

## IN DEFENCE OF A POLITICAL SOLUTION

At a time when a political alternative to the ethnic war is again being discussed, we are gravely concerned about the extreme nationalist spirit, intolerance and militarism evident in the present political debate. We feel that the leaders and spokespersons in this debate should be more in touch with the general public's awareness on the issue which, contrary to elite perception, is more tolerant and amenable to a political solution to the ethnic conflict.

Any proposal towards finding a solution to the ethnic problem requires informed and considered public debate and discussion. Given the intensely volatile nature of this problem, it is understandable that some ethnic communities view with scepticism the viability of solutions proposed from time to time. Therefore, an informed and dispassionate public scrutiny of any proposal should constitute a healthy aspect of a political process that must culminate in restoring peaceful and democratic ethnic relations in this war-ravaged country.

The present controversy is nonetheless characterised by the denial, on the part of some nationalist and religious leaders, of a political solution based on the principle of sharing of political power among all ethnic

communities. They are advocating a military solution on the assumption that a political alternative to the war would amount to the breaking up of Sri Lanka. Whatever may be the merits and demerits of Mr. Thondaman's particular initiative, we believe that the total rejection of the validity of a negotiated political settlement will have disastrous consequences for all communities, as some national and religious leaders have already warned.

As the past experience in our own country and the recent international experience too, particularly of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, testify, if ethnic problems are allowed to intensify without viable and democratic political alternatives being worked out, territorial disintegration of the country would become an irreversible process. In Sri Lanka, it is still not too late to explore a political alternative to the war. However, if the nationalist leaders continue to deny, as they did in the past and are doing now, the legitimacy and feasibility of a democratic political accommodation among different ethnic communities, there would be little reason for Sri Lanka to remain a viable political entity any longer.

We appeal to the government and the opposition political parties to work out, with-

out delay, a democratic political solution to the ethnic problem on the basis of genuine devolution or federalism. They must also take immediate political initiatives to arrive at a consensus on the need for a political solution so that all extreme nationalist forces are politically isolated and confidence among the masses of all communities built. We also appeal for the defense of the principle of a political solution to the ethnic conflict. ■

Signed by:

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- \* Prof. Bertram Bastiampillai.
- \* Dr. Jayadeva Uyangoda
- \* Dr. Deepika Udagama
- \* Dr. Neloufer de Mel
- \* Dr. Arjuna Parakrama
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- \* Ms. Jennifer Thambayah
- \* Mr. Srinath Perera
- \* Mr. Mario Gomez
- \* Mr. N. Selvakumaran

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January, 1992

But these are tainted years, ours; the blood of men far away  
tumbles agin in the foam, the waves stain us the moon is spattered.  
These faraway agonies are our agonies  
and the struggle for the oppressed is a hard vein in my nature.

Perhaps this war will pass like others which divided us,  
leaving us dead, killing us along with the killers  
but the shame of this time puts its burning fingers to our faces.  
Who will erase the ruthlessness hidden in innocent blood?

Pablo Neruda  
*The Watersong Ends*