

The struggle for socialism in Mauritius

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Mauritius is being, and will continue to be, seriously hit by economic crisis, perhaps more than other countries, because as a nation, Mauritius was invented by an emerging capitalist system that populated it through successive waves of Dutch, French and British colonisation and the slave trade. Luckily, the working class has always been hard for the capitalists to control. It is rebellious.

Political system in crisis right now

The last general election in December 2014 brought an unexpected landslide victory for the *Peoples' Alliance* of the MSM-PMSD-ML [1], cobbled together in haste just before the Labour Party Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam dissolved parliament in preparation for the general elections. Since then, in the space of 18 months, no less than three finance ministers in turn have been appointed, removed and replaced by the new Prime Minister Aneerood Jugnauth. The new government in the space of two years has become more and more unpopular as its inability to come up with the “economic miracle” it pledged to bring during the 2014 electoral campaign becomes clear. The 86-year-old Aneerood Jugnauth is due to retire as Prime Minister and to be replaced by another minister, his son, who is the leader of the MSM, the largest party in the Alliance. This situation has generated conflict between the two men as leaders, as father and son, between clans in the MSM organised around the two leaders, and between different parties within the government Alliance.

As unstable as the government may seem, the bourgeois parliamentary opposition parties have fared even worse. The former Prime Minister and Labour Party leader Ramgoolam, soon after his party's massive defeat in the election, was knocked groggy by some eleven different criminal charges of corruption. The other opposition party in parliament, the MMM [2], that had been in an electoral alliance with the Labour Party, came out of the general election weaker than ever before, both numerically and politically, when five of its miserable eleven MPs split away to form a new party, and then, in turn, three of this new party's MPs left this new party.

The very political system that capitalism has wrought to perpetuate its rule is in crisis; a crisis that is, in turn, part of the crisis of the capitalist system itself. A crisis both on a world scale, and at national level, both inextricably linked. And just as the election of Donald Trump as US President is both a reflection of an already existing political and economic crisis and also a cause for further deepening of the crisis in the future, so all over the world, including Mauritius, things both political and economic become more and more bizarre.

Economic crisis

Mauritius is in the throes of a dire economic crisis. More specifically, here, as in many countries, we are simultaneously going through “interlocked waves” of crises of capital. Each is different, and yet it reflects the general crisis of capitalism.

First, there was the Mauritian systemic crisis with the end of the European Union Sugar Protocol and the end of protected markets for textiles; these were the two main employers. And it was around the sugar industry that a “historic bloc” had been built up over literally centuries, permitting capitalist rule, however precarious, over a large and rebellious working class. The end

of commercial protection cut employment in the sugar and textiles industries by the tens of thousands and thus destabilized, and continues to destabilize, the historic bloc.

Then, just after this crisis began, world crises followed. There was the oil crisis; then the food crisis; then the financial crisis, then the world economic crisis, and now the deepening of an unpredictable and multi-dimensional ecological crisis. The speed of these crises has, over the last 15 years, been vertiginous.

This is not new.

Mauritius is being, and will continue to be, seriously hit by economic crisis, perhaps more than other countries are, for the simple reason that Mauritius, as a nation, was *invented* by an emerging capitalist system that populated it through successive waves of Dutch, French and British colonisation and through the slave trade and indentured labour system that this colonisation imposed. So, there is, for us, no pre-capitalist stability even to dream of. From colonial times, the historical agreement was that the sugar estates, who own and control 70% of the fertile land of Mauritius, would plant sugar-cane and produce sugar for Britain. This colonial agreement continued long after Independence with the British State providing a guaranteed price and market, thus literally guaranteeing profits for the sugar oligarchy.

In more recent history but before the contemporary crises, the world “sugar boom” in the mid 1970s, for example, quickly became the economic crisis of the late 1970s, when the revenue from sugar was no longer enough to insure the cost of imports of basic needs, and when there were two devaluations making working people bear the brunt of the crisis. Instead of thinking about what long-term future the sugar industry really had, the ruling classes just went into textiles and tourism, while the State gradually gave more and more tax concessions to the sugar bosses, mainly by reducing the sugar export levy. The sugar companies went on planting cane and investing in textiles and tourism, catering for the European Union markets, gaining short-term profits. Later these companies would take the surplus made by Mauritian workers and go and invest in other countries, where often, despite aiming at even worse exploitation of workers there, they lost all that social capital.

In the 1980s, the export levy on sugar was further reduced, until it disappeared altogether. So, the skewed land-ownership now produced no taxes as a veil of justification for the inequality.

At the same time, sugar mill amalgamations and mechanization of the cane fields went ahead full steam, supposedly to lower production costs. Once again, just as in the 1970s, the working class was being made to bear the brunt of the crisis, because jobs themselves (not just individual workers’ salaries) were being destroyed. Already, the price sugar was bringing in was not increasing in real terms, nor in comparison with increases in the price of imports. But the sugar industry went on surviving because of the protectionism that Europe offered through the Sugar Protocol, because of Mauritian State protection and because of the relative social cohesion of the “historic bloc” around cane and sugar production.

Successive governments have initiated and encouraged a series of measures to absorb the reduction in real prices that sugar exports were fetching with a sole aim: to maintain the profit levels of the sugar companies, that is to say of the “estates” themselves. Successive governments encouraged the separation of milling and planting into different companies. They encouraged the conversion of land previously under legal obligation to produce agricultural products to “non-agricultural status”. They encouraged land parcelling. And they subsidized the selling off of agricultural land. Successive governments accelerated centralisation of mills, meaning mill closures, and getting rid of mill workers; labourers were paid to close down the jobs now done by huge agricultural harvesters and so on.

The government encouraged sugar estates to produce electricity with cane bagasse in the 6-month harvest season (and with coal the rest of the year) and sell it to the national public Central Electricity Board (CEB) at a price higher than CEB-produced electricity, thus further imprisoning land in cane.

The only exception was something worse. The legal framework for IRS (Integrated Resorts Scheme) projects allowed sugar estates to convert thousands of *acres* of good agricultural land, along the coast-line first, then in the hills, too, into *deluxe* gated communities for the international jet-set.

All these measures aimed at nothing else but to float the profits of the sugar estates, without the least regard for the livelihoods of rural workers left without jobs, of the 30,000 to 40,000 small cane planters who provided sugar estate mills with cane, of working people and pensioners who have to pay more for electricity. And, worse still, with the land being concreted, on the one hand, and sold off to foreign millionaires, on the other, the State and the bourgeoisie got together to implement a catastrophic strategy, which risks destroying the future resources that could provide a good living for everyone.

As from 2000, all this process accelerated further: rapid mechanization of planting and harvesting brought the VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme) that destroyed some 45,000 sugar mill workers and labourers' jobs and re-introduced seasonal work during cane harvest; a mill on average closed each year, with a reduction in mill workers' jobs to the point where there are only 4 mills left compared to the 21 mills of the 1970s.

The sugar industry, which was the *raison d'être* of the country, would be moving from employing 50,000 workers to employing 5,000. The textile industry where 100,000 workers were employed in the 1980s, now employs some 40,000 workers of which half are migrant workers from China, Madagascar or Bangladesh. With Mauritian bosses delocalizing their textile plants and sugar production, all the profits produced by 30 years of workers' sweat and tears, has flown away to be invested in China, Madagascar, Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Swaziland and the Ivory Coast, to seek deeper forms of exploitation, and leaving no profound traces of economic development in Mauritius.

The sugar industry has gone into a crisis so deep that it cannot be alleviated by the depreciation of the rupee, or even by devaluation. The price of sugar is so low that many cane planters have abandoned their land to weeds, leaving sugar mills with under the 100,000 tonnes of cane that they say is necessary for each of their four mills respectively to be profitable.

This comes as no surprise given the crisis and capitalist response to the crisis. The tourism industry, that looked mainly to Europe and South Africa to fill its luxury hotels and was to become one of the new "pillars" of the economy, has been hit by the financial crisis, and then the Euro crisis. Even the dreaded IRS projects were put on hold.

Meanwhile, Mauritian capitalists, especially in the sugar, hotel and construction sectors have accumulated debts amounting to some \$5.5 billion. They are desperate. The new government has, in the last two years, as usual helped them out. It has given huge tax concessions to capitalists in real estate. The whole of the south, east and west of the main island of Mauritius is now being attacked from the mountains to the coast by IRS, Real Estate Scheme (RES), Property Development Scheme (PDS) projects, so-called "Smart" City projects (vamped up IRS's with a business component), villa projects for the rich and Invest-Hotel Scheme projects. The north had already been attacked from the previous decade. Capital is being encouraged to flow into speculative real estate with a double effect: destroying prime agricultural land as it gets transformed into real estate projects and sold off at astronomical prices, on the one hand, and escalating the price of land and housing to inaccessible prices for the majority of working people.

The destruction is immense. And it is, in fact - and this third effect is the most alarming - a *new form of colonisation*.

“Gated communities” have and continue to appear around beaches, marinas, hunting lodges, hills, golf-courses, on mountains and near national protected forest areas. There are now little colonies of the very rich from South Africa, Europe, Russia, Saudi Arabia, who gain permanent residence for their family in exchange for spending \$500,000 on residential property. They can even buy Mauritian citizenship for \$5 million under the “Smart” City scheme. These gated and guarded colonies are beginning to be linked up to one another and to shopping malls by motorways – in an eerie replica of Israeli colonies in Palestine. It is as though Israel has been the prototype for a future nightmare world. This is true in Mauritius and, we fear, in many countries. *If*, and this is the important bit, *if* we do not organize to oppose it.

Privatisation

The public sector has shrunk and goes on shrinking with the onslaught of neo-liberalist privatisation measures of successive governments: the most revenue-producing sectors of the public sector are in the process of being privatised: energy production, postal services, telecom, while other sectors like tertiary education and health services are also being privatized. This resulted in more job destruction and deterioration in salaries, work conditions, and job security. The Central Water Authority is next on the list.

For the last years, the Government has presented the health sector as a new emerging “sector” of the economy, which Mauritian capitalists have been calling for for quite a while. The government recently introduced a measure that allows workers to transfer “their” money out of a collective fund, the Employees Welfare Fund, to place it in private medical insurance; a measure aimed at undermining the relatively excellent public and free healthcare system in Mauritius, to benefit the private medical clinics and open up new investment grounds in insurance. In parentheses, we should mention that Mauritius, unlike many African countries, managed for over 40 years to oppose International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank conditions. This was done through the conscious articulation of left political struggles, often around LALIT, the trade union movement, and a highly organized society at grassroots level. Only recently has this resistance begun to cede ground.

Social crisis

The economic and political crisis we have described has already begun, in turn, to provoke painful and often dangerous social repercussions in addition to the economic effects.

Even with hotels and free zone factories set up in the countryside over the past 40 years, life tended to revolve around the sugar mill, as it has for over 200 years. Now that the mill is closed, and the cane plantations no longer employ many workers, the social cohesion of village life has suffered. People experience this as a kind of *dislocation*.

This dislocation followed an earlier dislocation suffered in urban areas. People experienced the effects of the economic crisis, as skilled craftsmen – tailors, shoemakers, cabinet makers - were replaced by factories, and as work became seasonal, casual and short-term contract work, and as, in turn, the smaller factories producing shoes or furniture closed, even at the same time as big textile factories closed down. This, too, was and still is *lived* as a kind of dislocation.

Every day, the newspapers are full of the tragic dramas and crimes within households, between neighbours, violent disputes over inheritance, jealousy of spouses, gang conflicts, all happening as if to personify the despair that the entire capitalist economic and political reign has produced.

Luckily, however weakened by technology and repressive laws, there is a working class. Luckily there are people who are experienced within this working class, who emerge as a local level leadership. And luckily there are parties like LALIT.

The working class

General strike and near insurrection in 1979

The working class in Mauritius has always been hard for the capitalists to control. It is rebellious. And rebellions come suddenly. A long tradition of militancy in the trade union movement and of political mobilisation also developed from the 1930s.

Then, in 1979, there was a conscious *general strike movement*, which lasted two weeks and led to a state of near-insurrection. It was planned for over a year by labourers and artisans (mill workers) and the central demands, in the early months, were trade union recognition and no mill closures. The workers realized that its leading sectors, in particular the dock and transport unions, were being weakened by mechanisation in the docks and by individual “non-company” buses being given licenses to operate. The labourers and mill workers would have to take over leadership. And they argued this, during preparations. “If you rural workers go on strike a week,” dockyard and transport workers vowed, “we will come in, indefinitely.”

And so it came about that, after a week of the strike in the sugar industry, the rest of the working class consciously joined into what became a general strike “movement”, in order, quite consciously, that the labourers and artisans’ unions could get strong enough to take part of the burden of leadership of the working class at this crucial time.

The Labour government in power still refused concessions. Bosses sacked thousands of striking workers. The general strike was then followed by a famous hunger strike – one at a time when the working class was exhausted – and the hunger strike was one without either food or water. A LALIT comrade, Ram Seegobin, one of the two main leaders of the movement, participated in the hunger strike. It could not have lasted more than three days, without a death. Not in the Port Louis weather. The government came and signed an agreement to review trade union recognition, to halt all mill closures, and to give alternative jobs in government to any sacked workers the bosses refused to take back.

A year later, the agreement had not been respected.

So once again, with Herculean strength, there was a huge uprising - this time not just the organized working class, but the broad masses. And mobilisation was focused on a second hunger strike, this time with the strikers drinking water, so as to give time to build up the protest. All the hunger strikers were working class leaders, again including Seegobin.

This time, so huge the protests, so volatile the marches all over the country, that the demands were met.

It was clear that mechanisation in the sugar industry and in the docks, the two sectors where workers’ consciousness, militancy and organisation were strongest, was just a question of time. Workers were aware that this mechanisation would eventually weaken the working class as a whole.

LALIT, at that time built around a publication called *Lalit de Klas* (meaning *Class Struggle* in Mauritian Creole), even though we were the political leadership of the 1979 strike and 1980 mass movement, was not strong enough to form the general *political leadership* of the working class, a very electoralist working class. Most members were part of a *tendency* in the MMM’s movement.

MMM sell-out

The MMM, whose leader Paul Bérenger was in the leadership of the 1979 strike, even though his party was not, had, at the time, a political program that recognised the irreconcilability of class interests of workers and bosses, that pledged nationalisation of more sections of the economy, and more democracy in general. The working class, in full-scale mobilisation during and after the strike led the MMM to a landslide electoral victory in 1982, providing it with *all* the elected seats in parliament, and hoping the MMM would bring in “socialism”. But by the time the MMM got elected, it had already swerved rightwards into “social consensus” – this is the name they gave it – or class collaboration politics.

After the elections, in 1982, it was Bérenger himself, as Finance Minister, who then led the neo-liberalist assault against the working class.

Lalit de Klas that had acted as a tendency within the MMM since our formation in 1976 had already left the MMM by then to form LALIT, a political party. This was two months before the general elections in April 1982 after having opposed the “New Social Consensus” unsuccessfully in the MMM party structures. We called for a vote for the MMM’s alliance, but warned of where it was heading.

After the MMM got elected, LALIT thrived, forming dozens of branches in every part of the country. The trade union movement started re-organising to oppose Bérenger’s neo-liberalist politics. The MMM could no longer contain the situation and it split into two: on the one side, Bérenger’s MMM, and the other, the MSM (Mauritian Socialist Movement) led by Jugnauth that opposed Bérenger’s neo-liberalist politics, which favoured the historical bourgeoisie. The MSM preferred to kick-start the development of a new wave of State-backed small capitalists, which it catapulted into the big-time bourgeoisie: a *State bourgeoisie*.

As LALIT became stronger, and the working class challenged the government, at the same time a massive split developed in the government. After the split, the working class got divided into two camps in the new general elections held in 1983 supposed to resolve the political crisis: the rural working class, seeing Bérenger allying with the sugar estates, supported the MSM; the urban working class, seeing its leader, Bérenger, under attack, supported the MMM.

LALIT had not in the nine months after the 1982 general election become strong enough to provide a new working class political leadership.

Electoral resistance

As from 1983, the working class was forced on to more and more defensive positions, facing wave after wave of neo-liberalist attacks. Mechanisation in the sugar industry and the docks where the working class was strongest sapped its strength as jobs got destroyed, forever lost, instead of changing into new jobs. In the 1980s, the Free Zone textile sector grew fast and became the biggest source of employment for the working class. The 200 years of experience of class struggle and political experience of workers in the sugar industry and the docks was not easily passed on to the new generations on their work sites. The free zone and hotel industry drew in youth and women: a new generation of young workers with no experience. The working class was fast demobilising under the two-pronged pressures of rapid economic mutation and betrayal by its chosen political leadership. “Full employment” brought on by the conjunctural expansion of the free zone textile sector and tourism masked the undermining of salaries and work conditions, as more members of the household had to join the labour force, work longer hours and pool salaries together to make a living.

Despite its weakening, despite its demobilisation and it being on the defensive, the working class was still strong enough to split political alliances in government and bring about elections

whenever any government came up with aggressive neo-liberal measures. Between 1982 and 2000, there were elections practically every 1-2 years: general elections, by-elections that gained national importance, local elections with national issues dominating the electoral agenda. Government plans to privatise the water supply, abolish subsidies on rice and flour, do away with universal old-age pensions – all these measures, even when government introduced them, were always immediately thwarted by the working class rising up in protest and then voting out the government that introduced them. The water system was to remain public, subsidies on rice and flour had to be re-introduced, as was the universal old-age pension system. LALIT members were involved in a four-year 1996-99 defensive battle in a broad coalition called All Workers' Conference.

Its effects continued, and in the 2000 general elections, the PT-PMSD [Mauritian Labour Party – Mauritian Social Democratic Party] alliance had to offer free public transport for students and old age pensioners, as well as people living with a handicap. They also had to restore democratically elected village councils that the former MMM-MSM government had abolished. Even for the 2014 elections, the MSM-PMSD-ML campaigned for the creation of 5,000 jobs in the public sector and to build 2,000 social housing units per year for those in need. In all general elections, capitalist parties have a “socialist” line. They are anti-capitalist. They address the working class. The working class in Mauritius is strong enough to force all parties to have this discourse. But, it is not yet strong enough to get them to implement it.

Since 1982, government alliances and even capitalist parties have split again and again as they tried to introduce neo-liberalist measures and have had to perpetually re-coalesce in new alliances so often that all capitalist parties have worked together in government at one time or another.

The trade union movement

With the weakening of the working class, the trade union movement got further bureaucratised, made less democratic. Like capitalist parties and alliances, this bureaucratisation brought more and more divisions in the trade-union federations and confederations, splitting and re-coalescing them on the basis of bureaucratic interests, much like capitalist political parties and alliances.

The trade union bureaucracy has been so divided in the last years that it has not been able to oppose the introduction of the *Employment Relations Act* and the *Employment Rights Act*, two new repressive labour and industrial relations laws that have given bosses a license to “hire and fire” workers more easily, and undermine salary and work conditions that were already minimal. The government at the same time also lured union bureaucracies with major concessions to bureaucratic demands within the trade union movement.

Meanwhile, the 1999 revolt

The poorer sections of the working class and an underclass, especially the young urban working class, when confronted with early signs of the economic crisis and growing police repression against working class people in the late 1990s, and when the *All Workers' Conference* that had provided some lines of defence, had broken up, rose up in revolt. The revolt was triggered by the death in police detention of the famous singer, Kaya, who had been arrested after singing in a concert for the decriminalisation of *ganja* [cannabis] in February 1999. The news of his death sparked off a mass rebellion. Police stations were attacked, advertising billboards torn down, prison doors broken down in Bastille fashion, prisoners released. The police retreated in utter defeat for a day and a night. The revolt ended in defeat in the absence of a political program including political demands. Still, it generated some debate on the reality of police brutality and the need for demands to confront it: a political campaign taken on by LALIT that has made some headway in the last 15 years, even if we are still in a period of downturn.

LALIT's work

In the last years, LALIT as a party, has put a lot of emphasis on building a transitional program, a program that constitutes a common understanding of the political work before us; a programme that can address the level of consciousness of the working class today and mobilise on the basis of demands that can bridge the transition to socialist revolution. We believe such a programme to be of absolute necessity, in particular, in times of capitalist crisis. Because we have always built our organization through, mainly, our regular publication, it is in large part through this that our program takes shape. The network of member-distributors also collects articles and discusses contents, so there is ongoing popularization of the program, as it develops.

Our program is continuously based on an analysis of the current political and economic situation and where it seems to be going; transitional demands that aim to shift the balance of class forces in favour of the working class, that increase class consciousness, and release dynamics that work towards an overthrow of the capitalist system and towards socialist change; and a shared understanding of how to popularise and mobilise on the basis of these demands; demands that adapt and change depending on where we are in the struggle.

We believe that such a programme and political thinking towards a strategy have helped us gain some victories in a period of downturn and use these victories to consolidate a socialist program as a totality.

The challenge of the economic crisis

Our biggest challenge now, and one that we have been preparing for some years now, is to bring the land question onto the political agenda and at the same time popularize our program for alternative politics of the economy.

LALIT has always worked for land reform, for agricultural diversification and for the development of a modern and ecological agro-industry. Since 1982, LALIT is known to be the only political force to have systematically warned against the kind of economic strategy based on sugar, free zone and tourism. Today we are being proven right.

We used the 2005, 2010 and 2014 general elections to popularize our *Campaign on Agriculture, Agro-Industry and Electricity: An Alternative Politics of the Economy* on a national scale, and continued political action and mobilisation based on this program after the elections. The campaign was primarily two-fold: forcing the sugar-estates to convert to food production and food preservation on a mass scale instead of cane, providing food security, jobs by the thousands and forcing the private sector into investing in fishing on a large scale, or the government might itself invest in this sector. This would, of course, involve continuing to claim fishing rights on the Mauritian Economic Zone around all the islands of our Republic, including Chagos and Diego Garcia, still militarily occupied by a UK-USA colonial conspiracy, and Tromelin, occupied by France.

In the present context of food insecurity, of growing unemployment, of world economic crisis, of systemic crisis in Mauritius, the demand for popular, democratic control over the land and the sea seems entirely reasonable. It is. Yet capitalism is unable to bring about this kind of change. So, our program puts into question capitalist ownership and control of land, and it puts into question the dictatorship of capital to decide *what* is to be produced and *how*.

Our political campaign for control over land for job creation, housing and food security has begun to catch peoples' imagination, especially after the present government announced as its biggest economic project a set of massive tax deductions and import duty concessions and fast track permits for thousands more hectares of land to be transformed into real estate projects. We started holding dozens of neighbourhood meetings, and began to gain wider support within a

working class faced with growing unemployment and the lack of affordable housing. People saw the enormity of the government's main priority being developing housing and infrastructure for millionaires from abroad when working people haven't got housing at all. In these LALIT meetings, workers working in "gated communities" testified what life is like inside gated communities: the checkpoints and body searches at the back gate entry for workers, the enormous tracts of land that go into golf courses, the millionaires who come to their Mauritian villa and go with their "own" domestic workers.

In the south and the west, IRS projects are threatening to push people off the coastal land they live on to transform inland projects into higher-cost beachfront villa IRS projects. In November, delegates from the east, west, south and centre, together with LALIT members, held a joint press conference to expose the selling-off and destruction of thousands of hectares of land. A national movement for control over the land, for jobs, for housing and for food security is getting off the ground.

Political gains on ownership and control over Diego Garcia

LALIT has made considerable political gains in the struggle to decolonise and demilitarise Diego Garcia, part of the Chagos Archipelago, which is part of Mauritius and that the UK, against all international law and against the UN Charter, excised and kept as an illegal "condition" for granting Mauritian independence. The Mauritius State has finally, after nearly 50 years of struggle since Independence, begun the process of putting a case before the *International Court of Justice* by way of a resolution at the General Assembly of the UN. Diego Garcia is suddenly being exposed to public scrutiny: The UK (the land thief) is being exposed as having leased Diego Garcia to the US (the receiver of this stolen land) for 50 years.

The Mauritian inhabitants of the Chagos had been living there from at least 1814, working on coconut plantations, fishing, living their lives, generation after generation, coming to the main island for medical treatment or for buying goods. The UK and USA, after effecting the theft of the islands, then secretly removed all the inhabitants from there, first denying them return ship tickets from 1963 onwards when they visited Mauritius' main island, while Mauritius was still a British colony. Families were thus cruelly divided. In 1973, the UK-US team forcibly removed those who refused to leave, after gassing their dogs to death in front of them.

The final shipload of Mauritians of Chagossian origin was "transported", just as if they were slaves, in the hold of a ship called the Nordvaer. That was as late as 1973. By then, the infamous military base was already being constructed on Diego Garcia.

Then for the next 40 years, the UK-US used Diego Garcia as a "secret site" from which US B52s have taken off to bomb civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq, and where the *Pelindaba Treaty for a Nuclear Arms Free Africa* is flaunted on a daily basis, and on which illegally detained prisoners were held, tortured and "rendered".

LALIT has since our creation been in the vanguard of the interlinked struggles to decolonise the Chagos islands and reunify Mauritius, to get the right of return to, and free circulation on, all of Mauritius, and to get the US military base on Diego Garcia closed and cleaned up. We have done so on a permanent basis in different waves of struggle as from 1976 against the UK, the US and the Mauritian State. Until very recently the Mauritian State was in collusion with the UK and US – mainly under the usual pressure from the capitalists for their sugar and textiles preferential prices and quotas for their goods into the UK and US markets.

LALIT has kept Diego Garcia on the agenda through all kinds of means: through dramatic Chagossian-LALIT-women-led demonstrations with big confrontations with riot police in 1981 (in which women won!). And there were poster campaigns, national and international open letters, national and international petitions, demonstrations in front of the British High Commission,

hunger strikes, mobilising towards preparing a Green Peace ship and then towards an international “peace flotilla” to go to the Chagos. The planned flotilla cornered the British government into offering to take Chagossians on a ship to visit the Chagos islands (the peace flotilla is a political idea that the present Mauritian Leader of the Opposition has now added his voice to), mobilising support in international protests in Australia, South Africa, Equador, France, the US, Europe, Japan/Okinawa, India, everywhere possible, exposing the crimes of the UK-US in public, calling for UN inspectors under the *Pelindaba Treaty against Nuclear Arms in Africa*, exposing the UK-US secret prisons, torture and rendering on Diego Garcia, and struggling to get the Mauritian State to call for Red Cross intervention there, challenging the “Marine Park” that the UK unilaterally declared on the Chagos (a Marine Protected Area to prevent Mauritian citizens especially of Chagossian origin from returning as WikiLeaks would later reveal in US cables).

In fact, this campaign led to the Mauritian State taking the UK to the UN *Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS) Tribunal that in 2015 ruled the UK decree “illegal”. And, LALIT has, from as early as 1985, called on the Mauritian government to act by putting a case before the *International Court of Justice*, via a UN General Assembly resolution, which it is finally in the process of doing. Such a resolution is right now (end of 2016) on the UN Agenda.

The struggle goes on: to mobilise national and international support, especially in the UK and the US, to both decolonise and demilitarise the Chagos. Especially now that the UK has announced that the UK-US lease that was to expire in December last year would “roll-over” for another 20 years. Especially now that the Mauritian State is finally, after 50 years of struggle, starting to act.

Internationalism

We in LALIT have learnt the importance of integrating an “international” dimension to all areas our political work as well as working towards political links internationally. There can be no socialist resolution to the present capitalist crisis without internationalism.

*** Rajni Lallah is an organiser with LALIT, a left-wing political party in Mauritius. LALIT means ‘struggle’ in Mauritian Creole.**

End notes

[1] Mauritian Socialist Movement – Mauritian Social Democratic Party- Liberating Party (split from the Mauritian Militant Movement).

[2] Mauritian Militant Movement

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Link: <http://www.pambazuka.org/democracy-governance/struggle-socialism-mauritius>