

## **For a Return to Class Politics**

By Ram Seegobin

28 April 2014

People who follow the politics of traditional parties have been experiencing a profound at the unprincipled manoeuvres and even more cynical horse-trading that the leaders of the main parties have been up to.

The secret and not-so-secret sessions of “*koz-koze*” between Ramgoolam and Bérenger had finally seemed, after the first Clarisse House meeting, to have engendered some kind of patched-up agreement around the question of electoral reform, an agreement they refer to as “unanimous”. They announced post-electoral constitutional amendments in a scheme referred to as a “*Second Republic*”.

All this happened behind the backs of the party structures of both parties.

The poor delegates of the MMM were summoned and made to vote in favour of the *MMM-MSM Re-Make*, even while their leader was negotiating with the Labour Party leader. This autocratic behaviour triggered unprecedented fury amongst MMM members at the grassroots and even resignations, including that of deputy leader Collendavelloo.

The profound disgust that most people feel now is entirely justified, and should be voiced out. But the danger lies in the development of a cynical attitude *towards politics in general*: this type of cynicism, unfortunately, prepares the ground for the rise of undemocratic and even reactionary forces.

### **The ideological degeneration of Labour and MMM**

Both the Labour Party and the MMM started as parties practicing “class politics”, mobilising workers and poor people against the domination of the “capitalist classes”. Their political practice was no doubt dominated by a good dose of populism, their strategy confused enough to allow opportunist forces within their ranks to gain the upper hand and determine party strategies.

The original Labour Party was totally taken over in the 1940’s and 1950’s by a group of rich cane planters, wealthy traders, and ambitious professionals organised around the *Advance* newspaper, from 1940. The same class-based process continued in the 1960’s, this time by a grouping of an urban “elite” around the *L’Express* newspaper. The “New Labour” set about to create a “state bourgeoisie” which soared to even greater heights under the “Democratisation of the Economy” platform: there was now even a Government Commission created to speed up the process.

At its creation, the MMM brandished the slogan: “*No to racial conflict, Yes to class struggle*”. The slogan immediately attracted the students and young workers who had recently lived through the horrific race riots which followed the propaganda of the anti-Independence forces, financed by the reactionary *bourgeoisie*. But the 1969 Labour-PMSD alliance left a political vacuum, which an opportunist MMM leadership dashed in to fill, using the “libertaire” aspect of its Marxist discourse.

Thus both the Labour Party and the MMM had followed political trajectories that had allowed opportunist forces within the parties to take control and caused constant ideological degeneration, and, in the process, the throwing overboard of all principles. Their fundamental “program” was how to win elections and stay in power.

## The Neo-Liberal Hegemony

After 6 years in Parliament as the official Opposition from 1976 and after a series of defections of its MP's, the MMM finally came to power in the landslide victory of 1982. But this was at a time when the IMF and World Bank were busy imposing the neo-liberal agenda. When the new Minister of Finance Bérenger signed the "Letters of Intent" that would lock Mauritius into the neo-liberal agenda, there were protests from the trade union movement and parties like LALIT. Bérenger brushed aside all these protests, saying that "Structural Adjustment Programs" were not being imposed, but that they represented "*Une gestion saine de l'économie*". Could Bérenger possibly not have realised that he was implementing the political and economic agenda of the international and local bourgeoisie?

Subsequent governments followed the same course and got locked into the same populist but hypocritical discourse of "defending workers" and "fighting poverty", while applying the neo-liberal agenda in favour of the economic ruling classes, and increasing inequality. They had transformed hypocrisy into an art.

### What principles?

The above brief analysis of the trajectory of the Labour Party and the MMM should provide sufficient reasons for us to not expect these two parties to be encumbered by principles when it comes to achieving political power, and even sharing it. If, as now seems quite likely, there is a Labour-MMM alliance at the next general election, it is quite likely there will be another clean sweep, and with the threshold for proportional seats being what it is, there will be practically no Parliamentary opposition. We will be faced with two parties in power who have already exposed a remarkable lack of principle and political morality, in addition to being openly "pro-finance capital".

Does that mean that we should give up and allow them a free reign? Does that mean we should restrict our indignation to "*zure gro-gro betiz anba labutik*" and shouting "*vander*" from time to time? Given what we already know of the MMM and Labour (and the MSM and PMSD as well), should we expect otherwise?

No. And there is plenty that we can do to prepare for the future.

### For a socialist agenda

What we now need is a *new political platform for working people*, a platform based on a programme that not only challenges the neo-liberal agenda, but questions the logic of the capitalist system itself. Poverty, social inequality, unemployment, injustice cannot be tackled unless we recognise that they derive from the dominant economic system itself. We need a platform that proposes an alternative economic agenda based on agricultural diversification, transformation industries geared to agricultural products, development of a large scale, sustainable industrial fishing industry, food security, massive investments in genuinely renewable energy. We need above all else "development" that guarantees stable employment. We need a housing policy that caters to the needs of all. We need education for all our children. We need to re-unify the territory of the country by regaining the Chagos, getting the Diego Garcia base closed down, and assuring real reparations for all Chagossians. We need a democratic system that enables people to control the economy, a democratic system that guarantees equal rights to all in the Republic.

Now that most people have come to realise that the traditional parties that are in

Parliament at present, and that have been in power at some time or other, are unable or unwilling to fulfil those needs, our political priority has to be to mobilise support around such a program: A Program for Socialism.

This is perhaps the only answer to the otherwise increasing cynicism amongst workers and young people against all forms of politics. And remember, politics is the only way out of this quagmire. It needs to be proper politics based on shared ideas, principled actions and alliances, and a lot more hard work than just going and putting “Three Crosses” on a bit of paper once every five years.

Ram Seegobin, pu LALIT

*This article was syndicated from Le Mauricien ([Le Mauricien | Site Indépendant d'information et d'opinion](#)) and was originally published on 25 April, 2014. You may republish this article, so long as you credit the author, and do not change the text.*