

# **The Anti-British Stance of Marxist Political Parties in Ceylon and the Indian Independence League**

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## **Abstract**

The movement for Indian independence from British rule was sponsored by the “Quit India” demand that began in India in 1942. These activities spread to the Malay Peninsulathen under British rule. Some peninsular Ceylonese enlisted in two units of the Indian Independence Movement, the Indian Independence League (IIL)- its political arm, and the Indian National Army (INA)- its military arm; only a few of them used direct militarism. The politically-active Ceylonese in their homeland expressed their anti-British agitation through political rhetoric rather than through military action. This reviewpaper documents, in their own words, the anti-British stance of these leaders in war-time Ceylon.

**Keywords:** Anti-British struggle, Marxist parties in Ceylon, Indian Independence League

## **1. Introduction**

During World War II in Asia, an anti-British revolutionary movement commenced in the Malay Peninsula; it gathered momentum when the Indian anti-British, anti-colonial Indian nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose left Germany where he was in exile, and returned to Asia to lead the anti-British revolutionary movement with Japanese sponsorship. The Japanese aim was more directed towards inhibiting Indian support for the British rather than supporting India in her struggle for political Independence; moreover Japan needed critical supplies (tin, oil and rubber) for her war effort while ultimately it was aimed at the Japanese-dominated “*Co-Prosperity Sphere of Greater East Asia*”.

An initial conference of Indian freedom-fighters was held in Tokyo in 1942, and an inaugural conference of the Indian Independence League (IIL), the political arm of the Indian Independence Movement, was next held in Bangkok; an Indian National Army (INA) was formed there as its military arm. The formation of the IIL had support from the political "Quit India" Movement that started in India in 1942. The INA opened an office on the Malayan border in south Siam (Thailand). Subhas Chandra Bose, the Indian, anti-British nationalist revolutionary who was in exile in Germany to escape arrest by the British, arrived in Malaya to lead the Indian Independence Movement. The IIL had its headquarters in Singapore while the INA operated from Kuala Lumpur, in Malaya. Some Ceylonese in their homeland during World War II fought with Britain and her Allies in Europe during the 1939 – 1945 World War II (WWII). A contrary militaristic movement evolved in India, and more notably in the Malay Peninsula (Malaya and Singapore) that involved a few of the 5,000 emigrant Ceylonese in the Peninsula; they organized themselves with Japanese support against the British, under the leadership of the Indian nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose. Their direct militaristic activity was however on a very minor scale. As pointed out through personal interviews of emigrant Sinhalese residing in contemporary times in the Peninsula (Arseculeratne, 1991), and reviewed below, the participation of these few in Japanese-sponsored anti-British activity was rather for self-protection from Japanese harassment rather than through anti-British zeal. The expatriate Ceylonese in the Malay Peninsula who enlisted were militaristically overt; they were trained in "...ideology, military and physical skills, propaganda and espionage by Japanese instructors...."(Arseculeratne, 1991), while others who joined the Japanese-sponsored IIL and INA and their Ceylonese units the Ceylon Department (CD) and the Lanka Unit (LU), did so for protection against Japanese harassment (Arseculeratne, 1991). For a few Ceylonese who enlisted in the LU, route marches, handling of arms, bayonet-charging, handling of machine guns and hand-grenades, espionage and sabotage were tasks for

which they were trained, mainly in Penang of the Malay Peninsula. Two Malaysian Ceylonese were sent to Ceylon but were captured and shot by the British.

Political groups of Ceylonese in the homeland expressed anti-British agitation without direct military activity. The Ceylonese political leaders in their homeland, had theoretical rather than practical militaristic anti-British political activity during WWII. They expressed their political views through sponsorship of strikes in the labour force on British estates in Ceylon beginning in 1939, while some of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) leaders were jailed (Muthiah and Wanasinghe, 1996). The LSSP (see below) in Ceylon, fomented anti-imperialistic attitudes amongst university students "... to form the conscious and militant vanguard of the proletarian revolution" (Muthiah and Wanasinghe, 1996); however no militant wing was apparently formed in Ceylon, contrasting with the INA in the Malay Peninsula.

The oral history of the Sinhalese in war-time Malaya and Singapore has been documented in depth (Arseculeratne, 1991). That book did not record the stance of the anti-British 'left'-oriented political parties that existed in Ceylon during the war years 1939 – 1945. This review, while discussing the background to the war in South East Asia, places in perspective, verbatim reports in more recent years, from the leaders of these latter political groups, on their anti-British stance in war-time Ceylon.

## **2. The Background**

The Indian Independence Movement had two complementary organs - the Indian Independence League (IIL Azad Hind Sangh, the political arm, with headquarters in Singapore) and its military arm, the Indian National Army (INA, Azad Hind Fauj); Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaya was the birth-place and hub

of the military arm of the Indian Independence Movement. The Indian National Army (INA) was founded by Rash Behari Bose, a militant Bengali, and it was led by Subhas Chandra Bose when he returned from exile in Germany to Malaya in 1943. The Indian view was that the INA's aim was the armed fight for Indian independence from Britain, while the Japanese wanted the INA for infiltration and subversion of the British Indian Army and for labour, but not for the invasion of India. In 1942, an inaugural conference was held in Bangkok, for a more representative assembly; Indian delegates from various parts of Japanese-occupied and Axis territories – Japan, Manchukuo (Manchuria), Burma, Hong Kong, Borneo, Malaya, Java Thailand, Shanghai, Manila and Indochina attended this conference but there is no mention of the participation of Sinhalese or even of the Ceylonese of the Malay Peninsula.

Gladwin Kotelawala (a nephew of a later Prime Minister of Ceylon, Sir John Kotelawala), who was in Malaya at this time

*“approached Subhas Chandra Bose, whom he happened to know personally. Bose was very sympathetic on the plight of the Ceylonese in Malaya... and suggested the formation of a Ceylon Department within the Indian Independence League...”*  
(Arseculeratne, 1991).

Bose's speeches in Malaya impressed Gladwin Kotelawala. In the early 1940s, additional, subsidiary units were formed in war-time Malaya to aid the anti-British movement- the Ceylon Department (CD) that had Lionel Dodampe as Regimental Clerk and the Lanka Unit (LU), with Gladwin Kotelawala as Secretary, under Bose's sponsorship; some Malay peninsular Sinhalese got recruited to these units. These two units were composed almost entirely of the peninsular Sinhalese who were either migrants to the Peninsula or were citizens there. It is of importance that no anti-British units comparable with the LU and CD were

formed in contemporary British-colonial Ceylon for the obvious reason that anti-British agitators would have been imprisoned by the British, as happened to the Ceylonese 'Left-oriented' politicians as mentioned below. Bose's anti-British revolutionary activities and consequent impending arrest, compelled him to leave India for Germany.

The CD in Malaya had only three (Sinhalese) staff members. Two Sinhalese in these units "threatened and intimidated" other reluctant Peninsular Sinhalese with visits from the Japanese military police, the Kempeitai. Lionel Dodampe the Regimental Clerk of the LU recalled (Arseculeratne, 1991) that they,

*"...as volunteers of the Independence Movement, went to see Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose ... he explained that we will be given one month's military training and then we'll be given special jobs...". It is significant that "... despite the ten-fold greater number of Tamils over the Sinhalese as Ceylonese in Malaya, the recruits to the Lanka Unit were mainly young Sinhalese...", and that "... with only about twenty-five persons, the Unit was only symbolic and not a fighting unit ... just for propaganda... But for a few of the Sinhalese who enlisted in the Lanka Unit there was a more physical role as well, for this diminutive unit was the military arm of the Ceylon Department while espionage and sabotage were its aims"(Arseculeratne, 1991).*

As of the Indians who joined the INA, the Sinhalese who enlisted were motivated by self-preservation or the opportunity for returning to Ceylon while on apparently revolutionary activities there, rather than by real revolutionary zeal. Although the CD and the LU have had no mention at all in commentaries on the Indian Independence Movement, except in the book mentioned above

(Arseculeratne, 1991), a few of their Sinhalese members participated in dangerous missions in the Japanese-sponsored Indian revolutionary movement. The initial successes of the Japanese army and the INA in their drive towards Imphal, the capital of Manipur district in north-eastern India along the Burmese border, received headlines in the Malayan newspapers of 1942: "April 21 – BATTLE FOR IMPHAL REACHING CLIMAX; APRIL 23 – OUR FORCES WITHIN 12 MILES OF IMPHAL; APRIL 26 – IMPHAL'S SOUTHERN DEFENCES COLLAPSE".

This discussion attempts to fill gaps in the documentation of these activities through personal interviews on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Quit India rebellion in India of 1942, with some members of the Marxist parties in post-war Sri Lanka. These interviews provide historical aspects of the left parties of Ceylon, the Communist Party (CP) and the Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP) through the views of important members of these two parties, on the anti-British revolutionary activities in contemporary India; the gaps are illustrated by Peter Ward Fay's book *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence* (Fay, 1994) that makes no mention of the Marxists' stand.

This review portrays the anti-British Imperialist stance of the Ceylonese in Ceylon during World War II as more rhetorical than militaristic, contrasting with the actions of some Indian anti-imperialists and Ceylonese in the Malay Peninsula that were overtly militaristic and violent.

Personal interviews were made in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) in the early 1990s by the author, with prominent 'Leftist' politicians in war-time Ceylon, on their Parties' stands, mainly during the years 1942-1945: The Communist Party (CP) of Ceylon- Pieter Keuneman, The Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) - Hector Abeyawardhana, Bernard Soysa, and A. Patchamuttu. A more recent interview with LSSP member Ranjith Amarasinghe was done in 2010. This article

documents these personal reminiscences. These interviews are quoted verbatim to provide an authentic background to the militarism, or absence of it, of the citizens of Ceylon both in Ceylon and in the Malay Peninsula) in the anti-British struggle. The interviews and quotations from the published literature are italicized.

The salient topics that these interviews might shed some light on are:

- (i) Ceylon and India were both under British colonial administration;
- (ii) Revolutionary anti-British militant and terrorist activity occurred in India but not in Ceylon;
- (iii) Was the presence of Subhas Chandra Bose in India and Malaya, without his presence and therefore influence in Ceylon, a determinant factor in this difference?
- (iv) Some Sinhalese emigrants in peninsular Malaya participated in Bose's campaign and were even sent to Ceylon and India but were arrested and executed by the British. Why were the Sinhalese in Ceylon similarly not motivated, by Bose's anti-British campaign, to militarism?

#### **The Ceylon Department and the Lanka Unit in Malaya**

H. G. Gunapala who was in charge of the Lanka Unit recalled (Arseculeratne, 1991) his meeting with Netaji (Leader) Subhas Chandra Bose who said:

*“India and Ceylon are under the British and we have been fighting for so long”; Bose's view was that “... Ceylon was the pendant in the Indian chain, both must hang together”,*

while a Japanese propaganda notice to the peninsular Ceylonese declared “The independence of Ceylon is inseparably linked with the independence of India”. Bose himself was optimistic when he said (quoted by the Perak Times 2603, [Japanese dating for 1943], 31 October):

*"... the Sinhalese community out here shares with nationalists at home, strong anti-British sentiments and aspirations for the freedom of Ceylon from British rule".*

Gunapala had "a year's training in propaganda, - Hindi, Japanese - , military work such as the handling of arms and espionage". Lionel Dodampe of the Lanka Unit gave a more realistic view: "The two Ceylonese communities in Malaya, had kept aloof from the activities of the Indian Independence League as they rightly considered themselves not Indians": Yet "Some members were trained in Penang (Lebra, 1971); Batticaloa was one of the selected places.... The first batch of Sinhalese included two Jayakody brothers, Piyasena, Christie Seneviratne, Somananda and George Tallale". The Jayakody brothers "...were sent to Ceylon on espionage transmission work in the jungles in Kirinda in south Ceylon, but were caught and shot by the British"(Lebra, 1971). Ariyapala was assigned to the 'Azad Hind Dal', formed in 1943 as the Reconstruction Unit of the Indian Independence Movement and which was also for civil administration of liberated territory (Arseculeratne, 1991). In the 1940s, Chelvasingham-MacIntyre was the Vice-President of the Johore State branch of the (Indian Independence) League. He wrote (Chelvasingham-MacIntyre, 1973):

*"The majority of the (Peninsular) Ceylonese felt that the question of Indian Independence was not their business, and, therefore, they should not be taxed for contributions..... while we were thus busy collecting funds, units of the INA, including the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, were moved to the Burma Front, in readiness for the invasion of India. I found the Ceylonese as a whole antagonistic to the aims and objectives of the Indian Independence League",*

confirming the views of other officials that anti-British revolution was not in the minds of the Ceylonese.

### **Pieter Keuneman's Comments on the Stance of Ceylon's Communist Party**

The Communist Party in Ceylon was formed in 1943. Its antecedents were stated by Fernando (1992): "A minority group of so-called Stalinists led by Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe, M. G. Mendis, and Shanmugathasan were expelled from the LSSP, They formed the United Socialists' Party, which later was to become the Communist Party of Ceylon in 1943".

Keuneman said:

*"In 1940, we split away from the LSSP and formed the United Socialists' Party". The Second World War was now on "and it was declared illegal and we went underground. There were reasons of an international character, for the split and the attack on the Soviet Union" (by Germany)"was one. When only Britain was against Germany, we were anti-Fascist and opposed to the war. We kept cropping-up under different names such as the 'anti-Japanese Propaganda Centre and to the anti-Japanese propaganda, we added Communist propaganda as well. We emerged after 1943. Even with our support for the war, we were banned by the British. The Party was prohibited by the defense regulations, it was declared illegal and its activities prohibited. Yet we were now overt but nothing was done to us".*

In the first phase of the war, the Communist Party actively opposed Indian participation in an imperialist's war; however with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, they shifted ground. With the Soviet Union now in the fray, the Communist Party supported the war and was thus at odds with the LSSP.

It was, through its anti-Fascist stand, anti-Japanese as well. Netaji Bose's anti-British Indian National Army was now in formation.

Keuneman continued:

*"We had no sympathy for Bose. We thought of him as a puppet of the Japanese militarists, although earlier we respected his anti-colonial stand. He made the mistake of thinking 'the enemy of our enemy is our friend'. Bose's movement did not have much influence here" (in Ceylon) although the Indian Independence Movement had a far greater impact. We, in Ceylon, did not actively support the British but did not engage in strikes".*

The Communists in Malaya however, through their Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (Arseculeratne, 1991) and collusion with "Force 136", supported the war against the Japanese. N. Shanmugathasan, the Tamil Communist Party member from Ceylon attended the All-India Trade Union Congress in India in 1945, and Prasad (1979) wrote "... Sanghamugha Das" (sic): "The Ceylonese delegate... assured the Indians that the Ceylonese people would give their whole-hearted support to the cause of Indian independence".

The Lanka SamaSamaja Party (LSSP) was formed in 1935. In place of the Poppy flower that symbolized the Allies' war of 1914-1918, a 'Surya-flower' campaign was launched "...on an anti-imperialist and anti-war basis". Links were formed with the (Indian) Congress Socialist Party. From the view point of popularity of the movement, it is noteworthy that, although a police permit was obtained for a 'street collection', "...they did not proceed with it on 11. 11. 40" which, "According to the police this was due to their inability to muster sufficient volunteers" (Muthiah and Wanasinghe, 1996). It is evident that according to the views expressed by the Party leaders (Muthiah and Wanasinghe, 1996) no



militancy was shown by the “left-oriented” parties in support of the anti-British struggle of Subhas Chandra Bose in India and the Malay peninsula.

### **Hector Abeyawardhana's Views on the Stance of Trotskyite LSSP**

Abeyawardhana said:

*“The LSSP was formed in 1935 to take the place of the CP elsewhere. There was no real differentiation between the Marxists on international issues. In 1935, Marxism was general and vague, hinged against Imperialism. Marxists books were not available here. Therefore access to literature was available only to those who went abroad. The 4<sup>th</sup> International of Trotskyites was set up in 1938. In 1935, the LSSP was called a party for Independence and Socialism. We didn't know about Trotsky who worked under difficult conditions under Stalin. Trotsky was killed in 1940. All shades of left opinion were incorporated in the LSSP. P.Keuneman was in Cambridge and S.A. Wicks was here. N. Shan was just raw and with me in the university College”.*

On S. C. Bose, Abeyawardhana said:

*“I heard about Bose, as a student in the University College, and was interested in what was happening in India. We were aware of Congress socialist issues. Bose did not belong to the Left Wing of the Congress Party. Bose's credentials were derived from the radical stand he took on the confrontation with imperialists. The entire socialist group was opposed to the dilly-dallying that went on with Gandhi versus British imperialists. This had grown under Nehru”.*

*“They built up a left-wing in Congress for full independence and for launching a struggle as soon as possible for independence. The*

*Congress Socialist Party with MinuMassani, A. Patvardan, RamManolohiyar as Editors of the 'Congress Socialist' with Jayaprakash Narayan. CSP formed in 1935. It exchanged views with the LSSP in public campaigns to build up the party all over Ceylon".*

In reply to the question: "Why was not this entire history of the LSSP's anti-imperialist struggle documented at the time?" Abeyawardhana replied:

*"We didn't document things at that time because it was conspiratorial. We were reluctant to document what happened because whatever was recorded had to be formally approved by the Party. All these were rationalizations. In the pre-war phase, the LSSP functioned as a loose mass party, and all its activities were conducted publicly. No special need arose, therefore, for particular documentation. Following the outbreak of the war, the whole character of the party was transformed and the orthodox Leninist model of organization was adopted. The emphasis of such activity had to be largely conspiratorial. Some form of party archives was maintained officially but most of these archives were later seized by the police both here and in India. No continuity of record keeping was therefore possible in conditions of illegality. This attitude appeared to dominate the approaches of the Party leaders, to the keeping of diaries, note-books and other records even subsequently. There was almost a prohibition that operated with regard to personal record keeping".*

*"Our involvement in politics lacked a certain breadth of history, ideology and acquaintance with world events which was largely a consequence of a mechanical view of revolution. We believed that the process of revolution was laid bare by the Russian Revolution and by its exposition. We even classified the process of*

*revolution in terms of a number of stages made inevitable and unchangeable by the victorious revolution in the Soviet Union. We didn't have an anti-imperialist struggle in this country”.*

Abeyawardhana explained why this was so:

*“We didn't have a social class which felt its interests had been compromised. The difference in India was that the conquest of India by the East India Company and later the British was a long and continuing process which never reached finality. British rule was therefore always an issue. It's impossible to say that any sections of the Indian population had (irreversibly) benefited from the British regime. Masses here were not concerned. The LSSP constituted the first genuine attempt to reject British rule and to end it”.*

Fernando's comments (Fernando, 1992) expanded on Abeyawardhana's views: The LSSP

*“held the Ceylon Revolution did not warrant the assumption that British power could be overthrown in Ceylon with the internal forces alone. This was because there was no capitalist class proper which was strong enough to take the responsibility for the country as a whole. The working class did not have the strength nor the cohesion to perform this task, either. The LSSP decided that this task could be accomplished only if the anti-imperialist movements joined hands with the mighty independence movement in India”.*

Abeyawardhana had views on Bose:

*“Bose first belonged to an important political family in Bengal. Sarat and Subhas were a part of the nationalist tradition. Their distinctiveness was the inability of the Bengali intelligentsia in*

*India. The Bengali intelligentsia was the vehicle of the spread of British culture. It was the real expression of the new set of rulers. Yet the Bengali intelligentsia didn't capitulate to the British. The educational system produced the cogs for the British”.*

Abeyawardhana's comment was significant:

*“We didn't have an anti-imperialist struggle in this country”, contrasting with the struggle waged in India and by the revolutionaries in Malaya (qv). “The educational system produced the cogs for the British”.*

which is perhaps why the Tamils in Ceylon with excellent schools modelled on British lines did not participate in anti-British activities. With the South Indian Tamils in Ceylon who were imported for the plantations in Ceylon, there was no leftist political activism except in parochial labour disputes and strikes.

Anti-British terrorism was not tied up with left politics; it was a negation of left politics. It substituted for the masses of the people the heroism of a few gun-toting individuals”. This explanation appears valid for the Sinhalese revolutionaries in Malaya. It appears that the difference between the anti-imperialist but revolutionary terrorist movement and the anti-imperialist left movement was therefore in political ideology and the bases of their support.

Abeywardena said:

*“The LSSP looked upon Subhas Chandra Bose as a militant nationalist and he represented the nationalist struggle more than Gandhi. We emotionally or instinctively endorsed the political platform of Subhas Chandra Bose”.*

*“When I went to Bombay in April 1942, we collected a lot of information on S. C. Bose. When Bose left India, the Forward Bloc” (party) “collapsed but till then it was a raging fire. There was a story we heard in Bombay. Bose had addressed a political meeting at Matunga near Bombay which was inhabited largely by South Indians. He lectured on the Forward Bloc. At the end he asked the crowd: ‘I would like to find out what impact I have had on you. Will those of you who are leftists put up their hands’. There was no one who did. ‘Will the rightists put up their hands’ Again no one did. Bose said ‘Please explain’. ‘We are neither leftists nor rightists. We are typists (clerks). Political concepts had not penetrated their consciousness’ “.*

*“With the outbreak of the ‘Quit India’ movement in August 1942, the one issue that divided the Congress between Gandhi and Bose, was removed. Our stance was full support and participation. In Ceylon we did not have a large LSSP membership, between 150 and 200 members, although membership was open. We needed an intellectual approach and had study classes but the process was slow”.*

With the outbreak of the Japanese war, the LSSP was proscribed and its leaders fled to India in early 1942. Abeywardena was arrested in July 1943. Abeywardena continued:

*“I was brought back to Ceylon along with Philip Gunawardena and N.M.Perera and detained in Kandy towards the end of 1943. I was subsequently conditionally released and placed under police scrutiny in Colombo. I then decided to break the condition I had agreed to and to return to India which was a few months later”.*



Abeyawardhana, then in Ceylon, commented on the anti-British Ceylonese units in war-time Malaya, the Ceylon Department (CD) and the Lanka Unit (LU):

*"We hadn't heard of the CD and the LU nor did Jack Kotelawala" (kinsman of the CD and LU leader Gladwin Kotelawala), "tell us. I didn't associate Gladwin with this kind of activity".*

His view agreed with that of Lionel Dodampe that Gladwin played his role in the CD and LU, not on political grounds but for the purpose of shielding the Ceylonese from Japanese harassment.

*"We thought S. C. Bose was supporting a Fascist movement especially after he had gone to Berlin. We rejected that".*

It is recorded that Bose was critical of Hitler's views expressed in the latter's biography, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), especially of his anti-Semitism., and Bose told Hitler that; Hitler altered some passages in his biography after listening to Bose. It should be remembered that Bose had another, perhaps more cogent reason for travelling to Berlin; at that time there were Indian prisoners of war who had been members of the British Indian Army. Bose's aim was to have these Indians as the nucleus of a western wing of the Indian National Army that was formed in the Malay peninsula.

Abeyawardhana continued on the Communist Party (CP):

*"Beginning with the outbreak of war in 1939, it became plain that the Communist Party had a problem with strategy and tactics in relation to war, as an independent act on their part. They were tied up with loyalty to the Soviet Union and the Communists. They literally repeated the stance of the Soviet Union and the Comintern. With the war, the CP was on the wrong foot. They*

*persisted in support for France and Britain continuing the popular front line of the prewar years against the Fascists of Hitler and Italy. Communist parties all over were told this was an imperialist war. Three months later from September 1939, the CP International got its leading organs together. Dimitrov expounded the CP line that there was no question of fighting Fascists and promoting democracy; this was an imperialist war on both sides. It (CP) supported Britain when the Nazis invaded the USSR”.*

On the scene in Ceylon:

*“We did not know of JR's (Jayewardena's) stance till recently. All we knew was that detachments were marching at the head of Japanese forces to Imphal. Lots of news were censored. This had an ambivalent impact on nationalist elements in India; there was joy with some. This was however not the orthodox view. Nehru had made it clear that he would not be accused of equivocality towards the Fascists. I was in Delhi during the INA trials. There was a tremendous surge of mass opinion in defense of them”.*

The use of violence would have meant anti-state action.

*“In Bombay jail we had the 'bombers', the arms users and the 'fighters' who were thinking in terms of a social struggle, organizing workers and students.... The British emphasized that violence was taboo. The use of violence would have meant anti-state actions and therefore much sacrifice for the ordinary individual. Non-violence was therefore theoretical and not philosophical. Had Bose been permitted to be the leader of Congress, Britain would have taken him in and smashed the terrorist movement. The arrest of Gandhi had a greater social*

*impact. Gandhi's strategy was to make it possible for the people of India to appreciate the need to participate in a common struggle for freedom. S. C. Bose was more sophisticated and represented the intelligentsia of Bengal. They were never a part of the masses but only spoke on behalf of the masses”.*

*“Yet there were rebels like the Boses. Bengal had generated a terrorist movement unlike the other parts of India. These terrorist were there before Gandhi, eg. RB Bose. There was therefore a violent movement in Bengal than elsewhere except possibly in Punjab. SC Bose was the inheritor of a tradition in Bengal which did not exist in other parts of India. This made it possible for the Congress Party to function as it did elsewhere. Proscription of leftist parties occurred in British Ceylon but not in British India”.*

**Comments of Bernard Soysa (Lanka SamaSamaja Party, LSSP, 1992)**

*“A number of Ceylonese students met at the Ceylon Students' Union, London in the 1930s, NM, Colvin, and Leslie Goonawardena. Philip” (Gunawardena) in the US, was associated with Indian politics there, with Jayaprakash Narayan in Wisconsin, the Bengal Labour Party member Niharendu Dutt Mazumdar and with Scott Nearing, the US Professor of Political Science. He shared their anti-British and socialist views. Their turn to socialism and Marxism was promoted by their study of economics, and the Great Depression of the late 20s. Capitalism had failed”.*

*“These Ceylonese students came from the English-educated, well-to-do sections of society”, and thus bore a similarity to the Bengali*

*intellectuals, Bose and others. "There were other people of that stratum of society who shared some of these views but were not driven to open politics against the British. Only the LSSP did so. In Bengal too, with the cultural renaissance, there were other middle class intellectuals who weren't however violently anti-imperialist. There was organization in Ceylon in parallel with the Indian National Congress. There was nothing anti-imperialist after PurangAppu. We had no base. We in Ceylon depended on the plantation economy of the British. We had no traditional militancy as in India. There was violent anarchism in India as in Russia with Bakunin as its proponent and its anti-Czar anarchism; they believed that only terrorism would work", as did the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Permuna (JVP) in Sri Lanka.*

*"In India, anti-imperialism took the form of petitions and later violence against officials. The terrorism was rooted in Bengal: for example, Bhagat Singh and Chandrasekhar Azad. Then came Mahatma Gandhi with civil disobedience. Indian believed that Gandhi's non-violence arose to quieten the workers, for his support of the land-lords. He dreaded violence and thought that the masses in action cannot be controlled. My own belief is that no one practised non-violence except Gandhi himself. This opposition was not the only factor that led to Indian independence; it was also British weakness. The anti-British stand precipitated independence after World War II".*

*"Came World War II. J. R. Jayewardene went to Bombay to attend the Congress sessions. I saw him with, I think, Mr. C. P. G. Abeywardena in a bookshop on Hornby Road, the day before the 'Quit India' resolution was passed. They did not know at the time*

*that Dr. Colvin R. de Silva and Philip Gunawardena, Leslie Goonawardena and Vivienne, V. Karalasingham, and (C. P. G. Abeaywardhana's cousin) Hector were in a Northern suburb of Bombay, planning ways of joining the 'Quit India' struggle. J. R. J. came back to the Island much impressed by what he had heard and seen. He sponsored a resolution in 1942 for 'Freedom' and these new 'radicals' of the Congress hoped the Japanese would come here and help to remove British imperialism. That this might mean only replacement of one imperialism by another had not apparently occurred to them. Mr. D. S. Senanayake remained the leader of the Congress even when he was in a minority when in 1942, the radicals had their resolution adopted. His view was that friendship and co-operation with the British in their time of trouble, would bring results after the war. India will be free”.*

*“The same view about the future was held by Pandit Nehru. In a letter of 1940 to JRJ: 'Personally I am convinced that, whatever the result of the war may be, the British Empire cannot survive, nor can such spread-out empires exist in the future'. We had no armed revolt for a hundred years. We had no movements of opposition to foreign rule like those led by the Kuomintang or the Indian National Congress. We had no civil disobedience struggles. What pressures were there on the British? Whatever there was in the Island, is referred to by D. S. Senanayake: 'I tell the British, you have no friends among the youth. Not only my son and his friends, all the youths are against you; the Samasamajists are already in jail'”.*

*“The LSSP formed a link with the Indians through the BLP-I in 1939/40. Philip formed links with Jayaprakash Narayan and the Congress Socialist Party (formed in 1934/5/6). Some Indians, Indrasen Gupta, Oncannath Shashtri, Kamalesh Bannerjee, came to Ceylon in 1940, to consolidate the BLP-I. for anti-imperialism, and socialist reconstruction. The BLP-I had branches in Bombay, Madras, Allahabad, and Madurai. It had some influence with the university students and intellectuals. Yet there was no main base in Ceylon and with émigré revolutionaries, we couldn't build up a revolutionary movement”.*

*“After the 1939 Tripura Congress meeting, the right wing of Congress turned against Bose. The Congress Socialist Party existed before Bose's time. Ceylon had no Gandhi. The LSSPers who met in London in the 1930s believed that there was no one to fight British imperialism. In 1935, a Youth League outside the LSSP was formed which included English-speaking professionals. This was also anti-imperialist and opposed the Poppy Day because of alleged discrimination against the Ceylonese servicemen, especially in funds. The Surya-mal campaign was started by S. A. Wickremasinghe and others. In 1935, the LSSP joined with some of these people though the Youth League itself fizzled out. S. A. Wickremasinghe joined the Communist Party in Britain while we drifted away from Stalinism into Trotskyism. In the event of a war against Germany, USSR will fight with Britain. Therefore we disliked the Stalinists and there occurred the split into the orthodox Stalinists in the United Socialist Party which became the Communist Party after 1942, and the LSSP. The Trotskyists expelled the Stalinists in Ceylon”.*

*“The CP was opposed to the war but when Germany invaded Russia, the CP turned a somersault and supported the war and was thus opposed to the LSSP. In 1938 we saw the development of the alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan. We knew of Japanese imperialism against China and with the Sino-Japanese war we saw the menace of the Japanese imperialists in the East. Therefore the LSSP had no truck with Japan. We did not want a change of masters”.*

Bernard Soysa continued on Bose:

*“We knew about Bose although there was little news here about the INA. He was an intellectual giant in his own right. We didn't completely agree with Bose. He accepted Marxism to some degree. After the Forward Bloc was formed, we kept in touch with Sarkar, journalist of the FB, but we later lost touch till we met in an Indian jail. We did not relish terrorism because we felt it couldn't succeed. We believed in mass struggle and we were against Japanese imperialism and therefore we had no truck with S. C. Bose. Bose failed partly because he was not with the proletariat. If he remained in Congress and with the 'Quit India' movement, he would have done more although he would have courted arrest”.*

*On the post-war scene in Ceylon, he commented:*

*“The match workers went on strike. Other workers in the Wellawatte Spinning and Weaving mills and the Port, also supported the strike at their meeting at Price Park, Colombo in 1946. After their warrants for arrest were withdrawn, Colvin, NM, and Leslie came to Ceylon and spoke at the meeting. Colvin spoke in Sinhala and in English, and praised the Red Fort prisoners”.*

Supplementary views were provided by Abeyawardhana in an interview with Premil Ratnayake (Ratnayake, 1992); he commented on a difference of opinion between the CP and the LSSP. In the context of the Quit India Movement

*"... the CP took up the position that there was little possibility of rallying round the working class in favour of the movement. But we in the BLP disagreed with this contention".*

On the question why the BLP/LSSP went to India, Abeyawardhana commented:

*"We went to India not because we were fleeing the police here. ... We went because we made a close examination of the situation in Ceylon and arrived at the conclusion that a relationship of all the forces in our society were extremely unlikely by themselves to conduct a revolutionary struggle against the British and make it succeed. We didn't have the strength nor the sound organization to go for such a task".*

The absence of Bose's anti-British influence on the Sinhalese in Ceylon may now be considered. As Bernard Soysa stated of the situation in Ceylon: there was

*"No Bose, no revolutionary leader, no contact with Bose in India, no motivation from history, life was comfortable. Other parts of India shared these features that accounted for the absence of terrorist anti-British activity. Bengal went along with Gandhi but there was dissent".*

Thus the Sinhalese in Ceylon did not have the opportunity to hear or even see or meet Subhas Chandra Bose, the founder and Head of the Indian Independence League and Indian Independence Army in Malaya, who would have infused militant anti-British revolutionary activities, but in Malaya (now

Malaysia), it's approximately 5000 Sinhalese met, heard Subhas Chandra Bose and were impressed by his fiery anti-British speeches.

The difference of opinion between Bose and the LSSP was due to the lack of mass support (of the latter) and support of the Fascists. As pointed out earlier (Arseculeratne, 1991) the motivation for Gladwin in his sponsorship the anti-British CD and LU was probably his over-riding concern to protect the peninsular Sinhalese (and Ceylon Tamils) from Japanese harassment and not for political (anti-British) revolutionary reasons. J.C.T. (Jack) Kotelawala (Joint Secretary, 1935 – 1940, and General Secretary 1940 – 1942 (LSSP) was interviewed by this author in 1991. He persuaded his brother Sir Henry Kotelawala, with the help of Sri John Kotelawala, to have Gladwin Kotelawala released from arrest after Gladwin came back to Ceylon after the war. J. C. T. recalled that Gladwin then became a loyal supporter of the right-wing United National Party, and was even conferred the title of Member of the British Empire (MBE). Gladwin's shift to the 'right' from an apparent allegiance to the 'left' during the war, also supports the idea that Gladwin's war-time apparent support for the anti-British CD and the LU as derivatives of the Indian Independence Movement, was not really through political commitment to the anti-British 'Left'.

#### **The views of A. Patchamuttu, (Trotskyite Lanka Sama Samaja Party - LSSP)**

Patchamuttu recalled that:

*"In India, especially after the 'Quit India' movement, aroused support for the 'Free India' movement'. However, while the overwhelming support of the Indians in Ceylon was for Gandhi and his 'Quit India' policy, the younger elements were attracted by Bose and his INA. The propaganda machine of the INA had its message on Indian freedom beamed on Ceylon as well: 'Free*

*India' broadcasts translated into Tamil were heard from Japanese-occupied Malaya and Burma".*

Patchamuttu commented on his party's anti-British stand:

*"The LSSP, of course, did not believe in that (Bose's) type of action by using the Japanese army" (to overthrow the British). Our political philosophy was that we had to mobilize the working class and, through combined action of the working class, with the support of the militia and the peasantry, we could go forward to a revolutionary capture of power".*

Patchamuttu dissented with Bose's collaboration with the Japanese army:

*"We could not capture power through a third army; we would only have been an instrument of that army". His view was, on the other hand, congruous with that of the Indian leaders; "In a press conference a few days earlier, Nehru noted that Bose had parted company from 'us' meaning presumably, the Congress leadership, some years earlier".*

*"We parted company with him many years ago. Since then we have drifted further apart, and today we are very far from each other..... But I do realize that the way he had chosen is utterly wrong, a way which I not only cannot accept but oppose, if it takes shape. Because any force that may come from that may come from outside, will really come as a dummy force under Japanese control. It is a bad thing psychologically for the Indian masses to think in terms of being liberated by an outside agency".*

**The views of Ranjith Amarasinghe (LSSP)**

Ranjith Amarasinghe said that:

*“Very few writings are available on the LSSP's stance in the revolutionary activities of Bose, the IIL and the INA”;*

the reasons were clarified at the end of this interview.

*“During the pre-World-War II years, the revolutionary-minded people of Ceylon, who later became the LSSP, were in touch with the Indian radical groups of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party (BLP); people from India and Burma, such as Saumendranath Bose were involved in the cities of Bombay, Madras“(Chennai)”and Calcutta, but Ceylon was not mentioned as a separate country; it was considered a part of India. The BLP of India and the Ceylonese were not allied to Bose but they appreciated his stance against the British. The Ceylonese group considered Bose as an adventurist and a Fascist” (the latter particularly after his meeting Hitler and Mussolini in 1934), “and that Bose's armed nationalist struggle with the bourgeoisie as ineffective, and they rather thought that mobilisation of the working classes was the proper move, and that an international movement was needed, contrary to Lenin's view that only a single country be tied to these efforts. Hence arose the divide between the 3rd International of the Stalinists and the latter LSSP's 4<sup>th</sup> International that was formed in 1935”.*

*“The LSSP was formed in 1935, and in later years N. M. Perera and Philip Gunawardena were the main figures. The ideological differences between the Trotskyites in the LSSP and that of other groups allied to the Soviet Union intensified, the main focus*

*having been their involvement with the proletariat while the Soviet Union's affiliations were with the bourgeoisie. The dissenters belonged to the incipient Communist party”.*

Meanwhile in India, Bose resigned from the Presidency of the Indian Congress and formed the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1934 (Gordon, 1989), “...with whom the LSSP was in touch and even participated in the CSP sessions in India”. M. N. Roy, Jawaharlal Nehru and S.C . Bose encouraged the formation of the CSP but did not join it (Gordon, 1989).

*“When Bose headed the Indian Independence League (IIL) and the Indian National Army in war-time Malaya, the LSSP in Ceylon were convinced that he was an adventurist as they thought militant nationalism was not the anti-British answer but that mobilisation of the plantation and urban workers was the only effective strategy. In short, Bose's appeal was on nationalism, which the LSSP thought was not a class-struggle, while the Trotskyite LSSP's efforts were with the proletariat, working classes. This explains the non-development of links with Bose's activities in the Malay Peninsula, though both the Trotskyites and Bose's IIL and INA were anti-British”.*

Amarasinghe's last comment was significant in the contrast between the Bose-sponsored CD and LU in Malaya with their revolutionary activities, and the non-violent, anti-British pronouncements of the Trotskyite party in Ceylon.

### **3. General discussion**

In conclusion, a comparison of the anti-British revolutionary activities in India, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Malaya (now Malaysia) could now be made; in

India, the revolutionaries had their rhetoric, with sporadic violence as when Rash Behari Bose threw a bomb at British Viceroy Hardinge, in Delhi in 1912 while in 1942, Indian "...youth took to manufacturing bombs in a big way" (Abeyawardhana to Premil Ratnayake in Ratnayake, 1992) The INA marched with the Japanese, across the Burma-India border into the Kohima-Imphal theatre of the war, in March 1944; by April 25, the Malayan newspapers reported that: "Imphal's southern defenses collapse". The INA with the sponsorship of Netaji Bose had their revolutionaries joining in the campaign across the Burma border, in India; that campaign was ultimately fruitless, as Stephen Cohen commented (Cohen, 1990) , "*Terrorism, infiltration, and subversion were never effective political instruments in India*".

In Ceylon, the revolutionary parties had their rhetoric, but without physical, revolutionary action. As Hector Abeyawardhana said: "*We didn't have the strength, nor the sound organization to go for such a task*". As supplementary reasons, Abeyawardhana commented to Ratnayake (Ratnayake, 1992),

*"In our country there was no great struggle against British Imperialism. Most of our people were supporters of the British. They were the capitalists with the bourgeoisie hang-over of the British"*.

Would the non-politically aligned, working class have had the sophisticated thinking to appreciate the revolutionary anti-British struggle of their party. If not, could this have been a reason for the absence of their militancy, apart from trade union strikes?. It is relevant in this regard to quote K.M. de Silva (1973); he commented:

*"The party (LSSP) organization was elitist in conception, and as a result it remained a small band of urban intellectuals with a modest political base rather than an effective national political force, unlike the Indian National Army and its militant*

*revolutionaries.... The failure to build up a rural organization save in the Kelani Valley, could be explained, partly at least, by political immaturity of a largely illiterate, recently enfranchised and quite unorganized rural population."*

K.M.de Silva's first sentence that the LSSP remained a small band does not explain the absence of militarism, for it was the single-handed Rash Behari Bose who, by throwing his bomb at the Viceroy, initiated the INA and the anti-British revolutionary action. There could have been another reason for the lack of overt anti-British militarism in Ceylon, contrasting with overt violence in India when Rash Behari Bose had thrown his bomb; in Ceylon there was no such example of direct militarism to provide a precedent. It is ironical that despite the sound and fury of the anti-British rhetoric of the Leftist political party members in war-time Ceylon, it was left to four young Sinhalese in the Malay Peninsula to participate actively in anti-British revolutionary militarism but these young Sinhalese paid for it with their lives. Indrasoma recalled (Arseculerane, 1991) that two of them,

*"The two Jayakody brothers had volunteered to go to Ceylon by submarine. They were off-loaded near Madras and were caught by the British... and were executed by the British military as they were Japanese agents".*

A philosophical comment deriving from the rich Indian religious and philosophical traditions, could now be added. The conflicting views of the persons who were involved in the Indian anti-British struggle, and the pros and cons of the use of violence recall the advice given by Krishna to Arjuna on the eve of the Kuru-Pandya war as related in the Indian epic poem *The Mahabharata*; it is relevant to the anti-British armed conflict. Arjuna was to wage war against his cousin and kinsmen, but was diffident to do so:

*“And I see forebodings of evil, Krishna. I cannot see any glory if I kill my own kinsmen in the sacrifice of battle”. Krishna replied: “Think thou, also of thy duty and do not waver. There is no greater good for a warrior than to fight a righteous war”.*

*“If Bose did indeed derive the message from the Bhagavad Gita, it was through Aurobindo Ghose who says in The Doctrine of Passive Resistance (Gordon, 1989), ‘Under certain circumstances a civil struggle becomes in reality a battle and the morality of war is different from the morality of peace. To shrink from blood-shed and violence under such circumstances is a weakness deserving as severe a rebuke as Krishna addressed to Arjuna when he shrank from the colossal civil slaughter on the field of Kurukshetra’ “ (Arseculeratne, 1996).*

A parallel in reality can also be drawn. During World War II, Churchill sought collaboration with the Russians whom he hated, to fight a worse evil – Germany. Stalin had plenty of skeletons in his Gulag and Siberian cupboards, as much as Hitler had. The stance of Churchill seems to vindicate Bose's seeking the help of the Germans and the Italians against, what he thought was, the greater evil - British Imperialism. Read and Fisher (1982) recalled a “famous message”, one of Churchill's greatest speeches in June 1941, having earlier given Stalin warning of the plans of the “*bloodless guttersnipe, the monster of wickedness*” in Berlin. It is of interest to compare Churchill's stance with that of Bose that earned him opprobrium not only in Congress members, but also, much later, from readers of the Bose saga.

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