

## CHINA'S DILEMMA IN CEYLON

By j.c.k., Radio Free Europe Research, April 20, 1971

**Summary:** This paper examines Chinese attitudes toward the Ceylonese government in the light of Ceylon's acceptance of foreign military aid to quell the extremist terrorist uprising in that country. It is argued that Mrs. Bandaranaike's willingness to accept Soviet military aid could be taken by the CPR as Ceylon's siding with Moscow in the Sino-Soviet conflict. Moreover, the arrest by Colombo authorities of the leader of the pro-Chinese Ceylon Communist Party makes it difficult for Peking indefinitely to maintain a neutral stand vis-a-vis the Ceylonese developments.

The arrest by Ceylonese authorities of pro-Chinese CP leader Sanmugathasan last Wednesday, as reported by the Western press, [1] could soon end China's studied silence on the current situation in that country. Sanmugathasan, General Secretary of the so-called Ceylon Communist Party and the only communist leader in Ceylon recognized by the Chinese Communists, is an ardent follower of Mao Tse-tung's thought and a frequent visitor to Peking.

Sanmugathasan's arrest comes as something of a surprise since he has apparently lacked direct connection with the elements who are responsible for the anti-government rebellion in the island country. In fact, indications are that the pro-Chinese Ceylon Communist Party (CCP) has publicly opposed the activities of the main force of the Ceylonese uprising, the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) or People's Liberation Front. The Party's opposition to the JVP's policies were most clearly demonstrated during the latter's first public rally held in Colombo on 10 April 1970. Besides trying to disrupt the meeting, members of the CCP claimed to have distributed some 50,000 copies of a leaflet denouncing the Guevarist tactics of revolution advocated by the JVP. [2]

The Ceylon Communist Party, under Sanmugathasan's leadership, has been consistently following a Maoist line of people's war, which presupposes the participation of the broad masses while rejecting individual terrorist tactics. It is possible, however, that besides being well aware of Sanmugathasan's personal differences with the leaders of the JVP, the Ceylonese government arrested him as a precautionary measure which, considering the CCP's policy aims, is not entirely unjustified.

Besides, it is not clear whether individual members of the CCP were not implicated in the uprising. In her March 23 speech in Parliament Prime Minister Mrs. Bandaranaike charged that the anti-government movement included not only the JVP, but also a number of splinter groups. The March 6 attack on the US Embassy in Ceylon, organized by the People's Liberation Front has allegedly been carried out, among others, by a small splinter group called "Mao Youth Movement," members of which could have been connected with Sanmugathasan's CCP.

The CCP General Secretary's arrest could hardly go unnoticed in Peking. The Ceylon Communist Party came into being as a direct result of the Sino-Soviet conflict. Sanmugathasan, who was once a member of the Moscow-oriented Communist Party of Ceylon (CPC), was ousted for his Maoist views in 1963. The pro-Peking CCP, with an estimated membership of 500 or less, [3] is important

mainly for its ability to control the Ceylon Trade Union Federation and the Ceylon Plantation Workers' Union with a combined membership of some 110,000. Moreover, its political statements and the movements of General Secretary Sanmugathasan have received wide publicity through the services of the Chinese news media, primarily the Chinese news agency, Hsinhua.

Sanmugathasan, whose views on international affairs differ little from the official policies of the Chinese Communist leadership, has for many years advocated a violently anti-Soviet line. Among other things, in late 1968 the CCP took a strongly pro-Chinese line on the Czechoslovak events, and in the following year it denounced the Soviet Union for "armed provocations" along the Sino-Soviet border. As far as international communist affairs are concerned, Sanmugathasan holds that "the attitude toward the thought of Mao Tse-tung [has been] the touchstone for genuine or fake Marxist-Leninists." Many similar statements made by him both in China and in Ceylon have made it amply clear that Sanmugathasan and his comrades consider themselves genuine Marxist-Leninists. [4]

The CCP's political platform on domestic Ceylonese affairs has been somewhat more complicated. As a follower of the people's war theory, Sanmugathasan has expressed himself as being opposed to democratic parliamentarism. Those views were most succinctly expounded by him at a Colombo meeting upon his return from Peking where he had attended the 20th anniversary of the CPR. According to an NCNA report on the speech, Sanmugathasan said:

"The Chinese revolution gained victory not through Parliament, but through an armed struggle. The road of Ching-kang mountains is the only road for gaining the victory of [the] proletarian revolution...." [5]

In spite of his expressed opposition to the parliamentary system of government, Sanmugathasan entered the race for Parliament during the 1965 elections. The pro-Chinese faction led by him, however, managed to win only 0.5% of the total votes and none of its candidates were elected. In spite of that defeat, three years later the CCP gained a representative in Parliament through the expulsion by his own Party of S.D. Bandaranaike (distantly related to the present Prime Minister, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike). Yet, in 1970 the same Bandaranaike was also expelled from the CCP for his support of the Prime Minister's foreign policies, which was taken by Sanmugathasan as an endorsement of the "evil parliamentary system" and as a break with the CCP policies. [6]

The Chinese have for many years taken no official notice of the pro-Moscow CPC and have "recognized the Ceylon Communist Party as the only legal representative of the revolutionary cause in Ceylon. Mrs. Bandaranaike's election victory in March 1970 came as a welcome development to Peking, which had some difficulties in its relations with the pro-western regime of former Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake. Yet, in spite of its obvious satisfaction over Mrs. Bandaranaike's return to power, China was somewhat embarrassed by the composition of the new coalition which, in addition to the Prime Minister's own Sri Lanka Freedom Party, included ministers from the Trotskyite Lanka Sama Samaja Party, as well as from the pro-Moscow CPC.

The Peking report on Mrs. Bandaranaike's swearing-in as Prime Minister mentioned that she would form her cabinet on the following day. [7] There was, however, no further report that would have clarified the composition of the new government. Peking's support to the new Ceylonese government, therefore, was primarily a personal support to Mrs. Bandaranaike, whose sympathies with China were amply demonstrated during her previous administration in 1960-1965. In less

than a month after the Prime Minister's return to power the Chinese expressed approval of her foreign policies by publicizing excerpts of one of the foreign policy reports in which she, among other things, recalled her party's condemnation of Soviet interference in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Chinese support was soon to be demonstrated in many other ways, such as the resumption of work on the Ceylonese prestige project, the so-called Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, [8] and, more importantly, the extension by China of an interest-free loan worth some 89 million dollars to finance the purchase of 100,000-tons of rice in addition to the amount provided for in the annual trade agreement.

On the basis of the support shown by Peking for Mrs. Bandaranaike's foreign and domestic policies it could be concluded that under normal circumstances the Chinese would sympathize with the present Ceylonese government's struggle against internal subversion, particularly since the anti-government actions are led by elements considered by China as "bourgeois" and "extremist" adventurers. However, the situation has been made more complex by the Ceylonese government's request and eventual acceptance of military aid by the United Kingdom, India, and other Commonwealth nations, and, most recently, by the Soviet Union. [10] The appearance of Soviet military personnel in Ceylon may well be interpreted by China as an indication of Mrs. Bandaranaike's siding with Moscow in the Sino-Soviet conflict. As such, it could be held more objectionable than similar help received from "bourgeois" sources.

Perhaps more than any other factor, Sanmugathasan's arrest could have a negative influence on Peking's attitude toward the Ceylonese government. While the expulsion by Mrs. Bandaranaike of the North Korean diplomatic mission is not necessarily objectionable to Peking (North Korea has lately become something of a rival to China in exporting its own revolutionary model), any possible suggestion of Chinese involvement in the present Ceylonese developments would be taken as a direct insult to the CPR.

Thus far the Chinese news media has maintained complete silence over Mrs. Bandaranaike's troubles, thereby implying that Peking considers the matter as Ceylon's internal affair. However, the arrest of Sanmugathasan cannot but put China on the spot. Further silence on the Ceylonese situation will be seen by Peking's own allies as the abandonment of a "Marxist-Leninist Party" in favor of cooperation with a "bourgeois" government. Conversely, any official protest on behalf of Sanmugathasan could be considered by Colombo as an interference in the country's internal affairs and an indirect admission of Chinese complicity with the anti-government insurgency in Ceylon.

Peking therefore must soon make up its mind concerning its future policies toward Mrs. Bandaranaike. It will be a difficult decision to make, one that could seriously influence future Chinese relations both with the neutralist governments of Asia as well as with the various pro-Chinese parties of the international communist movement.

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#### Endnotes

(1) The New York Times, 15 April 1971; Financial Times of the same date.

(2) Ceylon Daily News, 28 August 1970.

- (3) The lowest such estimate, "less than a hundred" members comes from the leader of the pro-Moscow Communist Party of Ceylon, Pieter Keuneman (Nepszabadsag, Budapest, 26 February 1968). Other sources put the Party's total membership between 300 to 800. The Communist Party of Ceylon is believed to have between 1,500 - 2,000 members and is represented in the present government coalition.
- (4) Sanmugathan's report to revolutionary leaders, students and Red Guards at the Peking Geological Institute in May 1967 (NCNA, 26 May 1967).
- (5) NCNA, 28 November 1969. (Chingkangshan, or Chingkang mountains in Southeast China, is considered by the Chinese regime as the cradle of the Maoist revolution, - j.c.k.).
- (6) S.D. Bandaranaike, a cousin of the late S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike (husband of the present Prime Minister) first entered the Ceylonese House of Representatives in 1952 as a representation of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). He was expelled by the SLFP in March 1968 and was thereafter considered an MP representing the pro-Peking CCP.
- (7) NCNA, 30 May 1971. The report also maintained that Mrs. Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party and "the United Front led by her" won in the general election on May 27 without, however, clarifying the composition of the Unit Front.
- (8) The Memorial Hall, to be built by the Chinese in Colombo, was originally agreed on during Chou En-lai's visit to Ceylon in February 1964. Plans were, however, delayed and later quietly abandoned, mainly as a result of little enthusiasm for the project by the Senanayake administration which took over from Mrs. Bandaranaike in 1955. After the latter's return to power in May 1970 Peking offered to resume work on the project. A Chinese technical team consisting of six engineers and architects returned to Colombo on 13 August 1970 in order to complete the preliminary work for the Hall. An "inauguration ceremony for the construction of the Bandaranaike International Conference Hall" was held in Colombo on 24 November. (NCNA, 25 November).
- (9) NCNA, 12 September 1970. The Chinese report mentioned neither the amount involved nor the purpose of the loan.
- (10) According to two Western news agencies reporting from Colombia earlier today, the Soviet Union has offered military aid to Ceylon in the form of helicopters and five MiG-21 jet fighters. (UPI, Reuter, 20 April 1971)