

INTERNATIONALISM VERSUS PARLIAMENTARISM:
FOURTH INTERNATIONAL AND THE CEYLONESE TROTSKYITES

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Radical Marxist parties, irrespective of their particular persuasions, have kept an important place in their practice and ideology for internationalism. Internationalism is a nodal feature of Marxist ideology. In the study of a radical party this becomes an important aspect in view of the dichotomous problem of internationalist aspirations and national considerations. The importance of this aspect is greater still for the radical parties that have shown a tendency to adapt to the national political system. Such adaptation is very likely to create serious problems if the internationalism of the radical party goes beyond the mere ideological link, i.e. to maintaining organisational links with a definite international organisation. In this paper an attempt will be made to outline the development of the links that the Trotskyite Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) had with the Fourth International (FI) and some of its Sections and to examine the nature of this relationship in the context of the deradicalisation that took place within the national party.

Ideologically and organisationally the LSSP was linked to the Fourth International until June 1964. Formed as a broad socialist party in 1935 the LSSP had embodied a dominant Trotskyite tendency almost from its inception. This Trotskyite faction was instrumental in successfully moving a party Central Committee resolution condemning the Third International in December 1939. However, the Ceylonese Trotskyites were not to establish organisational links with the Fourth International until 1942. In that year they, in

association with some Indian Trotskyites, formed the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India as the Indian Section of the Fourth International. Although the BLPI disappeared by the end of the 1940's the link with the FI was maintained by the Ceylonese Trotskyites who reorganised themselves in Ceylon as the LSSP. This link was kept up right upto 1964.

The F I was founded in 1938. The movement for the formation of a 'Fourth' International was afoot from about 1933 when Trotsky and his fellow left oppositionists became convinced of their incapacity to "transform" the Third International which was thought "degenerate", into a "vanguard of the International working-class movement". The founding conference was held on 3rd September, 1938, and was attended by about 30 persons representing 10 European countries and "Latin America". The "Transitional Programme" adopted by this Conference "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International" is the basic programmatic document of the world Trotskyite movement.

The relationship between the Fourth International and its Sections had been different from that between the Third International and its sections. The Third International was a very powerful organisation, and it had the resources and strength to make its branches adhere to the policies and directives of the centre. The Soviet power and the organisation of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union helped the Third International sustain this strength. It had the first socialist state of the world as its base; behind it was the authority of the Soviet Union. The Fourth International on the other hand had to depend mainly on the ideals of Trotskyism and the person of Trotsky for its strength. It lacked a definite centre whose leadership was accepted by all the affiliated organisations. Paris served as the headquarters atleast in theory; in practice Trotsky functioned as the real centre until his death in the formative stages of the movement. Once the movement lost this main unifying force diverse centrifugal forces started threatening the tenuous foundations of the FI. Although Paris functioned as the official headquarters of the organisation, in France there never developed a Trotskyite movement powerful enough to back it up. This paved the way for the rise of competition from powerful branch organisations which very often undermined the cohesiveness in action of the organisation as a whole. Factional rivalries based on theoretical and personal differences were to plague the

movement throughout its existence. Needless to say that the Fourth International organization never even came near to achieving the power and influence of the Third International in its relations with the affiliated sections. In the main the Fourth International remained the institutional manifestation of the Trotskyist ideal rather than a dynamic international organization. One has to take these factors into consideration in discussing the relationship that the LSSP had with the Fourth International.

The LSSP did not become affiliated to the F.I. until 1942; technically even then the LSSP was linked to the F.I. only indirectly; i.e. as the Ceylon unit of the Indian section of the Fourth International, the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India. Direct links between the LSSP and the F.I. were not established until 1950.¹ Before 1942 the LSSP had not attached itself to any International either directly or indirectly. However, it had had associations with at least one Trotskyist organization before that time.

The Socialist Workers Party of America was the first Trotskyist organisation with which the Samasamajists were to associate. At a time when American liberals were concerned with the developing nationalist struggle in India these socialists took an interest in the anti-imperialist and socialist movements of the Indian subcontinent. It was in this context that the Samasamaja movement in Ceylon drew the attention of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). In its early references to the LSSP the SWP described the former as a "revolutionary socialist party"². The LSSP was seen as a nationalist fighting organization struggling against British imperialism for full independence in the face of a complaisant national political leadership. The "Socialist Appeal" (the weekly newspaper of the SWP) quoted the third annual conference report of the LSSP and highlighted the anti-fascist character

1. Until 1950 the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party was the official section of the Fourth International in Ceylon. In June 1950 the Bolshevik Samasamajists joined the Lanka Sama Samaja Party thereby making the LSSP the FI section in Ceylon.

2 The Socialist Appeal (New York), 17.3.1939

of the Ceylonese Samasamajists.³ In early 1939 the Socialist Appeal enthusiastically referred to the "aggressive and direct struggles" led by the "radical socialists" in Ceylon. It carried details of the activities of the LSSP during the same period and the main resolutions of the 1938 LSSP conference were published in full; the revolutionary ardour of the Samasamajists was emphasised. The LSSP was presented as a party that relied on revolutionary class struggle as the only means of fighting imperialism; on behalf of the SWP the paper sent its "heartiest congratulations and warmest greetings of solidarity to the revolutionary socialists of Ceylon".⁴ However, it must be noted that even towards the middle of 1939 the LSSP had not gained the recognition of the SWP as one of its fraternal organizations. By the end of 1939 the contacts between the two groups had been established; it is possible that the British Trotskyist group, the Revolutionary Communist League, was instrumental in bringing the LSSP and SWP close to each other. Once the victory of the Trotskyites over the Stalinists within the LSSP in December 1939 came to be known the LSSP was trusted as a fraternal group by the SWP.

The first known direct contact of the LSSP with the American Trotskyists came towards the end of 1939. Mrs. Selina Perera, the wife of N.M. Perera and an important member of the LSSP, stayed and worked with the SWP on her visit⁵ to the United States in November/December 1939. While in the States she made an unsuccessful attempt to meet Trotsky in person in Mexico; the whole trip was organized and financed by the SWP. In an interview given to the Socialist Appeal Mrs Perera expressed her own faith in the correctness of the line of the F.I.

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3. The Socialist Appeal 25.4.1939.
 4. The Socialist Appeal 16.6.1939.
 5. See G.J. Lerski, Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon, Hoover, New York, 1968, pp. 185 - 187
for correspondence concerning this trip.

According to the paper she denounced the Comintern and she was also against the Second International. At the same time she appeared hesitant to commit her party to the line of the FI. All that she was prepared to say was that her party accepted the policy of the "proletarian internationalism".⁶

These preliminary contacts were further strengthened by the visit of a leading SWP member, Sherman Stanley,⁷ in early 1940. While in Ceylon he had met and had discussions with some LSSP leaders. On his return he reported very sympathetically about the LSSP and described the Ceylonese Socialists as "genuinely nationalist and militant fighters".⁸ By this time the Ceylonese Samasamajists had established contacts with some Indians who were generally described as "Trotskyist". The Indians, however, did not have any links with the FI at the time. These associations with Trotskyists outside Ceylon show a consistent progression of the LSSP towards Trotskyism and towards establishing formal links with the Fourth International. The formation of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India, Ceylon and Burma in April 1942 (of which the LSSP was the Ceylonese Unit) and its alignment with the Fourth International as its Indian section was an important stage in the development of the LSSP; it marked the culmination of the progression of the LSSP as a Trotskyist party: now it became a partner of a Section of the Fourth International, Trotsky's own party of the World Revolution.

6. The Socialist Appeal, 17.11.1939. This newspaper report mentioned the interviewed member only as a "Ceylonese Comrade" and did not give any names. But because Mrs. Selina Perera was the only LSSP member who was in the United States during November/December working in association with the Socialist Workers Party it would be reasonable to assume that this was Mrs. Perera.

7. Sherman Stanley was responsible for South Asian and for Eastern affairs at the SWP headquarters until he left the party in 1940.

8. The New International, New York, September 1940, pp. 266 - 268.

The Bolshevik Leninist Party of India became affiliated to the Fourth International at a time when it was a scattered underground movement; despite the impressive name, it lacked the proper organization or a base for operations, and its leaders were on the run. This made the strengthening of the formal organizational links between the Trotskyists of the BLPI and the world movement extremely difficult. The centre of the FI, the International Secretariat in Paris, was itself in complete disarray as a result of the Nazi occupation and the persecutions that followed.⁹ Therefore until 1946 the Ceylonese Trotskyists had no real links with the International; only the ideological affiliations remained. But they did continue their relations with the SWP, the only Trotskyist group of any significance to survive the war without suffering major organizational disruption. However, even with the SWP relations did not reach the point of exchanging delegates or participating in each other's affairs directly; relations were merely associational. The SWP was in communication with the group in India, though haphazardly; it received documents from the Trotskyists in India and these were reproduced with very favourable comments in SWP journals. The strikes, lockouts and demonstrations in which their comrades in India took part were given maximum publicity. The SWP attempted to raise funds in order to help the comrades in India and in addition tried to arouse American public opinion to influence British policy there. In general, the SWP served as the "window to the world" for the outlawed Ceylonese Samasamajists who were in India at the time. The fraternal support it extended often accompanied by exaggerated claims as to the struggles and bravery of the BLPI in the face of persecution by the authorities may have helped to create a picture of the BLPI in the minds of the world Trotskyites as a militant revolutionary organization with widespread support in India and Ceylon.

9. M. Pablo, in "Vingt Annees du Quatrieme Internationale", serialised in IVe Internationale, Paris, between January 1958 and the first issue in 1959, states that even during the World War the FI did not cease to function and that it even managed to publish its official journal sporadically and to hold a secret conference.

In 1946, when the FI itself was re-constituted¹⁰ the relations between the world Trotskyist groups became regularised. From this time onwards Paris became the headquarters for the Ceylonese Trotskyites as for many other groups; consequently, the SWP faded into the background as the leading contact of the Ceylonese Trotskyists, just as the SWP journals had done before, so now the publications of the FI centre gave publicity to the activities¹¹ of the Trotskyists in Ceylon; in addition to publicity, guidance and encouragement also now came from Paris. Soon after the re-constitution of the International regular correspondence with the Section in Ceylon was established, and this was to remain an important feature of their relationship for a long time.

When the Trotskyites in Ceylon made remarkable gains at the general elections of 1947, the Fourth International was elated and sent its greetings to the Ceylonese comrades.¹² It also issued a statement which declared that the "electoral victory of the Ceylonese Trotskyists was a source of great jubilation to Fourth Internationalists the world over". The victories were considered as evidence of deep rooted strength of the Ceylonese Trotskyites and as an indication that "at least in the colonies the obstacle of treacherous Stalinism and social democracy could be by-passed".¹³

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10. In April 1946 the first post-war conference of the FI was held in Paris and a new organisational structure comprising an International Executive Committee and an International Secretariat was established.
 11. The activities of the Ceylonese Trotskyites came to occupy a permanent place in the section "News of the Workers' Movements of the World" in the IVE Internationale.
 12. The two Trotskyite groups won 15 seats out of a total of 95 and polled about 317,000 votes between them. The letter sent by the Fourth International to its Section in Ceylon is reproduced in full in The Militant, 13.10.1947.
 13. "La victoire electorale des Trotskyites et le projet d'indépendance de Ceylan", the statement of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International. IVE Internationale, Jan - Feb. 1948, pp. 54 - 55.

During this early period the FI was concerned about the split within the ranks of its followers in Ceylon; this was regarded as retrogressive in a situation that was seen as immensely favourable to the growth of their influence. In its congratulatory message to the affiliated group the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party (a copy of which was sent to the "dissidents", the LSSP) after the election successes, the FI stressed the need for an early unification.¹⁴ Until unity was achieved three years later, the FI was to continually exhort its Section to unite with the dissidents in order to build a stronger and more influential Trotskyist party. Whenever there were signs of improved relations between the two Trotskyists groups, the FI became very enthusiastic and urged both the groups in the name of Trotskyism, to establish permanent unity.¹⁵ Despite this enthusiasm, the FI in the period upto the establishment of organizational unity backed its Section against the dissident Trotskyites. For instance, on the issue of Independence the FI defended the militant position taken by the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party (BSP) against the conciliatory attitude of the dissidents. The FI warned that if ever the dissidents were to be admitted into the FI they should be required to repudiate their position on the Independence celebrations:

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14. "Your victory imposes a grave responsibility and it is our fervent hope that the two parties will work unitedly against the class enemy and that this unity will lead to the eventual fusion of all those who stand on the programme of the Fourth International", The Militant, 13.10.1947.
15. For example the short-lived agreement established on the eve of the 1947 elections made the Fourth International jubilant; it did not examine the nature of this "unity". IVe Internationale, Dec.1946, p.60.

"If dissidents are keen to be integrated in the FI they must clearly repudiate the position taken by their representatives in parliament on the question of Independence The dissident party must place itself within the discipline of the BLPI and the International in its future actions"¹⁶

Naturally, the American Trotskyite party, the SWP, also accepted the view of the FI and joined in condemning the "dissidents" for failing to oppose the "Independence fraud" in any positive way. "The dissident LSSP contributed its mite to this deception of the masses", it said, referring to the event.¹⁷ On the whole, however, the FI was keen to see unification despite these obvious differences in the degree of militancy between the two groups and therefore continued to urge unification.

Early in 1950, after months of negotiations, the two groups reached agreement about unity. What emerged from the "Unification Conference" in June 1950 was the Lanka Samasamaja Party, the Section of the Fourth International in Ceylon. Despite the fact that the unification was achieved with the Bolshevik Leninist group as a partner junior to the "dissident" group, the Fourth International was highly gratified.¹⁸

With the Second World Congress of the FI in 1948, relations between the Ceylonese Trotskyists and the FI attained a higher level; for the first time they were represented at the Centre of world Trotskyism. Colvin R.de Silva, who led the Ceylon delegation was also elected to the Executive Committee of the International, the highest

16. IVe Internationale, Jan - Feb. 1948, p.55

17. The Militant, 29.3.1948.

18. The International was very pleased to extend its recognition to the new LSSP; a letter from the International Secretariat to this effect was read at the Conference. The Militant, 26.6.1950.

executive body of the Fourth International.¹⁹ From this time the Ceylonese Trotskyites were to have regular representation at the centre of the Fourth International, and this brought them closer to the world movement. Between 1948 and 1964 almost all the major conferences of the Fourth International were attended by representatives of the Ceylonese Trotskyites.²⁰ Moreover, for a long period of time between 1948 and 1964 two leading Trotskyists from Ceylon, Colvin R de Silva and Leslie Goonewardene, served on the International Executive Committee.

The Fourth International for its part sent leading executives of the International to Ceylon to hold consultations with the leadership in Ceylon and occasionally to address the general membership at conferences. There were five such occasions, twice before and three times after 1960.²¹ The most significant visit was that of Pierre Frank to the crucial June 1964 conference where he addressed the members and advocated a line that was opposed by the majority of the LSSP leadership. The LSSP, as the affiliated Section, was obliged

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19. The Second World Congress held in Paris in April 1948 was attended by about 50 delegates from 20 different countries. The Militant, 10.5.1948.
20. The following were among the Ceylonese representatives who directly participated in the affairs at the International Centre: V.Karalasingham (3rd World Congress, 1951), Bala Tampoe (Executive Committee Sessions in 1959) Edmund Samarakkody (7th World Congress, 1963); Colvin R.de Silva (2nd, 4th and 5th World Congress Sessions) Leslie Goonewardena (4th and 5th World Congress Sessions).

At the time when there were two Ceylonese representatives serving on the International Executive Committee the total membership of the Committee rarely exceeded 10.

21. Earnest Germain, "From Wavering to Capitulation", International Socialist Review, New York, Fall 1964, p.117.

to send its official documents, literature and reports on the general political developments in Ceylon to the International Centre. Occasionally, the International Secretariat would request the Ceylonese Section to apprise the International of a particular situation and to give the Section's view of this situation. By participating in the activities of the International Centre through its own representatives the Section in Ceylon could obtain first-hand knowledge and experience concerning the policy and developments of the International. Besides this, there were regular communications from the Centre to the Section in the form of reports of proceedings, circulars and comments on specific issues. Normally these communications were addressed to the leadership - the Political Bureau and the Central Committee - and not to the members of LSSP; yet, the International expected the members to be informed by the leadership about its policy. Like all other Sections the Ceylonese Section as an affiliated body was expected to make a subscription payment toward the expenditure of the International headquarters in proportion to its organizational strength.²² Needless to say, the FI gave maximum possible publicity to the successes and encouragement to the activities of the LSSP. The International also opened its theoretical journals, the 4th International (the English language organ of the International Secretariat, published first in Amsterdam and later in Rome, between 1958 and 1962) and IVe Internationale (Paris) to LSSP writers quite frequently; this provided the Ceylonese Samasamajists with world-wide Trotskyite audience. At the International there was only the highest regard for the Ceylonese leaders; they were praised as foremost theoreticians, honest leaders

22. There was special provision in the constitution of the LSSP to make a collection of Rs.1.50 per member annually to be paid direct to the International. Lanka Samasamaja Pakshaya Vyvasthava (The Constitution of the LSSP) u.d. (1958), Section 4 (4), p.2.

and brave fighters against local and foreign reactionaries.²³

As an organization the FI was by no means rigid; in fact as a reaction to the "excessive bureaucracy" of the Comintern, the FI was overconcerned with being democratic.²⁴ The Sections had the "freedom to differ from or oppose the decisions and resolutions of the World Party (i.e. the FI), within the movement. But the Sections had to accept the general line of the International and they were bound by the resolutions and decisions of the World Party",²⁵ once decisions were made. There was an International Executive Committee elected by the World Congress as the highest executive body of the International; the day to day operations were carried out by the International Secretariat, a body elected by the Executive Committee. The International Secretariat had the power to supervise the activities of the Sections; it also had the authority to advise, criticise or make suggestions regarding their policy. The implementation of the decisions of the World Congress and the Executive Committee regarding the organization was also its responsibility. The following section will attempt to examine the nature of the relations between the FI and its section in Ceylon; in passing, the attitude of the other sister organizations towards the LSSP will also be discussed.

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23. In the main Trotskyites outside praised particularly the 3 leaders Colvin R.de Silva, Leslie Goonewardena and Edmund Samarakkody. See for instance the special editorial on Colvin R.de Silva in The Militant, 15.1.1951.
24. See Ernest Germain, Marxism Vs. Ultra Leftism, Key Issues in Healy's Challenge to the Fourth International, Fourth International Publications, 1967, Paris. p.22.
25. Platform of the Left Opposition (LSSP internal Bulletin) mimeo, p.10.

It can be seen that the year 1960 marks a dividing line in the nature of the relationship between the FI and the LSSP. Before 1960 the FI made criticism of the LSSP with the object of improving its revolutionary character. Attempts were made to encourage the party to organize itself along Bolshevik lines; the party was constantly advised to practice the concept of a democratic centralism in its decision making. The LSSP leadership, the larger part of which was engaged in fulltime occupations, was similarly continually exhorted to give more time to party work by the FI. Further, the party was advised against continuing the non-Bolshevik practice of relying on the "general membership conference" as the supreme decision-making body; instead, the FI wanted the LSSP to have a "national congress" comprising of delegates elected by the members. The lack of systematic educational work and the lack of a proper recruitment process extending to the plantation workers were also criticised by the International. Further, attempts were made to have the party leadership integrated into the International. The poor interest of a majority of the leadership in the affairs of the International was seen as retrogressive if the party as a whole was to develop along the lines of revolutionary internationalism. Particular emphasis was placed on this because it was only through the leadership that the International could reach the members, the majority of whom were regarded as possessing a "low degree of real internationalism".²⁶ The International also tried to make the Ceylonese section keep close links with the Trotskyist group in India. Another criticism by the Paris centre was that the LSSP did not make financial contributions in proportion to its organizational strength towards the expenditure of the International. Further, attempts were made to persuade the LSSP to "study the agrarian problem in Ceylon."²⁷ Despite claims to the contrary the FI did not succeed to any significant degree in any of these attempts.

26. Germain, *Marxism Vs. Ultra Leftism*, p. 22.

27. Germain, "From Wavering" *op. cit.*, p. 115.

That the relationship between the two was qualitatively different in the period after 1960 may be made clear by two considerations. First, before March 1960, the International, while it criticised the LSSP's lack of good organization and the poor quality of its internationalism, did not concern itself with the broad political perspectives and the day to day tactics of the LSSP. The LSSP's line regarding these received tacit approval of the International. From 1960 onwards, the International, having failed to help the LSSP to improve its revolutionary character, began to concern itself with the Party's general political line. Secondly, in respect of the style of contact, the International before 1960 attempted to guide the party through "comradely collaboration" at leadership level. The keynote was "correction by fraternal discussion"²⁸ between the International Secretariat and the top leadership of the LSSP. After 1960, a more drastic method of open criticism - thus addressed to all members and even outsiders - came to be used frequently by the International.

The new phase of the relations between the FI and LSSP commenced with the general elections of March 1960. On the eve of the elections the FI as well as other fraternal organisations gave their fullest support to the LSSP. The circumstances of March 1960 generated enthusiasm throughout the international Trotskyist movement, for this was the first occasion on which a Trotskyist party had made a serious bid for power. The enthusiasm owed much to the exaggerated image held by outside Trotskyites as to their sister party's chances. In any case this enthusiasm, while never amounting to direct and formal approval of LSSP tactics, came very close to being such. The National Convention of the SWP (U.S.A.) sent its blessings to LSSP's "valiant organisation and lead of the socialist vanguard in Ceylon" at a time when the latter was preparing for the March 1960 elections.²⁹ Later, The Militant (7.3.1960) gave a very optimistic report on the LSSP's election campaign. The Socialist Labour League (SLL), the militant Trotskyite group in Great Britain, was also very enthusiastic about the elections; it "saluted warmly its sister party in Ceylon on the eve of a historic general

28. Ibid, p.115

29. The Militant, 13.7.1959.

elections" and pledged complete support. The SLL even promised to discuss "the opening of a fighting fund to help the LSSP".³⁰ The International itself sent its greetings. The 22nd plenum of the International Executive Committee unanimously voted to send the salutations of the Fourth International to the "Leader and member comrades of the Ceylonese section of the FI who are engaged in a decisive struggle for power".³¹

The results of the elections were disastrous for the LSSP and naturally dashed the hopes of LSSP and those of the FI. The FI in fact wondered whether it had been correctly apprised by the LSSP of its electoral prospects. In a letter the International Secretariat suggested "the necessity for a profound examination of the reasons which determined the non-verification of the perspectives of the party and of the International concerning the chances of the party in the elections".³² Not only that, for the first time the FI publicly questioned the correctness of the strategy of the LSSP. Referring to the coming elections (the second elections of 1960) and LSSP's preparations for them, the official journal stated:

"It would be rather dangerous however for the workers' parties to restrict themselves to the framework of the parliamentary aims and not look for a new effective contact with the masses through rigorous extra-parliamentary activity among the workers and peasant masses; and an electoral policy which put forward a radical programme to be realised by the united front of the parties which claim to be working class".³³

Basically, this statement summarised the line the Fourth International had recommended for the LSSP, i.e. more attention for extra-parliamentary mass work and cooperation with working class parties electorally, for the coming period. So now the Fourth International even went to the

30. The Newsletter, (the weekly newspaper of the SLL), 12.12.1959.

31. Ive Internationale, Jan.1960, p.82 (Emphasis added. Own translation)

32. Quoted in "Ceylon: Towards New Elections", 4th International, (Amsterdam), No19, Spring 1960, p.66.

33. Ibid., p.66.

extent of providing the LSSP with alternative policy lines. Furthermore, in addition to the normal method of confidential communications to the leadership, the International Secretariat now adopted the method of open appeal. Although at this time a distinct leftwing existed in the party leadership that advocated a policy similar to that of the FI., the International Secretariat still preferred to not take sides but to appeal to the party as a whole.

After the election defeat the right-wing of the LSSP steered the party toward a line of electoral cooperation with "anti United National Party" forces and of support for the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in Parliament, even to the extent of joining in a coalition government. The strategy of anti United National Party cooperation was instrumental in bringing the SLFP into power with a clear majority; now the LSSP adopted a policy of "supporting every activity of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party which would carry the country forward along progressive lines" and pledged to "assist the SLFP government to defeat and overcome any and every sabotaging effort of big capital."³⁴ In Parliament the LSSP group supported the Speech from the Throne and the Budget of the first government of Mrs. Bandaranaike. This policy appeared to be a direct violation of the policy line put forward by the FI, and brought further disapproval from Paris and from some sister Sections. The International Secretariat issued a statement publicly dissociating the Fourth International from the new policy of the LSSP.³⁵ This statement expressed disagreement in regard with both the LSSP's recent electoral strategy and its open support to the government of the SLFP. It stressed that the "no contest agreement, extended upto a mutual support agreement, involved the danger of creating illusions about the nature of the SLFP among the great masses". The statement went on to suggest that the party should have voted against the Throne Speech of the SLFP because of the "very moderate character of the government programme and its attitude against nationalisation of plantations".

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34. The statement of the Secretary, LSSP, after the general elections. Ceylon News, 4.8.1960.
35. "A declaration of the International Secretariat of the Fourth International on Ceylon", 4th International, Autumn 1960, pp. 53 - 54.

The irony of this situation was that this was a time when the FI had very high hopes for an independent role for the LSSP in Ceylon, not primarily in parliament, but rather in the extra-parliamentary area of the mass movement. Particularly in view of the political instability following S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's death, the apparent collapse of the "liberal bourgeois" SLFP and the "demise" of the United National Party, the FI believed that a left/right polarisation was taking place in Ceylon and that its Section would be the greatest beneficiary. The Draft Resolution for the World Congress of the FI articulated this line of thinking in the general context of the colonial and semi-colonial world. In the main, the Draft Resolution saw the "national anti-imperialist phase of the colonial revolution during which bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leaderships have been able to play a leading part ... giving way to a higher phase".³⁶ This was thought particularly relevant to many "formally independent" countries, in which category Ceylon was included. The Draft Resolution envisaged the possibility of "a touching off of a new revolutionary avalanche" commencing in India and Indonesia. Even in this context Ceylon occupied a special place; it was thought that due to the existence of the LSSP, the Ceylonese revolution may take place well ahead of a general revolutionary outbreak in the region. For greater victories the World Congress wanted the LSSP to strengthen its organizational structure along Bolshevik lines and link itself better with the peasant masses.³⁷ Yet in this atmosphere of great revolutionary optimism in the world Trotskyist movement, the LSSP was found playing second-fiddle in Parliament to a "liberal bourgeois" government.

Despite the warnings and advice that came from the FI through its official journals and direct communications the LSSP continued with its new line towards the SLFP government. It was in this atmosphere that the 6th World Congress assembled in Paris. After discussing the situation in Ceylon, the Congress adopted a resolution that censured the Ceylonese Section for "its erroneous policy line".

36. "Draft Resolution for the 6th World Congress of the Fourth International: The Colonial Revolution, its balance sheet, its perspectives and its problems" 4th International No.10, Summer 1960, p.60.

37. *Ibid.*

Section for "its erroneous policy line".³⁸ However, the Congress did not altogether exclude support for really progressive measures of any government: but believed that the "general programme of SLFP did not justify the support accorded to it by the LSSP. Further, the Congress appealed to the LSSP "for a radical change in its political course". This censuring by the World Congress of a Section that had not split away was a measure without precedent in the history of the International. This lead of the supreme body of the Fourth International was to be followed by constituent national Trotskyist groups who also censured the policy of the LSSP. The Militant,³⁹ expressing the view point of the Socialist Workers' Party of America, with which the LSSP had enjoyed fraternal relations for a long time, publicly criticised the new political line of the Ceylonese section as "an overturning of its past policy", the SWP appealed to the majority of the LSSP to "reassert their adherence to the tested principles of Marxism and turn to the revolutionary position" they had previously occupied. Despite the disapproval of the world Trotskyite movement the LSSP was to continue its policy of "general support"⁴⁰ to the SLFP government for about two more years. Consequently, the attitude of the FI towards its deviant Ceylonese section also remained unchanged

38. The resolution is reproduced in full in IVe Internationale, Jan. 1961 p.75. It stated, i.a. that the "World Congress disapproves the political line adopted by the LSSP following the election defeat of March 1960. The Congress condemns more specifically the vote of parliamentary support expressed on the occasion of the speech from the Throne and the adoption of the Budget by party's representatives in parliament". (own translation)

39. The Militant, 3.10.1960. (Editorial Comment).

40. A Short History of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, LSSP Publication, Colombo, 1960. p.65.

and it did not hesitate to make it public.⁴¹

From about early 1962 for a number of reasons the LSSP gradually moved to a position of opposition to the SLFP government; this change of policy was accompanied by a movement towards unity among the working-class based parties. The culmination of this policy line was reached in August 1963 when the 'leftist' parties, LSSP, the Communist Party and the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna of Philip Gunawardane, came together in a grand United Left Front (ULF) with the aim of forming a government. The new policy of the ULF with its obvious anti-government stand, revived the hopes of the FI regarding LSSP; the new policy was regarded as being "infinitely better" than the policy of support for the SLFP administration. This was of course the line advocated by the FI for LSSP in 1960 as an alternative to the latter's policy of cooperation with the SLFP. The 7th World Congress of the FI of 1963 at which the Section in Ceylon was represented by Edmund Samarakkody, greeted the ULF policy as a "fundamentally correct orientation".⁴² Nevertheless, the Congress, by means of a long letter drew the attention of the LSSP to four important weaknesses:

- (a) Insufficient analysis of the error of 1960;
- (b) Lack of clarity about the extra-parliamentary potentialities of the United Left Front in contrast to its parliamentary features;
- (c) Lack of any public criticism of the opportunist policy of its allies in the ULF;
- (d) Failure to integrate the unions⁴³ of the Tamil plantation workers in the ULF.

41. For instance when the 4th International, No.13, Summer 1961, reproduced a statement of the LSSP's parliamentary group on the "Language Problem of Ceylon", the editor of the journal attached a special note stating that the 6th World Congress of the Fourth International disapproved of the "Actions of the LSSP regarding SLFP" and that the policy of support to Mrs. Bandaranaike's government still remained the general line of the LSSP. p.46.

42. Earnest Germain, "Wavering to.....", op. cit., p.116

43. Quoted by Pierre Frank, La Quatrieme Internationale: contribution a l'histoire du Mouvement Trotskyste, Paris, 1969 p. 99.

With this support, though somewhat qualified, from the International, the LSSP pursued the ULF policy with vigour and the ULF thrived in Ceylon till early 1964. It should be mentioned that at this juncture the Socialist Labour League (SLL), the British Trotskyite group, came to oppose the LSSP's policy line.⁴⁴ The SLL characterised the tactic of "united frontism" as opportunistic; three weeks before the ULF agreement was signed it declared that "the Transitional Programme (i.e. the original manifesto of the FI) gives no place for any United Fronts". Through The Newsletter it appealed to the "hundreds of devoted communists in the LSSP" to reaffirm the "principles and programme of the FI and purge the party of revisionism and the revisionist leaders".⁴⁵ From this time onwards the SLL carried on a policy aimed at isolating the "revisionists" and winning over the "revolutionaries" in the LSSP.

The United Left Front was not to last very long; with the beginning of a new trend towards a coalition government between some left parties and the SLFP, the unity of the United Left Front shattered. As soon as the news concerning manoeuvres for coalition government in Ceylon reached Paris the United Secretariat advised the Central Committee of the LSSP, by letter,⁴⁶ against joining in any coalition with "bourgeois" parties. The letter stated quite categorically that the United Secretariat was opposed to LSSP's entering "any coalition government wherein decisive control is held by a party that has proved time and again its reluctance to move against the capitalist order and furthermore has demonstrated in action its essential anti-working-class

44. The opposition of the SLL at this stage was not surprising as the LSSP was a leading participant, in 1963, of the newly united and enlarged Fourth International, grouping, the "United Secretariat". The SLL and La Verite group in France did not associate with the new formation; instead they formed a new Fourth International Group, "The International Committee", as a rival International to the one in Paris.

45. The Newsletter, 20.7.1963.

46. The letter dated 23.4.1964 is reproduced in full in Ernest Germain, "From Wavering" op. cit. p.116.

character". Furthermore, in this letter the United Secretariat counterposed as the correct perspective of the period a ULF government based on a socialist programme. Later, in May, the Plenum of the International Executive Committee of the FI endorsed unanimously the recommendations of the letter and decided to pursue the line advocated therein. It also decided to send a leading member of the Committee to Ceylon to attend the impending conference of the LSSP, which would decide the question of joining in a coalition with the SLFP. A few days before the conference, another letter was sent to the members of the LSSP in which the International Executive Committee reiterated more forcefully its earlier position of "no coalition with bourgeois parties".⁴⁷

In Ceylon, the representative of the United Secretariat, Pierre Frank advocated the line of Paris both in his address to the conference and in private and group discussions; the copies of the letter of the United Secretariat were distributed among the members. The Socialist Labour League had sent its own representative to cover the conference⁴⁸ and to pursue its line of isolating the 'reformists' and winning over the revolutionaries to the 'international Committee', the International group led by it. Beforehand, the SLL had declared that the "left opposition (of LSSP) should wage a resolute fight which would result in the rout of the leadership or the splitting of the party and the formation of a real Trotskyist

47. Confidential letter dated 25.5.1964 of the International Executive Committee to the LSSP, reproduced in full in IVe Internationale, July 1965, pp. 46-47. The letter stated: "Let the SLFP government appeal to you in vain. We hope that the LSSP as a whole will remain faithful to its long tradition of uncompromising struggle against imperialism and the national bourgeoisie, and that it will successfully resist the manoeuvres of the bourgeois government in order to open the road for genuine representatives of the masses to come to power. No coalition at the expense of socialist principles and the possibility of a socialist victory! Forward with the masses in struggle for a government of the United Left Front!" (Own translation)

48. The SLL representative, G.Healy was refused admission to the conference on the ground that he was not a member of the Fourth International.

party".⁴⁹

The conference decided in favour of joining in a coalition with the SLFP, by a massive majority. What happened at the conference was a great blow to the prestige of the International; the International Executive Committee following the conference, decided to expel from the FI the three LSSP'ers who accepted portfolios in the coalition government. It also suspended all the members who voted for entering into a coalition with the SLFP. But it was not so forthright in disciplining the centrists; the two leaders of the centrist group Colvin R de Silva and Leslie Goonewardene, the favourite sons of the International who were also members of the International Executive Committee remained so for two more months before they too were expelled at the insistence of the newly formed Lanka Samasamaja Party (Revolutionary). The new LSSP (R) was admitted as the "Section of the Fourth International in Ceylon" and the LSSP was dis-affiliated, thus bringing an end to a relationship that was over 20 years old.

On the whole what emerges from the above narrative is a relationship of a peculiar kind. It was not a relationship between a dominating Centre and a submissive Section, nor was it one of mutual cooperation between the Center and the Section. The relationship between the FI and the LSSP was more a case of the Centre adjusting, until about 1960, to the line initiated by the Section. Although the links were dutifully maintained, the Section did not allow itself to be controlled either by the International or by the sister Sections. The LSSP particularly valued the tag "the section of the Fourth International in Ceylon".⁵⁰

49. The Newsletter, 25.4.1964.

50. Between 1945 and 1950 when the Bolshevik Samasamaja Group was the accredited section of the Fourth International, the Lanka Samasamaja group introduced itself as "LSSP, the Followers of the Fourth International". In 1964 after it was expelled from the International the old LSSP called itself "LSSP: the Fourth International Section", despite protests from the newly recognized LSSP (Revolutionary). The Short History of the LSSP p. 50, mentions that it gave up its membership in the Asian Socialist Bureau in March 1955 when it was asked to disaffiliate from the Fourth International as a condition for the continuation of membership.

Even when the differences between the FI and the LSSP were very wide neither party wished the links to be severed. The split in June 1964 occurred only after the left wing of the party led by a LSSP representative to the International Executive Committee broke away from the main party to emerge as a new LSSP (Revolutionary). Apparently, the practices of prior consultation by the Section or sending of instructions by the Centre had not been essential components of this relationship. Very often the Centre was seen to be lagging behind events. Its comments were usually made after situations had actually been resolved, or where an irrevocable course of action had already been embarked upon by the Section. Not that this mattered very much: for even when the Centre was made aware of a situation the most it could do was to give advice or comment on the merits of the views and tactics of the Section. It was upto the Section, LSSP, to accept the guidance or act on its own. Of course, the constitution of the LSSP states very clearly that the party is "bound by" the regulations and decisions of the FI:⁵¹ but this remained only on paper and never entered the practical relationship. Neither did the FI attempt to control or make decisions for the LSSP; its role was one of advisory capacity. If the Section acted contrary to the advice of the Centre there was nothing much Paris could do short of resorting to the extreme measures of suspension or expulsion. The FI possessed few financial or organizational resources and in both these matters it was largely dependent on the constituent Sections. It was not a powerful bureaucratic monolith backed by the authority of a state or a major political organization. Nor were there any "residing agents" supervising the affairs of the Sections affiliated to the International. Because of its general debility, the FI was not in a position to impose its will on any Section either by coercion or by offer of reward.

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51. Sec.2 (6), Lanka Samasamaja Pakshaya Vyavasthava, "As the Section of the Fourth International this party accepts the actions and regulations of the Fourth International. Further, this party is bound by the decisions made by the ruling authority of the Fourth International".
(Own translation)

Therefore, the only lever open for the FI in leading its Sections was the lever of ideological attachment of the Sections to the Centre; and this was totally dependent on the level of revolutionary consciousness of the constituent Sections. As far as the LSSP was concerned revolutionary internationalism was at a very low level. Among the members in general this was to be expected owing to the lack of a proper recruitment process, lack of Marxist education, barriers of language and the almost total absence of liaison with the International; but there was very little revolutionary consciousness among the majority of the leadership and this stood in the way of developing any real ideological attachment with the International. The FI constantly reminded the leaders of this lack of integration with the International; yet, even in 1963 a majority of the leadership was not integrated with the International.⁵² The few leaders who were close to the International, ideologically as well as on a personal level (through participation in Conferences etc.), belonged to a minority group in the party that became less and less influential as a force. Hence there was not much opportunity for the International to enforce its will upon its Ceylonese section. As has been pointed out earlier the foundation principle of the FI organization was the concept of "democratic centralism". In its organization, "democracy", there was in plenty but without much "centralism". In practice, the Sections were free to disagree not only before a decision was made but also in action even after a decision was made. At least this was the case regarding the relationship between the FI and the LSSP.

Despite the differences and deviations the two parties remained linked for over 20 years. What were the factors that facilitated this situation? As for the LSSP, it valued the link with FI because it symbolised a link with a world revolutionary movement of which the LSSP was considered to be a part. This link was particularly important in view of the existence in Ceylon of another party competing for the leadership of the working-class movement, namely the Communist Party. Moreover, there was no particular reason for the LSSP to leave the International, for the link did not become an obstacle for its advancement at home; any break, on the other

52. See, Platform of the Left Opposition, op. cit. p.9

hand, could have had the effect of forcing at least a significant number, the dedicated internationalists, out of the party.

The LSSP had maintained Trotskyism as its basic frame of reference from the early 1940's; its spokesmen articulated the Trotskyist doctrines of permanent revolution, bureaucratic degeneration of the socialist states, world revolution, etc; and the party supported the position held by the FI on the problems of Algeria, Cuba, China and Yugoslavia. The LSSP was also an energetic crusader of anti-Stalinism in Ceylon. The FI often commended its polemical publications. Its participation in militant trade union struggles and extra-parliamentary activities like the hartal of 1953 helped the strengthening of the image of LSSP as a "revolutionary" party. The leaders of the FI were proud of the policies the LSSP followed regarding the important issues of national language rights of the minorities and social and economic change in general. Until 1960 the LSSP strategy upheld the need for and the feasibility of a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state in Ceylon. Because the LSSP retained this revolutionary ideological framework the FI was satisfied to have it as an affiliated Section, whatever its domestic political tactics were. The FI did attempt to correct mistakes of the LSSP, but failed almost completely; yet no attempt was taken to break the relationship. This was mainly because of the presence of the above mentioned ideological framework and the existence in the leadership of a minority that was integrated in the International.

Moreover, because of the numerical and the organisational superiority of the LSSP within the International, the allegiance of the LSSP would have been counted by Paris as a great source of strength. Long before a 'big' Trotskyite party like the Socialist Workers' Party of America was able to poll above 50,000 votes in American presidential elections, the LSSP was polling many times that number in Ceylon; between September 1947 and December 1959 the LSSP was the second biggest party in Parliament and a major political force. It was also a likely challenger for power in the country. This was a position well in advance of any other party of the world Trotskyite movement, and made LSSP a very significant force in that movement. Ever since it emerged as an "anti-Comintern" political group, rival Trotskyite groups completed

to win over the LSSP.⁵³ After the split among the world Trotskyites in 1953 the position of the Centre in Paris as the centre of world Trotskyism was itself in question; the continued association of the biggest Trotskyist group of the world, in this context, would have been of immense significance to the International Secretariat.

As has been shown the change in the nature of the relationship between the FI and the LSSP broadly coincided with the transformation that took place within the LSSP. When the Ceylonese Trotskyites were engaged in revolutionary activism in defiance of the legal restrictions placed upon them (in the '40's) the FI hailed them as great revolutionary fighters worthy of being emulated by other Trotskyites. When the LSSP practiced "parliamentarism" while maintaining a militant revolutionary ideology as the basic frame of reference the FI continued to keep it within the movement but made attempts to improve its revolutionary quality. In 1960, the LSSP not only adopted the parliamentary perspective overtly it also made concessions in its ideological frame work. Subsequently, the FI adopted a very critical attitude towards the LSSP, even to the extent of dissociating from it publicly. The relationship became less than fraternal, to end very soon when the party decided to join a party of the bourgeoisie to form a coalition government.

53. As early as 1940 at a time when even the Trotskyist character of the LSSP itself was not very explicit the majority wing of the newly split Socialist Workers' Party (USA) claimed the allegiance of LSSP against the break away group (led by Max Shachtman)., see Fourth International, New York, March 1942, p.82., and May, 1942 p.82. Despite the differences among themselves all the Trotskyist groups were sympathetic to the LSSP. For instance the SLL (of G.B.) which violently opposed the Centre in Paris, supported the LSSP until 1963. The sympathy of the SWP (USA) lasted until 1960. Even when the new LSSP (R) was born as a result of the crisis of the old LSSP, the International Committee, the International headed by the SLL attempted to attract the new party out of the Centre in Paris.

Certainly, there remained fairly important elements of reciprocity in the relationship. The LSSP wanted the revolutionary dressing that the Fourth International could provide; the Fourth International still saw as valuable the numerical and organisational strength of LSSP. These played some role in maintaining the links for so long. But the similarities in the basic ideology and the revolutionary internationalism of a minority of the party leadership were the two main factors that sustained the link.

The experience of the LSSP vis-a-vis the Fourth International and the world Trotskyite movement appeared to have been different from that of some other radical parties in this region, as for example the Communist Party of India, as has been outlined by Kautsky.⁵⁴ In fact the experience of the LSSP appears to have been almost the reverse of what had been found by Kautsky regarding the Communist Party of India. The Indian Communist Party is seen as a foreign transplant that has consistently and almost rigidly taken its lead from Soviet foreign policy. Kautsky maintains that the Communist Party of India shaped its internal policies and strategy according to the instructions and advice from Moscow. But Kautsky seems to view the World Communist Movement as a monolithic structure devoid of ideological and factional disputes. Moreover, the over-concentration on the international dimension prevents him from assessing adequately the importance of the domestic problems on the behaviour of the Indian Communist Party. In any event, the Fourth International and the LSSP are not, by any means, the exact equivalents of the Third International, the Soviet Union, the World Communist Movement and the Communist Party of India. The relationship between the Third International, or the Soviet Union, and a national Communist Party, would be different from that between the small, and not so well-organised Fourth International and one of its Sections, both in scope and in depth.

54. Kautsky, John H., Moscow and the Communist Party of India, John Wiley and sons, New York, 1956.

However, from the point of view of the National Communist Party or the Section of the Fourth International the ideological problems raised by this relationship would be very different.

Ideologically the LSSP identified itself with the policy of the Fourth International but frequently decisions on national strategy and policy were taken independently of this body. Even on international issues there were occasions when it did not strictly follow the lead of the Fourth International, particularly when the LSSP's own national strategy was affected, as in the case of the Sino-Soviet dispute. The LSSP never allowed itself to be dictated to by the International, either in matters relating to its general strategy or its policy. For instance, the priority it gave to considerations of local power strategies was so great that it defied continual opposition, including a specific censure resolution by the World Congress of the Fourth International on its attitude to the government of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party formed in July 1960. It also appears that the more the LSSP adopted itself to the national political situation the less it had become amenable to the advice of the International. It could also be seen that in their relationship the Fourth International had very often acceded to the policy of its Ceylon Section. This flexibility on the part of the International was greatly instrumental in sustaining the link for as long as twenty years. The reciprocity of interests, no doubt, facilitated this. However, when the International reached a point beyond which it was not prepared to adjust, and when the LSSP came to regard its national political strategy as more important than the maintenance of the link with the International, the link itself had to be abandoned.

The case of the LSSP shows that even when the International concerned claims to be more "internationalist" than any before it, the requirement of adjustment to the national political process inevitably leads to the sacrifice of internationalism for national political needs. LSSP experience also reflects on the nature of the Fourth International: (and this is largely valid for other international ideological movements): the difficulty is to maintain any effective control, when the organisation's only asset is the ideology it professes, and the only means of control is the degree of ideological commitment of the Sections.