

## **Voice of Shakthi - Thursday 25 May 2000**

The talk these days among expatriate Sri Lankans is what can be done to ease the current situation in Sri Lanka. Many so-called advisers have sprung up at meetings and in radio interviews to tell us what should be done. The loudest of them all have been those who call for a continuation of the current war, making sure that whatever monies are collected are channeled to those in Sri Lanka who subscribe to the same aim. Without stopping at this, the latest news is that they have brought down people who preach bana and war at the same time to help their cause. It is obvious that their aim is not to bring real peace to the country but fulfill their own political ambitions.

The tragedy is that their call is being echoed by moderate organisations, not because they subscribe to these sentiments but through fear that they may be labelled traitors in this hour of crisis. So they continue their fund-raising activities too, separately but for the same cause.

In their haste to contribute to the war effort, what all these organisations have conveniently forgotten are the real dangers which ordinary people in Sri Lanka face today. The continuing loss of democratic rights, increasingly repressive laws, censorship of the press and the increasing costs of living due to the war does not bring even a bleat from these characters who say they love their motherland. Collecting a measly amount of dollars for Sri Lanka is their answer to all the ills of that country. And they really believe that this is patriotism.

It is in this context that we thought the time has come to spell out what a true patriot is to our way of thinking. In our minds, a true patriot is not a person who gets agitated simply because the Tamil side or the Sinhala side is winning the war. True patriots also do not get their blood pressure up when concepts such as devolution of powers to Tamils are discussed. To us, they are not patriots; they are people with feeble minds and equally feeble bodies, whose acts of bravery are limited to loud words and empty gestures.

A real patriot, on the contrary, cries when people are killed in the name of war, when children are orphaned and families displaced because of its curse. A true patriot weeps when the costs of war becomes too much to bear for the people, when it spawns terror and crime. A true patriot cries when villagers, unable to cope with the pressures of modern day living, commit suicide in large numbers; when slaving men and women in the Middle East, weep for the things they have lost in their search for the almighty dollar. And a true patriot cries at the rape and pillage of his or her country by multi-national companies and the decadence of a society where materialism has become the ultimate goal.

So to those men and women who strut about our community these days, we say open your eyes even now, look at the real injustices that are happening not only in Sri Lanka but around you in Australia, the racism of One Nation, the mistreatment of Aborigines, the plight of the refugees and make a real contribution to eradicating them.

Playing martial music over radio, holding poojas, donating a few dollars or boasting about the great democratic traditions of Sri Lanka does not make you a patriot. Instead of white-washing the blatant racism of your political masters, you can do your motherland a greater service by speaking out against such duplicity, by revealing the real agendas of these manipulators, who, by their actions in the past, has brought Sri Lanka to the situation it is facing today.