The role of socialists in the civil war in Sri Lanka

Rohini Hensman

THE GRUESOME FINALE of Sri Lanka's 26-year-long civil war drew international attention and considerable concern for the plight of civilians trapped in the war zone. Many people for the first time became aware of a conflict which had already claimed more than 70,000 fatalities. But the publicity tended to obscure rather than clarify the causes of the war, measures that could have been taken earlier to prevent the bloodbath at its climax, and what can be done now to advance democratization in the future. It is especially important to critique the role of socialists, because some of them have contributed to the rise and entrenchment of ethnic nationalism instead of constituting alternatives to it.

Independence and After

Prior to independence from the British in 1948, socialist politics was strong in Sri Lanka, at that time called Ceylon. In 1935, Trotskyists formed the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which engaged in union organizing and electoral politics, and, when the Fourth International was formed in 1938, affiliated with it. The Stalinist minority in the party was expelled, and later became the Ceylon Communist Party (CCP). In 1940, after LSSP leaders were arrested, their press seized, and their meetings banned, the party decided that the revolution in Ceylon could develop only as part of the Indian Revolution, and sent LSSP organizers to work with Trotskyists in India. In 1945, party leaders were released from jail and revived the LSSP. Given that capitalism was so much weaker in Ceylon than in India, the Left played a proportionally larger role in the independence movement in Ceylon.

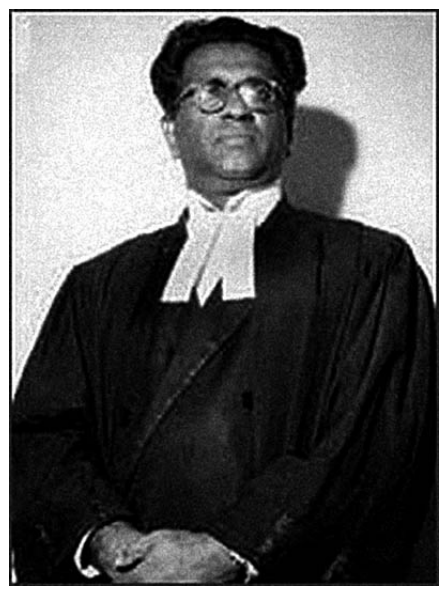
The Lanka Sama Samaja Party logo

Post-Independence, their trade union organizing, activity in the women's liberation movement, and campaigns for social security and welfare programs continued with considerable success. The result was that Sri Lanka had one of the highest levels of human development of all Third World countries, with low infant, under-5, and maternal mortality rates and extremely high literacy rates among both men and women. The contrast with India was striking. Even today, despite decades of neoliberal policies and civil war, its human development indices remain far higher than India's.

Sri Lanka's was a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural Left, comprising members from a variety of linguistic, caste, and religious communities. They believed that an attack on one section of the working class was an attack on all workers. Therefore, when the ruling United National Party (UNP), which took power at Independence, launched an assault on the citizenship and franchise of Tamil tea plantation workers (descendents of indentured laborers brought over by the British from India, and the most oppressed segment of the Tamil-speaking community), the Left defended them. The UNP was unashamedly a party of the ruling class and its rationale for the attack on plantation workers was simple: They had voted overwhelmingly against the UNP in the 1947 elections, helping to bring to power candidates of the Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC, later to become the Ceylon Workers' Congress or CWC) in 7 constituencies and Left candidates in 14 more, condemning the UNP to a minority government. Eliminating the plantation workers from the electorate would help secure an absolute majority for the UNP in future elections. Their vulnerability as an immigrant minority, isolated on the plantations from the rest of the population, made it easier to attack them without arousing public opposition.

The Left in Parliament argued that the Citizenship Acts were racist, anti-working class, and an attack on democracy. Voting on the bills was revealing: While the CIC and Left voted against them, most MPs of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), representing the Tamil elite, voted for them. However, a section of the party, led by S. J. V. Chelvanayakam—who foresaw that this attack on the rights of one Tamil-speaking community could be followed by attacks on others—left the ACTC, denouncing its leader as a traitor. They formed the Federal Party (FP), known in Tamil as the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi or Lanka Tamil Kingdom Party. This party's program offered nothing to the oppressed Tamil workers fighting for their political rights; the area in the North and East claimed for Tamil sovereignty did not even touch the areas where the plantation workers were concentrated. Class, caste, and location excluded these Tamils from the nationalist dream.

Language became the next battleground. In 1944, the Ceylon Legislative Council voted by an overwhelming majority to make both Sinhala and Tamil official languages for school instruction, public service examinations, and legislative proceedings. But in 1956, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, who had broken away from the UNP to form the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and a coalition, the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP or People's United Front), fought the elections on the slogan of "Sinhala Only" and won an absolute majority. A large part of the Sinhalese petty bourgeoisie, including Buddhist monks, were won over to this agenda in the belief that it would provide them with jobs by reducing employment opportunities for Tamils. In the end, not only the mainstream parties, but also the breakaway Left party, the Viplavakari (Revolutionary) LSSP of Philip Gunawardena, voted for the bill, while minority parties and the rest of the Left opposed it. With great prescience LSSP leader Colvin R. de Silva observed that Sinhala Only would lead to the creation of "two torn little bleeding states."



Colvin R. de Silva

In 1957, responding to protests by the FP, Bandaranaike signed the Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam (B–C) Pact, recognizing Tamil as the language of a national minority and of administration in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, where regional councils with limited powers over administration would be established. A year later, in response to militant agitation by Buddhist monks, Bandaranaike renounced the Pact. Tamils protested in Jaffna by blacking out the Sinhala letter *sri* which had been substituted for the English letters on vehicle number-plates. This was followed in turn by an orgy of arson and murder against Tamils by Sinhalese hoodlums in other parts of the country, including Colombo. At first Bandaranaike refused to intervene, but when the violence threatened to rage out of control, he handed over authority to the Governor-General, who declared an Emergency. Stopping the riots would have required shooting at Sinhalese gangs, and Bandaranaike wanted to avoid the unpopularity with Sinhalese nationalists that this would cause. Still, his appeasement of the right failed. In 1959, an organization of Buddhist monks, the Eksath Bhikku Peramuna, assassinated Bandaranaike.

If the Left lacked enough strength in Parliament to defeat anti-minority legislation, it made up for it by the strength it derived from grassroots organizing. In 1953 the Left organized a *hartal* (general strike) to protest against welfare cuts, including the withdrawal of the rice subsidy, which a visiting World Bank mission had advised. It was a massive success, leading to the resignation of the prime minister and restoration of the subsidy. Faced with a choice between continuing to extend its organizational strength at the grassroots and reaching for political power, however, the leadership of the Left parties chose the latter.

Abandoning Justice for the Minorities

In 1964, the LSSP and Communist Party formed an alliance with the SLFP, now led by the widow of the assassinated Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike. This was a popular front in which the program of the two Left parties was suspended. Their support for the rights of hill-country Tamils and parity for Sinhala and Tamil was abandoned. Just as earlier the UNP had opposed the B–C Pact, these parties now opposed a similar pact between UNP leader Senanayake and Chelvanayakam. Breakaway groups from the LSSP and Communist Party

"Sri Lanka" continues on page 4

Statement of Purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The Platypus Review is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The Platypus Review hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines

Articles will typically range in length from 750–2,500 words, but longer pieces will also be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editorial@platypus1917.org*. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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Left behind

The working class in the crisis

Chuck Hendricks, Aaron Hughes, Abraham Mwaura, and James Thindwa

On April 23, 2009, a panel discussion titled Left Behind: The Working Class In The Crisis was held at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The panelists were Abraham Mwaura of United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, who has worked as an organizer at the Republic Windows and Doors Factory; Aaron Hughes, representative at the International Labor Conference, Arbil, Iraq, and member of Iraq Veterans Against the War; James Thindwa, Executive Director of Chicago Jobs with Justice; and Chuck Hendricks, an organizer for the labor union UNITE HERE. The following transcript represents only a portion of a more extensive and wide-ranging discussion. The comments edited and published here chiefly address the historical relationship between the labor movement and Left politics as a whole, the relevance of the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) in current organizing practices, and the state of international labor today. These were not the only themes the panelists discussed and the Platypus Review *encourages interested readers to listen to the complete recording of the event at <http://platypus1917.org/category/multimedia/>.*

Regarding the Historical Relationship Between Labor and the Left:

Chuck Hendricks: I think that, broadly speaking, the Left and the labor movement were in an uneasy alliance in this country from the 1870s until the 1940s. With the Cold War, that alliance was broken. Socialists, communists, and anarchists, were, in some cases, chased out; in others, they fled; some simply went their separate way. The ideological Left abandoned the unions and the unions abandoned the ideological Left. And it has stayed that way for the past sixty years. Nevertheless, it is an oversimplification to say that the traces of that history have vanished. There are many union leaders today, from the shop steward to the top leaders of certain unions, who have very radical ideas about the economy and politics. While they may not call themselves socialist or communist, the idea of struggling against capital is still unmistakably present. The vision of what is truly accomplishable is what is lacking. When organizational capacity, the anger that drives us to organize, and the vision of what is possible are reintegrated, we will again have a Leftist labor movement in the United States. But we are not there now. In bits and pieces within labor, it is coming back together. But there are leaders in the labor movement that regard their function as essentially that of the Human Resources department for the bosses. Corporate unionism retains its grip on the movement. There are parts that do not want to do anything—that, frankly, have been stuck in their ways for fifty years. But, as I said, there are parts that really want to fight. The labor movement will have to figure out whether it wants to remain the stagnant labor movement of the 1960s or become more assertive like the labor movement of the 1930s. It remains to be seen by people in the unions whether or not working class leaders develop a vision and the drive to achieve it.

Abraham Mwaura: Our history has been surrounded by mistakes on all sides, from the sectarian Left, the communists, and the socialists to the House of Labor, the labor establishment. The constitution of my own union makes clear that we do not discriminate based on political beliefs. So, yes, there were many individuals in leadership who were active communists and belonged to Left parties. But the assessment that that is what our union was, or that that is what labor was, even at the height of communism and Left power in this country, is a mistake in my view. In regards to my union, it is a common outsider's perspective. But on the inside, the Communist Party and sectarian Left pushed our union to join with the House of Labor in order to fight off McCarthyism. But, had we chosen to go in that direction, we would have ceased to exist. This would have meant a loss to the labor movement as a whole, because it would have lost the last national union with rank-and-file militancy left in the country. Of course, now the IWW is organizing. But in terms of national unions, there would be no CIO, no militant rank-and-file led unions left, had we chosen to liquidate ourselves into the House of Labor at that time. So the attacks were coming from both sides, and the mistakes made were massive all over.

There is a story told over and over again in our union of GE's president at the end of World War II stating, "Our country has two giant enemies. The Soviets abroad, and labor at home." Then began in earnest the collusion between government and industry to squelch labor. Industry heads understood clearly that the problem was not really communism so much as labor. I think that is key to understanding what that time period was actually about. It was about class war first, and Left ideology second. We need to be careful in moving forward to re-establish Left politics in this country and to understand that that was what it was about. Those in power at the time were clear that it was a fight between industry and labor. It was never, or at least not in the beginning, about the communists at home.

The reason Left politics grew in our union was because of the tradition of militant struggle. That is what ultimately builds leadership and the capacity for political analysis: engaging people in militant, aggressive struggle against the boss. Against the boss, against the mayors, against the city halls. That is what builds leadership and, ultimately, people's politics. That is how people get engaged in radical politics, radical being an understanding of problems from the roots. As a Left union, we believe this is how we actually move people's politics. Militant, aggressive struggle against the boss is the key to moving forward.

Regarding the Relevance of the Employee Free-Choice Act (EFCA) to the Labor Movement Today:

Mwaura: EFCA to us is not a cure-all. Though we are putting a lot of resources into it and moving our members to ensure that this legislation gets passed, we also have no delusions about it. Still, it is an opportunity to build political power among the working people in this country. We need to understand that it is only a means to an end, that of rebuilding workers' power. It is really worker and community power, as we cannot separate those workers from the communities in which they live. The EFCA is one way to reopen the road to workers' power. We are far behind the rest of the industrialized world in terms of labor law that actually protects people when they choose to organize. We want good, living-wage jobs. The only way to really demand this is if we have power. Worker power is acutely tied to economic recovery. In the 1930s and 40s, the economy improved with increased union density. As union density increased, so did wages, so did working conditions, so did the standard of living. That has to be what happens again. Otherwise, we will fail at more and more bailouts, and the workers will suffer. We see EFCA as a crucial means of achieving true economic recovery, one that means worker recovery as well.

James Thindwa: Too often we fall victim to false choices. The Employee Free Choice Act is not a panacea. So the question is not whether it should be pursued or not. It is really about where we place our emphasis. The debate should be about priorities, about how much time and effort should go into ensuring the passage of the EFCA. But there is no denying that corporate strategies over the years, elaborate strategies to undermine labor unions, to undermine the right of workers to organize, have been very effective. 8.5% of the workforce in the United States is unionized, 11% if you throw in public sector workers. At the center of this de-unionization are the elaborate strategies corporations have pursued to undermine workers' right to organize. One out of five workers gets fired for trying to join a union. The penalties have become so miniscule, so negligible, that for most employers, penalties for violating labor law, penalties for firing workers who are trying to join a union, have just become another cost of doing business. There is no real deterrent. But union organizing is a fundamental right, a part of the constitutional right to associate and to free speech. These are rights at the center of democracy itself. We have to take seriously the effort to free workers to be able to form unions and to join unions without fear of reprisal.

If the Employee Free Choice Act fails to pass, that failure should prompt reflection on the relationship that labor has cultivated with Democrats in Congress. The amount of money that labor unions give Democrats should already have produced a cadre of leaders in Congress who are out front and talking about this everyday, cultivating other members of Congress, and building leadership. Really, the Employee Free Choice Act should be in the DNA of members of Congress who are getting union money. So, if EFCA does not pass, labor unions should consider whether it is really wise to continue to make this type of investment when we get so little for it.

I am disturbed by the premise that struggle needs to be hard and bloody all the time. If I have to run five miles, and a car stops by and picks me up, I do not have a problem riding in that car so I can get to my destination faster. We need to punish employers who get in the way of workers organizing. One out of five workers get fired for trying to organize. If you stop that from happening, you are not making the worker lazy. You are eliminating some of the impunity with which the employer class operates. There has been a cycle of impunity in which the employer class has done all kinds of nefarious things. For instance, they show these vile videos that suggest that labor unions are subversive or somehow un-American. This is antithetical to what most of us think of as democracy. Getting rid of that and easing the process of organizing is not going to spoil workers into thinking, "Great! Now I don't have to struggle anymore." But struggle is not an end in itself. I think we need to be careful with that.

Hendricks: I am not against EFCA. On the contrary, I want it to pass. But there are problems with EFCA. For example, one of the provisions of EFCA is that there will be binding arbitration. Right now, one problem unions face when they organize is that roughly half the time if a union wins an election to gain recognition, still they do not get a contract. This means they go through these massive fights and win recognition, yet this does not translate into palpable improvements in workers' day-to-day lives. The EFCA's provision for binding arbitration means that if an employee does not get a contract within a year, her contract will go before a judge, who will decide what the employee wins for the life of the contract. While I am aware that this is a compromise people fight for, I think it has a capacity to create a situation where unions come to rely on the courts. It is important that we do not give up our collective power to judges and politicians. I want people to have a better life. I was fired for organizing a union when I was 19. I think that it does really matter that the power we have as workers comes from ourselves, and not from the law. When I was young, I read a book called *The Labor Law for the Rank-and-Filer*. In this book, it talks about how the law can be a shield,

"Left Behind" continues below

Left Behind, continued from above

but your union is a sword. The union is a weapon you can use to fight, the law is something you can defend yourself with. And we need better laws in place to defend workers' rights. But we cannot rely on that alone. And it makes me nervous whenever unions do so little actual organizing. I want to build a movement where we fight as workers, relying chiefly on our own power and our own ideas, not on the law. Because the law can too easily change. Our organized union strength will always prove our most reliable support.

In Response to a Question Regarding the State of International Labor, Mr. Hughes Gives an Account of His Work in Iraq:

Aaron Hughes: Humbling is about all I can say of my experience of returning to Iraq to participate in the first international labor conference held in Arbil. The conference took place thanks to U.S Labor Against The War, which organized for more than a year to put it on with the goal of bringing together as many labor constituencies in the country as possible. Since the invasion, we have helped Iraqi workers establish a new constitution that provides for their rights. However, the U.S occupation authorities and the new Iraqi government have carried over Sadaam Hussein's laws in regards to organizing, essentially denying workers all rights. In 2006, they froze all worker funds, and seized their assets. Yet, despite this, Iraqi workers continue to organize, and they are winning.

The oil workers in the south, a federation of over 25,000 workers, have the strongest union in Iraq. They went on a massive strike and kicked the British military and Halliburton subsidiary KBR out of their oil fields. The electrical workers in the central part of the country are another large, organized labor federation. When the U.S. military took over their power plant, and told workers that they could not bring their supplies to the power plant, the workers said, "We need our supplies to maintain this plant." When the military says that it does not matter, that it is a security threat, the workers went on a massive strike. They received calls from the central government, telling them to stop, because they are angering the U.S government and American soldiers. But they kept fighting. Why? Because they are fighting for their communities. Because they have seen how many other power plants have been shut down and blown up over the last six years of this occupation. They kept fighting, and they won. Eventually, the U.S. military left their plant.

There were over 200 representatives from all over Iraq at the Arbil conference. They came from many different sectors of the economy, including the Iraqi oil and gas industry, port facilities, electricity generation and distribution, construction, public sector transportation, communication, education, railroads, service and healthcare industries, machinist and metal-working sectors, petrol and chemical industries, civil engineers, writers and journalists, food, tailors, and students.

Republic Windows & Doors factory workers and supporters rally in front of the Chicago headquarters of Bank of America, December 10th, 2008.

There were also multiple women's unions represented at the conference. These workers came together and expressed the following demands: 1) the rights granted to them by the International Labor Organization and by their national constitution; 2) no ethnic or sectarian government; 3) an end to the U.S. occupation; and 4) cessation of the privatization of the public sector, the granting of national assets to foreign corporations, and the bringing in of third-country nationals as esentially slave labor.

Closing remarks:

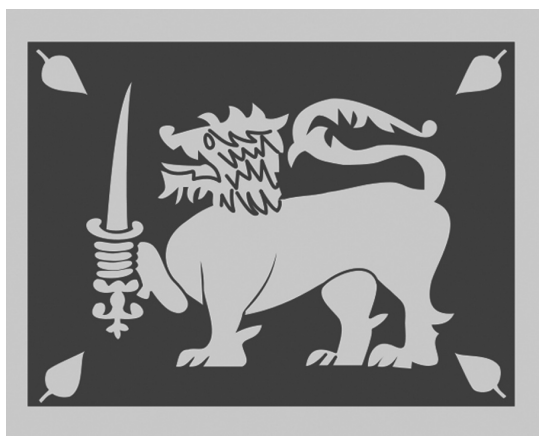
Thindwa: We are at a crossroads. Capitalism is discredited. Neoliberalism is discredited. But I worry that we are unprepared for this particular moment, unprepared to seize the opportunity it offers to put forward credible alternatives. But I also know that there are a lot of minds engaged. People are coming out to forums like this one, which are happening all across the country. We are having a large meeting on May 2nd here. I'm part of a group called Arc 109 that is bringing people together to imagine a different world, and to think strategically about how we capitalize on this moment by energizing each other and pushing for progressive, radical change.

Hendricks: While it is great to be able to have forums like this and to discuss our political ideas and aspirations, I think that the work required to fundamentally change the world is really very daunting. The most that I can say is I hope that each person who comes here takes it upon themselves to find their role in doing the organizing that is necessary. A lot of the talk has been about community and outreach, and how people outside of unions can play a role, and that is true. People outside of unions can be a large part of fights for worker power. I would encourage you all to find that place in the labor movement, whether in a union or a community organization, where you help to perform the difficult work that needs to be done to build worker power.

Mwaura: I agree that we are at a crossroads. The one word of caution I would state is that we have to be aware of the scale of the force we are up against. Neoliberalism has been shown not to work, to have unsurmountable contradictions within itself. But it is also a beast that has changed forms by absorbing and subverting the work we have done and gains we have won in the past. We need to be smarter. We need to be united, I think. If we are going to rise to this challenge, we need to clear our heads, be forthright about who are enemies are, and unite. **|P**

Sri Lanka, continued from page 1

stood by their earlier positions, yet the fact that the only major non-minority parties which had supported minority rights now abandoned that cause shattered working class unity and strengthened Sinhala nationalism with its right-wing agenda. In 1968, the LSSP and Communist Party formed the United Front (UF) with the SLFP, which was elected to power in 1970. Despite its name, this was another popular front. The Left parties justified this coalition by arguing that, while the UNP was the party of private capital, including foreign capital, the SLFP was committed to public ownership of the Bank of Ceylon, tea plantations, public transport, etc., and also to the welfare state. However, they surrendered their capacity to oppose state policies discriminating against minorities and the unprincipled nature of the alliance grew increasingly apparent as time went on.



The Sinhala Lion

In 1970, the UF government introduced a measure that made a significant contribution to the growth of a militant movement of Tamil youth. This was the "standardization" system, whereby the minimum university entrance marks for a Tamil-medium student were higher than those for a Sinhala-medium student. The new system put Tamil students at a disadvantage by comparison with Sinhalese students from the same social strata, creating a group of frustrated and embittered Tamil youths.

Given all these attacks on equality aimed at giving Sinhalese privileges at the expense of Tamils, it is paradoxical that the first large-scale violence of Sinhalese against Sinhalese was during the insurrection of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP or People's Liberation Front) in 1971, in which an estimated 5–10,000 people were killed. The JVP drew its membership and supporters precisely from the strata that were supposed to benefit from the Sinhala Only policies. The depth of dissatisfaction among these sections should have alerted the UF government to the facts that discrimination against Tamils did not benefit the majority of Sinhalese, and other policies to address issues of poverty and unemployment were needed. Instead, the UF simply went farther along the same trajectory. In the name of nationalizing the plantations, which might have been a progressive measure had it been carried out differently, plantation land was distributed to Sinhalese government supporters under the Land Reform Law in 1972 and 1975. Tamil plantation workers and their families were assaulted and driven out, their dwellings looted and burned; some were killed and others were left to starve.

The 1972 Republican Constitution—presided over, ironically, by Marxist Minister of Constitutional Affairs Colvin R. de Silva—not only gave constitutional status to Sinhala as the sole official language, but also provided a special place to Buddhism, and omitted the protection of minority rights; it defined Sri Lanka as a "unitary state," which thus became synonymous with a "Sinhala-Buddhist state" The new constitution also omitted the second chamber of Parliament, the independent Public Service Commission (intended to guarantee impartiality in public service appointments), and the Judicial Service Commission (intended to guarantee the independence and integrity of the judicary). Judicial review of legislation was also prohibited. Thus, in addition to further depriving minorities of their rights, the new constitution centralized power in a manner that could be used against the majority of Sinhalese.

The Destruction of Democracy

J. R. Jayawardene, leader of the UNP that came to power in 1977, engaged in a wholesale neoliberal transformation of the economy and enacted a new constitution, omitting the right to life and further centralizing power in the hands of one person, the Executive President. Thereafter, attacks on democracy followed thick and fast. Previously SLFP politicians had used lumpen gangs to terrorize the population, but these had no institutionalized status. After 1977, Jayawardene set up the Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya (JSS or National Workers' Union), which carried out similar functions on behalf of the government on a larger scale as an organized and centralized force. These gangs were used to intimidate voters in the October 1982 presidential elections, from which Jayawardene's main rival, Mrs. Bandaranaike, was barred. When, despite this, Jayawardene got only 52.91% of votes cast, he used massive violence to push through a referendum by which the citizens of Sri Lanka supposedly voted to disenfranchise themselves by canceling the general elections scheduled for 1983!

JSS gangs were used to intimidate and kill opposition supporters and judges who gave verdicts against UNP criminals. They were used repeatedly against workers and trade unions to break strikes, assault and kill trade unionists, get members of existing unions dismissed, and even abuse and assault management personnel who attempted to rein them in. That members of the JSS had protection from the very top was obvious from the fact that the police never acted against them, while around 80,000 public employees who opposed them and went on strike lost their jobs. It has been suggested that this organization compares with the storm troopers in Hitler's Germany, and certainly in its mode of operation vis-à-vis the labor movement and opposition parties, as well as its relationship to the ruling party and police, the JSS resembled an amalgam of the fascist storm troops and "unions" of Hitler and Mussolini.

The parallel with fascist storm troops is most striking in the way the JSS was used to assault and kill Tamils, loot and burn their shops and homes, and drive them out of the areas where they lived. The anti-Tamil pogroms of 1977 started just a month after the UNP took office. Then in May 1981, violence broke out in Jaffna, and the targets of widespread arson attacks included the Jaffna Public Library, with its 95,000 volumes and priceless manuscripts. This was followed by island-wide pogroms against Tamils, which were only over-shadowed by the even more gruesome massacres of 1983, which left

The Tamil Tiger

thousands of Tamils dead. This violence was claimed to be a spontaneous response to the killing of thirteen soldiers by Tamil militants, but there is ample evidence that the 1983 pogrom was carefully planned and state-sponsored. Simultaneously, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1979) and provisions of the Public Security Act were used as a cover for the torture, disappearance, and killing of thousands of Tamils by the state.

The pogroms of 1983 converted a simmering conflict into a civil war. This was a direct consequence of the Left's abandonment of Sri Lankan working-class solidarity in the 1960s, which allowed extreme right-wing Sinhala nationalist forces to become enormously powerful while robbing the working class of the capacity to resist. Tamil socialists were demoralized. Many drifted into Tamil nationalist parties and militant groups, some were later killed or driven into exile by the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or Tamil Tigers).

This was the background against which the Indo-Lanka Accord was signed by Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President J. R. Jayawardene in July 1987. While recognizing the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, it also affirmed the country's multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious character. The 13th Amendment was enacted to make Tamil an official language and provide for limited devolution of power to the provinces, and the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) occupied the North-East. But within three months, fighting broke out between the LTTE and IPKF, with Tamil civilians caught in the crossfire.

Meanwhile, in the South, the state was embroiled in a violent confrontation with the JVP, whose ideology was a mixture of socialism and Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. It had launched an insurrection in 1987 to oppose the Accord. The JVP's leader, Wijeweera, had earlier been in the Ceylon Communist Party (Peking Wing), and in 1966 was disciplined by the party for his participation in demonstrations against the Senanayake–Chelvanayakam pact that provided for the official use of Tamil and regional devolution of power. Later, Wijeweera led the JVP to take the position that Tamil plantation workers were an arm of Indian expansionism, and should therefore be repatriated to India. They were also characterized by a putchist conception of revolution and an authoritarian party structure. After the 1971 insurrection was defeated, many survivors engaged in a critique of the authoritarian and chauvinist elements in the JVP's ideology and left the party.

By 1986, most of those who remained in the JVP, still led by Wijeweera, were hardline Sinhala nationalists. Their response to those who opposed them inside or outside the organization was invariably violent. The state, controlled by the UNP, was no less ruthless and far more powerful. This is what resulted in the gruesome atrocities and massive death toll (estimated at 40,000–60,000) during the second JVP insurgency, which ended with the execution of Wijeweera in November 1989. On the pretext of fighting the JVP, government death squads killed unarmed critics, political rivals, and even dissidents within the UNP, and this repression went on even after the JVP was defeated. By then, the presidency had been taken over by Premadasa, who opposed the Indo-Lanka Accord. Keen to expel the Indian army, Premadasa supplied the LTTE with arms, ammunition and cement for bunkers. After the Indians withdrew their troops in 1990, hostilities between the Sri Lankan armed forces and LTTE broke out again.

Tamil Nationalism: A Parallel Trajectory

Soon after the 1972 constitution was enacted, various Tamil parties, including the FP (led by S. J. V. Chelvanayakam and A. Amirthalingam), the CWC (representing hill-country Tamils), and the Tamil Congress, came together in the Tamil United Front (TUF). The TUF became the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in May 1976, after adopting a resolution calling for a separate Tamil state. However, Alfred Duraiappah, several times mayor of Jaffna and a popular figure among the urban poor, aligned himself with the SLFP, led by Mrs. Bandaranaike, and argued for unity between people of the North and the South. From 1972, the FP launched vicious attacks

"Sri Lanka" continues below

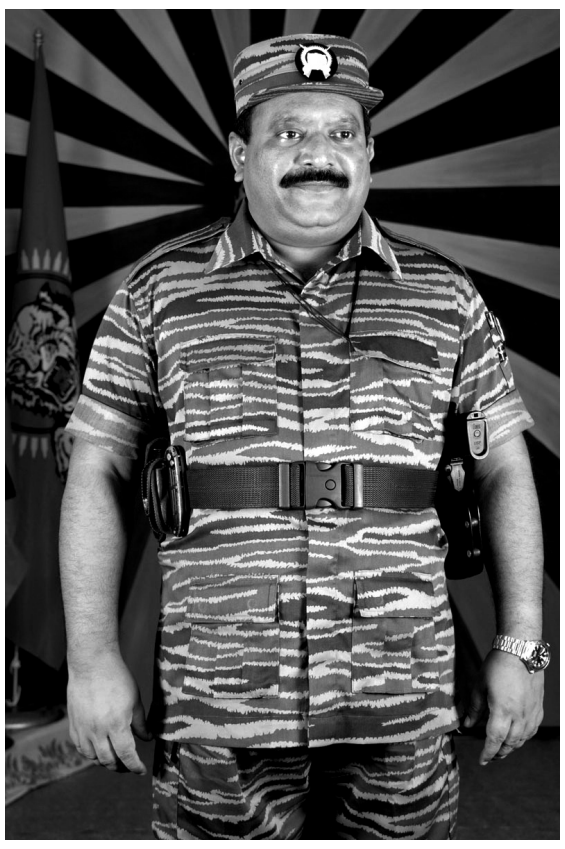
Sri Lanka, continued from above

on Duraiappah, calling him a traitor worthy of death, and in 1975 he was shot dead by assassins, one of whom eventually became supreme leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran. It is significant that the call for his execution was made by the supposedly non-violent leadership of the FP.

Later, the annihilation of the TULF leadership, including the murder of TULF leaders Amirthalingam and Yogeswaran by the LTTE in Colombo in 1989, was strongly reminiscent of the murder of Bandaranaike by Buddhist monks. Just as Bandaranaike had done, the TULF leaders had created a Frankenstein's monster which eventually destroyed them. The LTTE also destroyed many others supposedly fighting for the same goal, a separate state of Tamil Eelam. Wholesale massacres of the cadres and leadership of TELO (Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation), EPRLF (Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, socialist in orientation) and other groups wiped out the LTTE's potential rivals. Tamil civilians who dissented from LTTE policies were also killed, especially those who rejected the goal of a separate Tamil state. These victims included leading figures in the fight for Tamil women's rights, Rajani Thiranagama (1989) and Maheshwari Velauthan (2008). Within the LTTE, there was complete subjection to the totalitarian rule of the leader, Prabhakaran. Anyone who disagreed with Prabhakaran or posed a challenge to him was branded a traitor and killed, typically after incarceration and torture. Just as the inherent authoritarianism of Sinhala nationalism expressed itself in the brutal repression of Sinhalese, the inherent authoritarianism of Tamil nationalism expressed itself in the brutal repression of Tamils.

However, Prabhakaran made a fatal mistake when he tried to liquidate Karuna Amman, his Eastern commander, who expressed dissatisfaction with LTTE policies in 2004. Despite a confrontation in which hundreds of Karuna's supporters were killed, Prabhakaran failed to destroy Karuna himself, who then formed the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP or Tamil People's Liberation Tigers) and teamed up with the government of Sri Lanka to defeat the LTTE. Karuna's defection illustrates another feature of Tamil nationalism: its marginalization and exclusion of large sections of Tamil-speaking people. One of the Eastern commander's complaints was the marginalization of Eastern Tamils. The Tamil nationalist agenda of the LTTE also excluded some of the most oppressed Tamils, hill-country Tamils and Tamil Dalits (ex-untouchables). It also engaged in massacres and large-scale ethnic cleansing of Tamil-speaking Muslims.

Given the reactionary character of the LTTE, it is all the more anomalous that some Sinhalese leftists who had refused to make concessions to Sinhala nationalism now gave critical support to the LTTE. For independent Tamil socialists opposed to the LTTE, this meant the loss of the solidarity of their Sinhalese comrades. Since the pretext for this betrayal was the "right of nations to self-determination," it is worth examining this issue in some depth in the context of Sri Lanka.



Velupillai Prabhakaran

The Right to Self-Determination

To this day there remains near-universal acceptance among Marxists of Stalin's definition of a nation as a "historically-constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." While it is doubtful whether there exists any nation on earth answering to these specifications, this monocultural ideal of a nation is certainly cherished by fascists everywhere, including the Nazis. Achieving it in most countries would entail marginalizing or eliminating minorities by methods ranging from assimilation to ethnic cleansing and genocide. Still, this is the definition of a nation we must keep in mind when evaluating the Lenin–Luxemburg debate on the right of nations to self-determination, defined as the right to a separate state.

Apart from a reactionary minority, Marxists from Marx and Engels onwards supported national independence for the colonies. While West European countries acquired their colonies abroad, Tsarist Russia annexed many neighboring lands and the debate arose in connection with a clause in the Russian Marxists' program dealing with these peoples. In the ensuing debate, Lenin took the position that the clause referred specifically to Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, when it and its neighboring countries were going through national movements. He insisted on the right of nations like the Ukraine to have separate states, and contended that denial of this right would merely strengthen Great Russian nationalism. Luxemburg disagreed even with the phrase "right of nations to self-determination," asking, Who determines the will of the nation? Her fear was that right-wing nationalists would be supported by socialists, to the detriment of the working class.

Luxemburg made it clear that socialists, being opposed to all oppression, were duty-bound to oppose national oppression. Lenin, on his side, conceded that the prime consideration was self-determination of the proletariat, and that "no Russian Marxist has ever thought of blaming the Polish Social-Democrats for being opposed to the secession of Poland." Both these theorists opposed nationalism, Lenin in imperialist Russia, Luxemburg in oppressed Poland; the main goal for both was the advancement of revolutionary international socialism. So why did the disagreement arise? Surely because both tried to elevate a contextual policy into a universal one. It is vitally important for socialists to oppose imperialist oppression, as in the cases of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. Indeed, all oppression of one nation by another should be opposed. But the demand for an ethnically or religiously "pure" state of the sort that the Taliban has been trying to construct is a reactionary demand by parties hostile to the working class movement. As such, it deserves no support from socialists, especially in Sri Lanka where, despite areas where one community or the other might predominate, Tamils are dispersed within a population comprising other minorities as well as Sinhalese, with mixed workplaces, neighborhoods, and even families. A genuinely working class program in such a context opposes all forms of oppression and fights a unified battle for workers' rights, as in the LSSP's program in Sri Lanka immediately after Independence.

There was, in fact, an ideal opportunity for launching such a struggle in 1994, when a left-of-centre People's Alliance (PA) government and President Chandrika Kumaratunga were elected to power on a platform of peace with justice for Tamils. After decades of extreme right-wing repression, the government restored democratic rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right to form unions and engage in collective bargaining in the parts of the country under its control. A new constitution was drafted by a Tamil MP and legal expert, Neelan Thiruchelvam, and an undertaking was initiated to give parity to Tamil, make discrimination illegal, devolve much more power to the provinces than under the 13th Amendment, and do away with the dictatorial Executive Presidency. A ceasefire was declared to negotiate a political settlement with the LTTE. But the LTTE broke the ceasefire and restarted the war in 1995. In 1999, they assassinated Thiruchelvam and tried to do the same to President Kumaratunga. Yet throughout this period sections of the Left in Sri Lanka and elsewhere continued to give critical support to the LTTE and its agenda. After another ceasefire agreement was signed in 2002 a new peace process was started with the mediation of the Norwegian government. Again there was a mood of reconciliation in the country and an offer of a federal solution from the government in fresh negotiations. Again, Prabhakaran scuppered it, assassinating more of his Tamil opponents to tighten his stranglehold on Sri Lankan Tamil politics.

On each of these occasions, the LTTE used the ceasefires to kill critics and dissidents, and prepare for war. Preparations for war included forced conscription of thousands of child soldiers, a feature that characterized the LTTE throughout its career. In the last stages of the war, press-gangs were sent out with quotas for the number of children they had to abduct, failing which they themselves would be sent to the front line. Parents adopted desparate measures to evade these press-gangs.

How can we explain Left support for the LTTE in such circumstances? This is a typical example of doctrinalism: the dogmatic application of a formula (in this case, the right of nations to self-determination) in a context where it is completely inappropriate. The LTTE's agenda of a separate state of Tamil Eelam was reactionary, and Luxemburg's caveat was eminently applicable. Yet many leftists, including Fourth Internationalists, despite having a presence in Sri Lanka which should have alerted them to the widespread existence of mixed communities and to the fact that Tamil nationalism simply reinforced Sinhala nationalism, were unable to engage in a concrete analysis of the situation and come up with a genuinely socialist alternative.

Thus during the carnage at the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War, some socialists supported the LTTE even while it was using civilians as human shields. Others were part of a government bombing and shelling of those same civilians! Unless sections of the Left which have aligned themselves with Sinhala nationalism as well as those who have aligned themselves with Tamil nationalism return to internationalist working-class politics, engage in a concrete analysis of Sri Lanka in its global context, and reformulate their program accordingly, the crisis in that country is likely to continue, albeit in a different form from the dreadful civil war that has just ended. **IP**

Film Review: *Che*

Ryan Hardy

Alberto Korda, *Guerrero Heroico* (1960)

THE STORY ITSELF IS WELL KNOWN: Originally trained as a physician, Ernesto "Che" Guevara was an Argentine revolutionary who played a significant part in the Cuban Revolution. Later, Che tried to help incite revolution in the modern day Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Bolivia, where he was eventually killed in 1967. In the more than four decades since his death, Che has been transformed from one among many icons of the revolutionary 1960s into the most recognizable political icon of the period. Indeed, it would be difficult to name a more obvious—or more ambiguous—symbol of that era's supposedly revolutionary character than the ubiquitous photograph of Che taken by Alberto Korda, *Guerrillero Heroico*. This photo crystallizes a range of the period's dominant preoccupations—with revolution, heroism, masculinity, and martyrdom—all of which continue to haunt us still. As the actual political significance of Che's actions recedes into the past, and revolutionary Cuba, his chief living testament, is transformed into little more than an exotic tourist destination, we might expect that Che's revolutionary glamour would fade. And yet, it remains very much an ongoing concern today. From giant murals in Cuba to the ubiquitous T-shirts bearing his image, the Che mystique persists, and with it a legacy that, whether endorsed or condemned, grows increasingly opaque in the present. Both that image and that legacy have now been brought to the screen by one of Hollywood's leading directors, Steven Soderbergh. The resulting film raises the question of working through the history of the Left only to disavow this project as potentially paralyzing.

Che consists of two parts, which in some markets have been released as two separate films: *The Argentine* and *Guerrilla*. Taken together, it represents a significant contribution to the already substantial corpus of Che-derived media, not least because it is the first noteworthy encounter between the icon and Hollywood. It is a complex film, an obvious labor of love on the part of one of American cinema's finest directors, with an impressive performance by its leading man, Benicio del Toro. In terms of its formal achievement and realization, *Che* is a very good film and ranks with Soderbergh's best work. But when the film's subject is Che, this might not be enough.

Although a biopic, *Che* makes no effort to cinematically recreate Guevara's life story. Rather, it sticks to Che the Revolutionary, narrating the story of two guerrilla campaigns: the successful insurgency against the Batista regime in Cuba (*The Argentine*), and the failed and ultimately fatal attempt to incite the peasants of Bolivia into revolution (*Guerrilla*). While some scenes are set in neither Cuba nor Bolivia, including a sequence that treats Che's trip to New York City and address to the United Nations, *Che* remains fundamentally a tale of two wars. In consequence, Che's complex career is synthesized into two relatively conventional war films. Eschewing the introspective approach taken by Brazilian director Walter Salles in *Motorcycle Diaries* (2004), this film has a different focus. As Soderbergh remarked, "I was interested in Che as a warrior, Che as a guy who had an ideology, who picked up a gun. [T]his [film] was the result."

In explaining his attraction to Che, Soderbergh does mention ideology; still, it is clear that Che's picking up of the gun is what genuinely captured the director's imagination. Alternatively, we might say that this film suggests that ideology is something people with guns are more likely to have. At any rate, for Soderbergh, Che is a military man first and a political man second; hence the near exclusive focus on military campaigns. As others have pointed out, this decision allows Soderbergh to omit from the film any serious treatment of the most controversial aspects of Che's record, such as the notorious executions at the La Cabana fortress or his stint as President of the National Bank of Cuba. No scene in this film shows Che executing political prisoners, bungling the national budget for the fiscal year, or speaking in glowing terms of Joseph Stalin. Apparently, these are not the aspects of Che's career that Soderbergh thinks worthy of further exploration.

It comes as no surprise that in the hands of the director of *Ocean's 11* (2001), *Out Of Sight* (1998), and *Traffic* (2000), the leading impulse is to entertain. Battle scenes are tightly paced and genuinely suspenseful, even if we know how things will turn out. The acting of the ensemble cast is likewise superb. Catalina Sandino Moreno, who plays Che's wife Aleida March, and Demián Bichir, who plays Fidel Castro to surprisingly comic heights, are particularly outstanding. In the leading role, Benicio del Toro forges a moving, complex performance from the sparse raw material of Che's biography.

In one sense at least the film is right to give short shrift to Che's politics. After all, as even the most cursory

Film still, *Che* (2008)

glance at his writings proves, Che was no great theoretician. In virtually all cases, and definitely in the case of Cuba and Bolivia, his approach was little more than Robin Hood-style banditry gussied up as Marxist revolution: His *modus operandi* was to take to the hills and start kicking ass, but make periodic reference to the working class while he was at it. By treating Che chiefly as a military adventurer, the film does convey something essential about Che's politics: its opportunism. Yet even this treatment, sympathetic in both form and content, cannot avoid bringing its hero into conflict with other, very different elements of the Left.

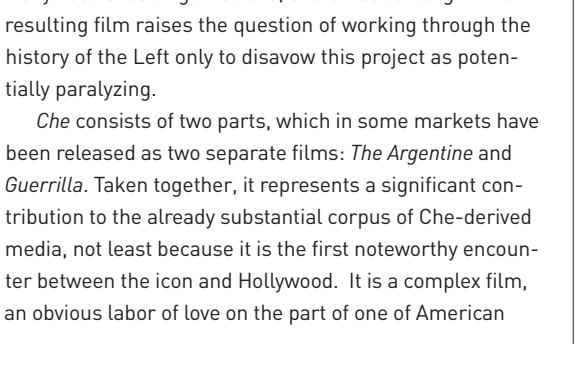
In *The Argentine*, after Castro meets with the leaders of Cuba's urban labor movement to conclude a vital cooperation pact, Che derides them as "clowns" and questions the value of dealing with them at all, since they are not fighting. Likewise, in *Guerrilla,* when Mario Monje, leader of the Bolivian Communist Party, tells Che that the party disagrees with his methods, Che's response is a burst of invective and the continuation of an increasingly quixotic guerrilla campaign. Che seems almost hopelessly naïve in these encounters, such as when early on he responds quizzically to another guerrilla's bitter remark about "Stalinists."

While Soderbergh clearly feels it is important to introduce these scenes into the film, his handling of them is uncertain. Ultimately, the film, like Che, seeks dramatic resolution through armed struggle, and thus implicitly endorses Che's impatient preoccupation with "action." This is never clearer than when Che and his fighters prepare for the Battle of Santa Clara, which represents both the climax of *The Argentine* and the death knell of the Batista regime. In preparation for this risky engagement, Che makes an effort to unite various rebel groups under his leadership. This is one of the most interesting parts of the movie, because it raises the spectre, for the first time, of serious political divisions between the various factions fighting Batista. There are several causes of discord between the factions, from tactical questions to strategic differences, but in the end it is Che's charisma and seemingly unique martial abilities that resolve what are made to seem merely verbal disagreements. Che's personality cements the Popular Front supposedly necessary to overthrow Batista's detested lackey regime.

Watching *Che*, particularly *The Argentine*, it is difficult not to be reminded of David Lean's memorable *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Both films tell the story of a foreigner who throws in his lot with an insurrectionary movement only to become one of that movement's greatest leaders, both share the trope of the execution of a disobedient soldier as a sort of revolutionary baptism, and both are exceptionally entertaining Hollywood epics built around complex performances by great actors. But the achievement of these films as works of art serves, perversely, to confirm the politically problematic character of the men they celebrate. Of course, there is no real comparison between Lawrence's support for the House of Saud in the service of British imperialism and Guevara's struggle against American imperialism in the Western hemisphere. Yet both films betray deep ambivalence towards politics, preferring instead to promote the myth that massive and systemic injustice can be rectified simply by recourse to personal courage and armed struggle. Though, unlike *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Che* does condescend to portray something of the real political content behind the events it displays, through its narrative structure it ultimately subverts and empties those scenes of content. It is because of this that, as an attempt to actually work through the past, *Che* must be judged a failure. **IP**

Book Review: Susan Buck-Morss. *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009.

Soren Whited



Hegel and his students

SUSAN BUCK-MORSS'S RECENT OFFERING, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, takes critical aim at two targets: what she identifies as Eurocentric models of universal history, on the one hand, and, on the other, the rejection of any notion of universality whatsoever in favor of the postmodernist "plurality of alternative models" (*ix*). What she proposes instead is "a universal history worthy of the name" (*x*), by which she means one that does not give the European Enlightenment and its direct heirs a monopoly on the historical project of freedom. It is refreshing to see the false choice of Eurocentrism vs. postmodernist pluralism identified as such, but if Buck-Morss opposes such a false choice, she fails to register and critique it as a contemporary historical symptom itself. She thus ends up with a theory that is universal in name, but which remains essentially postmodernist in content.

The short book reprints her essay "Hegel and Haiti," originally published in 2000 in *Critical Inquiry,* together with a new essay, "Universal History," in which Buck-Morss responds to the original essay's critics, particularly those for whom "the very suggestion of resurrecting the project of universal history from the ashes of modern metaphysics appeared tantamount to collusion with Western imperialism"(*ix*). The book also contains substantial prefaces to both essays.

In "Hegel and Haiti," Buck-Morss's central historical claim is that Hegel's discussion of freedom, generally, and his formulation of the "master-slave dialectic," specifically, were directly informed by his awareness of the Haitian Revolution. This argument, Buck-Morss asserts, has scarcely been made, much less thoroughly investigated, by mainstream Hegel scholarship. "One wonders why the topic Hegel and Haiti has for so long been ignored. Not only have Hegel scholars failed to answer this question; they have failed, for the past two hundred years, even to ask it" (56).[1] Buck-Morss supports her claim that Hegel was aware of the Haitian Revolution by pointing out that the revolution was going on at the same time as Hegel was formulating his philosophy of history, and that he was reading periodicals such as *Minerva* and *The Morning Post* at the time, both of which closely covered the events in Haiti. The conclusion to be drawn, she argues, is that Hegel, who at the time was engaged in thinking through the historical project of freedom, was influenced, if not compelled, by his reading of journalistic accounts of a contemporary, actual slave rebellion that Buck-Morss regards as a concrete unfolding of this dialectic.

But if the Haitian Revolution inspired Hegel, his philosophy of freedom remains bound, for Buck-Morss, to a Eurocentric and racist worldview. In this way Hegel is representative of what Buck-Morss sees as the hypocrisy of modern Europe in general, wherein the pursuit of freedom was carried out in theory but only partially and selectively in deed. Modern Europe, in other words, developed a theory of freedom that was simultaneously negated in practice.

The Haitian Revolution, on the other hand, represents for Buck-Morss a break with this hypocrisy, and the first genuinely modern political struggle for freedom, by which she means that it first posed the problem of freedom in a truly universal, albeit not entirely unproblematic, manner. "The Haitian experience," she asserts, "was not a modern phenomenon *too*, but *first*" (138). She also attributes to the Haitian Revolution a degree of singularity: "The radical anti-slavery articulated in Saint-Domingue was politically unprecedented" (138). Most importantly for her argument, the Haitian Revolution constitutes an example of a "historical rupture," an event discontinuous with the trajectory of history (133).

It is in such ruptures that Buck-Morss sees the possibility of a universal humanity emerging. This is also where her affinities with postmodernism, a mode of thought she professes to contest, are clearly visible. There is a shared hostility to dialectical theory, which would demand that the contradictions born of the European Enlightenment and the bourgeois revolution, including that of racism, be dealt with immanently. But for Buck-Morss such a treatment would, to use her language, be tantamount to collusion with European racism. Her hostility to dialectics is evident when, for example, she says, "any political movement that attempts to transform the death's-head (the skeletal remains of the victims of history) into an angel's face (history's redeemer) is far more likely to unleash a human hell" (144). Thus, faced with the glaring contradiction between Europe's philosophy of freedom and its brutal economic

"Revenge Taken by the Black Army," engraving in Marcus Rainsford's *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (1805).

and political practices, Buck-Morss searches elsewhere for a practice that corresponds to the theory. Her approach, then, is based on an understanding of theory and practice as autonomous, or at least semi-autonomous, phenomena. Rather than necessarily bound up with each other as part of a single historical practice, the pursuit of freedom in theory and its negation in practice remain for her distinct and incidental, if simultaneous, processes. This sundering of theory and practice, this failure to take account of their dialectical relationship, compels Buck-Morss to remain satisfied with merely condemning the brutality of Europe's political and economic practices, to bracket them, and thus to fail in rooting the struggle for (and denial of) freedom within them.

The model of historical rupture also has a distinctly Third-Worldist thrust, which comes out clearly when Buck-Morss states, "The greater the power a civilization wields in the world, the less capable its thinkers may be to recognize the naiveté of their own beliefs" (119). According to this logic, Buck-Morss is herself in no position to adequately grasp the world and her beliefs about it, which ironically becomes the case precisely because she holds this view. Several pages later she continues, "It is in the discontinuities of history that people whose culture has been strained to the breaking point give expression to a humanity that goes beyond cultural limits. And it is in our empathic identification with this raw, free, and vulnerable state, that we have a chance of understanding what they say" (133). Such romanticization, which represents the crux of Buck-Morss's thought in this book, is nothing new. It has dominated radical thought for the last 40 years, in both its New Leftist and postmodernist strains. Buck-Morss frames her call for "a universal history worthy of the name" as a challenge to such thought, when really it is only its repackaging. **IP**

1 It should be pointed out that Buck-Morss immediately goes on to say, "Surely a major reason for this omission is the Marxist appropriation of a social interpretation of Hegel's dialectic. Since the 1840s, with the early writings of Karl Marx the struggle between the master and slave has been abstracted from literal reference and read once again as a metaphor, this time for the class struggle" (56). This is one example of her contention that Marx and "(white) Marxism" are complicit in the whitewashing of history and the struggle against oppression, an ill-conceived charge that I will not directly address in this review.