

The Patriotic Struggle of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna: A Reappraisal

by

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This thesis is my own work containing, to the best of my knowledge and belief, no material published or written by another person except as referred to in the text.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I will investigate the prevailing perception of the JVP's (Peoples Liberation Front) 1987-1989 Insurrection. Focusing on the highly influential works of C. A. Chandraprema and Rohana Gunaratna, I will argue that the ideology of the JVP's Insurrection has been misrepresented. Furthermore, by establishing a connection between the prevailing arguments of JVP scholarship and the diffusionist approach to Third World nationalism – espoused by well-known nationalist theorists Ernest Gellner and Tom Nairn – I will also critique the framework in which the JVP's 1987-1989 Insurrection is commonly viewed. Drawing on interviews with three former cadres of the JVP, this thesis will ultimately present the JVP's 1987-1989 Insurrection firmly in the Third World Marxist-Leninist tradition

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CHAPTER ONE

Sri Lankan History and the JVP

“When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for them the most sacred of rights, the imperative of duties. The only remedy against authorised force is to oppose it by force”.

JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera (Gunaratna 1990, p. 120)

In December 2011, my father and I travelled to Sri Lanka. A few days into our trip, we decided to visit the popular tourist attract of Sigiriya – an ancient 200 metre high rock fortress located in the central province. Upon arrival, a Sri Lankan policeman took us aside and asked for our passports. We replied that our passports were at our Colombo residence. After remonstrations from our Sri Lankan friend and guide Dimithu¹, the policeman allowed us to carry on. Disconcerted, I asked Dimithu why the police were demanding our passports. Dimithu told us that the police had been following us since we left Colombo, and were asking for our passports to prevent us moving freely around the island. According to Dimithu, this was due to his membership of the Front Line Socialist Party, a newly formed splinter group of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (Peoples Liberation Front or JVP). Visibly concerned, Dimithu said we better go back to Colombo before dark “because that’s when people disappear”².

On our way back to Colombo the situation escalated. As we passed a police station – which seemed more like a military encampment – a policeman approached our car and directed us toward the station. For the next three to four hours, we were detained in the car as Dimithu tried to plead our case to the authorities. Eventually, we were informed that the police were going to allow one of our Sri Lankan friends to collect our passports from Colombo and bring them to us.

Hours later, our passports arrived. At this point, my father and I were called into the police station and asked to fill in some forms. A Sri Lankan policeman then interviewed my father. “Why are you in Sri Lanka?” asked the policeman. “On holiday” replied my father. Soon the questions became more pointed. “In Sri Lanka, foreigners come here and try to tell us how to run the country... Do you like the Sri Lankan people?” My father answered in the most inoffensive way he could think, telling the policeman that he had a great respect for the Sri Lankan people “for the way they treated people”. It was only on the drive home that I realised the irony of this response.

¹ Not his real name

² A few days earlier, on 11 December 2011 two Front Line Socialist Party members – Lalith Kumar Weeraraj and Kugan Muruganathan – disappeared while conducting party activities in the northern city of Jaffna (BBC News, 12 December 2011). Both are still missing and are presumed dead. According to journalist Peter Boyle, 15,000 people have been abducted by government forces between 2009 and 2012 (Boyle, 28 August 2012).

About a week later, my father and I were preparing for our return flight home to Melbourne. As we walked through airport security gratefully clutching our passports and boarding passes, a customs official approached us. He told us that our passports had triggered a problem in the system. After closely analysing our passports, he informed us that we were free to go. However, if we ever decide to come back, the customs official said, “there might be a problem”.

Soon after this incident, I developed a keen interest in Sri Lankan political history, particularly the country’s history of socialism. It did not take long for me to come across the tragic history of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). Inspired by the ideas of Karl Marx and V. I. Lenin, the JVP was the first major political party in Sri Lanka whose leaders were not part of the privileged elite. Operating mainly from the universities and the rural areas of the Sinhalese-dominated south³, the JVP found considerable support among Sri Lanka’s unemployed youth and rural poor. Led by its dynamic founder Rohana Wijeweera, the JVP endeavoured to apply the principles of Marx and Lenin to the local material and cultural conditions of Sri Lanka (Cooke 2011, p. 85).

Almost immediately after its formation in 1965-1966, the JVP was subject to intense scrutiny from the government’s security forces. Faced with the Sri Lankan government’s increasingly repressive tactics, in both 1971 and 1987-1989 the JVP took up arms against the state⁴. On each occasion, however, the ferocity of the government’s security forces overwhelmed the JVP’s ill-equipped military wing. While the government’s 1971 counter-insurgency operation was by far the bloodiest episode post-independence Sri Lanka had hitherto experienced – resulting in the deaths of between 5,000 and 15,000 JVP members and sympathisers (Gunaratna 1990, p. 105)⁵ – it is the JVP’s second insurrection of 1987-1989 that is most renowned for its brutality. During 1987-1989, it is estimated that between 40,000 and 70,000

³ The Sinhalese made up 73.92% of the Sri Lankan population in 1989, or around 12.5 million (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka). The rest of the population was made up of Sri Lankan Tamils (12.62%), Sri Lankan Moors (7.42%) and Indian Tamils (5.19%).

⁴ There is an ongoing debate over the nature of the JVP’s 1971 and 1987-1989 insurrections, with many commentators stating that the JVP imitated the violence (Chandraprema 1991; Gunasekera 2007). However, as I will demonstrate throughout my thesis, both JVP insurrections were responding to a certain degree of government repression.

⁵ Official government statistics indicate that 1,200 people died in the JVP’s 1971 insurrection. At the time, the parliamentary Opposition stated the number killed was somewhere in between 5,000 and 10,000. In the immediate aftermath of the insurrection, JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera stated that 15,000 JVP cadres had died, but according to author Rohan Gunaratna, later reduced this figure to 10,000. While Gunaratna stated that the figure was most likely between 6,000 and 8,000, he also acknowledged that “the strategy of repression and terror employed by the State to wipe out the radicals and the militants of the JVP was such that it would never be possible to give an accurate record of the numbers killed that April of 1971” (Gunaratna 1990, p. 105).

Sri Lankans were killed, the “overwhelming majority of them civilians murdered on slight and random suspicions that they were JVP members or sympathisers” (Weiss 2012, p. 62)⁶. As a result of its sheer magnitude, the JVP’s 1987-1989 insurrection (hereafter ‘the Insurrection’) will be the central concern of my thesis.

In the years following the systematic destruction of the JVP, there has been a conspicuous absence of a credible government investigation into the Insurrection⁷. Consequently, virtually no members of the security forces have been prosecuted for their role in the government’s brutal campaign against the JVP in 1987-1989 (Weiss 2012, p. 62; Amnesty International 2009). Indeed, a number of military figures that held command positions during the Insurrection still remain in the Sri Lankan Army⁸. Not even the discovery of multiple mass graves dating from 1987-1989 – the biggest of which was discovered in November 2012⁹ – has convinced the government to investigate the Insurrection. Instead, the current Sri Lankan government – led by President Mahinda Rajapaksa – continues to crackdown on socialist dissidents such as Dimuthu.

In the absence of a meaningful government inquiry into the Insurrection, secondary sources have assumed increased importance. Scholars of Sri Lankan history must not only undertake the usual task of writing a thorough and even-handed history of the Insurrection, but also they must confront the continued unwillingness of the Sri Lankan government to investigate the tragedy. Unfortunately, neither of these requirements has yet been achieved¹⁰. Through a close examination of the works of C. A. Chandraprema and Rohana Gunaratna – the two most influential scholars on the Insurrection – my thesis will argue that there are two major

6 Official government statistics claim that 20,000 died during the JVP’s 1987-1989 insurrection. At the time, political figures sympathetic to the JVP stated that the number killed was closer to 70,000. Amnesty International, on the other hand, stated that the death toll was 40,000. In 1992, a European Parliament delegation estimated that the figure was 65,000. Many sources put the figure somewhere in between these estimates. Similarly to the JVP’s 1971 insurrection, it has been remarked that gaining an accurate figure is impossible. (Richardson 2005, Gunaratna 1990, p. 269; Gunasekera 1998, p.10; Cooke 2011, p. 369)

⁷ In 2009, Amnesty International published a report criticising the Sri Lankan government’s failure to investigate the large number of “enforced disappearances” that occurred during the JVP’s 1987-1989 insurrection. Although the Sri Lankan government has since 1991 conducted nine “ad hoc” (Amnesty International 2009, p. 45) Commissions of inquiry, Amnesty International stated that these commissions lacked credibility and consequently resulted in “very few prosecutions for human rights violations” (Amnesty International 2009, p. 10).

⁸ The current Minister of Defence, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa – who is also the brother of President Rajapaksa – was the Military Coordinating Officer for Matale during the 1987-1989 insurrection (Finch 2013). A number of other current members of the Sri Lankan Army and police force are also implicated in the killings of 1987-1989.

⁹ Known as the Matale Mass grave. At least 154 bodies were discovered – the most of any mass grave in Sri Lankan history (Finch 2013).

¹⁰ Considering the size constraints of this thesis, I will only be investigating the secondary sources’ presentation of JVP ideology. The lack of secondary source inquiry into the absence of government investigation into the Insurrection will consequently not be a feature of my thesis.

flaws that characterise their approach: (1) JVP ideology has been either grossly oversimplified or simply ignored, and (2) the important role played by the Sri Lankan masses has been overlooked. Indeed, considering the revelation that the government censored all independent media during 1987-1989 and beyond, an analysis of the reliability of the secondary literature is long overdue¹¹.

Research Techniques, Questions and Limitations

The primary objective of my thesis is to critically examine the ideology behind the JVP's self-proclaimed "patriotic struggle" of 1987-1989 (Gunaratna 1990, p. 57). However, before undertaking this investigation, I must first address the prevailing arguments of the secondary sources. Two books immediately stand out as the most influential – *C. A. Chandraprema's The Years of Terror: The JVP's 1987-1989 Insurrection* and *Rohan Gunaratna's A Lost Revolution: The Inside Story of the JVP*. Consequently, Chapter Two of my thesis will begin by closely examining their arguments. Here, I will contend that both these works are characterised by an oversimplifying and parochial tendency; a tendency that ultimately went on to mar JVP scholarship in the subsequent decades. In this second chapter I will also examine the theoretical foundations on which Chandraprema's and Gunaratna's arguments rest. Using the theories of prominent nationalist scholars Ernest Gellner and Tom Nairn, I will demonstrate the link between the diffusionist approach to "Third World"¹² nationalism (Nairn 1981, p. 340) and the arguments of Chandraprema and Gunaratna. In this way, I will point out the shortcomings of the diffusionist approach when applied to the JVP's 1987-1989 insurrection.

¹¹ On 13 January 2013, Shamindra Ferdinando from the Sri Lankan newspaper *The Island* revealed that President Jayewardene introduced a campaign of censorship on all private media during 1987-1989. Known as the Competent Authority (CA), this branch of government had the power to inspect all articles, particularly those relevant to the JVP or the newly arrived Indian-Peace Keeping Force. Any subversive material would be summarily edited or censored. Under the pressure of the Competent Authority, editors would mark out the censored parts in black or simply cover the offending sections with the word 'censored'. Uncooperative Journalists were subjected to intimidation and even assassination. One journalist, Richard de Zoysa, is widely believed to have been killed by the government security forces for resisting government censorship (Pathirana 2012). Indeed, the government censorship of print media was so pervasive during 1987-1989 that the then-editor of *The Island*, Gamini Weerakoon, decided to run a front-page note to remind readers that the newspaper was subject to intense government censorship (Ferdinando 2013). While some commentators have denied the existence of the Jayewardene's strict campaign of censorship (Gunasekara 1999, p. 79), Ferdinando's testimony contradicts this claim.

¹² Through this thesis, I will refer to the post-colonial world as the "Third World". While I recognise this term is significantly outdated with the collapse of the "second world" of the Soviet Bloc, and also has certain Eurocentric connotations, I have decided to use this term in order to comply with the terminology of the secondary sources

At this point, I must acknowledge the limitations of my discussion on nationalist theory. In my thesis, only the theories of Ernest Gellner and Tom Nairn will be explored in any depth, and even these discussions will be limited to areas relevant to Third World nationalism. As nationalist theory is not the prime concern of my thesis, Gellner and Nairn will only be examined insofar as it relates to the Insurrection and JVP scholarship more generally. Although this limitation will result in a rather narrow characterisation of the diffusionist approach to Third World nationalism, it is unavoidable given the size of this thesis.

In Chapter Three, I will expand my theoretical discussion by introducing the chief rivals to the diffusionist approach to nationalism – V. I. Lenin and Frantz Fanon. I will argue that these theorists offer a framework that challenges the dominant perception of the JVP's patriotic struggle of 1987-1989. Through the theories of Lenin and Fanon, my thesis will present the JVP's patriotic struggle as part of the Third World Marxist-Leninist tradition of national struggles. Therefore, I will argue that JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera is comparable with the celebrated leaders of other Third World socialist struggles, such as Fidel Castro, Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi Minh and Kim Il-sung.

In Chapters Four and Five I will undertake the necessary historical analysis of the JVP. Beginning with the formation of the JVP in 1965-66 and ending with the Insurrection of 1987-1989, I will argue that JVP ideology was a product of the political and economic oppression inflicted upon the Sri Lankan poor and rural youth. Thus, I will challenge the dominant portrayal of the JVP as a “hard headed and cynical organisation” that imposed its patriotic struggle on a submissive Sri Lankan population (Chandraprema 1991, p. 246). Drawing from interviews I conducted with three former cadres of the JVP, my thesis will begin to reveal the inherent complexities of JVP ideology. With a particular focus on the JVP's approach toward two crucial policy areas – Sri Lanka's national question¹³ and the signing of the Indo-Lankan Peace Accord – I will highlight the Marxist-Leninist influences that informed the party's ideology. Instead of simply dismissing JVP ideology as a “Sinhala chauvinist” (Chandraprema 1991, p. 23) attempt to exploit the “wounded nationalism and forgotten patriotism” of the Sinhalese people (Gunaratna 1990, p. 68), I will demonstrate that the JVP, for better or for worse, always had the interests of Sri Lanka's impoverished masses

¹³ The “national question” is a general term used for questions relating to nationalities, nationalism, and nations.

at heart – Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala alike. While it is undeniable that the JVP’s patriotic struggle adopted certain nationalist slogans, this strategy must be viewed alongside the many other Marxist-Leninist Third World national struggles that used similar tactics to mobilise the masses in the fight for socialism. Vietnam, Cuba, North Korea and China are clear examples of this. What makes the JVP’s patriotic struggle different from these struggles, however, is that the party leadership ultimately lost control of the nationalist forces it sought to harness. In this way, far from portraying the JVP’s patriotic struggle as the product of opportunist and “Sinhala chauvinist” policies, I will present it as a poorly executed attempt to bring socialism to Sri Lanka.

The information I gathered from interviewing three former JVP cadres comprises an important part of my thesis. Through these semi-structured interviews, I was given a number of important insights into the feelings and thoughts of a JVP cadre during the Insurrection. Indeed, considering the chronic shortage of secondary material on the Insurrection, the interviews proved to be an invaluable source of information. The first former cadre I interviewed was Lionel Bopage. A former General Secretary of the JVP, Bopage left the party in 1984 after disagreements with the party leadership. Since then, Bopage has become a well-known critic of the JVP and long-standing advocate of Tamil self-determination. Secondly, I interviewed Nuwan¹⁴, a low-ranking JVP cadre who was loosely involved with the party during 1987-1989. And finally, I interviewed Sanath¹⁵, a mid-level former JVP who was highly active throughout 1987-1989. After the Insurrection, Sanath remained in the JVP for many years until finally falling out with the party leadership. The admissions of these former JVP cadres marked a significant departure from the prevailing arguments of the secondary sources. Here, the need for a close analysis of this incongruity became glaring. Three research questions emerged:

1. Is the influential characterisation of the JVP offered by Chandraprema and Gunaratna based on an accurate reading of JVP ideology? What are the major theoretical foundations of Chandraprema’s and Gunaratna’s arguments?

¹⁴ Not his real name

¹⁵ Not his real name.

2. What can be learnt from a review of all available primary and secondary sources about the positions held by the JVP on the national question and India between 1977 and 1989?

3. Was the JVP's patriotic struggle of 1987-1989 consistent with Marxist-Leninist ideology, and if so, how does this contrast with the characterisation offered by Chandraprema and Gunaratna?

I will now discuss some of the limitations associated with my project. Firstly, there is the language barrier. Clearly, my inability to understand Sinhalese and Tamil has significantly inhibited my capacity to gather more information on the JVP and Sri Lankan history in general. This brings me to the second limitation – the acute shortage of studies available in English. Indeed, the lack of adequate material available in English is the *raison d'être* of my thesis. However, this is a double-edged sword – in the absence of an adequate secondary literature on the Insurrection, I struggled to gain a full understanding of the JVP. While I attempted to mitigate these limitations through interviewing three former JVP cadres and analysing the available primary sources on the JVP, the task was ultimately too ambitious to be properly realised given the time and word constraints of this thesis. Furthermore, as the admissions of the former JVP cadres only offered the JVP perspective of the Insurrection, there are still many holes to fill. Given these significant limitations, one of the central aims of my thesis is to alert scholars to the inadequate nature of the secondary material on the Insurrection, so that more studies can be undertaken, more interviews conducted, and more answers retrieved.

CHAPTER 2

JVP Scholarship and the Diffusionist Approach to Third World Nationalism

“Most of the books written about the JVP are anti-JVP...even though I have criticisms of the JVP, I am not going to criticise like this. My criticism is a totally different one.”

Sanath (Former JVP cadre)¹⁶

¹⁶ 2013, pers. comm., 7 September

The JVP's 1987-1989 Insurrection occupies an inconspicuous place in Sri Lankan scholarship. Despite the Insurrection's explosive impact on Sri Lankan society, there is a distinct shortage of scholarly work on the subject. As a result, Chandraprema's and Gunaratna's largely simplistic portrayal of the Insurrection has become the prevailing view. Although there is evidence that presents JVP ideology as considerably more complex than Chandraprema and Gunaratna suggest – most notably the writings of JVP founder Rohana Wijeweera – no scholar has seriously challenged Chandraprema and Gunaratna.

The arguments of Chandraprema and Gunaratna are typical of a well-known theoretical approach to Third World nationalism. Referred to as “Eurocentric diffusionism” (Blaut 1993, p. 8) this approach posits that Third World nationalism is a reaction to the uneven diffusion of European development and modernisation to the Third World (Nairn 1981). Excluded from the advantages of European civilisation, it is argued that the indigenous political elites of the Third World contrived grand nationalist movements to ensure their share of European modernisation. Thus, the diffusionist model portrays Third World nationalism as a product of the European “tidal wave of modernisation” (Gellner 2006, p. 108) – a wave that emanated out of the industrial heartlands of Western Europe after the 17th century and washed down the social stratum of Third World societies. Proponents of the diffusionist thesis commonly assert that Third World nationalism is primarily the domain of the indigenous political elites of the Third World (Gellner 2006, p. 113; Nairn 1981, p. 340). The masses are brought in at a later stage, largely through the populist appeals of the “intelligentsia” (Nairn 1981, p. 340).

As I will argue in the following pages, the prominence of diffusionism within nationalist thought has had profound implications on the study of the Insurrection. Using Chandraprema's and Gunaratna's portrayal of the Insurrection as the central example, this chapter will demonstrate the oversimplifying tendencies of the diffusionist approach to Third World nationalism.

Secondary Sources on the JVP 1987-1989 Insurrection

The task of obtaining reliable information on the Insurrection is riddled with difficulties. Of these difficulties, the most initially apparent is the shortage of available material. Today, only four major studies on the Insurrection have been published in the English language, all of

which are out of print¹⁷. While there are numerous passing references to the Insurrection made in other related secondary material, overall the existing material is not sufficient to adequately represent the complexities of the JVP. This shortage of material on the Insurrection has increased the importance of the existing studies. Two books in particular stand out – *C.A Chandraprema's The Years of Terror* and Rohana Gunaratna's *A Lost Revolution: The Inside Story of the JVP*. As both of these books were written in the immediate aftermath of the Insurrection, they occupy an important position in JVP scholarship. The fact that both authors adopt similar conclusions about the Insurrection further increases the importance of these studies. Thus, any study on the Insurrection must begin with these two books.

In *The Years of Terror: the JVP's 1987-1989 Insurrection*, Chandraprema portrays the JVP as only interested in one thing – power. The JVP's confessed ideology of Marxism-Leninism is largely viewed as a sham, a smokescreen to deceive the masses. “Any ideal that did not go with their future aspirations for power”, writes Chandraprema, “was liable to be unceremoniously thrown overboard” (Chandraprema 1991, p. 99). The JVP's approach to the rise of Tamil nationalism and the signing of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord in 1987 – two key focuses of JVP ideology – are presented as examples of the JVP's opportunist campaign to exploit Sri Lanka's ethnic divisions for its political advantage. Chandraprema consequently labels the JVP a “Sinhala Supremacist” political force (Chandraprema 1991, p. 103). Indeed, Chandraprema considered JVP opportunism to be so widespread that anytime the party adopted a more liberal agenda – such as acting in solidarity with the Tamils¹⁸ or showing a willingness to participate in mainstream Sri Lankan politics¹⁹ – it was done only to “present a pacifistic, democratic face to a public wary of their non-violent bona fides” (Chandraprema 1991, p. 97). As Chandraprema explains, the JVP was “a hard headed and cynical organisation with a ruthless leadership” that was willing to undertake any policy as long as it resulted in a political advantage (Chandraprema 1991, p. 246). He goes on:

¹⁷ A. C. Alles, *The JVP: 1965-1989*; Prins Gunasekera, *A Lost Generation*; Rohana Gunaratna, *A Lost Revolution*; C. A Chandraprema, *Sri Lanka: The Years of Terror*. Unfortunately, I was unable to access A. C. Alles' study on the JVP.

¹⁸ For example, in October 1979, the JVP joined with several other left parties to oppose the government's plan to send troops to the north to fight Tamil militant groups. The JVP also called upon the government to respect the basic democratic rights of the Tamil people (Chandraprema 1991, p. 97-98)

¹⁹ See the democratic phase of the JVP (1977-1983) in Chapter Four.

The only thing held sacred by the JVP was power. If at any time they thought that a link with the Tamil separatists would have helped them in their bid for political power they would most certainly have consorted even with the most extreme of the Tamil terrorists [Chandraprema 1991, p. 97].

Here, Chandraprema essentially divorces JVP ideology from the Sri Lankan masses.²⁰ The extensive and complex Marxist-Leninist considerations of the JVP are left unexamined.

Gunaratna's *A Lost Generation*, on the other hand, spends more time enquiring into the JVP's attempt to apply Marxism-Leninism to its policies. Rather than dismissing the JVP's theoretical considerations, Gunaratna allocates a few pages to describe its content. In stark contrast to Chandraprema, Gunaratna considers the writings of JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera "highly theoretical and complex" (Gunaratna 1990, p. 201). Gunaratna's consequent use of Wijeweera's quotations provides the reader with an important insight into JVP ideology during the 1980s (Gunaratna 1990, p. 164). For Gunaratna, the JVP were more complicated than simply a "Sinhala Supremacist" party (Chandraprema 1991, p. 103). However, despite Gunaratna's more sophisticated understanding of JVP ideology, he ultimately agrees with Chandraprema's general assessment. Gunaratna writes:

During the last 10 years the Sinhalese have been made to forget the pride of their race. The JVP used this element of wounded nationalism and forgotten patriotism to draw members first to bring its party into power and secondly to wage a battle against the foreign troops in this land [Gunaratna 1991, p. 68].

While there are elements of truth to this conclusion²¹, it does not reflect the whole picture of the JVP's ideology in 1987-1989, which includes both pragmatic and principled components.

For Chandraprema and Gunaratna, the JVP's patriotic struggle of 1987-1989 was essentially a populist attempt to exploit the prevailing ethnic tensions of Sri Lanka. The fact that the

²⁰ Chandraprema elaborates: "Not content to simply stop at introducing revolutionary theory to the working class, Wijeweera wanted to cut off their avenues of escape and thus make the working class – so to speak – the prisoners of the revolutionary process" (Chandraprema 1990, p. 25-6)

²¹ See Appendix I for more details

patriotic struggle was introduced in reaction to the growing public resentment toward India and Tamil nationalism is viewed as further proof of the party's rampant opportunism. Indeed, it seems that there was little the party was not prepared to do in order to exploit the prevailing political environment. Even the much-revered Marxist-Leninist strategy of class struggle was ultimately subordinated to the JVP's "Sinhala chauvinism" (Chandraprema 1991, p. 115). After all, as Chandraprema concluded, "it was the JVP's strategy to make use of popular objects of hate and envy to further their political cause" (Chandraprema, 1991 p. 95). However, according to both Chandraprema and Gunaratna, the JVP's failure to act on its lofty populist slogans seriously undermined its credibility among the Sri Lankan population (Gunaratna 1990, p. 269; Chandraprema 1991, p. 184). In particular, the alleged unwillingness of the JVP to act on its fierce anti-Indian rhetoric is viewed as a major factor behind the destruction of the party in late 1989²². Chandraprema writes:

The JVP never killed a single Tamil terrorist or an Indian soldier. Thus, when public opinion turned against the JVP there were no extenuating factors to mitigate the fury of the reaction [Chandraprema 1991, p. 184].

Alienated by the JVP's broken promises, Gunaratna (1990, p. 269) argues that public support for the JVP dwindled, particularly among the "poor and the lower middle class groups". Here, Chandraprema and Gunaratna portray the JVP's opportunism as the defining feature of the Insurrection – both its rise in 1987 and fall in late 1989 can be explained by the party leadership's obsession with power. Far from presenting the JVP as representatives of the Sri Lankan masses, the party is ultimately shown as a highly "cynical organisation" (Chandraprema 1991, p. 246) that sought to exploit the popular sentiments of Sri Lankans for its own political advantage. The complexities of the JVP's ideology are ignored.

Chandraprema's and Gunaratna's study of the Insurrection have become widely influential. Indeed, it is commonplace for scholars of related areas of Sri Lankan history – most commonly Tamil nationalism – to uncritically adopt similar arguments. Edgar O'Ballance's

²² As this thesis will demonstrate in Appendix II, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the JVP did fight the Indian Army.

The Cyanide War, Gordon Weiss' *The Cage*²³, Patrick Peebles' *The History of Sri Lanka* and Jonathan Spencer's *A Sinhala Village in a Time of Trouble* are clear examples of this²⁴.

Without providing any further analysis or comment, these studies dismiss JVP ideology as “ethnic chauvinism” (Spencer 1990, p. 24), “Sinhalese Extremist” (Peebles 2006, p. 6), “embedded in Sinhalese dominance” (Weiss 2012, p. 43) “Sinhala nationalist” (O’Ballance 1989, p. 122) and so on. While there are other scholars who undertake more in-depth investigations of the Insurrection, such as Richardson (2005), Gunasekera (2007), Wickremasinghe (2006) and McGowan (1992), their conclusions ultimately do not differ from those of Gunaratna and Chandraprema. The shortcomings of Gunaratna and Chandraprema are effectively ignored. For instance, the fact that both Gunaratna’s and Chandraprema’s studies were composed under the close watch of President Jayewardene’s campaign of government censorship during 1987-1989 is seldom mentioned. Chandraprema’s membership of the Independent Students Union – a government sponsored “paramilitary force” designed to challenge the JVP’s control of the universities during 1987-1989²⁵ – is also ignored. However, despite the general shallowness of JVP scholarship, it would be a grave error to characterise the entire field as being in line with Gunaratna and Chandraprema. Mick Moore (1993), Prins Gunasekera (1998), Bruce Mathews (1989) and Michael Cooke (2011) are scholars who have questioned – and in some cases criticised – the dominant perception of the JVP. But ultimately, as these works fail to offer any alternative explanation of the JVP’s 1987-1989 insurrection, the arguments of Chandraprema and Gunaratna have remained dominant.

To fully understand Chandraprema’s and Gunaratna’s highly influential portrayals of the JVP’s patriotic struggle, it is essential that their underlying theoretical foundations be identified. Fortunately, the theoretical influences of Chandraprema and Gunaratna are easily detected. In particular, the diffusionist approach to nationalism has much in common with Gunaratna’s and Chandraprema’s method of analysis. In the following pages, I will demonstrate the closeness of this link.

²³ In *The Cage* (2011, p. 42), Weiss typifies the secondary source approach to JVP ideology when he erroneously refers to JVP ideology as “Maoist”.

²⁴ There are countless other examples. See Essman & Herring (2003, p. 85); Lynch (2007, p. 64-5); Morrock (2010); Coy (1997, p. 86) and Hobsbawm (1990, p. 126)

²⁵ Sanath 2013, pers. comm., 7 September

The Diffusionist Thesis

Diffusionism has had a long history in European thought. Its origins stretch back to the 16th century when Europeans first began to think about themselves in relation to the extra-European world they were conquering (Blaut 1999). The central thrust of this theoretical school was simple – Europe was the centre of the civilized world and, therefore, the source of all progress. With the expansion of European influence to all corners of the globe after the Napoleonic period, the diffusionist doctrine gradually “solidified into a theory” (Blaut 1999, p. 128). After all, it was an ideology perfectly suited to the European colonialist missions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The diffusionist thesis was so pervasive in European thought that it subsequently acted as a theoretical platform for many different academic fields, ranging from geography to history (Blaut 1987). The study of nationalism is no exception.

Early nationalist theorists Carlton Heyes and Hans Kohn were arguably the first popular examples of the diffusionist approach to nationalism. Both presented nationalism as a European idea which gradually and inexorably spread to the rest of the world. In this way, nationalism was viewed as an ideological force of development; a European invention which diffused to the rest of the world (Heyes 1968; Kohn 2008). The “ideological diffusionism” (Smith 1976, p. 87) inherent throughout Kohn’s and Heyes’ works can be seen in the subsequent works of nationalist scholars Elie Kedouri, Frederick Hertz, Alfred Cobban, E. H. Carr, Louis Snyder, and Boyd Shafer. While many of these scholars adopted vastly different attitudes to nationalism, all contained certain diffusionist assumptions (Smith 1978). Indeed, the far-reaching effect of the diffusionist thesis is still apparent today: both Ernest Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism*²⁶ and Tom Nairn’s *The Break-Up of Britain*²⁷ – two highly influential and diverse studies of contemporary nationalism – clearly adopt diffusionist components. It is to these two scholars that I now turn.

In the 1980s, the “modernist approach” became the dominant theory of nationalism (Breuilly 2006, p. xxxi). Led by Ernest Gellner, the modernist approach infused together an array of previously unexplored areas such as language, psychology, education, media, and industrialization to provide a more complete picture of the origins of nationalism. While

²⁶ First published in 1983

²⁷ First published in 1977

Gellner made important and necessary alterations on the “classical Eurocentric diffusionism” (Blaut 1993, p. 52) of early scholars like Kohn and Heyes, certain elements of diffusionism remained, particularly in regard to the spread of nationalism to the Third World²⁸. Indeed, as Gellner viewed nationalism as a direct product of the European “age of industrialization” (Gellner 2006, p.39), his diffusionist approach is clearly observable (Assayag 2003, p. 154). For Gellner, the “tidal wave of modernisation” that erupted out of the industrial heartlands of Western Europe in the 18th century was ultimately responsible for the growth of nationalism around the world. Gellner explains:

As the tidal wave of modernization sweeps the world, it makes sure that almost everyone, at some time or other, has cause to feel unjustly treated, and that he can identify the culprits as being of another ‘nation’. If he can also identify enough of the victims as being of the same ‘nation’ as himself, a nationalism is born. If it succeeds, and not all of them can, a nation is born [Gellner 2006, p. 108].

Thus, as Gellner remarked, “nationalism forms nations and not the other way round” (Gellner 2006, p. 56). However, this formulation leaves an important question unanswered – how exactly does nationalism disseminate throughout Third World societies? Gellner has a very specific response to this question.

Gellner’s conception of Third World nationalism places vital importance on culture (Berberoglu 2004, p. 8). Throughout *Nations and Nationalism*, Gellner identifies the “imposition of high culture on society” (Gellner 2006, p. 57) through a system of “common education” (Gellner 2006, p. 39) as the central force behind nationalism. For Gellner, without a centralised system of education there would be no “common culture” (Gellner 2006, p. 7) necessary for the formation of nationalism. Consequently, the social group responsible for educating the population – what Gellner calls “the intellectuals” – are viewed as the “driving force of initial nationalism” (Gellner 2006, p. 113). Here, the masses of society are effectively subordinated to a passive and submissive role. Only through the dissemination of nationalist culture by the ‘intellectuals’ are the masses brought into the picture. As I will demonstrate in my thesis, the works of both Chandraprema and Gunaratna subscribe to this

²⁸ J.M Blaut (2000, p. 7) refers to this more refined version of “classical European diffusionism” which took place after World War II as “modern Eurocentric diffusionism”.

conception of nationalism.

Gellner's diffusionist approach is widely recognised. A number of prominent nationalist scholar such as Anthony Smith (1998), Thomas Eriksen (2007), and Benedict Anderson (2006, p. 214) commonly point out Gellner's "Euro-centric" approach to nationalism. Indeed, Gellner himself admitted late in his life that his "theory of nationalism is a bit europeocentric" (Assayag 2003, p. 154). However, Gellner's "europeocentrism" could be excused if he had emphasised the effect of European imperialism on the Third World and the class struggle inherent within nationalist movements. He does not. Gellner's attitude to European imperialism is best summarized in his own words:

When Europe was conquering and dominating the world, it had, on the whole, other, more pressing and internal things to occupy its attention. It did not even pay the conquered nations the compliment of being specially interested in the conquest...The conquest had not been planned and was the fruit of economic and technological superiority, and not of a military orientation. With the diffusion of this technological and economic might, the balance of power changed, and between about 1905 and 1960 the pluralistic European empire was lost or voluntarily abandoned [Gellner 2006, p. 42].

Here, Gellner effectively presents European imperialism as an unintentional expression of its dominance. The effects of European colonialism and imperialism on the economic and political freedoms of its colonies are glossed over. Instead, Gellner emphasises the European "diffusion of technological and economic might" to the rest of the world; a process that makes up an important part of his 'tidal wave of modernization' theory. Similar to the arguments of Gunaratna and Chandraprema, the class struggle inherent in nationalist movements is left unexamined (Berberoglu 2004).

Like Gellner, Tom Nairn has had a significant impact on the study of nationalism. Nairn's approach, however, comes from a vastly different perspective. Unlike Gellner, who came from an anthropology background, Nairn's conception of nationalism was specifically designed to enter into the existing Marxist debate on nationalism. Ultimately, Nairn's main intention was to address the "great historical failure" (Nairn 1981, p. 329) of the traditional Marxist approach to nationalism. In this way, Nairn helped created a new school of Marxism

– dubbed “Neo-Marxism” (Blaut 1987; Spencer & Wollman 2003, p. 41) – which sought to remodel Marxism to recognise the increasingly “progressive” nature of nationalism (Nairn 1981, p. 347). For Nairn, the emergence of what he called “neo-nationalism” (Nairn 1981) in the undeveloped world had ultimately made traditional Marxist attitudes to nationalism obsolete.

The key to understanding Nairn’s conception of neo-nationalism is ‘uneven development’²⁹. For Nairn, uneven development refers to the failure of European progress to diffuse evenly to the non-European world. Confronted with the disappointment of uneven development, Nairn argues that the elites of the colonies and neo-colonies “had no option but to try and satisfy [their] demands by taking things into their own hands” (Nairn 1981, p. 339):

Unable to literally ‘copy’ the advanced lands (which would have entailed repeating the stages of slow growth that had led to the breakthrough), the backward regions were forced to take what they wanted and cobble it on to their own native inheritance of social forms [Nairn 1981, p. 339].

Thus, Nairn presents Third World nationalism as an attempt by the peripheral elites to replicate Europe’s “economic and political institutions of modernity” (Nairn 1981, p. 340). Here, Nairn’s conception of Third World nationalism becomes noticeably diffusionist.

According to Nairn, Third World nationalism is essentially an attempted “historical short cut” (Nairn 1981, p. 340) to “Western founded progress” (Nairn 1981, 361). Envious of Western progress, Nairn argues that “peripheral elites” sought to initiate “the forced march out of backwardness or dependency” by making populist appeals to the nation (Nairn 1981, p. 343). Thus, Nairn concludes that Third World nationalism is “invariably populist” (Nairn 1981, p. 340). “The new middle-class intelligentsia had to invite the masses into history” writes Nairn, “and the invitation had to be written in language they understood” (Nairn 1981, p. 340).

By relegating the masses to a supporting role, Nairn, like Gellner, presents Third World nationalism as the realm of the indigenous “middle-class intelligentsia” and “peripheral elites”. He does not see the political and economic oppression inflicted upon the masses as a causal factor of Third World nationalism. On the contrary, European oppression of the Third

²⁹ A Marxist precept made famous by Lenin. See Lenin’s *A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism*

World is seen as a conduit that exposed the “periphery” to the possibilities of European modernity. Consequently, Nairn asserts that class struggle has little to do with the formation of Third World nationalism. Indeed, the “renewed failure of the revolutionary class struggle” was one of the main reasons neo-nationalism achieved such historical importance throughout the 20th century (Nairn 1981, p. 355). Borrowing Gellner’s famous phrase, Nairn ultimately portrays Third World nationalism as a product of the European “tidal wave of modernization” (Nairn 1981, p. 96).

The parallels between the ‘diffusionist thesis’ and the arguments offered by Chandraprema and Gunaratna are striking. Both share the crucial assumption that Third World nationalism is a phenomenon independent of the political and economic oppression inflicted upon the masses. By portraying the JVP’s patriotic struggle as an opportunist attempt to capture state-power, Chandraprema and Gunaratna fit neatly into the diffusionist model. Following in the path of Gellner and Nairn, the JVP leadership is ultimately presented as a cynical clique of “intellectuals” (Gellner 2006, p. 113) who were cut-off from the political and economic struggles of ordinary Sri Lankans. However, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the Marxist-Leninist and anti-colonial traditions represented by V. I. Lenin and Frantz Fanon present convincing arguments against this diffusionist conception of Third World nationalism.

CHAPTER 3

The Non-Diffusionist Argument: V. I. Lenin, Frantz Fanon and Rohana Wijeweera

“I am a Marxist-Leninist. I am a modern Bolshevik. I am a proletarian revolutionary. Marxism-Leninism is a clear doctrine.”

Rohana Wijeweera (Wijeweera 2013, p. 1)

“Let us decide not to imitate Europe and let us tense our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us endeavour to invent a man in full, something which Europe has been incapable of achieving” (Fanon 2004, p. 236). With these words, written just before his death in 1961, well-known French anti-colonialist Frantz Fanon concisely summarised the non-diffusionist argument. For Fanon, the notion that the advancement of the Third World was dependent on the diffusion of European “progress” and “development” (Nairn 1981, 361) completely ignored the exploitative and oppressive history of European colonisation and imperialism. Europe held no answers for Fanon, only problems. Indeed, when the United States decided to “catch up” with Europe over two centuries ago, Fanon claims “it succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions” (Fanon 2004, p. 236-7). Fanon wanted the Third World to create a new history, independent of European domination.

Fanon’s call to arms typified the anti-imperialist and pro-independence movement that had been gaining ground in the Third World after World War II. While Fanon was an influential figure in this movement, he was ultimately only a part of a previously established anti-imperialist Third World tradition. To fully understand the writings of Fanon and the anti-imperialist tradition of the Third World more broadly, it is essential to analyse its historic and theoretical foundations. To this end, we must recall the Second Congress of the Communist International of July 1920. At this famous congress, over 125 Communist parties from 35 different countries met in the newly formed U.S.S.R and agreed on the revolutionary potential of Third World national struggles (Lenin 1965, pp. 213-265). In stark contrast to the theories of Gellner and Nairn, the Second Congress declared that the national struggles of the Third World were a product not of European diffusion, but of the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist class struggle. The position of the Second Congress – most famously articulated by V. I. Lenin – later became the ideological corner stone of all subsequent Marxist-Leninist Third World struggles. By delineating Lenin’s theory on the revolutionary potential of Third World national struggles – and the subsequent writings of Frantz Fanon and JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera – this chapter will place the JVP’s 1987-1989 patriotic struggle firmly within the Third World Marxist-Leninist tradition.

Lenin's non-diffusionism

In 1920, the Second Congress of the Communist International produced the definitive Marxist-Leninist approach to the national question³⁰. For Lenin, one of the foremost members of the Second Congress, it was essential that a strict distinction be drawn between the “oppressed and oppressor nations” when discussing the national question (Lenin 1965, pp. 213-265). Lenin explained his reasoning:

In the present world situation following the imperialist war, reciprocal relations between peoples and the world political system as a whole are determined by the struggle waged by a small group of imperialist nations against the Soviet movement and the Soviet states headed by Soviet Russia. Unless we bear that in mind, we shall not be able to pose a single national or colonial problem correctly, even if it concerns a most outlying part of the world. The Communist parties, in civilized and backward countries alike, can pose and solve political problems correctly only if they make this postulate their starting-point [Lenin 1965, pp. 213-265].

From this analysis, the Second Congress subsequently recognised all national movements of the “oppressed nations” as anti-imperialist. Thus, the Congress unanimously agreed to refer to these national movements as “national-revolutionary movements” (Lenin 1965, pp. 213-265)³¹. While Lenin was quick to point out that Marxists should not blindly support every national movement – a careful study of the concrete historical circumstances must always be undertaken to assess their potential revolutionary nature (Lenin 2002, p. 82) – he clearly regarded Third World national struggles as the most promising form of national struggle. Unlike the advanced countries who could achieve socialist revolution only through “civil war by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie”, Lenin (1964, p. 60) argued that in the “undeveloped, backward and oppressed countries” revolution can be achieved through a “whole series of democratic and revolutionary movements, including national-liberation movements” (*italics in original*). Consequently, many Third World Communist leaders left

³⁰ According to revered British historian E.H Carr (1953, p. 196), “the second congress marked the crowning moment in the history of the Comintern as an international force”.

³¹ The Marxist movement previously referred to the national movements of the neo-colonial and colonial world as “bourgeois-democratic” movement (Lenin 1965, pp. 213-265).

the Second Congress committed to enacting a national-revolutionary movement of their own.

By stating that nationalism had revolutionary potential in the colonies and neo-colonies, Lenin broke with the prevailing Marxist approach to nationalism, most famously articulated by Stalin in his influential 1913 essay *Marxism and the National Question*. In this essay, Stalin presented nationhood as a phenomenon specific to the period of rising or early capitalism (Stalin 1975). Thus, before the outbreak of the Great War the Marxist movement generally dismissed nation-states as an inherently bourgeois concept (Blaut 1987). All the major Marxist thinkers of the pre-war period – Lenin, Stalin, Luxemburg, Bauer and Kautsky – agreed with this position (Blaut 1987). However, the outbreak of World War I influenced Lenin to seriously reconsider this position. Around this time, Lenin identified the emergence of imperialism – “the highest stage of capitalism” (Lenin 1963, p.667-766) – as a period of history that would prolong the life of the nation-state, and with it, nationalism. Consequently, Lenin began to take an increased interest in the “national-liberation” movements of the Third World, which, according to his analysis, had developed an anti-imperialist character (Lenin 1964, p. 60). While certain critics argue that Marxism-Leninism did not effectively deal with the rising importance of nationalism during the 20th century – most notably Tom Nairn and the neo-Marxist school – a close analysis of Lenin’s post-War writings on the national question reveal his keen awareness of Third World national struggles; indeed, he actively encouraged them³².

After Lenin’s groundbreaking analysis of imperialism, a schism emerged in Marxist thought. While Stalin and other leading Marxists acknowledged that the pre-World War I approach to the national question was increasingly irrelevant considering the new imperialist developments, others, like Rosa Luxemburg, held to the belief that the nation – and therefore the national struggle – was an inherently bourgeois phenomenon (Blaut 1987). Despite this theoretical divide, Lenin’s new approach to the national question had profound implications throughout the international Marxist movement, particularly in the Third World. For prominent Third World revolutionaries such as Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi Minh, Kim Il-sung, Fidel Castro, and later Rohana Wijeweera, the conclusions of the Second Congress of the Communist International allowed them the freedom to mobilise their respective socialist

³² This has been noted by a number of scholars including J. M Blaut (1987, p. 126): “The emergence of this distinctively Leninist theory of nationalism of national struggle has tended to be neglected for a number of reasons, one being the high visibility of Lenin’s earlier debates with Luxemburg, another being the prominence of Stalin’s 1913 essay on national struggle”.

movements under a national banner³³. Indeed, the influence of the Second Congress was so great that all subsequent anti-colonial and neo-colonial Marxist struggles must be viewed within its historical context.

Frantz Fanon and Postcolonialism

As the Third World entered into a period of anti-colonial upheaval in the latter half of the 20th century, many scholars became increasingly interested in the wide-ranging effects of colonisation. This school of thought became known as Postcolonialism. Notoriously difficult to define, Postcolonialism is not, as its name suggests, solely concerned with the post-colonial period of decolonisation. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall explained, Postcolonial theory primarily deals with the period after colonisation, or what Hall calls the period of “high imperialism and colonial occupation” (Drew 1999, p. 230). As a result of this broad definition, there is virtually no area of the colonial world that doesn’t come under the Postcolonialist rubric. Despite its ambiguous definition, however, Postcolonialism is arguably best known for its studies on the psychological, economic and cultural effects of colonialism as epitomized by the works of Edward Said and Frantz Fanon. Invariably, these Postcolonialist studies – particularly the works of Frantz Fanon – present the nation as the focal point for the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist class struggle (McLeod 2000).

While Fanon is not seen as Marxist-Leninist in the traditional sense, his position on Third World national struggles shared much in common with Lenin. Like Lenin, Fanon highlighted the unending struggle between the Third World and European imperialism, leading Fanon to differentiate the national struggles of the Third World from the European tradition.

Throughout his landmark work *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon stated the importance of breaking free of European influence – economically, politically and intellectually:

It is all too true, however, that we need a model, schemas and examples. For many of us the European model is the most elating. But we have seen in the preceding pages how misleading such an imitation can be. European achievements, European technology and European lifestyles must stop tempting us and leading us astray [Fanon 2004, p. 236].

³³ Prominent British Marxist Eric Hobsbawm stated that the Leninist theory of national movements “widened the category of national movements” regarded as “progressive” (Hobsbawm 1977, p. 10).

A path specific to the needs and desires of the Third World must be sought. Fanon consequently emphasised the need to establish a united “national-consciousness” in the Third World; without it, “national liberation” – and ultimately “internationalism” – would be impossible (Forsyth 1973, pp. 160-173). United class struggle, not European “mimicry”, was the only way the Third World could advance (Fanon 2004, p. 236).

Postcolonialism has become the chief rival of the diffusionist approach to Third World nationalism. In the wake of the growing taboo surrounding the traditional Marxist-Leninist theory on nationalism – as shown with the popularity of the Neo-Marxist school – Postcolonial scholars have taken up the gauntlet. The influence of Frantz Fanon on this school has been immense, particularly on the Subaltern branch of Postcolonial theory represented by Partha Chatterjee. In his well-known essay, entitled *Whose Imagined Community?*, Chatterjee directly challenged the diffusionist assumptions of nationalist theory. For Chatterjee, the diffusionist approach to nationalism ignored the fact that the “most powerful nationalisms” of Asia and Africa were formed, not by replicating the Western model of nationalism, but by struggling against it (Chatterjee 2010, p. 26). Following in the path of Lenin and Fanon, Chatterjee ultimately portrays Third World national struggles as a unique phenomenon incomparable to the history of European nationalism. As I will argue in the following pages, the JVP’s 1987-1989 patriotic struggle reinforces this central tenet of Postcolonial theory.

Wijeweera’s ideology

Wijeweera’s definitive study on Sri Lanka’s national question – entitled *What is the Solution to the Tamil Eelam Question?*³⁴ – is a highly complex historical study of Sri Lanka’s ethnic divisions. Throughout the study, Wijeweera critically examines the growing spectre of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalism and puts forward the JVP’s socialist “solution” to the crisis. Following the path set by Lenin and Fanon, Wijeweera presents Sri Lanka’s extensive history of exploitation by colonial and imperialist powers as the chief source of the country’s national crisis.

³⁴ As this book is unpublished and the copy I had access to was a recently translated word document, I will be unable to cite specific pages.

Throughout *What is the Solution to the Tamil Eelam Question?*, Wijeweera describes the crippling effect of British Colonialism on Sri Lanka. By subjecting Sri Lanka's ethnically diverse population – made up of Sinhala, Tamil, Moors and Burgher peoples – to ethnically specific laws, Wijeweera argues that the British colonialists created enduring national divisions throughout Sri Lankan society (Wijeweera 1986; Nissan & Stirrat, 1990). Although the British left Sri Lanka in 1948, Wijeweera asserts that this strategy of “divide and rule” not only remained after independence, but intensified (Wijeweera 1986). According to Wijeweera, both major parties in Sri Lanka – the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP) – resorted to spreading “Sinhalese racism in the South to come into power”³⁵ (Wijeweera, 1986). The anti-Tamil pogroms of 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983 demonstrate the devastating effects of this tactic.

As the Sri Lankan capitalist system entered into a severe economic and political crisis in the 1980s, Wijeweera argues that there was a sharp intensification of the divide and rule tactic (Wijeweera 1986). Faced with the growing failure of the Sri Lankan capitalist state – as shown by the unemployment rate standing at around 20 per cent during the mid-1980s (World Bank, 27 May 1988) – Wijeweera claimed that the Sri Lankan ruling class began to “whip up racism to divert people's attention from the burning social questions” (Wijeweera 1986)³⁶. To this end, the Sri Lankan ruling class also allowed “the Tamil racist capitalist class to whip up racism in the north and east in the most despicable manner” as it served their Sinhala chauvinist program (Wijeweera, 1986). Like the British colonialists before them, the Sri Lankan ruling class knew that the more divided Sri Lanka became the easier it would be to control. Consequently, Wijeweera presents the economic crisis as “the main reason and

³⁵ Successive Sri Lankan governments have enacted many anti-Tamil policies. The Official Language Bill of 1956 (Known as the Sinhala Only Act, which made Sinhalese the official language of government), the 1972 Constitution (which made Buddhism the foremost religion of Sri Lanka) and the introduction of a ‘District Quota system’ at universities (which “discriminated against the indigenous Tamils in the North”) are all examples of this attack on the Tamil population. Indeed, the United Front's decision to change the name of Ceylon to Sri Lanka in 1972 is viewed by many indigenous Tamils as an example of Sinhala hegemony, as the name is affiliated with Sinhala history and traditions (Cooke 2011, p. 203).

³⁶ Lionel Bopage (2013, pers. comm., 11 July) elaborates on the tactics used by the Sri Lankan capitalist class to spread Sinhalese chauvinist propaganda: “In the ‘80s, in Sri Lanka the chauvinist currents were gaining ground. It was advocated by the governing party as well as the bourgeois parties in the opposition. Within the governing party there were cabinet ministers who were openly advocating chauvinism, and they used many organisations to distribute literature advocating their chauvinistic policies in workplaces, in schools and so on. Cyril Mathews [former government figure] ... used a government printing press to print chauvinistic material and distribute it everywhere. Because of the economic situation, people in the south, especially the youngsters, they also were tending to believe all these chauvinistic things – like Pauline Hanson's things here, when economic circumstances are dire people tend to believe all the propaganda used by the chauvinist groups”.

accelerator of the crisis created by the national question” (Wijeweera 1986). Here, Wijeweera reveals his pointed opposition to the diffusionist conception of Third World nationalism. For Wijeweera, the growth of nationalism in Sri Lanka was not the product of the populism of a “middle-class intelligentsia” as the diffusionists suggest (Nairn 1981, p, 340), but rather was a reaction against the oppressive “divide and rule” tactics of successive Sri Lankan governments (Wijeweera 1986).

Wijeweera offered a simple solution to counter the divide and rule tactics of the Sri Lankan ruling class: he called upon all Sri Lankans – Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim alike – to join the JVP in opposing all bourgeois attempts to salvage Sri Lanka’s ailing capitalist system. Wijeweera ultimately saw it as the prime responsibility of the JVP to ensure that “all parties ... join hands without delay to maintain the democratic rights of the people ... let us mobilise the entire working class, every patriot, every democrat, to save the country” (Wijeweera 1986)³⁷. Wijeweera strongly believed that the national question could only be solved after Sri Lanka is liberated from the bourgeois and imperialist forces – both Tamil and Sinhala, domestic and foreign – who sought to divide it. This was the rationale behind the JVP’s patriotic struggle of 1987-1989.

Wijeweera’s contention is nothing new. The influence of the Second Congress of the Communist International made six decades earlier is clearly apparent. Consequently, it is imperative that the JVP’s patriotic struggle be viewed within this Marxist-Leninist tradition of Third World “national-revolutionary” movements. Like Lenin and Fanon before him, Wijeweera’s tactic was simple – use the national struggle to kick-start the movement for a unified socialist Sri Lanka. By analysing the history and development of JVP ideology in the following two chapters, this thesis will put Wijeweera’s argument to the test.

³⁷ Although Wijeweera stated the need to unite the country, certain commentators have been highly critical of the JVP for failing to form a united front group with other groups during 1987-1989 (Chandraprema 1991; Gunaratna 1990).

CHAPTER 4

The JVP and the Class Struggle: 1965-1987

“You cannot copy a revolution. Whenever anyone copied, it ended in failure and disaster. We realised that in our country the course of action should come through experience.”

Rohana Wijeweera (Gunaratna 1990, p. 112)

“We formed the JVP because the leaders of the traditional left parties...became servants of the bourgeoisie”³⁸.

Lionel Bopage

³⁸ Bopage 2013, pers. comm., 11 July

The JVP has had a tragic history. Beginning with its inception in 1965-1966, the party continually struggled against forces beyond its control. Confronted with the repressive measures of both the Sri Lankan government and its international allies, the meagre resources of the JVP were simply not enough. With no support from the Sri Lankan or the international left-wing movements, a small revolutionary cadre-based party comprised mainly of the rural youth stood little chance of survival. And yet despite the formidable domestic and international obstacles blocking the JVP's road to power, on two occasions the JVP managed to build itself up from complete obscurity to become arguably the most dynamic political force in Sri Lankan politics: first in 1965-1970 when it established itself as a significant revolutionary force; and again in 1977-1987, when the party attracted a whole new generation of young loyal cadres to its cause. What made the JVP so attractive to the Sri Lankan poor youth? What made two generations of Sri Lanka's impoverished youth risk their lives for the party? The answers to these questions ultimately lie in the complex history of JVP ideology.

In stark contrast to the arguments presented by Gunaratna and Chandraprema, this chapter will argue that the Sri Lankan poor – or *Nirdhana Panthiya* (the property-less) as the JVP called them (Wickramasinghe 2006, p. 240) – gravitated toward the JVP because the party was offering them something that no other organisation was at that time: a socialist Sri Lanka. Unlike the “traditional left” of Sri Lanka (Cooke 2011, p. 126) – who in 1968 entered into a coalition with Sirimavo Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party – the JVP proclaimed that it would never “tag itself on to any capitalist party” (Gunaratna 1990, p. 154). Thus, in this chapter I will contend that the roots of the JVP's patriotic struggle were to be found not in the populism of the “intelligentsia” (Nairn 1981, p. 340), but in the concrete economic and political struggles of the Sri Lankan masses. With a particular focus on the JVP's 1971 insurrection and the subsequent rebuilding phase of 1977-1987, this chapter will demonstrate the JVP's indelible link to the Sri Lankan class struggle.

JVP formation and 1971 Insurrection

Since its inception in 1965-1966, the JVP identified as a Marxist-Leninist party (Wijeweera 2013). However, as with most socialist parties, simply labelling the JVP Marxist-Leninist does not tell the full story. To fully comprehend the party's ideology, one must first analyse the JVP within the context of the international socialist movement. Indeed, this task is made

all the more pressing considering the break-down of the friendly relations between the Chinese and Soviet Communist Parties in the early 1960s. Known as the Sino-Soviet split, this development had a profound effect on the international communist movement. All over the world, Communist parties were forced to pledge allegiance to either China or Russia. The JVP chose neither³⁹. To get a full picture of how the JVP fitted in with the international situation, it is most informative to enquire into the ideological evolution of the JVP's most dynamic force – Rohana Wijeweera.

The son of Communist Party member, Rohana Wijeweera – born Patabandi Don Nadasari Wijeweera – developed a keen interest in politics at a young age⁴⁰. A highly capable medical student, at age 17 Wijeweera won a scholarship in 1960 to continue his studies at the famed Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University in Moscow, making him the youngest student to be admitted to the University (Gunaratna 1990, p. 2). The three years he spent in the Soviet Union had profoundly affected his political outlook. Most notably, Wijeweera's discussions with other young socialists at Lumumba University convinced him to adopt the Chinese side of the Sino-Soviet split (Wijeweera 2013). Upon Wijeweera's return to Sri Lanka in 1964, the Communist Party of Ceylon (Moscow Wing) promptly related Wijeweera's pro-Chinese views to the Soviet Union and his return visa to the Soviet Union was blocked (Cooke 2011, p. 79). Subsequently, young Wijeweera naturally gravitated toward the Communist Party of Ceylon (Peking Wing). However, after joining the Peking Wing in 1965, Wijeweera soon became dissatisfied with its "rightist and social-democratic tendencies" (Wijeweera 2013, p. 8) and began an ideological struggle within the party. In a dramatic gesture, Wijeweera and nine other Peking Wing activists met in Akmeemana on 14 May 1965 and signed in blood to confirm their commitment to initiate a true socialist movement within Sri Lanka (Gunaratna 1990, p. 77; Gunasekera 1998, p. 616). For many, this is seen as a watershed moment in Sri Lankan history, with some commentators – as well as the JVP themselves – considering it as the formation of the JVP. Not long after this historic event, Ceylon Communist Party (Peking Wing) leader N. Shanmugathan discovered Wijeweera's plan to seize power within the party. Consequently, from April 1966 onward Wijeweera and his comrades were gradually expelled from the party. It was at this point that these young Sri Lankan socialists, disaffected with both Chinese and Soviet Sri

³⁹ In 1975, Rohana Wijeweera wrote a book called "Opportunism or Proletarian Internationalism" which criticised both the Russian and Chinese communist parties (Sanath 2013, pers. Comm., 7 September).

⁴⁰ Wijeweera was a member of the Communist youth league (Wijeweera 2013).

Lankan communist parties, decided to form a new Marxist-Leninist party. The JVP was born⁴¹.

Right from the start, the JVP had an antagonistic relationship with Sri Lanka's traditional left wing movement⁴². Communist Party of Ceylon (Moscow Wing) leader Pieter Keuneman best articulated the feelings of the traditional left toward the JVP when he characterised its ideology as an "infantile form of negative nihilism" (Cooke 2011, p. 102). For the traditional left, the JVP represented a largely adolescent movement that held nothing sacred, not even the established political lines of the Soviet Union or China (Cooke 2011). More importantly, however, the traditional left recognised the JVP as a major threat to its support-base. Accordingly, the traditional left went to considerable lengths to undermine the JVP. In a remarkable example of socialist sectarianism, the traditional left hijacked the JVP's attempts to foster friendly relations with the Chinese and Soviet Communist parties. To this end, Sri Lanka's Soviet affiliated parties – led by the Communist Party (Moscow Wing) – informed the Soviet Union that the JVP was a CIA-led group⁴³, while the Chinese affiliated parties – led by the Communist Party (Peking Wing) – simultaneously informed China that the JVP was a KGB-led group⁴⁴. Adding to this farcical situation, during the JVP's 1971 insurrection, Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike appealed to the West for military assistance by portraying the JVP as militant Marxist group (Cooke 2011, p. 209). While these campaigns were highly effective in isolating the JVP from the international community, they were ultimately powerless to prevent the JVP appealing to its most important power-source – the Sri Lankan poor.

In 1967, the JVP began its program of mass-education. JVP cadres travelled extensively throughout the country explaining the importance of a socialist Sri Lanka. Commonly referred to as the "five-classes"⁴⁵, this program of education was a highly effective recruiting method. For the growing proportion of Sri Lankans living below the poverty line – which in 1969 had risen to 65 per cent of the population (Cooke 2011, p. 118)⁴⁶ – the JVP's

⁴¹ Before 1970, the JVP was popularly known as the Movement (Cooke 2011) and the New Left (Weiss 2011).

⁴² The traditional left was pejoratively referred to as the 'Old Left' by the JVP. Accordingly, the JVP saw themselves as 'the new left' (Cooke 2011).

⁴³ In response to the allegation that they were CIA operatives, the JVP began a highly successful lecture campaign on how the CIA operated and who the real CIA agents were (Cooke 2011, p. 127).

⁴⁴ Bopage 2013, pers. comm., 11 July

⁴⁵ Ibid.,

⁴⁶ Taking a yearly per capita income of 3,000 Rs. as the poverty line.

impassioned message of a socialist Sri Lanka was attractive. The “five classes” also offer an invaluable tool for the historian to discern the JVP’s early ideology. I will now very briefly elucidate each of the five classes (Cooke 2011, pp. 87-94):

1. *“The Manner in which the Economic Crisis grows into a Political Crisis”* – Detailed the economic crisis of the Sri Lankan capitalist system.
2. *“Independence: a Neo-Colonial Strategy”* – On the growing influence of American imperialism in the Third World.
3. *“Indian Expansionism”* – Explained the growing influence of Indian capitalism throughout South-Asia.
4. *“The Left Movement in Ceylon”* – Looked at the reasons why the traditional left movement became subservient to the Sri Lankan capitalist class.
5. *“The Path the Sri Lankan Revolution Should Take”* – The most controversial class. It explained the manner in which the peasantry and urban proletariat would wage a simultaneous armed struggle to capture state power.

Those who showed an interest in joining the JVP were encouraged to attend an extended three to five day education camp in the countryside. In these camps, Wijeweera led all discussions which went for as long as 18 hours each day (Cooke 2011, p. 86). Soon, this well-organised and highly effective campaign gained the attention of the ruling United National Party (UNP) government. Consequently, in 1969 Wijeweera was arrested and put on trial (Cooke 2011). However, far from stifling the burgeoning JVP movement, the UNP government’s decision to arrest Wijeweera only succeeded in increasing the revolutionary sentiments of the Sri Lankan rural youth, and along with it, the JVP’s membership⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ After his trial Wijeweera was released (Cooke 2011, p. 126).

When the traditional left joined the Sri Lanka Freedom Party's United Front Coalition in 1968, the JVP's characterisation of them as "social-democrats" (Wijeweera 2013) appeared vindicated. Nevertheless, the United Front's impressive program of sweeping reforms could not be denied, and the JVP subsequently supported the United Front's successful – and largely unexpected – march to power in the 1970 general elections⁴⁸. By this time, the JVP were becoming increasingly influential – the party's tireless education campaign had attracted around 23,000 members, many of whom were rural youth (Cooke 2011, p. 128)⁴⁹. The attraction many thousands of Sri Lankans felt to the JVP, however, was not only due to the party's unyielding commitment to a socialist Sri Lanka – the fact that the JVP leadership all came from relatively poor backgrounds was also of great significance.

Unlike the leaders of the traditional left who were exclusively educated at the privileged institutions of Sri Lanka (St. Thomas, Royal College) and England (Oxford, Cambridge), the JVP leaders were largely products of the country's least prestigious schools (Cooke 2011, p. 76)⁵⁰. Furthermore, in stark contrast to all other Sri Lankan political parties, the JVP had no paid office bearers (Cooke 2011, p. 128). Instead, the party survived on funds raised from its supporters and robberies. Accordingly, the JVP had strict rules that forbade party members from spending party funds on unnecessary expenses like cigarettes and alcohol (Gunaratna 1990, p. 128). This system remained right up until the JVP's annihilation in late 1989. Thus, when the JVP began delivering its five classes, underprivileged Sri Lankans – particularly the rural youth – were instantly attracted. The impoverished youth of Sri Lanka, so often neglected by mainstream politicians, appeared to finally have a voice. And so when the newly-elected United Front coalition failed to deliver on its progressive program (Cooke 2011), the JVP presented itself as the only true socialist force in the country.

⁴⁸ The United Front's election into government marked a number of important milestones, not just for Sri Lanka, but for global politics. Not only was it the first time a female (Sirimavo Bandaranaike) was elected as a head of state, but it was also the first time a Trotskyist political party (LSSP) was elected into government.

⁴⁹ The JVP's appeal was particularly strong amongst the youth. One of the main reasons for this was Sri Lanka's remarkably high proportion of young people. By the 1970s, 60% of the population was under 24 years of age (Gunaratna 1990, p. 358). This high proportion of youth population was a product of Sri Lanka's exponential increase in the population – between 1946 and the late 1960s, the population had went from 6.6 million to 12.5 million (Cooke 2011, p. 109). Unsurprisingly, many of these youth were unable to find jobs and by the late 1980s, half of the unemployed figure (which stood at around 1.2 million) was under 24 years old. Many of these youths naturally gravitated toward the JVP (Gunaratna 1990, pp.63-67).

⁵⁰ Wijeweera's scholarship to Lumumba University is an obvious exception. This fact has been used by some commentators – rather unconvincingly – to support their argument that Wijeweera had special privileges within the party (Chandraprema 1991; Gunaratna 1990).

In the face of growing dissatisfaction with the United Front government – and the growing unemployment rate, which had reached about 20 per cent in 1971 (World Bank, May 1988)⁵¹ – the government security forces intensified their repressive tactics against the JVP. Once again, on 13 March 1971, Wijeweera was arrested. Three days later, on 16 March, Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike announced that her government had discovered a JVP plot to overthrow the government and declared a state of emergency. The government's security forces moved quickly to neutralise the JVP threat, and by the end of March 1971 4,000 JVP cadres had been arrested (McGowan 1992, p. 407). At the same time, Prime Minister Bandaranaike enacted an archaic Emergency Regulation which allowed the government to dispose of bodies without an inquest (Cooke 2011, p. 138). A conflict was imminent.

On 2 April 1971, the JVP leadership gathered without the imprisoned Wijeweera to discuss the situation. At this meeting it was agreed that the best way the party could defend itself against the government's increasingly repressive tactics was to go on the offensive – a move Wijeweera later regarded as suicidal (Cooke 2011, p. 153)⁵². Thus, on the 5 April 1971 the JVP attacked 74 police stations throughout the island (Gunaratna 1990, p. 92)⁵³. According to scholar Anthony Alles, this action marked the first time in history a youth movement launched an insurrection without any outside assistance (Alles 1990). However, this lack of international support for the JVP would have tragic consequences for the party. Unknown to the JVP, Prime Minister Bandaranaike had appealed to the international community for assistance in crushing the JVP, or the “Che Gueverarists” as the government occasionally referred to them (Jiggins 1979, p. 142). The international response surpassed even the most ambitious of government expectations – India, Yugoslavia, China, the United States, the Soviet Union, Pakistan, Singapore, Czechoslovakia and even Australia sent military

⁵¹ Under the United Front government (1970-1977), unemployment went from 585,000 to 700,000. In a workforce of only 4.4 Million, this was “unacceptably high” (Cooke 2011, p. 130). The public disappointment in the United Front government was profound. As Fred Halliday (1975, p. 184) stated, “Ceylon’s popular mood has slumped drastically from euphoria and hope to dismay and discontent. Seldom can ministers have had to disappoint their followers so unkindly, backtrack so rapidly and pigeon-hole promises so irreverently.”

⁵² Many factors would have influenced this decision, most notably the growing trend of repression against Communist Parties in the Third World. No example can better illustrate this point than the slaughtering of the Indonesian Communist party (PKI), which was then one of the biggest Communist Parties in the world. As President Suharto launched his US-sponsored military coup in 1965-1966, his army began a widespread campaign of killings ending in the deaths of between 500,000 to 1 million Indonesian Communist party members and sympathisers (Vickers 2005, p. 159; Friend 2003, p. 113) Another 1.8 million were taken prisoner (Friend 2003, p. 111). Fearing an Indonesian style slaughter, the JVP leadership decided to go on the offensive (Gunaratna 1990, p. 84).

⁵³ JVP activists in Monaragala district misunderstood the order to attack, and launched its attack on the Wellawaya police station at 5:20 am on April 5 – many hours before was agreed. Consequently, all across the island the police were alerted to the JVP’s plan (Gunaratna 1990, p. 92-93).

assistance to Sri Lanka (Cooke 2011, p. 147; Weiss 2012, p. 45). With its airports brimming with new military equipment, the Bandaranaike government made short work of the JVP's insurrection⁵⁴. The traditional left took a prominent role in the crushing of the JVP. Under the control of Communist Party (Moscow Wing) leader Pieter Keuneman, the government counter-insurgency unit arrested 16,500 JVP cadres and sympathisers (Cooke 2011, p. 133). This figure later rose to around 35,000-40,000 (Weiss 2012, p. 46)⁵⁵. Simultaneously, the United Front government began a highly effective anti-JVP propaganda campaign by stating officially that the JVP planned to kill all children under the age of five and all adults over fifty-five (Cooke 2011, p. 146). With this avalanche of anti-JVP forces, both foreign and domestic, the JVP's insurrection lasted no longer than a month. Estimations of JVP deaths range wildly from 4,000 to 15,000. Following the resulting trial of the JVP – known as the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) trial – 390 party cadres were imprisoned (Gunaratna 1990, p. 115). Wijeweera, along with five other leaders, were sentenced to life imprisonment. The JVP's unexpected and sudden rise appeared to be over.

The JVP Rebuild and Reorganise: 1977-1987

After a growing island-wide campaign to repeal the Criminal Justice Commission Act and release the political prisoners, on 11 November 1977 Rohana Wijeweera was released from prison. The newly elected Prime Minister J. R. Jayewardene later reasoned that if his United National Party government did not release Wijeweera “he would have become like Nelson Mandela” (Gunaratna 1990, p. 141). Jayewardene would come to regret this decision. Despite the assurances of the JVP leaders that they had learnt their lesson from the disaster of 1971 and would never again resort to insurrectionary violence (Gunaratna 1990, p. 127), it was clear to many that Rohana Wijeweera would not allow the JVP to become a social-democratic party. The JVP instead pursued a middle ground – while the party openly advocated parliamentary politics and omitted the most openly confrontational parts of the

⁵⁴ Lionel Bopage (2013, pers. comm., 11 July) explains what happened when the JVP tried to make friendly contacts with the Chinese government during the insurrection. “In ’71...I had connections with the Chinese embassy in Colombo and after the insurrection – that was 5 April – I went to the Chinese embassy on 7 April and met the political attaché there, and I told him that I wanted to explain what really happened on the 5 April and what the political situation is. And what he basically said is ‘leave the embassy now otherwise I’m going to call the police’”. The Chinese government instead chose to side with the Communist Party (Peking Wing), effectively dashing the JVP's hopes of a successful insurrection.

⁵⁵ The average age of those arrested was 20 years old and 98.4% were Sinhalese (Gunaratna 1990, p. 119).

“five classes”⁵⁶, behind closed doors the party acknowledged that a peaceful transition to socialism would be impossible (Richardson 2005, p. 475).

During this parliamentary phase⁵⁷, the JVP leadership reconsidered its position on a number of important ideological matters, most notably the rising trend of Tamil nationalism⁵⁸. As former General Secretary Lionel Bopage explained, the time spent in jail gave the party the opportunity to conduct a close analyse of Sri Lanka’s political and economic environment:

When I was brought back to Colombo [after meeting Tamil dissidents while in jail in 1972] I spoke to Rohana and said that in addition to our problems there are problems for the Tamil people; we need to study these and develop some sort of a policy to address these issues⁵⁹

Thus, Wijeweera asked Bopage to publish a book on the correct Marxist-Leninist approach to Sri Lanka’s national question⁶⁰. Bopage’s subsequent study, entitled *A Marxist Analysis on the National Question*, put forward the JVP’s approach to the national question. In a move that would have surprised many, Bopage’s report accepted the democratic right of Tamils to determine their own political destiny. Although Bopage’s study effectively granted the right of Tamils to self-determination, he also maintained that separation was not the solution to the problems of Tamils⁶¹. Consequently, after the release of Bopage’s book in 1977, the JVP “advocated a united Sri Lanka with regional autonomy, where all residents could live as equals” (Cooke 2011, p. 310). However, with the sudden rise of Tamil nationalism

⁵⁶ For example, the highly controversial class “The Path the Sri Lankan Revolution should take”⁵⁶ became “The Path Taken in the Making of a Revolution” (Gunaratna 1990)

⁵⁷ In this period, the JVP made significant headway in parliamentary politics. By 1982 thirteen JVP representatives were elected to the District Development Councils (DDC) councils and the party received about 10% of the vote at the DDC elections. (Gunaratna 1990, p. 152-153) In tune with the JVP’s principles, each JVP DDC member donated their salary of around Rs. 1000 to the party.

⁵⁸ Tamil nationalism officially began on 14 May 1976 when the leading Tamil political group – known as the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) – adopted the Vaddukoddai Resolution, which called for the creation of a separate Tamil state; a Tamil ‘Eelam’. The TULF subsequently ran on this program during the 1977 elections and won a majority of votes in the North and East, winning 18 seats. Eventually, with the escalation of the Sinhala chauvinist policies of the UNP and SLFP governments, many Tamils – particularly the youth – became disillusioned with parliamentary politics. Consequently over 30 Tamil militant groups had emerged during the 1970s. In particular five stood out: these were the People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) and of course the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE). (Mehta 2010, p.41) As we will see in Chapter Five, most of these groups received military funding and assistance from the Indian government.

⁵⁹ Bopage 2013, pers. comm., 11 July

⁶⁰ Ibid.,

⁶¹ Ibid.,

throughout the early 1980s, the JVP's commitment to this new position wavered. Sanath – a former mid-level JVP cadre – explains:

After 1980 – the Tamil movement, Tamil nationalism, rising to a different level – and then only we had to examine the problem in Lanka. So once we started examining the situation the differences occurred ... because earlier we didn't have any sort of discussion⁶².

An ideological debate within the party ensued. While Bopage was adamant the party must retain its policy granting the Tamil right to self-determination, Wijeweera and his supporters argued that the rising tide of militant Tamil nationalism necessitated a change of policy. For Wijeweera, accepting the Tamil right to self-determination was not in the proletarian interests of Sri Lanka as it would encourage the growing bourgeois nationalist forces operating within the country. In June 1983, the debate was taken to a vote in the Central Committee. As only two Central Committee members voted with Bopage, Wijeweera's position easily prevailed (Cooke 2011, p. 310)⁶³. As a result, the party abandoned its position that accepted the Tamil right to self-determination (see Appendix I). In the subsequent years, the JVP's change of policy on the national question has been consistently criticised. Due no small part to the writings of Bopage and others, the JVP's decision to abandon the Tamil right to self-determination has been widely viewed as a capitulation to the Sinhala chauvinist forces existing in Sri Lanka during the 1980s (Chandraprema 1990). However, a close analysis of the JVP's post-1983 ideology presents a far more complicated picture.

On 23 July 1983, Sri Lankan politics changed forever. Following the deaths of 13 Sri Lankan soldiers at the hands of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the northern area of Jaffna, Colombo became engulfed in arguably the worst case of communal violence ever to hit Sri Lanka (Weiss 2012, p. 51). Angry at the growing influence of the LTTE, on 24 July Sinhalese gangs roamed Colombo attacking Tamils. Soon the anti-Tamil riots spread across the country (Cooke 2011, p. 286). It is estimated that 2,000 to 3,000 Tamils were killed in these attacks, with nearly 200,000 others forced to flee their homes (Cooke 2011, 290). Eventually, around 125,000 Tamils would cross the Palk straight into India (De Silva 1991, p. 80). On 31 July 1983 – a full week after the event took place – President Jayewardene finally

⁶² Sanath 2013, pers. comm., 7 September

⁶³ According to Bopage (2013, pers. comm., 11 July), this was the first vote in the central committee that was not unanimous.

responded to the crisis by banning the JVP, the Communist Party and the NSSP⁶⁴ for their alleged role in the riots. While it is universally acknowledged that these parties had no role in the attacks (Gunaratna 1990; Chandraprema 1991) – indeed, the Communist Party and the NSSP were legalised shortly after (Gunasekera 1998, pp. 237-239)⁶⁵ – the ban on the JVP remained for the next five years. This had a profound effect on the JVP⁶⁶. Sanath explains:

In 1983 the party was banned and the majority of the full timers and the cadres left the party, from the top and the lower level as well, because number of politburo members, number of central committee members left the party and they didn't want to go underground ... Once the JVP went underground in 1983, we knew we were heading to an armed revolution⁶⁷.

After the ban, the majority of the party membership – which according to Wijeweera was roughly 200,000 in 1982⁶⁸ – left the party. Further inflaming the situation was the rise of separatist Tamil militant groups in the north. Indeed, the anti-Tamil riots of July 1983 had effectively driven thousands of disaffected Tamils – particularly the youth – straight into the arms of the Tamil militant movement. According to Sri Lankan government intelligence, the membership of the Tamil nationalist groups skyrocketed from around 200 before to riots, to at least 15,000 in 1987 (Gunaratna 1990, p. 238). The 1983 riots had ultimately spawned two militant armed forces looking to overthrow the Sri Lankan state – the JVP in the south, and the LTTE in the north. While the JVP would wait until 1987 to begin its armed struggle, the

⁶⁴ New Social Equality Party, an offshoot of the LSSP

⁶⁵ The Communist Party's proscription was lifted with the intervention of the Soviet Embassy (Gunasekera 1998, pp. 237-239).

⁶⁶ Rohana Gunaratna (1990, p. 156) comments on the effects of government repression on the JVP: "Even though the JVP had not yet resorted to a militant existence, it was being gradually forced into such a path". Bopage (2013, pers. comm., 11 July) on other hand, maintains that the party should not have gone underground after the ban. "Still I believe we could have got the proscription lifted ... they [the government] would have lifted the proscription and allowed us to operate in public, but they would have used more repressive methods – banning meetings, attacking people physically and all those things would have happened – but at least we were in the public". Instead, the JVP leadership decided to make preparations for the armed struggle – a decision which Bopage sharply criticises.

⁶⁷ Furthermore, after its proscription it took more than a year for the JVP to begin operations (Sanath 2013, pers. comm., 7 September). Bopage insists that the JVP should not have gone underground in 1983, and considers it the beginning of the JVP's poor decision making that ended with the destruction of the party in 1989 (Bopage 2013, pers. comm., 11 July)

⁶⁸ Estimations of party membership range widely. Gunaratna (1991, p. 178) states that in 1982 the party membership numbered around 400,000. The best indication of membership, however, is the 1982 presidential elections in which Wijeweera ran as a candidate. In these elections, Wijeweera received around 300,000 votes – a huge disappointment for the highly ambitious JVP. While this vote made JVP the third largest party on the island and the most popular party of the Sri Lankan left, the JVP had failed to break the Sri Lankan two-party system. Some critics, most notably Lionel Bopage, alleges that this disappointing election result led the party on a Sinhala chauvinist path to increase its membership (Cooke 2011; Bopage 2013, pers. comm., 11 July). See Appendix I for more details.

superior funding and support given to the LTTE led them to begin operations immediately. Consequently, between 1983 and 1987, the LTTE were responsible for many terrorist attacks, killing roughly 600 to 700 innocent civilians (Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence 1984-1987).

There is no doubt that the growing influence of the LTTE led the JVP to harden its approach to Tamil nationalism. Drawing mainly from the works of Lenin, the JVP argued that Sri Lanka's changing historical circumstances necessitated a new policy on the national question. Under the party's new analysis – seen in Wijeweera's *What is the Solution to the Tamil Eelam Question?* – it was argued that Sri Lanka's growing ethnic divisions were a direct product of the country's "economic crisis" (Wijeweera, 1986)⁶⁹. Thus, while Wijeweera acknowledged that the rise of militant Tamil nationalism was essentially a reaction to the "national discrimination" imposed by the "Sinhalese racist capitalist class", he also pointed out the political and economic motivations behind this discrimination (Wijeweera, 1986)⁷⁰. This is not the argument of a "Sinhala chauvinist" (Chandraprema 1991, p. 115).

According to the JVP, a separate Tamil state would not solve Sri Lanka's national question. What would happen to the 50 per cent of Tamils who lived outside the northern areas? What would happen to the hundreds of thousands of Muslims living in the north and the east? Sanath explains:

If you examine Sri Lanka properly, the historical situation and the land and everything, the population and where they live ... you can't find a reason to separate. The only thing is the chauvinist, nationalist policies adopted by the successive governments. We accepted the national oppression. But there isn't a reality to separate. You can't find a separate land. That is our point, that is our main argument ... Because north and east and everywhere is connected to a centralised economy ... Some say – like Bopage – they say, "it doesn't matter you just say we are for self-determination because that's the only way you can make them believe, and you can build up the trust". But my point is very clear: yes if there is a reality for a separate state, we

⁶⁹ See Chapter Three

⁷⁰ Sanath (2013 pers. comm., 7 September) echoed this sentiment: "We analysed the LTTE as a fascist movement, or like a nationalist or chauvinist movement, but at the same time we knew the reason why LTTE had emerged – the LTTE or any other Tamil armed groups...as Marxist party, as a leftist party, we explain the reason why; the situation. But we did not want to fight against them, because our main enemy was the state, our main enemy was the Indian army. They [the LTTE] were the results of the situation – the national oppression and the policies adopted by successive governments and the policies adopted by the Tamil bourgeois... So we did not want to fight against the result." Consequently, according to Sanath the "DJV did not fight against any sort of Tamil person, a single person."

can use that, but other than that if you don't have a reality, if you are using the slogan, it means you are cheating them. You are cheating them ... Eastern province, there are three districts, Batticaloa, Ampara and Trincomalee, and according to latest senses, Muslims are the majority, Tamil, then Sinhalese ... and 50% of Tamils are living outside the Northern and Eastern Provinces ... There is no room for a separate state in Lanka. Because if we accept Tamil then are accepting for Muslims as well, and for Sinhalese as well. Separation is that isn't it? If you believe this is a Sinhala state, you can say "yes you can separate", but we don't believe this is a Sinhala state; this is a state for Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people, all together⁷¹.

Consequently, the JVP offered one simple solution – a united socialist Sri Lanka. Somewhat controversially, the JVP dismissed any middle-ground of regional autonomy as a policy that would lead to separation. Lionel Bopage, among others, has been particularly critical of the JVP's firm stance against all forms of Tamil autonomy during the mid 1980s. According to Bopage, there was essentially "no difference between what the JVP was advocating and what an orthodox parliamentary party would have been advocating on the national question" (Boyle 2009). Despite these critics, however, throughout 1987-1989 the JVP leadership was confident that overthrowing the ethnically divisive capitalist system – not separation or regional autonomy – was the only solution to the country ethnic crisis. According to the JVP, only then could Sri Lankans – Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim alike – be free to construct a society in their own interests.

The history of the JVP prior to 1987-1989 reveals much about the nature of the party. In contradiction to the arguments of Chandraprema and Gunaratna, it shows that the JVP were a product of the Sri Lankan masses' dissatisfaction with the traditional left. This gave the JVP ideology a uniqueness never before seen in Sri Lankan politics. More than any other political organisation in Sri Lanka, the JVP considered the emancipation of Sri Lanka's masses – or in other words, the establishment of a socialist Sri Lanka – as its most pressing task. Anything that was deemed to be impeding the struggle for a socialist Sri Lanka, such as the rise of Tamil and Sinhalese nationalisms, was firmly opposed. In this way, to label the JVP as a Sinhala chauvinist or a populist party during the pre-1987 amounts to a complete misrepresentation of JVP ideology. However, beginning with the signing of Indo-Lanka

⁷¹ Sanath, pers. comm., 7 September 2013

peace accord in July 1987 and subsequent arrival of the 100,000 Indian soldiers (Gunaratna 1990, p. 255), the JVP began to change rapidly.

CHAPTER 5

The JVP's Patriotic Struggle of 1987-1989

“Kill the Brutes ... crush them like animals”

President J. R Jayewardene (Gunasekera 1998, p. 315)

“There are only three places for a revolutionary in these times. He should either be among the dead or in a dark prison cell or in the battle field”

Che Guevara (Gunaratna 1990, p. 221)

To begin to understand the JVP's 1987-1989 patriotic struggle, one must first recognise the importance of India. Indeed, it was only after the signing of the Indo-Lankan Peace Accord in July 1987 – and the subsequent arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Force – that the JVP became a major political force on the island. While Gunaratna and Chandraprema conclude that the JVP's patriotic struggle was a “cynical” (Chandraprema 1990, p. 315) attempt to exploit the “prevailing anti-Indian sentiment” generated by the Accord (Gunaratna 1990, p. 255), this chapter will strongly refute this claim. Drawing heavily on my interviews with three former JVP cadres, I will argue that the JVP's patriotic struggle was a product of three important factors: (1) India's campaign of interference in Sri Lanka that began after the anti-Tamil riots of 1983; (2) the JVP's long-held reservations about India's growing influence in the South Asian region; and (3) the Marxist-Leninist tradition of Third World “national-revolutionary” struggles.

India's Intervention

India has been a ubiquitous presence throughout the rise of Sri Lanka's Tamil nationalist movement. As the southern Indian states are home to some 50 million Tamils, the Indian Tamil community has naturally developed an interest in their fellow Tamils located only 90 miles away in Sri Lanka. However, it was not until the re-election of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister in 1980 that the concerns of the Indian Tamil community were reflected within the policies of the Indian government. As Indira Gandhi rose to power through the support given to her by the southern states, she was “more sensitive than ever before” to their concerns (De Silva 1991, p. 78-79). To this end, after the anti-Tamil riots of 1983, the Indian government established close links with a number of Sri Lankan Tamil militant organisations⁷². Over the next five years India's foreign intelligence service – the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) – trained and armed around 15,000 separatist Tamil militants in Indian military camps (Gunaratna 1990, p. 238)⁷³. Indira Gandhi's approach to Sri Lanka was so combative that she

⁷² As the Indian government was closely aligned with the U.S.S.R during the 1980s, Indira Gandhi was growing increasingly anxious over President Jayewardene's friendly relations with the United States. Indeed, President Jayewardene was popularly referred to as ‘Yankee Dick’ for his pro-American stance. Therefore, Indira Gandhi's intervention into Sri Lanka's internal politics is commonly viewed as a way to prevent the development of a pro-American Sri Lanka (Muni 1991, p. 119).

⁷³ “According to the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) sources, corroborated by information from militants, India trained, armed and directed 2000 LTTE militants, 8000 People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) militants, 1250 Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) militants and 1500 Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) militants” (Gunaratna 1990, p. 238).

also allegedly held secret plans to invade (Gunaratna 1990, p. 243-244). However, the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards on 24 October 1984 put an end to such plans.

When Rajiv Gandhi became India's Prime Minister after the death of his mother, he inherited her combative policies toward Sri Lanka⁷⁴. The prickly relations between the two countries finally came to a head on 26 May 1987, when the Sri Lankan Army launched a highly effective attack on the LTTE's power-base in the northern city of Jaffna⁷⁵. With the LTTE fast losing control of the Jaffna peninsula, India began to flex its muscles. On 3 June 1987, Rajiv Gandhi sent a flotilla of around 20 fishing vessels filled with food and petroleum products to the Jaffna peninsula to assist the besieged LTTE⁷⁶. Affronted by India's meddling, the Sri Lankan navy promptly turned them back. However, India was not to be outdone and returned the next day armed with MiG fighter planes (Weiss 2012, p. 56). In a blatant violation of international law, the Indian Air Force proceeded to enter Sri Lankan airspace and dropped food and medical supplies into LTTE territory, effectively breaking the siege. For the next month, India pressed home its advantage⁷⁷ and pressured President Jayewardene to agree to its terms of establishing a semi-autonomous Tamil regional unit in the north and east of Sri Lanka. In the end a compromise was reached – the Indians would send in a peacekeeping force to disarm the insurgents and in return the Sri Lankan government would cease hostilities in the north and add a new amendment to the constitution that would oversee the establishment of a provincial council system (Weiss 2012). The Indo-Lankan Peace Accord was signed on July 27 1987.

While on the surface it appears that the Indian government simply bullied President Jayewardene into signing the Indo-Lankan Peace Accord, a closer examination reveals that the JVP's growing presence in the south was also an important factor⁷⁸. Not only were the

⁷⁴ Like his mother before him, Rajiv Gandhi refused to acknowledge India's training and funding of Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups despite the fact both Western and Indian newspapers carried stories acknowledging their existence (De Silva 1991, pp.79-83).

⁷⁵ Known as "Operation Liberation".

⁷⁶ Additionally, around this time the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu made a highly publicized donation of US\$3.2 Million to the LTTE and its allies (De Silva 1991, p. 89)

⁷⁷ After the first supplies were dropped, the Sri Lankan government reluctantly agreed to allow Indian supply vessels into Jaffna (De Silva 1991, p.90).

⁷⁸ The fact that President Jayewardene banned 17 JVP affiliated trade unions in May 1987 demonstrates the growing anxiety of the Sri Lankan government (Gunaratna 1990, p. 55).

JVP actively undermining the government at universities across the island throughout 1986 and early 1987, but from March 1987 the party had also begun raiding military camps and collecting weapons. Hamstrung by the civil war with the LTTE, the government was unable to confront the JVP. However, with the signing of the of the Indo-Lankan Peace Accord – and subsequent arrival of the 100,000-strong Indian Peace Keeping Force to disarm the LTTE (Gunaratna 1990, p. 255) – the government security forces were able to relocate its operations to the south to tackle the JVP head-on. There is no question that without the intervention of the Indian Peace Keeping Force – which ironically would become bogged down in a two-year war against a force it had hitherto armed and trained⁷⁹ – President Jayewardene’s government would have been unable to effectively wage war against the JVP. Yet despite the obvious tactical prowess of President Jayewardene, he was either unwilling or unable to recognise that by signing the Indo-Lankan Peace Accord he was also providing the JVP with the perfect tool to mobilise the Sri Lankan masses in the fight for a socialist Sri Lanka.

Evolution of JVP’s ideology on India

The JVP’s critical approach to India dates back to the party’s inception in 1965-66. Following a concept originated by Mao Tse-tung in the late 1950s⁸⁰, the JVP criticised India’s expanding influence throughout the south-Asian region⁸¹. Consequently, in 1967 the JVP developed an educational class entitled “Indian expansionism” (Gunaratna 1990, p.61).

⁷⁹ On 18 September 1989, Rajiv Gandhi signed an agreement to withdraw the Indian Peace Keeping Force – or as the JVP called them, the Indian People Killing Force. By March 1990 the Indian Peace Keeping Force completed its withdrawal (De Silva 1991, p.98-99). The 32 month presence of the Indian Peace Keeping Force resulted in the deaths of 1200 Indian soldiers and around 5000 Sri Lankans, and cost the Indian government an estimated 10.3 billion rupees (Richardson 2005, p. 562). Notably, in 1991 Rajiv Gandhi was later assassinated by the LTTE (President Ranasinghe Premadasa – who was elected following Jayewardene in late 1988 – was also killed by the LTTE two years later in 1993)

⁸⁰ In 1954, India published new maps that included the Aksai Chin region within the boundaries of India. China rebuffed India’s claim to this area, which it argued was a part of Tibet. Mao then accused the Indian government – then led by Nehru – of imperialism and expansionism (Noorani 2004). This disagreement between India and China eventually resulted in the 1962 Sino-Indian border war (October 20 1962-November 21 1962).

⁸¹ Bopage elaborates on the extent China influenced the JVP’s policy on Indian expansionism: “We originated as Maoists. Just before we joined the JVP we were Maoists and the Indian expansionism – the concept – was something put forward by Mao. What Mao basically said is that India has been developing capitalistically, and as what happened in the UK during the industrial revolution, nationally they built up capitalism and then they came to a certain situation where they needed to expand capitalism more: they needed raw materials from somewhere else, and they needed to sell their stuff somewhere else ... so basically Mao argued that India is trying to dominate the region, so that was the concept behind Indian expansionism” (Bopage 2013, pers. comm., 11 July).

The concept of Indian expansionism was of such import to party ideology that in the 1970 Wijeweera released a press release – the party first – calling for the “anti-imperialistic patriotic people to expel the unpatriotic UNP which was a pawn of Indian expansionism and U.S imperialism” (Gunaratna 1990, p. 82). After the party’s 1971 insurrection, however, this policy underwent significant changes. Similar to the JVP’s significant re-think on the national question in 1977, the party leadership began to examine the effect its position on Indian expansionism was having on Sri Lanka’s Tamil population. Due to the strong connection Sri Lankan Tamils had to India⁸², the party leadership questioned whether its policy on Indian expansionism would alienate Sri Lankan Tamils. Consequently, the JVP took out its class on “Indian expansionism” in 1971. Lionel Bopage explains:

In the south of Sri Lanka, when you speak about Indians – you know, even Tamils are considered as Indian ... so there was this misconception within the south, when we said about Indian expansionism it also meant Tamils ... In the discussions we had while imprisoned – this is from 1971 to 1972 – during the discussions we understood that there had been many deficiencies in the class, that it has been interpreted in different ways by different people within the JVP ... some people have used it against the Tamil people ... it was a mess. So the best way to address that was to get rid of the class⁸³.

Yet the sudden rise of Tamil nationalism after 1983 led the party to once again change its approach to India. The prominent role played by the Indian government in arming and funding militant Tamil nationalist groups led the JVP to identify a new obstacle confronting a socialist Sri Lanka – Indian imperialism.

In 1986, the JVP’s analysis of Indian Imperialism became a central component of the party’s ideology. In response to the rising influence of the LTTE, the JVP decided to take a firm stand against India. Sanath explains:

In 1986 we distributed pamphlets and slogans everywhere. The posters campaign – “there is going to be an Indian invasion” ... everybody laughed at us, “this is an allusion” ... still I can

⁸² In explaining the strong link Sri Lankan Tamils have with India, Sanath stated that the majority of the Sri Lankan Tamils support the Indian cricket team when they play Sri Lanka (Sanath 2013, pers. comm., 7 September)

⁸³ Bopage 2013, pers. comm., 11 July

remember because I also took part in that event...Because repeatedly there were blasts; bomb blasts occurred in Colombo, number of people, 200-300 people were killed by the Tamil Militant groups. So [our] main slogan was – I will try and translate it into English – ‘the reason for this bombing is to create a situation for an Indian intervention’⁸⁴.

Here, the origins of the JVP’s patriotic struggle can be found. By early 1987, the party’s critique of Indian Imperialism was made into a class entitled “Save the Motherland from Indian Imperialism”⁸⁵. Crucially, the JVP’s newfound approach to India was much changed from its previous heavy-handed class on Indian expansionism. Sanath explains:

After 1987 we introduced another class on Indian Imperialism – not “Indian expansionism”. That’s what I’m saying its totally different names and different context as well...we just talked about the Indian political line; how did they use the Tamil military groups for their sake? ... How did they fund them? How did they arm them? ... and how the Indian state has been expanding to a kind of an imperialism⁸⁶.

Thus, by the time India invaded Sri Lankan airspace and the Indo-Lankan Peace Accord was signed on 27 July 1987, the JVP had already established its position against India’s increasing influence in Sri Lanka⁸⁷. Unsurprisingly, many Sri Lankans were impressed by the accuracy of the JVP’s prediction and flocked to its cause⁸⁸. The patriotic struggle had begun.

The ideology behind the JVP’s 1987-1989 patriotic struggle was a long-time in the making. While the JVP’s initial class on “Indian expansionism” was very different from the party’s later opposition to “Indian Imperialism”, certain principles remained constant. Indeed, dating back to 1970 the JVP openly condemned the government’s “unpatriotic” subservience to the

⁸⁴ Sanath 2013, comm., 7 September

⁸⁵ Ibid.,

⁸⁶ Ibid.,

⁸⁷ Eventually the JVP would directly fight the Indian Peace Keeping Force (See Appendix II)

⁸⁸ After the signing of the Accord, the JVP – along with a number of other parties – took part in widespread anti-Accord protests. Gunaratna (1991, p. 235) explains: “There were 2,527 incidents between July 28 and August 2. 16 were murdered, 40 were injured and 5209 government buildings and corporation buildings damaged (including 42 government and assistance government offices, 47 railway stations), 1,005 government, corporation and private vehicles were damaged and some burnt. This included over 500 buses of the Sri Lanka Central Transport Board. There were also 187 cases of damage to private property, and 189 telegraph poles damaged. Finally there were 561 robberies”.

Indian bourgeoisie (Gunaratna 1990, p. 82). Remarkably, an almost identical slogan would be later adopted by the JVP during 1987-1989. Thus, contrary to the arguments of Chandraprema and Gunaratna, the JVP decision to firmly oppose the arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Force was quite inline with the party's established Marxist-Leninist principles. Sanath explains:

The party adopted a strategy to achieve socialism by using the patriotic movement. That was the line. The line was patriotism. But the goal, the objective, was socialism. It has happened in Vietnam; it has happened in Cuba; it has happened in North Korea; it has happened in China. In each occasion we saw there was an enemy outside and the national bourgeoisie connected with that and the armed revolution occurred fighting against the state and the invader⁸⁹.

However, unlike these examples of successful Third World struggles, Sri Lanka's deep ethnic divisions made the execution of a patriotic struggle considerably more difficult. Ultimately, the JVP's efforts to bridge the country's ethnic divisions and "ensure [Sri Lanka's] national independence, territorial integrity, sovereignty of the people, democracy, freedom, fundamental human rights, equality and racial unity" (Gunaratna 1990, p. 259) failed. The rising tide of Tamil and Sinhala nationalisms was simply too strong⁹⁰. In stark contrast to the Cuban, Vietnamese and North Korean and Chinese 'national-revolutionary' movements, the JVP was unable to create the unified national identity necessary for a successful patriotic struggle⁹¹.

The Failure of the JVP's Patriotic Struggle

In early 1987, the JVP began conducting activities under the new moniker of the "Patriotic

⁸⁹ Sanath 2013, pers. comm., 7 September

⁹⁰ Some critics argue that the JVP failure to create a unified Sri Lankan identity was due to its "opportunist" abandonment of the Tamil right to self-determination (Cooke 2011, p. 308). Indeed there does appear to be some ground for this link between. Unfortunately, the space and time constraints of my thesis mean I cannot adequately investigate this debate.

⁹¹ In a famous phrase, Rohana Wijeweera stated that "it is wrong to say that there exists in Sri Lanka either a Sinhala nation or a Tamil nation. Marxism-Leninism does not accept this. What exists is a Sinhala nationality, a Tamil nationality, a Moslem nationality, but only a Sri Lanka nation" (Wijeweera 1986).

Liberation Front” (DJV)⁹². The significance of this change is shown by the party’s subsequent overhaul of its education program in early 1987. According to Gunaratna (1990, p. 57), the JVP’s five classes were altered as follows:

1. Introductory Talk
2. Save the Motherland from Indian Imperialism
3. The Crisis of the Capitalist System
4. The Solution to the Crisis through Patriotic Struggle.
5. This Can only be Achieved under JVP Leadership

A former JVP leader explains the rationale behind this change (Gunaratna 1990, p. 258):

The unpatriotic government is subjected to more and more protest by the general masses. Accordingly, a united patriotic struggle under the leadership of the JVP is building up in the country ... In this manner the patriotic struggle opens the path for the implementation of a socialist programme. The victorious path of the Sri Lankan socialist movement is through patriotic struggle ... It is not an act of waning socialism.

Despite the success of the JVP’s patriotic program – the party went from a “very small force in 1986” to around 10,000-15,000 full-time cadres in 1988⁹³ – there developed an ideological divide between the socialist principles of the leadership and the nationalist sentiments of the new recruits. Eventually, this divide widened to the point where the JVP leadership lost

⁹² Sanath (2013, pers. comm., 7 September) elaborates on the organisation structure of the DJV. “JVP is the party, the DJV is the mass movement, and all the members of DJV are not the members of the JVP, but all the JVP members are apart of the DJV ... it [the DJV] is the military wing, but military wing means it is a mass movement. In that mass movement there are military groups – for districts and student union, student sector, there are different armed groups – but that is the mass movement. Most of the patriots, some nationalist, they join the DJV. But DJV is not a formal organisation by filling in forms or something like that to get membership, its not that kind of organisation.”

⁹³ Sanath 2013, pers. comm., 7 September

control of its party, particularly the DJV.

After the capture of two top JVP leaders in late 1989 – D.M Ananda and Gamini Gamanayake – it is reported that they both “freely admitted” the party had lost control of the DJV (Chandraprema 1991, p. 145)⁹⁴. Whether this is true or not is difficult to determine. What is certain, however, is that during the early activities of the JVP in 1987, a great many experienced and highly educated Marxist-Leninist cadres were killed and arrested. Sanath explains:

The first attack on the air base in Kattewanaike, it was a failure ... some of the comrades were killed and most of them were captured. But the attackers [the DJV] did not kill anyone of the armed forces...The best comrades – these are the comrades that fought first in 1987 – the majority of them were captured and a certain amount of them were assassinated. So suddenly in 1987, there was a huge vacuum. In numbers it was around 500-600, but they were the best cadres, the best ones. They had been fighting for the party for 10, 15, 20 year ... because of the requirement the vacuum was filled very quickly, very rapidly. Most of the positions were held by the newcomers ... the party composition was changed⁹⁵.

Losing such highly disciplined and educated cadres, particularly so early in the insurrection, was a major setback for the party. Although the party leadership subsequently attempted to fill this “vacuum” by attacking prisons to release their comrades, by that time it was too late. According to Sanath⁹⁶, the party “couldn’t do anything to change the party composition because most of the newcomers have gone very far away...so the people who came out of the prisons, they were spectators in 1988”⁹⁷. The JVP had become flooded with new untested

⁹⁴ Chandraprema (1991, p. 171) goes on: “When the JVP suddenly was in need of large numbers of killers after 1987, they had no option but to rely on recruiting professional killers who already had the necessary experience...As the prospects of gaining power receded more and more into the distance, the JVP found it more and more difficult to control their barbaric hordes. Ultimately when D.M. Ananda was captured in October 1989, he plaintively declared “we lost control of the organisation”. The strategists had become the victims of their own strategy. They were gobbled up by their own pet monster”.

⁹⁵ Sanath 2013, pers. comm., 7 September

⁹⁶ Ibid.,

⁹⁷ In his resignation letter – written in 1984 – Bopage clearly foresaw the dangers of the JVP’s unscrupulous recruitment policy: “I strongly opposed the voluminous publicity campaign which comrade Rohana forwarded to the then Politburo [in 1977], but to which I adhered to as it was launched according to the majority decision. I opposed this because a massive publicity campaign without a definite dialectical relationship between propaganda and organisation work compels us to “eat more than we can digest” and destroys the revolutionary organisation pattern of the party...As a result of the failure to engage in educational activities, with the rapid

recruits:

In the beginning of 1988, the patriotic movement was at its peak. Everybody wants to be a member of the DJV... So when I was arrested [in April 1987 after taking part in a raid on military camp], it was not popular in our university. But when I came out, most of them were full-timers⁹⁸.

By mid-1989 the party identified the seriousness of this problem and decided to initiate an island-wide education program to turn the patriots “into Marxist-Leninists”⁹⁹. However, by then “it was too late”¹⁰⁰; the DJV was too powerful.

Most of the DJV members were not Marxist-Leninists¹⁰¹. Indeed, according to the secondary sources, some were known criminals and hit men (Chandraprema 1991; Gunaratna, 1990). While the JVP hoped to use these untested elements to gain the advantage over the security forces, the overzealous new recruits only succeeded in alienating the Sri Lankan people from the party. Former JVP cadre Nuwan explains:

In 1988-1989 all the incidents happen. A lot of bad things happen. Just imagine you're a bus driver, you are a poor, poor bloke. You are taking your passengers to a destination and some of them are sick; going to the doctors. And because I am a patriotic JVP, I am a leader of the DJVP, and I ask you not to drive. And you say “I have passengers...I am serving the people”. Shot on the head and killed. That's not a good thing to do. That's not JVP, that's not Marxist Leninist... Government used those kinds of incidents ...to liquidate the JVP leadership and all

quantitative growth of the party, the party core disintegrated and threatened to bring about the destruction of the party... The party and mass organisations which we built up with many sacrifices after 1977 have been completely ruined after the Presidential elections in 1982 and the proscription of the party in July 1983. We have been reduced to a small minority among the people and are organizationally in a position of disarray. There is, however, a possibility of hiding this reality from the people and once again building up unrealistic estimates of our strength. Coupled to this is the possibility of a few taking to ultra-left courses of action. Knowing this, I made one final request. Such an ultra-left action will bring incalculable harm and destruction on the Sri Lankan Socialist revolution. Therefore, I earnestly request you to desist from such actions. We will be forgetting the lessons of 1971 if such an adventurist course of action is taken” (Bopage 1984).

⁹⁸ Sanath 2013, pers. comm., 7 September

⁹⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.,

¹⁰¹ Ibid.,

the other members, ruthlessly killing and burning them on tyres¹⁰².

The history books are riddled with similar DJV attacks on civilians¹⁰³. Whether these DJV brutalities were undertaken on direct orders from the JVP leadership or were the product of the undisciplined elements within the DJV is difficult to determine. Unfortunately, such an investigation is out of the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, the increasingly ruthless tactics of the DJV reveals much. Most clearly, it shows that during 1987-1989 the JVP leadership began to accept members that had not gone through the political and educational processes hitherto demanded of JVP/DJV cadres. While the JVP leadership reasoned that the educated and experienced full-time cadres would reign in the untested nationalist elements, over time it became clear the party's Marxist-Leninist base was not strong enough¹⁰⁴. Sanath explains:

Most of the newcomers had nationalist sentiments, but they didn't act as nationalist in the DJV. They didn't have the opportunity. But it doesn't mean that they have become Marxist Leninists. They were not class conscious, but at the same time they didn't do what they wanted. But in 1988-1989 what happened – the forces joining the DJV keeps expanding – now the JVP did not have the control of these forces ...they [the DJV] were responsible for a number of attacks at village level, but JVP did not want to...finally the image of the JVP was deteriorating rapidly. Within a few months the JVP's total image was deteriorated¹⁰⁵.

There was simply not enough strength in the JVP to reign in the DJV's rising tide of violent nationalism. The traditional Marxist tactic of class struggle was effectively overrun by the

¹⁰² Nuwan 2013, pers. comm., 17 July

¹⁰³ There is vastly different statistics on how many people the JVP killed during 1987-1989. According to Chandraprema, the JVP killed around 17,000 people. Remarkably, this figure includes people killed by police at JVP marches and protests because "this was a deliberate policy to get the security forces to fire on a human buffer and thereby kill ordinary citizens and as they hoped, build up resentment against the security forces" (Chandraprema 1991, p. 313). On the other hand, the Tamil Centre for Human Rights (n.d.) state that the JVP killed 6203 people during this period (comprising 649 members of the government security forces, 3210 informants, 2222 government supporters and servants, 24 Buddhist Monks and 70 Politicians). More recently, current JVP leader Somawansa Amarasinghe allegedly admitted that the JVP killed around 6000 people during 1987-1989 (Tamil Centre for Human Rights, n.d). However, just like many of the statistics on this period, the nature of 1987-1989 means it is almost impossible to produce an accurate figure.

¹⁰⁴ According to Sanath (pers. comm., 7 September 2013), most full-time JVP members "knew that we were using these patriotic slogans to achieve socialism".

¹⁰⁵ Sanath 2013, pers. comm., 7 September 2013

DJV's increasingly "adventurist" (Gunaratna 1990, p. 127-31) tendency of violence and intimidation.

By mid-1988, the DJV's campaign of intimidation and violence significantly escalated. In its most bold move to date, the DJV stated that the families of an elite counter-insurgency group – the Special Task Force (STF) – would be killed if the STF continued its operations against the JVP. However, the STF called the DJV's bluff and the threat was "never followed up on and soon forgotten" (Chandraprema 1991, p. 293). However, when the DJV once again decided to threaten the families of soldiers in August 1989 – this time on a wider scale – the newly elected Premadasa government pounced. Sanath explains:

According to DJV, it [the threats against the families in August 1987] was a tactical approach, but the government used it very smartly. So what happened, the JVP didn't do anything, but the government forces killed the families and put the blame on the JVP...the people believe 'yes, the JVP are killing armed [force's] families'. And if there was any sort of hesitation among the armed personnel to fight against the JVP, it was solved. It was poor, poor, very poor, stand. Poor slogan, one of the poorest slogans¹⁰⁶.

Although such an assertion is difficult to verify, it provides an invaluable insight into the demise of the JVP. Immediately after the DJV was accused of killing the families of soldiers, the government security forces established a number of extra-judiciary paramilitary groups with one single aim in mind – wiping out the JVP¹⁰⁷. The then Minister of State for Defence Ranjan Wijeratne explains:

The JVP put us against the wall. They motivated us to hit back. When you are against the wall, you have nothing to lose. I hit right round, peripheries, middle and the top, and as the attack was simultaneous the results were brilliant. The JVP had no chance in that strategy to find out where the fire was coming ... I started this beginning August 1989 soon after my return to

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁷ Some known examples are the Green Tigers, the Black Cats, the Hawks, Scorpions, Eagles, People Revolutionary Red Army (PRRA), Shra, the Yellow Cats, Ukussa and the SRRA (Gunaratna 1990, p. 295; Chandraprema 1991, p. 262; Weiss 2012, p. 60). There is very little known about these "vigilante groups" (Chandraprema 1991, p. 238).

India, and after the first week of November the politburo was in the bag. Once the politburo was smashed, it was only a mopping up operation that was necessary [Gunaratna 1990, p. 335].

According to Chandraprema (1991, p.312), from August 1989 to January 1990 around 15,000 JVP cadres and sympathisers were killed by the government forces, or roughly 100 killings per day. Many of these deaths were prolonged and involved torture, dismemberment and burning. As the government-sponsored death squads were mainly comprised of former soldiers who had previously suffered at the hands of the DJV/JVP, these groups killed JVP cadres and supporters with reckless abandon. Many thousands of innocent civilians were killed for nothing more than being suspected JVP sympathisers (Weiss 2012). In the Menikhinna-Kundasale area, almost an entire village was wiped out, killing 200 people (Chandraprema 1991, p. 312)¹⁰⁸. By early November 1989, the army finally captured JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera. In the early morning of 13 November 1989, Wijeweera was taken to the Colombo Golf Club and shot dead on the 8th tee (Wiess 2012, p. 62). Before his death Wijeweera reportedly stated that he had opposed the DJV's campaign to threaten the families of the security forces (Chandraprema 1991, p. 295). All other politburo members – except for one¹⁰⁹ – were similarly hunted down and killed. In the space of four months, the JVP had been systematically crushed.

The government's systematic destruction of the JVP during 1987-1989 is the bloodiest episode Sri Lankan history has ever witnessed. Indeed, when compared to other analogous events around the world, only the destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in 1965-1966 by President Suharto surpasses the brutality of the Sri Lankan government's counter-insurgency campaign¹¹⁰. While Chandraprema and Gunaratna portray the opportunism of the JVP's patriotic struggle as the central cause for the tragedy of 1987-1989, a closer examination of JVP ideology contradicts this assessment. How can the JVP's patriotic struggle have been a deliberate attempt to exploit "the island-wide anti-Indian feeling" (Gunaratna 1990, p. 255) when the party's critical approach to India had already

¹⁰⁸ The examples of government barbarism are simply too numerous to repeat in this thesis.

¹⁰⁹ Samawansa Amerasinghe, current leader of the JVP.

¹¹⁰ Other recent examples include the repression of Chilean left-wing figures under Pinochet in the 1970s, which resulted in the deaths of around 3,000 people (Bizzarro 2005, p. 583) and the slaughter of "thousands" of FARC (Colombian Marxist Group) by the Colombian government in the 1980s (Gott 2011, p.194).

been established almost a year before the signing of the Indo-Lankan Peace Accord? Clearly, it was not the public's growing resentment toward India that created the JVP's patriotic struggle, but rather the party leadership's principled stance against Indian imperialism.

Following in the footsteps of the Marxist-Leninist Tradition of Third World national struggle, the JVP leadership implemented its patriotic struggle as a tactic to liberate Sri Lanka from foreign imperialist forces and bring the country a step closer towards socialism. Overtime, however, the nationalist forces began to dominate the JVP, and consequently its patriotic struggle degenerated into an increasingly violent campaign to bludgeon Sri Lanka into socialism. Tragically, this tactic only succeeded in provoking the government forces to commit unspeakable crimes against the JVP and its supporters, unprecedented in both ferocity and volume.

CHAPTER 6

Towards and Understanding of the JVP's 1987-1989 Insurrection

“In 1971, the Security Forces and the Judiciary chopped the branches of the tree. This time, the Government has uprooted the tree. The JVP is dead. But if the burning problems of the masses are not going to be solved, the seeds fallen from the mother tree will germinate and many more trees will grow in time.”

Last words of Polit bureau member (Gunaratna 1990, p. 355)

Chandraprema's and Gunaratna's studies on the JVP's 1987-1989 insurrection represent a great failure within the study of post-colonial Sri Lanka. Following in the footsteps of the diffusionist thesis perpetuated by influential scholars Ernest Gellner and Tom Nairn, the JVP's 1987-1989 insurrection is effectively divorced from the political and economic oppression that created it. At almost every turn the JVP's ideology is portrayed as a cynical attempt to exploit the prevailing ethnic divisions of Sri Lanka. The complex Marxist-Leninist considerations of JVP leadership – particularly Rohana Wijeweera – are effectively ignored.

Portraying the JVP's patriotic struggle as an opportunist attempt to capture state power raises many problems. Most obviously, it ignores the complexities of the JVP's Marxist-Leninist ideology. As Lenin remarked in 1914 (2002, p. 82), “the categorical requirement of Marxist theory in investigating any social question is that it be examined within definite historical limits” (*italics in original*). Accordingly, throughout its history the JVP adapted its Marxist-Leninist ideology “in accordance with the circumstances”¹¹¹. In particular, the rise of militant Tamil nationalism in the early 1980s – and India's subsequent role in arming and funding these groups – had a significant impact on JVP ideology. While Gunaratna and Chandraprema argue that the JVP altered its ideology on these crucial questions in order to exploit the growing resentments of Sinhalese Sri Lankans (Chandraprema 1991, p. 94), a deeper investigation reveals that the JVP were responding to Sri Lanka's changing historical circumstances. As the JVP leadership's analysis identified the rising influence of India and militant Tamil nationalism as expressions of “bourgeois” and “imperialist” interests (Wijeweera 2013), the party adopted a strong stand on both these questions¹¹². Thus, following the path set by the Second Congress of the Communist International and the Third World Marxist-Leninist tradition, the JVP launched a patriotic struggle to expel all forces sympathetic with India's imperialist designs on Sri Lanka. Only then could the struggle for a socialist Sri Lanka begin.

Attempting to widen the socialist movement into a patriotic struggle presented many practical difficulties for the JVP leadership. For instance, how exactly would the JVP absorb its rapidly

¹¹¹ Sanath pers. comm., 7 September

¹¹² As Bopage explained, there is a distinct possibility that the JVP's increasingly hard-line approach to the national question (after 1983) and India (in 1986) served to encourage the “chauvinist currents” growing in the Sri Lanka during the 1980s (Bopage 2013, pers. comm., 11 July). However, as I argued in Chapter 4, this does not make the JVP ideology on the national question “chauvinist” and “opportunist”.

expanding ‘patriotic’ membership? The party leadership was ultimately unable to solve this problem. With nationalist sentiments rising to critical levels during 1987-1989, the JVP’s highly educated and experienced Marxist-Leninist base gradually became “spectators” to the rising power of the DJV¹¹³. By 1988, the JVP leadership was unable to ensure that the patriotic struggle was kept within the strict confines of its socialist objective. In the words of Nuwan, “they [the JVP] created a monster, and they became the victim of the same monster”¹¹⁴. However, despite the mistakes made by the JVP during 1987-1989, the core Marxist-Leninist principles on which the party’s patriotic struggle was built must be clearly acknowledged. Indeed, without the Third World tradition of Marxist-Leninist “national-revolutionary” (Lenin 1965, pp. 213-265) movements to draw from, the JVP’s patriotic struggle would have never existed.

Today, the spectre of the JVP’s 1987-1989 insurrection still haunts Sri Lanka. Countless Sri Lankan families continue to carry the scars of those tragic years. For example, when 154 bodies from 1987-1989 were uncovered in the town of Matale during November 2012 – the largest mass grave ever discovered in Sri Lanka – many family members of former JVP cadres came forward looking for their lost relatives (Finch 2013). All too predictably, these grieving families were greeted with an unsympathetic Sri Lankan government that actively impeded any form of investigation into the JVP’s 1987-1989 insurrection (Finch 2013). Considering this extensive government campaign of interference and misinformation – a campaign that began with the introduction of President Jayewardene’s censorship campaign way back in 1987 – a truly objective account of the JVP’s 1987-1989 insurrection appears unattainable. Fortunately, however, there are no such obstacles preventing scholars exposing the flaws of the prevailing perception of the JVP’s 1987-1989 insurrection, espoused by scholars like Gunaratna and Chandraprema. The tens of thousands of Sri Lankans who lost their lives during the JVP’s 1987-1989 insurrection – both at the hands of the DJV and the government security forces – are owed at least that.

¹¹³ Sanath 2013, pers. comm., 7 September

¹¹⁴ Nuwan 2013, pers. comm., 14 July

APPENDIX I

The JVP's Change of Policy on Tamil Self-Determination

Even before Sri Lanka erupted into ethnic violence during the anti-Tamil pogrom of July 1983, Sri Lanka's increasing ethnic tensions brought the JVP leadership to an ideological impasse. One incident in particular created friction within the party leadership. In the early months of 1983, a group of Sinhala fisherman attacked and killed several Tamils in the northeast of the country. In response, Lionel Bopage, then the General Secretary of the JVP, issued two communiqués condemning this attack. The JVP Politburo – the party's second most powerful administrative organ after the Central Committee – took issue with the wording of these communiqués, particularly Bopage's statement that the Tamils had the right to determine their own destiny (Cooke 2011, p. 209)¹¹⁵. Undeterred, a few months later Bopage submitted another communiqué to the Politburo that once again professed the right of the Tamil people to self-determination. Again the Politburo disagreed. Bopage was adamant that he was only following party policy, which he explained as follows (Cooke 2011, p. 209)

The JVP policy position is that the JVP accepted the right to self-determination of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. However, the JVP did not advocate separation as a solution to their problems; rather it advocated a united Sri Lanka with regional autonomy, where all residents could live as equals.

More recently, Bopage elaborated on this position:

¹¹⁵ This was not the first conflict Bopage had had with the Central Committee over the national question. According to Bopage, in the 1980 the party leadership opposed his attempts to create links with the Tamil militant groups in the north. "I was in charge of conducting political activities in the north and east among the Tamil people – I was the political bureau member responsible for that...and I went and spoke to Tamil people in villages...more than 80 villages. In the morning you go there and put up a notice saying this afternoon you are going to have a discussion and in the evening you go ... As a result of these discussions [during 1978-1980], what I noted was that most of the Tamil youth they have already started moving toward Tamil nationalist organisations....My view was that, although they advocate separation, we need to have discussions with them so that we can move them away from separation and bring them to our fold, or as independents they can organise under a socialist banner... but then the JVP leadership rejected it. What they said is basically "if we start discussions with these organisations then the government will start repressing us. It was opportunist basically." (Bopage 2013, pers. comm., July 11).

When we say “right to self-determination”, what we are basically saying – what we are basically accepting – is the right of the Tamil people to decide their future, political destiny. So it is up to the Tamil people to decide whether to separate or whether to stay united ... But at the same time we say it is better to stay together and fight for socialism, and include all these things under the banner of socialism¹¹⁶.

Bopage considered any divergence from this position as an abandonment of Marxism-Leninism. However, only the JVP District secretaries for Anuradhapura and Batticaloa shared Bopage’s concerns and in June 1983 the Central Committee agreed to discard its policy accepting Tamil self-determination (Cooke 2011). “Flabbergasted”¹¹⁷, Bopage became disillusioned with the party and eventually resigned from all party duties in 1984.

In the subsequent years, Bopage identified the 1982 Presidential elections as the turning point in JVP ideology on the national question. As the JVP’s performance at the Presidential elections was generally seen as a disappointment within the party – Rohana Wijeweera received only 300,000 votes as the presidential candidate¹¹⁸ – Bopage argues that the JVP began to distance itself from accepting Tamil self-determination. Bopage explains:

When it came to 1982 Presidential elections – we had Rohana as the Candidate – and we didn’t get much of the percentage of the votes, although we became third closest but we got only about 300,000 votes. Now when people started analysing why the number of votes were so less ... a strong group advocated that because we advocated the right to self-determination of Tamil people, the people in the south did not want to vote for the JVP; and Tamil people also did not vote. So that position was also taken up by Rohana¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁶ In this interview, Bopage (2013, pers. comm., 11 July) also emphasised the practical difficulties associated with separation: “There are certain hard and fast conditions in Sri Lanka which we need to specifically consider. One is the distribution of population – it’s a mixed population. Tamil people at that time lived in the south of the country...in Colombo it is all mixed; Sinhals, Tamils and Muslims. So when you say a separate state, practical problems – you know like what is happening in Sudan now or in Ethiopia ... so when we pointed out these issues, we didn’t mean that we don’t accept the right to self-determination – we accept the right to self-determination – but it our right as socialist to tell the reality to the Tamil people so that they can take a decision. It is not for us to impose.”

¹¹⁷ Bopage 2013, pers. comm., 11 July

¹¹⁸ According to Bopage, Wijeweera was deeply unsatisfied with the election result. “After the Presidential election results, he was at the house close to Colombo and he was pretty depressed for three days. And we had to go pull him out of the bed – that was the situation (Bopage 2013, pers. comm., July 11).

¹¹⁹ Additionally, Bopage claims that Sri Lanka’s growing chauvinist currents led the JVP to abandon its position accepting Tamil self-determination. “When the chauvinist currents were also gaining ground in the south, the

Consequently, after the 1982 presidential elections, Bopage maintains that the party gradually “moved towards more chauvinistic policies and it was because of this opportunistic assessment”¹²⁰. However, as I argue in Chapter Four, labelling the JVP’s approach to the national question as “opportunist” and “chauvinist” does not recognise the complexities of post-1983 JVP ideology. While Bopage’s testimony is undoubtedly of great historical value¹²¹ – particularly considering that the JVP later become flooded by nationalist elements in 1987-1989 – I will argue that it ultimately oversimplifies the JVP’s post-1983 policy on the national question.

JVP also had to compete with them...JVP’s base was in rural areas in Sri Lanka in the south – it was not an urban sort of party. The chauvinist forces also had their base there in the rural areas, so there was this competition between the two groups, and that also pushed the JVP” (Bopage 2013, pers. comm., July 11).

¹²⁰ Bopage 2013, pers. comm., 11 July

¹²¹ Bopage’s claim that the JVP could have impeded the growth of militant Tamil nationalism in the north if the party leadership had not opposed Bopage’s program of cooperation with Tamil groups is compelling (Bopage 2013, pers. comm., July 11).

APPENDIX II

The JVP Fights the Indian Army

The JVP's hostile approach toward Indian Imperialism placed the party on a path of confrontation with the Indian Army. While Chandraprema and others confidently declare that the JVP's armed forces never directly fought the Indian army (Chandraprema 1991, p. 184; Gunasekara 1999, p. 70; Gunasekara 1998), two former cadres of the JVP disagree. According to these two former cadres, the JVP's armed forces attacked the Indian Peace Keeping Force in the north-western city of Trincomalee¹²². This attack ushered in the JVP's increasingly hostile approach to India. By 1988, the JVP had reportedly banned all Indian made goods and prevented Sri Lankan women from wearing Indian sarees (Gunaratna 1990, p. 273).

¹²² Sanath 2013, pers. comm., 7 September; Nuwan 2013, pers. comm., 17 July. According to Sanath, the JVP attacks on the Indian army were misinterpreted by the media as LTTE attacks on the Indian Army.

APPENDIX III

Timeline of Notable Events

1960s

1965-66: The JVP is formed.

1967: The JVP introduce their “five-classes”, including the class on “Indian expansionism”

1968: The traditional left joined in an alliance with Sirimavo Bandaranaike’s Sri Lanka Freedom Party to form the United Front coalition.

1970s

1970: The United Front, led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike, is elected into government.

5 April, 1971: The JVP launches its first insurrection.

1971-1972: The JVP take out its class on Indian expansionism

14 May, 1976: The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) adopts the Vaddukoddai Resolution, thus marking the beginning of the Tamil nationalist movement. After July 1983 a number of Tamil militant groups rose to prominence, particularly the LTTE.

11 November, 1977: JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera is released from prison by the newly-

elected Jayewardene government.

1977: The JVP begin to accept the Tamil right to self-determination

1980s

1980: Indira Gandhi is reelected as Prime Minister of India. Under Indira Gandhi's leadership, after 1983 the Indian government began training and funding a number of Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups.

June 1983: The JVP abandon its policy which accepted the democratic rights of Tamil to self-determination.

23 July, 1983: 13 Sri Lankan Soldiers are killed by the LTTE in the north, sparking a island wide anti Tamil riot known as 'Black July'.

31 July, 1983: The JVP is banned by the Jayewardene government for its alleged role in the anti-Tamil riots.

1986: The JVP begin its campaign against India's interventionist program in Sri Lanka. This campaign would later form the basis of its 'patriotic struggle' of 1987-1989.

1987

January 1987: President Jayewardene proscribed all JVP affiliated groups from universities.

March 1987: The JVP begin raiding military camps for weapons.

April 1987: The JVP officially begin their patriotic struggle with the introduction of the class "the Solution to the Crisis through Patriotic Struggle".

18 May, 1987: The Jayewardene government, by virtue of the powers vested in him by

paragraph (1) of regulation 68 of the emergency (Miscellaneous Privisions and Powers) regulations No.5 of 1987, banned 17 JVP dominated or controlled trade unions and the umbrella union named the All Ceylon Trade Unions Federation.

26 May, 1987: The Sri Lankan Army launches an offensive against the LTTE on the Jaffna peninsula known as Operation Liberation.

4 June, 1987: The Indian government invades Sri Lanka's airspace and drops supplies to the under siege LTTE.

July 27, 1987: Indo-Lankan Peace Accord is signed.

September 18, 1987: The Indian government agrees to begin withdrawing the Indian Peace Keeping Force, a process which is completed by March 1990.

1989

August 1989: The DJV threatens to kill the families of the security forces.

August-December: The government security forces initiate a ruthless new tactic of warfare against the JVP – interrogate and destroy.

November 13, 1989: JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera killed by the Sri Lankan security forces.

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