands are, among others, that Parliament should be dissolved and Presidential and Parliamentary elections should be conducted under a caretaker government, steps should be taken by Party leaders to ensure peaceful elections and that Party leaders and the general public should conduct their affairs with restraint and patience.