Europeans and their tribes

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The tenth session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva has come to a close without the anticipated assault on the Sri Lankan state. This had been on the cards for quite some time, beginning with the motion against Sri Lanka that had been put forward three years ago. Fortunately some concerted diplomatic action, involving regular briefings of all states who were genuinely interested in the country, saw that motion scratched in 2007, and since then there was much less pressure.

This year however was different, for the LTTE saw this as their best hope of internationalising the issue. Hence the hordes of LTTE sympathisers who turned up, to buttonhole various ambassadors, to brief the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to make aggressive interventions during the debate. They were aided and abetted by a number of Non-Governmental Organisations, some genuinely if foolishly idealistic, others closely associated with the LTTE, still others not perhaps keen on the LTTE in itself but so bitter about the Government that they had no qualms about the LTTE benefiting from their performances. Hence indeed the ludicrous situation of Nimalka Fernando, representing her grand sounding organisation with its dead treasurer and its absence of accounts for years, joining with the London head of the TRO to denigrate Sri Lanka to a Navanethem Pillay harassed by a surfeit of e-mails. The reason I find Nimalka’s dead treasurer so fascinating is that the finances of all these organisations are very shady. I am not talking here only of the TRO and suchlike, which have been recognised in several places as LTTE fronts. What is equally worrying is the fact that so many of our local NGOs are funded by countries that want to criticise us, and then use the findings of these NGOs to claim that we deserve criticism. Thus the European Union funded an organisation that then claimed elections in the East would be bad, whereupon the EU, claiming it had objective evidence, had the gall to call in our ambassador in Brussels and tell him that having elections in the East would be undemocratic. Why is the EU so prejudiced against Sri Lanka? I should note that this is not true of all member states, indeed most are sympathetic or could not care less, but their leader has now got into the habit of claiming to speak for 27 states and their candidate members too, and whether these statements are carefully researched or not means little to most of the rotating leadership. Indeed we found the ignorance of some of them startling. One Minister asked about a complaint he had received from a young Tamil lady resident in his country, who had claimed that babies were torn out of the wombs of mothers and killed before their eyes, though he at least had the grace to ask us if this story could be true, since he needed to respond to his Tamil fellow countrywoman. Sadly his Ambassador for Human Rights has not as yet responded to my query as to how they had responded once we had briefed them. And more absurd was the much younger Minister from another country who wanted to know whether our forces had stopped using child soldiers. Such nonsense. Much of it springs of course from assiduous LTTE propaganda, but assuming these are intelligent people, one realises that they have to play along because they need votes. It is no coincidence that the vast majority of the small number of British MPs who scream about us come from marginal seats where the Tamil vote is quite influential. Indeed one Tamil Labour Councillor told what seems to be a local Harrow paper called the Leader that Harrow MP Gareth Thomas ‘could be a goner at the General Election… if Harrow Tamils changed their allegiance.' At the same time, leaving aside folly and self interest, there is a streak of sanctimonious self-justification amongst some of the European politicians who criticise us, just as there is in the Nimalkas of this world. After they hold forth, they get very upset when they are accused of amorality themselves, in playing up to the Tigers in a manner that can only precipitate greater suffering for the Tamil people. In some cases, indeed one senses an attempt to convince themselves that they are the standard bearers of all civilised values, even as they come to terms with the fact that Europe is no longer at the top, no longer indeed second or even third, as Russia revives and the Asian giants leap ahead. And when they are lectured back, with more logic and knowledge of facts than they can command, they can sometimes get very testy. Of course economically they still call the shots, and will continue to do so for some time yet. But that has never been enough for the heirs of Greeks and Romans, and hence the attempt to assert a different sort of leadership with a country they think is small enough to knuckle under. Elsewhere I will look at the factors they bring up, and show that they have no evidence at all for the moral superiority they affect, and that in the end all their complaints boil down to the fact that there are civilians still trapped by the Tigers in the small area under their control, and that these civilians will continue to suffer so long as the Tigers continue in action. But my point here is simply the relentless self-righteousness of people who will not utter a word against the excesses of other countries to which they owe allegiance, including their fellow members. So, as a couple of the Europeans themselves told us, there had been an attempt to have a special session on Sri Lanka. When that failed, encouraged perhaps by Ms Navanethem Pillay’s increasingly strange statements about us, they wanted her to make a statement on Sri Lanka to the Council. There were attempts too to place the matter on the Agenda of the Security Council in New York. And, when we were advised of this by several nations that thought all this excessive, and made this clear to the European tribe, the story sprang up, as it had sprung up in 2007 when the European motion lapsed, that we had been saved by undemocratic nations. When I heard this, I was reminded of an African comment at a meeting of the Dutch Third Chamber, when a sanctimonious journalist said that he had been frightened by the Chinese presence in Africa. His argument was that they would prop up undemocratic regimes, but he was reminded of the various regimes the West had propped up when they were exploiting the place shamelessly. Human Rights now seems a tool to ensure the domination of regimes acceptable to the West, whereas some competition for influence might actually be more beneficial than the old monopoly under another name. Certainly people change, and one must hope that there is some genuine feeling in some of those who pronounce. But remembering the support rendered by the West to that most racist and undemocratic of regimes, the Jayawardene government under which the Tamils suffered so much, one cannot help feeling that this strange coalition, ignorant European Ministers and characters like Nimalka – and Sunanda Deshapriya – who feed their ignorance, along with extraordinarily able and focused Tigers, is really rather disgusting.

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Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process Courtesy: SCOPP