

Letters and replies on the assassination of Sri Lankan foreign minister

5 September 2005

The following letters were sent to the World Socialist Web Site in response to the article “Unanswered questions about Sri Lankan foreign minister’s assassination”, published on 26 August 2005. The replies of one of the authors, K. Ratnayake, a member of the WSWS International Editorial Board, have been included.

Great article, with bold analysis. Most Sri Lankans in the Western world are emailing your article to each other and expressing admiration for your impartial stand.

CW

Tanzania, USA

It is refreshing to note that there still are journalists from the mainstream who follow the tradition of decent journalism.

WT

Yangon, Myanmar

Thank you for your appreciative email. I would point out that the *World Socialist Web Site* is hardly “mainstream” in the sense that the term is normally used, but is a socialist publication. The fact that no one else is capable of providing an objective account of events in Sri Lanka is an indictment of the mainstream media. In Sri Lanka, it is thoroughly steeped in communal politics—Tamil or Sinhala alike—and is organically incapable of reporting even basic facts in an unprejudiced way. The international media simply repeated uncritically what was said in Colombo—that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was responsible for Kadirgamar’s murder.

K. Ratnayake

This was exactly what I mentioned to all my Sinhala friends. The LTTE, the President and the leader of opposition had a lot to lose while the parties mentioned and the nationalist (chauvinist) premier has much to gain along with the arms dealers.

SS

You have gone taken great pains to exonerate the LTTE of this crime. While it is admitted that definite proof is still forthcoming about those that committed this despicable act, you try your best to implicate other parties giving vague reasons (nothing definite). I strongly feel that you have assumed the names Sunil and Ratnayake and that you are not socialist but terrorist. If however you truly bear those names and are LTTE sympathisers, you are a disgrace to the very wombs of your mothers who bore you. If you represent a *World Socialist Web Site* and you are condoned by that organisation, I pity your type if socialism.

CD

Dear CD,

You have provided a clear example in your letter of the poisonous communalism that pervades not only politics but every aspect of life in Sri Lanka. The starting point of your argument is that the LTTE must have carried out the assassination of foreign minister Kadirgamar, but you provide not a shred of evidence to support your assertion. You conveniently ignore the fact that unlike you, we have not jumped to conclusions, and have clearly stated that the LTTE may have carried out the murder.

Instead, you employ the method of racist slur and slander. As far as you are concerned, any Sinhalese that fails to support your chauvinist conclusions is a traitor—a disgrace to their mothers. In fact, there is no other “type” of socialism other than one based on internationalism, which requires as an elementary duty opposition to all forms of nationalism and racism. Significantly the LTTE has in the past employed similar slanders against us. In 1998, it imprisoned our members for opposing their communal politics, which is simply the mirror image of yours.

K. Ratnayake

Sinhala readers don’t like to read your articles. They are like a frog in the well. They Sinhalese Sri Lankans don’t have analytical skills. That’s the problem in Lanka. Because of their lack of understanding in the local and world situation, they are destroying our country. However, please continue your work. Thanks.

KN,

Colombo, Sri Lanka

While we appreciate your comments, the current political crisis in Sri Lanka is not a product of a lack of understanding or analytic skills. It is the result of the wretched politics of the ruling elites—Tamil and Muslim as well as Sinhalese. Utterly incapable of addressing the social needs and democratic aspirations of working people, they all stir up reactionary communalism to bolster their position. To the extent that confusion and communal sentiment exists among ordinary Sri Lankans, the ruling class and its political representatives—including the LTTE—are directly responsible.

Like the Colombo government, the LTTE have nothing to offer workers and the rural poor. Their proposal is for a mini-state or provincial government in the North and East of the island that would offer exploited labour at the cheapest price to foreign investors. In pointing out that elements associated with the military or Sinhala chauvinist parties could have murdered foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, we do not rule out the distinct possibility that the LTTE carried it out. It has been responsible not only for murdering Sri Lankan officials in the past but outrages such as the 1996 bombing of the Central Bank in Colombo in which many innocent workers died. These only provided grist to the mill for Sinhala extremists.

The only way out for the working class in Sri Lanka and more broadly throughout the region is to reject all forms of nationalism, racism and communalism and unite in an independent political movement to refashion society on socialist lines. That more than half a century of foul communal politics has not eradicated elementary class sympathies was evident in the immediate aftermath of the December 26 tsunami when ordinary Sinhalese workers and youth streamed into the East of the country to assist the victims regardless of their ethnicity, religion or language.

K. Ratnayake

It is very fair comment. However, I could not quite understand Paragraph 7 since Kadirgamar was also opposed to the aid, the peace process and the ceasefire although the two parties mentioned are to gain

by the assassination. Thanks a lot.

SJ,

Australia

If one attempted to understand Sri Lankan politicians from their stance at any one point of time, one would have to conclude that they were either completely erratic or mad. President Chandrika Kumaratunga, for instance, came to power in 1994 advocating peace and was responsible for more death and destruction than the previous right-wing United National Party (UNP). In 2003, with her Sri Lankan Freedom Party in opposition, she joined the chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in denouncing the UNP-led government for undermining national security in peace talks with the LTTE. She arbitrarily dismissed the government in February 2004 on that basis. When her SLFP-JVP-led coalition won the elections in April 2004, Kumaratunga did a backflip and announced her intention to restart the peace process.

Kumaratunga's twists and turns are not simply the product of an unstable individual but reflect the derangement of a class—the bourgeoisie—which has no solutions as it lurches from one crisis to the next. Economically, it is evident to the business elite that the war is a disaster that has to end in order to integrate the island into the processes of globalised capitalist production. Politically, however, the ruling elites are incapable of lifting themselves out of the quagmire of communalism. Any move towards a deal with the LTTE is invariably denounced as treachery by opposition parties in Colombo.

What about Kadirgamar? Throughout the last decade or so, he proved himself to be Kumaratunga's loyal servant and diplomatic tool—one of her inner circle. He was just as capable of negotiating with the LTTE, as denouncing it and the peace process. When he was murdered, Kumaratunga, with Kadirgamar's assistance, was endeavouring to push through an arrangement with the LTTE for the joint distribution of tsunami aid. She confronted the opposition of her former allies—the JVP—and other chauvinist organisation as well as from sections of the state apparatus.

In that context, Kumaratunga's initial comment that the "political foes of peace" were responsible for the murder is highly significant. She has connived and schemed with the military top brass for more than a decade and is well aware that disaffected military officers would be quite capable of organising such a conspiracy.

K. Ratnayake

Every time the LTTE carries out a bombing or an assassination, there always are the 'nay' sayers who try to shield them from blame by denying the LTTE's role. And, here we go again! In my opinion, the Tigers had the motive and the means to carry out the assassination. Mr. Kadirgamar was the prime target of the LTTE because he was a Tamil holding a powerful post in the government. Furthermore, his work helped in getting the international community involved in the crisis and recognizing the LTTE as a terrorist organization. Just the fact that he was a Tamil was sufficient for him to be labelled a 'traitor' by the LTTE, its supporters and sympathizers. This establishes motive. The Tiger cadres are known to have threatened and terrorized innocent Tamils to gain access and secrecy to carry out their terror operations. This provides the means. Every high-profile assassination the Tigers executed was blamed on President Premadasa (except his own, of course). What does it take for people to realize and accept the fact that all those assassinations and bombings were the work of the cowardly Vellupillai Prabhakaran & Co.? Come on people, wake up and smell the roses. In my opinion, if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's got to be a duck. So, there's no way the Tigers can duck this.

RW

Dear RW,

With this argument, you have proved nothing. Changing what needs to be changed, one could replace the words "LTTE" and "Tigers" in your

email with "military" or "JVP" and reach a similar conclusion. You provide no evidence for your case and simply appeal to communal prejudice. Like others you ignore the fact that we have plainly stated that LTTE may have carried out the murder. Our article was written to oppose the deluge of unsubstantiated denunciations of the LTTE appearing in the Colombo press that have the clear aim of whipping up a climate for a return to war.

Motive and means? Layers of the military and state apparatus, as well as the JVP and Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), are hysterically opposed to the agreement between the government and the LTTE to jointly administer tsunami aid and to any resumption of the peace process. What better way to prevent further negotiations and send a warning to Kumaratunga than to murder one of her closest confidantes and blame it on the LTTE. Two decades of war have produced elements in the state apparatus in Colombo that are more than capable and ruthless enough to carry out such a plot to defend their entrenched interests.

As for the unanswered questions that we raised in our article, you have nothing to say. How was it that the assassins were able to get close enough to one of the most heavily guarded political figures in Sri Lanka to kill him and then get clean away? Neither you nor anyone else has as yet provided any satisfactory answer.

K. Ratnayake

This article is nothing but a try made in vain to whitewash LTTE of its reality as a gang of ruthless terrorists. Do not forget the freedom enjoyed by people living under a democratically elected government, which is much different to that of people at gunpoint of a ruthless terrorist organisation.

Therefore it's obvious that these LTTE terrorists who are world famous liars, drug traffickers and murderous masterminders of crime, could easily penetrate the loopholes of security in a democratic society and hide behind their usual denials. Your article indicates your hidden ambition of trying to fabricate tales of misinformation that's a simple copy of LTTE's preplanned claim which they immediately made after SL FM's assassination.

The present international community as well as the peace loving Tamils of Sri Lanka are not that foolish to believe anymore the false claims of either any terrorist groups or their supporters like you.

CC

Dear CC,

Firstly of all, our opposition as socialists to the LTTE has been publicly stated many times. In particular, it was outlined at length in a statement entitled "Victory of international defense campaign strengthens Tamil struggle: The SEP and the fight for the Socialist United States of Sri Lanka and Eelam" published after a protracted campaign by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and its sister parties around the world to demand the LTTE release four of our comrades who were arbitrarily detained for campaigning for our socialist program.

Secondly, to claim that you are defending a "democratic society" against terrorism is absurd. Right from the outset, the parties of the Sri Lankan ruling elites have based their rule on chauvinism and the abuse of basic democratic rights. The first act of the UNP government that came to power in 1948 was to disenfranchise around a million Tamil plantation workers—or about 10 percent of all voters—on the basis that they were "foreign aliens". Anti-Tamil discrimination, which ultimately led to civil war, has been the fundamental ideology on which successive governments and the state apparatus have rested. For most of the last two decades, this "democratic society" has been under emergency rule and draconian anti-terrorism laws that have enabled the arbitrary detention and in some cases torture of thousands of "LTTE suspects".

Now even the façade of "democratic elections" is in doubt. Four elections in the last five years have solved absolutely nothing for the ruling class and there is open discussion in the Colombo press of other

forms of rule. It would not surprise us at all if the sections of the ruling elite move to dispense altogether with elections, including the current one.

K. Ratnayake

Can you honestly explain on which grounds you have decided the JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) as a Sinhala chauvinist party? Why [do] you use wrong words to describe the JVP, a party who respects all the races, religions equally. What are the facts you know about them to say the JVP is a chauvinist party?? Why [do] you try to cheat people????

Awaiting your genuine reply,

PW

Dear PW,

To turn the question around, how can you in all honesty claim that the JVP is “a party that respect all the races, religions equally.” For their own immediate purposes, the demagogues of JVP claim at times to be many things—supporters of peace, advocates of racial equality, and even socialists. But one would be a fool in politics if one simply accepted what a party said about itself and failed to examine its program and record.

The JVP’s origins in the 1960s lie in its efforts to appeal to disaffected Sinhalese rural youth not with genuine Marxism but with a form of Stalinism, packaged with Castroite and Maoist phrase-mongering and radical anti-imperialist slogans. Right from the outset, however, its program was permeated with anti-Tamil chauvinism. It branded Tamil plantation workers as the fifth column or agent of “Indian expansionism.”

A key turning point in its evolution took place in the late 1980s. The JVP mounted a vicious campaign against Indo-Lanka Accord—a joint attempt by the Indian and Sri Lankan ruling classes to impose a peace deal on the island, including the dispatch of Indian troops. The JVP dropped its socialist rhetoric and thrust itself forward as the patriotic defender of the Sri Lankan capitalist state. As it murdered workers and political opponents who refused to support its campaign, the JVP declared itself to be the follower of the Sinhala king, Vijayabahu-1, who fought against Indian invaders in the past.

The JVP was legalised in 1994 but its basic ideology has not changed one iota. In 2000, the party lined up with the Buddhist hierarchy in vehemently opposing the limited concessions to the democratic rights of the Tamil minority contained in President Kumaratunga’s draft constitution. It defends the present communal constitution which entrenches Buddhism as the state religion. The JVP’s hostility to the so-called peace process has nothing to do with socialism but is based on foul Sinhala supremacism. Together with like-minded organisations, the JVP formed the Patriotic National Movement and National Buddhist Conference under the banner of the nationalist lion flag and the Buddhist flag with the slogan “Defend the Motherland.”

K. Ratnayake

It is good piece of work. Because of people like you Sri Lanka can still hope to regain her peaceful existence. It is sad the politicians, particularly the ruling elites, have messed up the country for the last 50 years. I left SL in 1975 for good with a vow not to return. As an LSSP supporter, I was fed up with them after Colvin’s 1972 constitution & lost hope. I also read in a Tamil website that Kadirgamar was dead even before the operation. There was a cover-up or distorted information given. I do not know how reliable this news is.

ST

We have seen nothing to suggest that Kadirgamar was dead before he was shot. As in many high profile crimes, conspiracy theories abound. As a general rule, such theories do nothing to clarify the political issues involved.

As to the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), the fundamental turning point in its evolution was the 1964 betrayal when it entered the bourgeois government of Mme Bandaranaike. Its leaders like Colvin R de Silva completely abandoned the principles of socialist internationalism and embraced Sinhala communal politics. De Silva’s role as constitutional

affairs minister in drawing up the 1972 constitution, which entrenched anti-Tamil discrimination as the guiding ideology of the state, was the logical outcome.

We are still living with the consequences of the LSSP’s betrayal today. The ability of the LTTE and the JVP to appeal to radicalised youth in the 1960s and 1970s on the basis of communal politics resulted from the fact that the LSSP had abandoned the struggle to unify all workers on a class basis. The JVP and LTTE denounced Marxism and Trotskyism by pointing to the LSSP and the wretched policies of the government of which it was a part. In the final analysis, the LSSP’s betrayal was responsible for the country’s devastating 20-year war.

In these difficult circumstances, the forerunner of the SEP—the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL)—alone continued the struggle for the principles of the international Trotskyist movement—the International Committee of the Fourth International—and sought to clarify for workers and young people the theoretical and political basis of the LSSP’s betrayal. It is because of that determined struggle that the SEP is in a position today to provide a socialist alternative to the morass into which all the major political parties have plunged the island.

K. Ratnayake



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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