

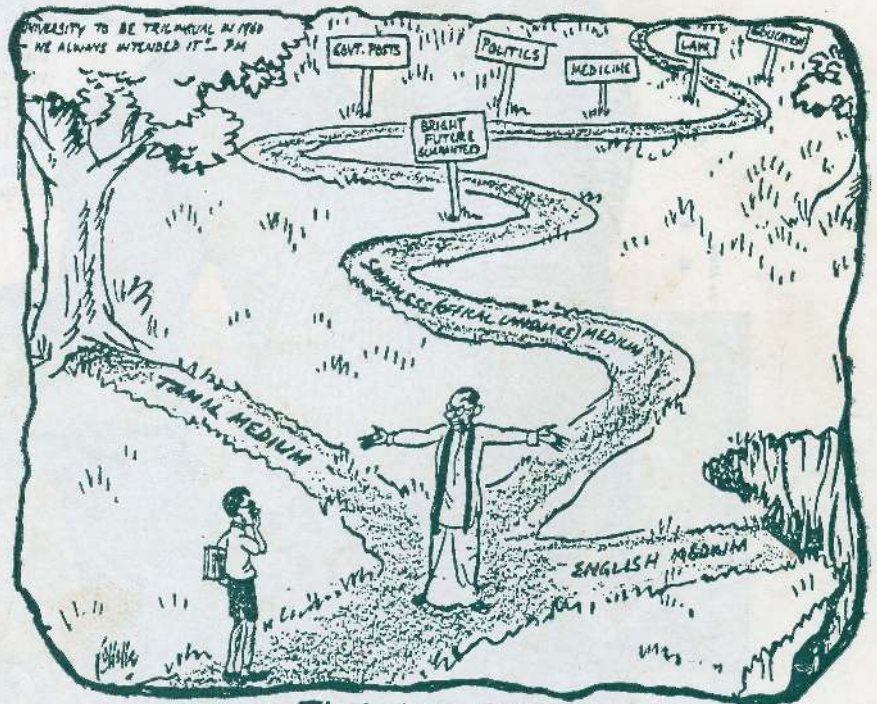
LANKA

# GUARDIAN

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Post-'56 choices

- \* Gananath Obeyesekera on religion and ethnic violence
- \* Denzil Peiris : India, US and the Lankan crisis
- \* Mervyn de Silva : RTC — the end of jaw-jaw ?
- \* Jehan Perera : Urban Sinhala perceptions



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## PRESS CENSORSHIP

The three week old censorship has been relaxed but not all editors are satisfied with the informality of the arrangement. In the first place, censorship covered by provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act remains. Various matters like 'Israeli interests section' and protest by the various communities along with the unrests on the campuses were brought within the broader ambit of the censorship in May-June.

It is this censorship that has been "relaxed". Editors have been asked to use their discretion but cautioned at the same time about reports and articles that could "in-flame public opinion", while "terrorist activity" and even a category called "University issues" remain matters where the regulations are still operative.

"If it is worthy of reporting go ahead and we won't object" says a generally tolerant Competent Authority encouragingly. Now why cannot the self-same Editors be entrusted with the far less exacting task of deciding which letters to the editor, and articles from non-staff writers should be published under a pseudonym?

## CHANGE OF HEART

Three militant Tamil expatriate groups — EPRLF, TELO and EROS — which teamed up to form a united front in April are prepared to join "the negotiating process to find a solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict" reports Minoli de Soysa (in Madras) and D B.S. Jeyarajah in the ISLAND. What is noteworthy is that these three organisations all leftwing had the blessings of Tamilnadu's two top leaders, Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran and M. Karunanidhi (DMK boss) when they forged a working alliance.

Earlier the LTTE (Tigers), main rebel organisation declared its willingness to seek "a political settlement" that would meet the

"aspirations of the Tamil masses". Interestingly it made a strong criticism of the TULF. Clearly, the LTTE is adopting the same stance as the mainstream PLO in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The PLO demands an independent participatory role in the negotiations and will not agree, under any conditions, to proxy participation by Jordan.

## EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

The meeting was in New York State but it looks as if the UK-based Eelamists have taken over from the Bostonians and the Californians. The implementation of a resolution adopted at the second Eelam international conference has been entrusted to a five-member 'task force' which consists of Mr. S. C. Chandrachud, Mr. N. Satyendra, Mr. Saatchi Ponnambalam and Mr. Nedukumar from Madras. The fifth will be a representative nominated by the TULF.

Of the three Sri Lankan expatriates or exiles, two are wellknown lawyers (Mr. Chelvanayakam's son and ex-Senator Nadesan's son) and the third is a magistrate living in London, Mr. Ponnambalam.

London of course is the base of the extremely active Eelam Information Centre. Modern history supports a piquant irony. It is always from the 'mother country' that exiled intellectuals provided the ideological underpinning for independence and liberation movements from London, Paris, the Hague or Amsterdam, and in the case of Latin America, New York. But this fact also leads often to ideological and factional strife within the larger movement where the activists — the men with the guns — finally run the show.

## TRENDS + LETTERS

### Brain Drain

Once again a proposal has been made by some bureaucratic adviser who is ignorant of past mistakes to reintroduce compulsory service for medical graduates and government doctors. This 'big stick' move by the last regime proved an utter failure. The same argument that the public pay for university education will be trotted out to justify this new scheme.

The GMOA should raise the question of those who pass out of the Private medical college. What about them? Will they be asked to perform compulsory service or will they be treated as "paying patients"?

L. S. Hewagama

Kandy

LANKA

## GUARDIAN

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# THE END OF JAW-JAW

Mervyn de Silva

NEWS  
BACKGROUND

On the Churchillian assumption that 'Jaw-Jaw' was better than 'War-war' the Roundtable conference was supported by the large majority of Sri Lankans, despite the ill-concealed scepticism of many perceptive observers and the openly critical attitude of SLFP sympathisers who took their line from Mrs. Bandaranaike's 'boycott' decision. The SLFP's non-participation did pre-empt any UNP effort to produce and proclaim a pan-Sinhala consensus. Consequently the UNP was studying not so much the TULF or the Tamil demands but looking over its shoulder nervously at the SLFP and any attempt by the UNP's traditional enemy to exploit the opportunity to rouse Sinhala chauvinism in the traditional fashion.

Unable or unwilling to offer the TULF anything more than the half-eaten carrot of DDC's, the UNP went through the ceremonies of 'jaw-jaw' to reduce the conference to what the FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW, quoting a SLFP stalwart, described as the "roundtable yawn". It looked as if the RTC would be given a tranquiliser and quietly put to sleep. How would the situation change following the Delhi summit where President J. R. returning from his first official visit to Washington met the Indian prime minister Mrs. Gandhi?

What happened in Delhi is no longer a secret because Mr. Jayewardene, in his characteristically outspoken manner, has shared all the 'secrets' with the Sri Lankan, Indian and international press. Presidential responses at press briefings, formal face-to-face interviews and open press conferences provide a perfect guide to the turn of events.

Correspondent Sinha Ratnatunge who covered the 'summit' for the SUN wrote:

Ms. Gandhi allayed whatever fears that existed of an Indian invasion or intervention in Sri Lanka. She said that she had already told the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) that there would be no Indian intervention. She however requested

Sri Lanka's Government to find a speedy solution to the problem of regional autonomy for the Tamils in Sri Lanka. She urged the Sri Lankan government to give serious consideration to the concept of provincial councils even if the regional councils may not be accepted by the majority.

President Jayewardene told Ms. Gandhi that even provincial councils may not be accepted in the present mood amongst the majority. "We will lose our entire base. We will lose everybody" he said.

Ms. Gandhi pointed out that her government favoured the holding of the All Party talks in Sri Lanka. She appealed that an early decision be reached at this conference.

The Sri Lankan leader expressed the view that progress at this conference was hindered by those engaged in violence in Sri Lanka and by those terrorists living in Tamilnadu and having training camps there.

When he met the Delhi-based foreign press corps, President J. R. gave this reply to a question on Development Councils:

## NO CONSENSUS

**"For forty years no government could introduce these councils. It should have worked in the north and east like in other parts of the country. We will not agree to councils joining. There is strong opposition from the other parties at the all-party conference. We can't get consensus".**

So Sri Lanka, whatever the political constraints and compulsions, cannot at this stage anyway offer the "political settlement" which everybody from President Reagan to Premier Gandhi says is the only viable "solution" to a problem which is fundamentally of an ethnic and political character.

Sri Lanka's position is that which National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali outlined clearly in the exclusive interview he gave this writer on the eve of his departure to Delhi. He said: **"There's an integral connection between the two. (i.e. the**

**"political" and the "military")**. The point is that the more you succeed in curbing terrorist activities, the better the chances of a political settlement.... India can help the process greatly. India has the power to place curbs on the activities of the terrorist groups" (L.G. July 1).

If Sri Lanka could not meet Indian expectations on the issue of a political settlement (the UNP's maximum concession was the TULF's unacceptable minimum) India did not fulfil Sri Lankan hopes either.

When he was asked whether he had taken up the question of extradition with Mrs. Gandhi, President J.R. told the SUN "not officially". Explaining this, Mr. Jayewardene said:

"We know there are Sri Lankan citizens who have committed offences in our country in South India. Others are making statements in India and around the world to create antagonism against the government and encourage terrorism. It is not easy to deal with them. There are legal questions of deportation and extradition and which require court applications. We have made representations to these countries and they will consider what we have said".

The President said he had protested to India about the terrorists in Tamil Nadu.

"Terrorism is an international situation. One country must help the other. Terrorists move from country to country. The United Nations should take it up in an international basis."

When asked about the fact that terrorist groups have indicated they want to be part of the negotiations, the President pointed out that they had been offered amnesty. "They want to make the whole of Sri Lanka a Marxist state," he said.

## New phase

Does the end of jaw-jaw mean the beginning of a new phase in 'war-war'? If so, will any major power help us, directly or indirectly? President J.R. was



equally candid in his answers to questions put to him on this matter.

**Q:** Would you have preferred direct support from western governments rather than private companies?

**A:** We would have liked it very much.

**Q:** Why did they not give direct support?

**A:** Ask them.

**Q:** They refused?

**A:** Yes they refused to train them like in the past.

So Sri Lanka's strategic option of enlisting Indian support for actively 'curbing' the militant expatriate groups and scaling down violence without making any immediate political concessions to the Tamils (from the silent majority and the TULF to the "boys") has been closed. The direct outcome is a situation which I feel is best described as the diplomatic-military "containment" of Sri Lanka. This is the direct result of policy decisions founded on the balance-of-power considerations of the U. S. and the West (that is, the government's strongest and most

steadfast supporters) vis-a-vis India, the preponderant regional power or in the phrase the Chinese President used in his conversation with President JR, 'the subsuperpower'. Our most hopeful options have been severely circumscribed by these considerations, based on the perceived self-interest of the major western nations when they analyse and reflect on the fundamental nature of the Sri Lankan crisis (i. e. ethnic conflict) physically located as it is in the middle of the Indian ocean, and now integrally linked, geographically and politically, to Tamilnadu, a state in the Republic of India where the US and the West have critically important economic and strategic concerns.

The other critical factor is the Delhi Madras relationship in high-pressure, fast-moving pre-election conditions and how the relative importance of this connection will determine Delhi's decisions vis-a-vis Sri Lanka as we enter the new phase.

## Ideological split : PLOTE attacks new Eelam group

The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) has condemned the recently held New York convention describing it as "an attempt by some individuals to divert attention from the real nature of the Tamil struggle" according to the Madras daily "News Today" of July 7.

"The New York convention was organised by bourgeoisie elements out to discredit the objective of Tamil Eelam namely the socialist transformation of the society" PLOTE said.

In a press statement PLOTE said the convenors of the convention had used huge amounts of money to organise it in the "most imperialist country which is always opposed to national liberation".

The press statement said it was ridiculous for some individuals to organise the so-called convention in New York in the name of the Tamils. The first convention was described as Tamil Eelam convention. The second convention did not carry "Eelam" in its title. This alone would show that the con-

vention had been organised by 'shady elements' opposed to Tamil nationalism.

PLOTE said the individuals behind the diluted second convention were only "playing the game of CIA which is determined to crush Tamil resistance through devious methods and through its planted agents.

"The so-called Tamil International said to have been formed is pledged to securing the physical well being of Sri Lankan Tamils. The reality is this task cannot be achieved except in a socialist Tamil Eelam" PLOTE added.

PLOTE said the unauthorised attempts of individuals like Satchi Ponnambalam in drafting the so-called constitution of Eelam people's liberation "is motivated by a design to mislead the Tamils and create lethargy among liberation fighters. This will not succeed".

According to PLOTE the so-called New York Convention made some noise but otherwise failed miserably. This was because it was held as a showpiece at the behest of an imperialist power backing Sri Lanka government in its attacks on Tamils.



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# Student unrest and Open Economy

The four-party Opposition "alliance" (SLMP, LSSP, CP and MEP) lost the fight to get a Commission of Inquiry appointed to investigate the student unrest which swept the campuses and some high schools in June, which led to clashes with the police and the death of two students.

The four-party bloc made a commendable effort (and a clever tactical move) in initiating a dialogue with the Prime Minister Mr. Premadasa. And the PM's responsiveness was obviously appreciated by the opposition and the student community.

However the government dashed all hopes of both a public inquiry as well as a parliamentary debate with the argument that judicial inquiries have not been completed.

Behind the campus eruptions in recent years are much deeper causes which have very much to do with economic policies once

loosely described as Reaganite monetarism-cum-Thatcherism.

Social welfare is no longer a high priority. In real terms, the money spent on public health, education and other social services — the continuity in bi-partisan policy which made Sri Lanka a 'Third World model' in POLI terms — was steadily reduced. At the same time 'privatisation' advanced into the same field to help the sons and daughters of the affluent. The best example of course is the Private Medical School. And there's talk now of a private university!

In the schools things have generally been quiet. School children are not known, usually, to protest over their grievances; they are not always aware of them. With undergraduates, things are different. Every generation enters the university with starry eyes and high hopes — and then goes through the gradual process of disillusionment, especially in the non-profes-

sional faculties, and face teacher apathy, paltry library and other facilities and a totally unintellectual environment. Add to this the fact that student loans (the government cannot afford grants) have remained static in the last five years, despite tremendous increases in living costs, and you have a simmering and frustrated student population. The policy of all governments has been to look upon students as potential trouble-makers, to be treated firmly whenever they get out of hand. No thorough investigation has been made of their problems and the reports of the many commissions that have inquired into various aspects of the problem have been shelved. It is now reported that the government is planning to revise the Universities Act. The present one is liberal, somewhat, on paper; but has never really been fully implemented. Given present tendencies towards greater and greater regimentation the proposed Act is bound to be controversial.

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# An agenda for a non-violent solution

The United Nations University's **South Asia Perspectives** project, in association with the *Lanka Guardian*, held a seminar on "Ethnic Relations and Nation Building in Sri Lanka" on the 26th and 27th of May 1984. Nearly twenty five religious leaders, scholars, journalists, trade unionists and communicators attended this seminar

Sri Lanka currently faces the most profound and acute crisis in its post-colonial history. It pervades the entire social fabric covering the socio-economic structure, relations among classes and ethno-religious groups. This crisis has given rise to a condition of uncertainty at the level of ideology, morality and social consciousness. The serious deterioration of ethnic relations in the recent decades which has led to the incessant eruption of anti-Tamil riots in the recent years, culminating in the holocaust of July 1983 has threatened the country's body politic as never before. This has created an atmosphere of mutual distrust and hostility between the Sinhala and Tamil communities, given rise to a situation of confrontation between them and has brought the normal political process almost to a grinding halt.

In the meantime, in the North and the East, violent actions of the armed groups continue and the punitive actions of the state security forces have been intensified. The civil administrative apparatus in the North and East is being gradually dismantled to be replaced with military authority. With the resignation of the TULF members from the National Assembly, the North and East are virtually devoid of parliamentary representation. All these processes have contributed to the growing alienation of the North and the East from the rest of the country.

Against this background the seminar considered in detail, the

aspects of the current crisis in relation to the following broad themes: ethnic consciousness, measures necessary for confidence building, political reforms needed for ensuring a United Sri Lanka and the international context within which these aspects are embedded.

## 1. Ethnic Consciousness and Sri Lankan Consciousness

Given this situation, nation building in Sri Lanka is encountering almost insurmountable difficulties. For historical reasons, a Lankan national consciousness, as distinct from ethnic consciousness, did not become pervasive among the masses in Sri Lanka. A Lankan consciousness superceding the level of ethnic consciousness, however, was present among the urban elite strata. Sri Lanka's independence movement which was spear-headed by these elite groups failed to provide a stage for mass struggle which could have created a broad social base for the growth of such a national consciousness among the masses. Post-colonial Sri Lanka suffers from this historical failure, a failure to build up a mass base directed towards national independence from which a modern, secular Lankan consciousness may have developed.

The results of this historical failure are being compounded by the activities of various vested interest groups who stand to lose by the emergence of such a modern, secular national consciousness and gain by the consolidation of parochial ethnic consciousness. Among these vested interest groups are the mercantile elements involved in business rivalries, certain opportunist politicians bent on short term gains and traditional obscurantists, who fear the erosion of their ideological dominance and social privileges within the context of rapid social change.

In this context the Seminar formulated the problem and possible ameliorative measures as follows:

1. Both major communities have an ethnic consciousness with minority overtones — the Tamils seeing themselves as a minority within the country and the Sinhalese seeing themselves as a minority within the larger Tamil community of South India. This consciousness gives rise to perceptions of identity-threat, manifesting itself in mutual prejudices.

At the present time, Tamil consciousness initially shaped by its sense of unresolved grievances and injustices finds expression in a struggle against harassment by a state apparatus seen to be dominated by the major community; the Sinhalese consciousness is dominated by a fear of external intervention.

2. This level of consciousness in both communities is reproduced by the ideological apparatus of education, media, religions etc.

3. There is thus need for the development of a counter-ideology leading to the development of a modern Sri Lankan consciousness that would transcend ethnicity. A basis for such a step could be a movement for the eradication of national inequalities, and the acceptance of the principle of the equal rights of every citizen in the country

4. The armed actions of the Tamil youth and the repressive measures of the security forces are both products of a political system which has been determined by the rivalries of political leaders of all communities, the vested interests of economic elites and the ethnic prejudices of the people at large. The evolution of new, democratic political structures is therefore a necessity.

5. The plea for a United Sri Lanka and for a modern Sri Lankan consciousness is based on the belief that the joint historical experience of the communities in the country and their cultural affinities provide a foundation for the development of a common identity as well as in the belief



that values based on concepts of equality and social justice can remove the existing sense of grievance.

6. The committee recommends the creation of a permanent body, adequately staffed, that will devote itself to the promotion of the ideal of a United Sri Lanka based on justice and equality, fully conscious that it will be a long and arduous process.

## II. Measures to build confidence

In the present climate of distrust, confidence building measures are a pre-requisite for a non-violent solution to the national question. The Seminar accordingly proposes:

Confidence-building measures should be undertaken in the following areas:

(1) a systematic campaign of dialogues among people at all levels.

(2) the revitalisation of democratic political institutions and the strengthening of the rational processes in society.

(3) a mutual, step by step de-escalation and demilitarisation of the ethnic conflict, concurrent with honest efforts at reaching a non-violent political settlement.

(4) security for minorities in all parts of the island.

### I. Dialogues

A primary reason for ethnic conflict has been the failure of communication between the two major ethnic groups. To overcome this 'communication gap', a series of dialogues should be inaugurated:

Among those proposed are —

(a) Negotiation to be initiated between Tamil militant groups in the North and the East and in South India, and government leaders, policy-makers. Concerned citizens could explore possibilities of conducting preliminary dialogues with a view to opening up such negotiations.

(b) Dialogues on the ethnic question to be taken to the people by a large number of 'inter-communal peace groups'. These groups should highlight in

their discussions, the benefits which will accrue to all segments of society if a political solution based on regional autonomy is negotiated. Religious leaders, interested academics, opinion makers and members of the intelligentsia should play a leading role in initiating such discussions. There should be special consideration given to the planning of a 'nation-wide movement' — which would focus country-wide attention on the issues concerned and appeal to the emotional good-will of the people toward a non-violent political solution.

## 2. Democratisation of Political Institutions

Violence and Extremism are the reflections of the collapse of democratic institutions. In recent times there has been an unprecedented increase in lawlessness, the most invidious of which has been lawlessness protected by State power. This has led to an increasing sense of insecurity among all segments of society. Special measures must therefore be taken immediately to strengthen the democratic values and institutions of our society. Such measures should include:

(a) the holding of a free and fair nation-wide general elections.

(b) restoration of civic rights of all political leaders.

(c) a commission of inquiry to be set up to investigate the July 1983 events and discussion of full and fair compensation for the victims.

(d) removal of the proscription of the JVP and NSSP.

(e) re-employment of the July 1980 strikers.

(f) special appeal to the Press and the national media to provide objective and responsible coverage of the Ethnic issue with a special understanding of their own educative role in society and in dispelling myths and prejudices.

## 3. A Declaration of mutual De-Escalation of the Ethnic Conflict concurrent with honest efforts at reaching a non-violent Political Settlement.

A political solution, as opposed to a military option, is the only possible means for the resolution of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka. To create the necessary atmosphere for the success of such negotiation the following measures should be taken along with an honest attempt to reach a political solution:

(a) Amnesty for members of the Tamil Political Underground and the release of political prisoners.

(b) Removal of the Armed Forces from Jaffna and the Eastern province and the Removal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

(c) A special Tribunal to be set up to probe into allegation of violations of Human Rights in the North.

## Security

Since the July 1983 riots, the Tamils in the South of Sri Lanka continue to live in a state of physical insecurity. This insecurity is especially felt in the Tamil plantation 'enclaves' and in certain urban areas. Special measures should be taken to increase the sense of security in southern areas for national minorities. Sinhala minorities living in the North and the East should similarly be assured of security of life and property.

## III. Political Reforms

The existing political structures have not been able to accommodate the demands of the Tamil people for full political expression as an ethnic community. Neither have they been able to ensure to the citizens of the country as a whole that degree of participation essential for a democracy.

The Seminar took as fundamental to the very notion of a democratic society, two principles:

(I) the genuine exercise of political power by all citizens on a basis of equality.

(II) the preservation of the territorial integrity and cultural identity of the various ethnic groups in the country.

As a means of moving towards the realisation of these principles the Seminar proposes the creation of a political structure that will restore to the people their fundamental rights over the political



process. After discussing the broadest possible range of alternatives, from a federal system to District Development Councils with enhanced powers within a unitary structure, the Seminar arrived at the following consensus, laying down only broad outlines of the concept.

1. The State of Sri Lanka should be constituted of a number of Regions. Each Region shall be composed of a number of districts which are geographically contiguous and linguistically homogeneous which choose to come together to form themselves into a region. The present districts have been used as the basis of the proposed regions because they are the presently constituted administrative and electoral units, and because the concept of the province no longer has any concrete validity.

2. Each region shall have a regional legislature and shall be responsible for all the function of legislation and of executive and Judicial administration within its area of jurisdiction.

3. There shall be a Central government consisting of a legislative, executive and judiciary. The Supreme court will be a function of the Centre. The Central government will have control of finance, foreign affairs and defence; it shall also be responsible for the execution and maintenance of country-wide services such as railways, posts and telecommunications, harbours, which it will not be feasible to bring within regional administration as well as of projects which spread over a number of regions; in the latter instance it will act in full consultation with the regions concerned.

4. Below the level of the Region, there shall be developed at district and lower levels, a system of local authorities so that power is devolved to the basic levels of the community and to ensure that the rights of minority ethnic groups within such regions are protected. The local government authorities that were in existence earlier such as Village Councils, Town Councils are not sufficient for this purpose; the regions should therefore develop broadly comparable systems of local government, yet specific to their own needs.

5. The Central Legislative, regional legislations and all sub-regional authorities should be regularly elected by the people at free elections. The regional and sub-regional bodies should not contain any nominated representatives of the Central executive.

6. The Constitution of the country should be so framed as to provide for the proposed regional structures and to guarantee their continued, autonomous existence.

The Seminar believes that the proposed structure will broadly answer the needs of the various ethnic groups for political expression and control within a genuinely democratic framework.

#### IV. The International Context

The deterioration of ethnic relations in Sri Lanka, given the country's strategic location, cannot be dissociated from the web of international relations in general and the South Asian relations in particular. The presence of the State of Tamilnadu close to the North of Sri Lanka, sympathetic to the Sri Lankan Tamil community, has added a complex dimension to the problem. The Indian government has time and again reaffirmed its commitment to the preservation of Sri Lanka's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The Indian government has also indicated its support to Sri Lanka evolving a just and a humane solution to the Tamil ethnic question. Despite these reassurances, at the level of the global power balance, the super powers are unlikely to be passive observers to a possible change in the status quo of the South Asian region.

Against this background, the Seminar formulated its basic assumptions and proposals as follows:

1. The post-July period has witnessed the steady internationalisation of Sri Lanka's ethnic issue.

2. The problem also threatens to disrupt the island's post-independence foreign policy traditions which had helped to earn Sri Lanka a respected place in the international community and a position of not inconsiderable importance and influence in the non-aligned group and other Third World fora.

3. Whereas the cornerstone of the post-independence foreign policy structure was an Indo-Sri Lankan relationship, based on a high degree of mutual understanding, respect and accommodation, the unresolved ethnic issue and its many-sided consequences have had a dangerously disruptive effect on this crucially important relationship.

4. While the asymmetries of size, population and economics power in the regional context imposes on India a special obligation to help ensure the independence and integrity of each neighbour, and the stability of the South Asian sub-system in general any failure to reduce the growing misunderstanding and friction between Sri Lanka and India could only endanger Sri Lanka's own stability. Such stability is accepted as the prerequisite for economic advancement and social progress.

5. In conditions of instability, other conflicts and rivalries, both regional and superpower, could intrude in a manner that would further complicate domestic issues, weaken Sri Lanka's declared resolve to resist all forms of foreign interference and its political will and capacity to seek national solutions to national problems.

6. The widely and publicly stated view of influential sections of Sri Lankan opinion that domestic conflicts have led to greater U.S. involvement in Sri Lankan affairs, and a supportive Indian conviction that such involvement, direct or indirect, would be hostile to India's interests, have tended to aggravate the island's present discontents and thus undermined any united effort at seeking a political settlement of the ethnic issue.

(7) Any foreign policy decisions which adversely effect Sri Lanka's traditional role in the international and Third world communities, whatever the anticipated benefits of such decisions, will not help break the vicious circle of violence but could instead result in the escalation of the violence that now threatens the social fabric of the country.

(8) The shift of emphasis from serious political negotiations to

(Continued on page 22)



# Island centre of Ocean politics

Denzil Peiris

**W**hile Mrs Indira Gandhi accuses Pakistan of supplying arms to Sikh extremists, India's other neighbour, Sri Lanka, accuses it of conniving at military training being given to around 5,000 Tamil insurgents in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

The Tigers, as the Tamil guerrilla movement is usually known, openly declare that their violent tactics are designed to provoke the majority Sinhala into retaliation, politicising Tamil masses in the process and forcing an assault on the regime to make it accept the creation of *Eelam*, a separate Tamil state.

With elections due soon in India, Mrs Gandhi is reluctant to fetter her ally, M G Ramachandran, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. In the votes auction in Tamil Nadu, the highest offer of support for *Eelam* and the Tigers could also buy victory in the polls.

*Eelam* began as an internal dispute in Sri Lanka; now it has grown into a controversy in sub-continental politics, and it could be thrown into the arena of superpower and Chinese manoeuvrings in the Indian Ocean, as the Sri Lanka government looks for allies against the insurgents.

Such a development could threaten India's security. The bait, as India sees it, is Trincomalee, one of the world's finest natural harbours. On the east coast of Sri Lanka, it is in the area claimed for *Eelam*. Britain used Trincomalee as the port to dominate the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal when India was the centre-point for British Middle East and Far East policies. The port regains its old military value by virtue of the undeclared Sino-US strategic consensus to contain the Soviet Union, and Moscow's equal determination to weaken the chain of encirclement. The weapons on both sides are warships and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, an option that requires as many home ports as possible in the Indian Ocean.

US strategy has two levels. The primary target is to strike at Soviet Central Asia from Polaris submarines.

This and other Soviet targets can also be reached from the nuclear base of Diego Garcia, from permanent Indian Ocean carrier task forces and bases in Kenya, Somalia, and Arabian Sea islands.

The second is securing the resources of the Gulf and South East Asia for the western alliance, which would involve the Rapid Deployment Force, using bases in Oman, Kenya and Somalia as well as the task forces. Indian strategists allege that the pro-western government of President Junius Jayawardene, moving away from non-alignment, and Pakistan may also offer bases for the US fleet and the RDF.

The Soviet Union has broken out of the chain of encirclement, with bases in South Yemen and Ethiopia. It has also developed its naval power to counter hostile action against its lifeline, running through the Black Sea, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to the Pacific. Trincomalee could be turned into another break in the anti-Soviet chain.

A report of a recent seminar on India's security says significantly: "Beijing may seek port facilities in the (Indian Ocean) area. China has two nuclear submarines with missile tubes... if China were to develop submarine-launched ballistic missiles to keep a sea-based option against the Soviet Union, the Indian Ocean will assume strategic importance for China." China, too in other words, would seek home port facilities in the Indian Ocean.

Alarmed by reports that Sri Lanka may ask an outside power to protect it from the insurgents, Indian officials have warned that any attempt to sign an external military treaty will be considered a hostile act. While India does not see the superpower presence in the Indian Ocean as a direct threat, it does see the intimidating presence as hobbling India's freedom of international manoeuvre. India is also worried that the improvement of facilities for the RDF could lead to intervention that would affect it adversely; the Gulf is a critical area for

Indian oil supplies and a massive source of foreign exchange.

However, China's Indian Ocean presence is seen as directly anti-Indian, as an extension of Chinese attempts to encircle India.

**Given India's suspicion that Sri Lanka is inclined to respond favourably to US strategic initiatives in the Indian Ocean, a re-trained guerrilla movement on the island, backed by Tamil Nadu, could keep Colombo off balance. In the event of a military agreement with the US, oil storage and other facilities in Trincomalee could be sabotaged. But, with the increased use of the military road to Eelam, pro-Indian MPs and constitutionalists such as A Amirthalingam, leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front, have become irrelevant. The guerrillas are the pace setters. They are intensifying their campaign against the Tulf. V.Prabhakaran, leader of one Tiger faction, says: "...the flame of the revolution is fast spreading over Tamil Eelam. But the Tulf leaders are trying their best to smother the fire. In this sense you can term the Tulf leaders as betrayers."**

The Tigers are fractured into seven organisations, all confessing radical socialism. They also have links with Zimbabwe's Zapu and Zanu, and with the ANC, and most of the Tigers' foreign revolutionary supporters are tied to the Soviet Union. The congruence of the diverse radical trends in Sri Lanka's Tamil north may be a Marxist-oriented, pro-Soviet *Eelam*, which India would certainly not want. It already has two communist states of its own to deal with — Kerala and West Bengal.

Mediation between the Sri Lankan government and the Tulf would be Mrs Gandhi's best option. But how can she or the Tulf cage a Tiger?

— "SOUTH"



# From Sinhala Only to ethnic violence

Kumari Jayawardena

In the years up to 1950, various ethnic and religious groups, other than the most important group, namely, the Sri Lanka Tamils, had become the victims of attacks by Sinhala Buddhists of different classes. As described in earlier articles, the **Sinhala Buddhist bourgeoisie** had challenged Christian hegemony in the late 19th century; the **trading and merchant elements of the petty bourgeoisie** had let loose violence against the Muslims in 1915, and the **Sinhala working-class**, with support from sections of the **Sinhala urban petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia**, had shown hostility to the Malayalis in the 1930s. After independence, the chauvinist attitudes became further aggravated, with the **Sinhala bourgeoisie** taking the lead in depriving the working-class of Indian origin of both citizenship and franchise rights. In this case, racist policies were also class-biased manoeuvres to weaken the labour movement.

However, one minority, relatively untouched by communal and religious violence, had been the Sri Lanka Tamils, who in 1953, numbered 885,000 or almost 11% of the population of 10.6 million. This group had been in Sri Lanka for (probably) as long or longer than those calling themselves Sinhalese and were, on occasion, regarded by the Sinhalese, as 'sons of the soil'. In fact, it should be stressed that the early chauvinist propaganda of the Sinhala Buddhists had been directed mainly against **foreign** religions and **foreign** ethnic groups; the attacks had focussed on **alien** bureaucrats, traders and workers said to be denying the Sinhalese their just rights and opportunities for trade and employment. The targets were therefore **not** the Sri Lanka Tamils but the Bohras, Sindhis, Coast Moors, Malayalis and Christians who were directly pinpointed as 'enemies', as well as the British

administrators and missionaries who were accused of 'Christianising' the country, thereby endangering the Sinhala language and Buddhist culture. This was to change in the mid-1950s and for the next thirty years, the armoury of the Sinhala Buddhists was turned on the Sri Lanka Tamils who were rediscovered to be the 'traditional enemy' of the Sinhalese — an attitude which began as a cry of the petty bourgeoisie, but was to sweep all classes by the 1980s.

## Language as an issue

The language rights of the Sinhalese and Tamils, a question that came to the forefront in the 1950s, was the basic issue around which antagonism manifested itself. In Sri Lanka in 1953, almost 60% of the people (over 3 years of age) spoke **only** Sinhala and just over 20%, **only** Tamil. However, the Sinhala population amounted to 70% and the **Tamil speaking** population (Sri Lanka Tamils, Indian Tamils and Muslims) amounted to around 30% of the population. Apart from an insignificant number (0.2%) who spoke English only, the whole population was linguistically divided into two groups, Sinhala and Tamil speaking. (R. Kearney, *Communalism and Language in the Politics of Sri Lanka* 1967 p. 17)

The anomaly of continuing to conduct the administration in English, which was only understood by a fraction of the population led to campaigns for a more democratic language policy. Since a knowledge of English was confined to those who had gone to urban schools, the issue was also a class question. The privileged segment of the population with an English education, command the highest administrative and professional jobs and this group also dominated all political movements. In this context, the most aggrieved section was

the Sinhala and Tamil educated intelligentsia, who resented their exclusion, even after independence, from the prestigious occupations and became vociferous in articulating their views on the language issue.

In the colonial context, the agitation for Sinhala and Tamil language rights had been put forward by both the Left and the more nationalist elements of the bourgeoisie. When the Lanka Samasamaja Party was formed in 1935, one of its fundamental objectives included the demand for the use of Sinhala and Tamil in the lower courts, at police stations and in government departments. With the democratisation of political life through universal franchise and the expansion of education in Sinhala and Tamil, the language issue was frequently discussed in the 1940s. **The main political leaders of the time were willing to espouse the cause of both languages as official languages.**

For example, in 1944, **J. R. Jayewardena** had proposed that **Sinhala be made the official language** 'within a reasonable number of years'; this was amended to include Tamil and by 27 to 2 votes, it was decided to recommend that **Sinhala and Tamil** be made the official languages for school instructions, public service examinations and legislative proceedings. **S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike** in 1944 remarked 'I have no personal objection to both these languages being considered official languages, nor do I see any particular harm or danger or real difficulty from this'.

After independence, an Official Languages Commission was appointed to decide on procedures for making both Sinhala and Tamil the official languages. In 1951, after S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike broke away from the UNP to form the SLFP, he alleged that the UNP



had delayed action on the language question and the first manifesto of the SLFP declared :

It is most essential that Sinhalese and Tamil be adopted as official languages immediately so that the people of this land may cease to be aliens in their own land; so that an end may be put to the iniquity of condemning those educated in Sinhalese and Tamil to occupy the lowliest walks of life. (Quoted in Kearney, p. 65).

Although language was not the cause of any great agitation at the 1952 elections, during the period of Sir John Kotelawala's premiership (1953 — 1956), this question became the dominant issue of the day. Because of the build up of this agitation, there was a swift change from the progressive demand for the use of both Sinhala and Tamil, to a chauvinist cry for Sinhala to be the only official language, and political competition for the support of the masses played a key role in this process. Between 1953 and 1956, the 'Sinhala Only' cry swept the country and arguments about being 'swamped', this time linguistically, were used in favour of Sinhala being proclaimed the **only** official language, to the exclusion of Tamil.

Political parties felt obliged to take a stand on this issue and in some cases, to change their policies. The SLFP by 1955, had officially switched to a 'Sinhala Only' line; the UNP leadership was committed to parity and in 1954, Sir John Kotelawala visited Jaffna and reiterated support for this position; however, faced with the mounting agitation, the UNP also changed sides and by January 1956, had adopted a resolution that 'Sinhala alone should be made the State language'.

### Revivalism in a post-colonial period

In the early 1950's, Sri Lanka went through a new upsurge of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, based not only on the language question but also on religious fervour. The two issues, language and religion, were combined in the Sinhala mass consciousness not only by various mythic and symbolic factors, but also because Sinhala was the linguistic medium by which

Buddhism was 'reproduced' among the Sinhalese. The Buddhist resurgence during this period, was inspired by the preparations for Buddha Jayanthi—the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's death. The feeling of dissatisfaction that Buddhism was still not given its due place in independent Sri Lanka, was frequently expressed and this discontent was expressed in the famous report of the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress in 1956, entitled 'the Betrayal of Buddhism'. In this document, an open denunciation was made of political leaders who were "completely dominated by an alien outlook and values and estranged from their national history and culture".

Another publication reflecting this revivalist trend was **The Revolt in the Temple** by D.C. Wijayawardene (1953) in which **openly chauvinistic sentiments were expressed in a rambling book** of 700 pages, discussing all manner of topics; the main concern was however the 'sacred rights' of the Sinhala, re-emphasising some of the pronouncements of Anagarika Dharmapala forty years earlier :

The history of Lanka is the history of the Sinhalese race.... The Sinhalese people were entrusted 2500 years ago, with a great and noble charge, the preservation...of Buddhism....in 1956 will occur the unique three-fold event—the completion of 2500 years of Ceylon's history, of the life of the Sinhalese and of Buddhism (Revolt in the Temple, p.25 — 27)

Legend and superstition were put forward as historical fact, which went unchallenged by the Sinhala intelligentsia of the period:

Thus did it happen that, on the very day the Lord died at Kusinara, Vijaya of the Solar race and his band of seven hundred followers of Sinhapura, in pursuance of the design of the Master, and of the gods, landed in Ceylon and so helped to found in Lanka what thereafter came to be known as the Sinhalese race.

The birth of the Sinhalese race would thus seem to have been not a mere chance, not an accidental occurrence, **but a predestined event of high import and purpose.** The nation seemed destined, as it were, from its rise, primarily to carry aloft for fifty centuries the Torch that was lit by the great World-Mentor twenty-five centuries ago. (ibid p. 32 emphasis added)

However, the totally romanticised and unhistorical view of the past based on mythology, fantasy and racial 'destiny' is also seen in the author's references to the 'Aryan Sinhalese', alleged descendants of Prince Vijaya, who were 'Sinhalese' even before their arrival in the island :

**Most of these people were Sinhalese in heart and mind before they left their motherland.** They brought with them, within them, rather, the ripened fruit of centuries of civilization, literature and art, poetry and music; and Aryan culture was bodily transported to create and enrich the virgin civilization of Lanka. (ibid. p. 31, emphasis added)

The persistence in a post-colonial and presumably more enlightened era of prejudices and misconceptions that might have been excusable in an earlier age, is certainly evidence for the non-development of a rationalist consciousness among the majority of the Sinhala people.

### Class and Language

In Sri Lanka, language was mainly connected with **certain class interests of the petty bourgeoisie.** For the bourgeoisie, **swabasha** (i. e. the use of one's own language) was not an important class issue and their leaders had no particular reason to get agitated on the question; they were fluent in English and able to get by in Sinhala as well. The reactions to the language issue among the various political leaders showed that while advocating **swabasha**, they were not emotionally committed to the exclusive slogan of 'Sinhala Only'. For example, in 1944, **J. R. Jayewardene** was quite prepared to accept an amendment, adding Tamil to his proposal to make Sinhala the official language and up to 1954 **S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike**, as well as **John Kotalawela** had advocated the parity of official languages. It was only when language became a means of gaining political power that the leadership changed its earlier position on the issue.

**For the working people of Sri Lanka, too, language was certainly not a crucial issue.**



But **swabasha** policies were supported because of the need for communicating officially and otherwise in their own language, whether it be Sinhalese or Tamil and on some expectations that recognition of the mother tongue would mean better educational and job opportunities for their children. *But the agitation exclusively for 'Sinhala only' was neither the main preoccupation nor a particular demand of the Sinhalese working-class and peasantry, who had no reason to exclude the recognition of Tamil. In fact in August 1953, the working-class led a militant hartal on an economic issue, protesting the cut in the rice subsidy, an event which united the entire non-plantation workers of all ethnic groups and which also spread to the rural areas.*

To the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie, however, language was an issue that aroused strong emotions and had profound significance. This class included the rural and urban small proprietors and traders and those who were key opinion-makers among the Sinhalese intelligentsia — monks, writers, novelists, poets, journalists — as well as other articulate sections — school teachers, students and minor employees in the government and private sectors. In a society dominated by the Christianised English-educated, it was these sections who felt economically, socially and politically deprived and excluded from the various material privileges of society.

During the 1950s, the two connected issues of employment and education became very strongly interlinked to emerge as basically, an anti Tamil issue. Up to that date the members of the Sinhalese and Tamil bourgeoisie had amicably studied together in the universities, were colleagues in the higher profession; at lower levels they had worked alongside each other in the public service. This worked without too much antagonism as long as the system had enough space for both communities in the educational institution and in employment. The increase in unemployment in the early 1950s, however along with the rapid expansion of secondary education Sinhala and Tamil put a further strain on the employment situation and eventually on the higher

education system. These factors aggravated the tensions that were building up and language itself thus came to be seen as an economic issue.

### Teachers

Four main sections of petty bourgeoisie were particularly active on the language agitation. First, the Sinhala teachers, who in 1956, numbered 35,000, felt great resentment not only because they were paid half the salary that an English-trained teacher obtained, but also because they had low status in a situation where knowledge of English was linked to higher positions in the social hierarchy. In addition, the facilities and conditions in the English schools were far superior to those in Sinhala schools and this distinction which affected the performance of students, further aggravated the hostility against the English-biased education system. Howard Wriggins, who interviewed many Sinhala teachers summarised their views:

Most of these disadvantages would disappear, it was argued, if Sinhalese were made the sole official language. All the status that previously adhered to English when it was the 'official language' would become associated with the Sinhalese language and thence to Sinhalese teachers. They were, after all, the experts in Sinhalese culture and language, and if their proficiency received state recognition, naturally they themselves would rise in status. If Sinhalese were made the state language, differential pay, educational facilities, and job opportunities would no longer favour the English speaking elite. And, as it was seen from the village, vast numbers of government jobs would immediately be opened to their students if English were displaced and Sinhalese promoted. (Wriggins *Ceylon Dilemmas of a New Nation*, 1960, p. 338-9).

### Students & youth

The students in Sinhala schools and the unemployed youth educated in Sinhala, were also at the forefront of the 'Sinhala Only' agitation. The expansion in **swabasha** education in the 1940s had resulted in increasing numbers studying in Sinhala and Tamil. By the 1950s the problem of unemployed educated youth had become a political issue. The Sinhala students were particularly vociferous on the language issue in the hope

that a 'Sinhala Only' policy would lead to greater employment opportunities. This point was emphasised by Pieter Keuneman of the CP, who in parliament exposed the economic illusions created by the 'Sinhala Only' Act, which had given false hopes of employment to young Sinhalese:

We had one argument from the representative of the local Klu Klux Klan.... he made a statement that this is a bill to solve the employment problems of the Sinhalese.... Why do you think all these SSC students and others are stirred to such an extent?... many of them believe that immediately this bill is passed they will all get jobs, that their economic problems will be solved. (Hansard, 14 June 1956)

### Ayurvedic physicians

Another active pressure was that of the **ayurvedic** physicians who numbered between seven to ten thousand; they had occupied an important position in the traditional society, but had been relegated to a marginal position by the government's medical services based on 'Western' medicine. This group were particularly active on the language issue, believing that raising Sinhala to the position of the official language would automatically be associated with a restoration of traditional Sinhala culture, within which the **ayurvedic** system of medicine would receive its due place. Since the **ayurvedic** physicians commanded respect in the rural areas and also had an important hold on the people in their capacity as healers, the involvement of this group in language agitation served to bring the issue to the rural masses.

### The Monks

The most militant and articulate spokesmen of the petty bourgeoisie on the language issue were the Buddhist monks, who in the early 1950s had begun to prepare for Buddha Jayanti by organising themselves into associations and then into federations of bhikku organisations. Two of the large federations joined to form the **Eksath-Bhikku Peramuna** (EBP), designed to mobilise the monks to defeat the UNP at the elections. The main issues included those raised in the Buddhist Commission Report:

(Continued on page 24)



# The Religious Dimensions of the Ethnic Conflict

Gananath Obeyesekera

It is against the backdrop of this complicated situation that one must understand the importance of the religious revival of the late nineteenth century and their impact on Tamil and Sinhala identities. Briefly stated, the trauma of imperial conquest and the disestablishment of the two major religions produced in the north a Tamil-Hindu revival movement headed by Arumuga Navalar and in the south a Sinhala-Buddhist revival headed by Anagarika Dharmapala. Both reformers were educated in Protestant Mission schools and brought a kind of "this-worldly asceticism" (very much like the protestant ethic) into Hinduism and Buddhism. Both rationalized their respective religions, scorned folk beliefs and rituals, affirmed their respective great traditions. Navalar gave contemporary Hinduism a philosophical base in Saiva Siddantha while Dharmapala affirmed the ascetic and austere values of doctrinal Buddhism largely influenced by Western commentators on Buddhism. Both provided a philosophy and an ethic for classes that have practically no historical parallel in the past — a bourgeoisie and proletariat that emerged in the colonial and postcolonial periods. Dharmapala not only affirmed the traditional identity but opposed it to other identities — Moslem, Hindu, Christian.

The victory of Bandaranaike in 1956 was spearheaded by those who were directly or indirectly influenced by Dharmapala. Thus the post-1956 era saw the introduction of a new fundamentalist and militant Buddhism advocating the takeover of denominational schools to reduce the power of the Christian missions; the compulsory teaching of religion in schools; the

propagation of the intellectualist view of Buddhism as not a religion but a philosophy consonant with the spirit of science; and above all using Buddhism for political purposes. As a result, in our time, Buddhism had become the effective political and civil religion of the state.

In popular as well as doctrinal Buddhism, the Buddha was not a conventional deity that could either grant favours or affect the movement of history. He had achieved *nirvana*, the state of final bliss and consequently had no intercessory role in the affairs of the world. The internalization of this figure in the socialization of children was radically different from that of monotheistic religions or Hinduism where the deity is an active figure and punishes and rewards the transgression of religious morals. In traditional society as also nowadays, people worshipped the Buddha as the embodiment of Buddhist values but demanded nothing from him and expected nothing. Abstract Buddhist values such as *karuna* (universal kindness), *metta* (compassion), *mudita* (tenderness), etc. and the complex Buddhist philosophy (such as the theory of dependent origination) were never inculcated as abstractions. Abstract Buddhist ideas were concretized through the Buddha legend and the *Jataka* tales in which the past of the Buddha, his exemplary life, his self-sacrifice, his compassion for others, etc., were related. The values embodied in these tales were disseminated in various ways: through sermons, religious gatherings at temples and through popular books. Villages also staged many ritual dramas where these themes were enacted or sung; the opposed values of

greed and hatred were embodied in demonic figures of evil also a part of folk beliefs and rituals.

Thus what I have called the Buddhist identity — the idea that Sinhalese equals Buddhist and that the nation is a Buddhist one — was tempered by a Buddhist conscience which concretized the abstract values of the doctrinal tradition and gave a Buddhist humanism to traditional culture. With the reforms of the nineteenth century, Buddhist folk traditions were rejected by the Sinhala bourgeoisie. The *Jataka* tales were underplayed or rationalized. The emphasis shifted to the abstractions of the textual traditions highlighted western scholars. Buddhism was a compulsory school subject and parents left the onus of teaching Buddhist values to the school curriculum. The socialization of the conscience to be effective, must start in infancy and early childhood. This is rarely done nowadays. As for the ritual dramas they are nonexistent in urban society and are dying even in the villages. An absence or gap thus exist in the Buddhists conscience. People attempt to fill this gap in a variety of ways, through the inculcation bourgeois moral value imparted through a secular idiom or through meditation. But what happens with a lumpen proletariat in a city like that of Colombo, where 50 percent of the people live in crowded slums and only 25 percent of its children go to school? The gap must surely be wide. To continue the metaphor, the empty space in the Buddhist conscience is then filled with the predominant identity, Sinhalese equals Buddhist, reinforced by the hatreds and frustrations that slum dwelling breeds everywhere.



## The Institutionalization of Political Violence

One of the fascinating problems of population growth in Sri Lanka is the relative absence of huge cities on the scale of other Asian nations (excluding Burma). People seemed to prefer to migrate into villages, and up to the forties this was the dominant pattern. Through time, however, this had an unfortunate effect in destroying the homogeneous kin-based nature of village society, and producing a variety of social groups in village life competing for scarce resources. The spillover from increasingly large and heterogeneous villages centred in the little market towns scattered all over Sri Lanka, and of course into Colombo, the one large city in the nation. The trade in these market towns is controlled by Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim merchants. Racial violence was often sparked by business competition. Merchants employ the dispossessed proletarians of these towns to eliminate business rivals specially during periods of post-election political violence. In addition to these anomic market towns colonization schemes where surplus villagers were siphoned off to new irrigation projects generally in the north central and southern dry zones became increasingly important after independence (1948). The recruitment to the colonization schemes took place from crowded village areas. Settlers were often chosen by local members of Parliament, from party supporters. As a result settlements not communities were created. Often, in more recent projects, total outsiders have come in and taken over the political control of colonies. In addition outsiders from the city of Colombo and its suburbs have begun to infiltrate old villages as small-time merchants and entrepreneurs. Practically all civil disturbances — postelection riots endemic after the sixties, and race riots — have occurred primarily in these lumpen colonization schemes, in the anomic market towns and in the city of Colombo. These civil disturbances have never been a village problem — though it will soon become one as the villages change character.

One of the features of the politics of Sri Lanka since the six-

ties is the use made by politicians of all parties, of these dissatisfied urban people. Nowadays it is routine to use them to intimidate opponents or voters. Since the sixties it has been commonplace for ordinary citizens to use phrases like "so-and-so's (politician's) thugs." Furthermore, increasingly disturbing trends have occurred in the use of these elements for political "thuggery" (as it is called in Sri Lanka). These are not my inventions: they have been widely reported in the local press.

(1) Thugs who are at the service of politicians in power are linked on the local level to merchants, some of them genuine businessmen but others involved in a variety of illegal activities, the most common of which are *kassippu* (moonshine), distillation, marijuana cultivation and distribution, and felling of timber from forest reserves. In recent visits to villages in Sri Lanka I have come across members of Parliament serving remote areas actively involved in these activities, especially the latter two.

(2) Police who oppose these activities or prosecute these people can be, and often are, transferred out of the area or cowed into acquiescence of illegal activity. Several newspaper editorials over the last few years have underscored this trend. The result has been the demoralization and corruption of the police force. Village peoples I interviewed in many parts of the nation often mentioned that the Police are in the hands of the local M.P. or local undesirable. The view is widespread that some of the institutions of justice have become an alienating force turned against the people themselves.

The most disturbing trend in the institutionalization of violence occurred in the massive election victory of the UNP (the present ruling party) in 1977, in its relations with the trade union known as the *Jatika Sevaka Sangamaya* (National Workers Organization), hereafter referred to as J.S.S.

(To be continued)

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# Glimpses of Sinhala perceptions - (3)

Jehan Perera

**Interviews at Central Bank —  
22 March 1984**

**(1) Junior level Staff Officer  
(Buddhist — age 25)**

Tamils have equal rights. There is no discrimination. This Government has aggravated the problem by not handling it well. JR's time is past and he is to blame.

The armed forces can eliminate terrorism but they must be better equipped.

Regional autonomy is an acceptable solution because there is no reason why Tamils should not be able to decide their own affairs. The influence of Buddhist priests is insignificant. Most people are blindly against Tamils.

**(2) Junior level Staff Officer  
(Buddhist — age 30)**

Tamils have more than equal rights. For instance every Central Bank document is translated into Tamil and the Tamil translator at the (Head office level) is paid overtime whereas the Sinhala translator (done at the departmental level) is not paid overtime. No one reads the Tamil translation, yet it is done. Further the Tamils are disproportionately represented in government's service.

This government gave the Tamils a lot, but received only trouble in return. The SLFP did not give them much, except for the Import ban on subsidiary foodcrops, but the trouble started now not then.

Sri Lanka is a Sinhalese country, and Tamils should be kept in their proper place. Regional autonomy must not be given; the Buddhist Priests are very powerful, more than politicians.

**(3) Middle level Staff Officer  
(Buddhist — age 30)**

Tamils have less rights than Sinhalese. There is discrimination against

Tamils in government employment and university admissions. Because the MP's in power are Sinhalese, Job Bank jobs are the preserve of Sinhalese; out of approximately 300 entrants in the Central Bank last year less than 10 were Tamil. If there is any truth in the claim that Tamil examiners cheat, these ethnic proportions is the solution, but if not true then merit must be criterion.

The army cannot solve the communal problem. No where in the World has force succeeded other than temporarily. 1971 is not like now. The insurgents did not have training. In fact the terrorists do not think of themselves as terrorists, but as fighters against injustice.

Not in favour of regional autonomy. Precisely because the majority in the North are Tamils having a different culture, they will want to get more and more powers and finally separate.

Buddhist priests have no power, they are used by politicians as tools.

Cannot say whether Mrs. B. is better than JR because 1971 was different. JR does not want to take risks. He leaves it to others to solve problems, like he did in July, but then the problem grows worse.

**4) Middle level Staff Officer  
(Buddhist — age 42)**

Basic problem is unemployment in the North. Too many educated people there because Jaffna has 36 Grade I schools whereas Colombo has only 31. This group of unemployed educated radicalized the rest. Now the Tamils in the North suffer from both the army and terrorists.

There is discrimination against Tamils via the Job Banks and MP's

lists. When there were impartial selections only the educated got jobs and so lots of Tamils got jobs.

Against Regional autonomy, the territory will expand. Muslims might ask for it. Negombo and Puttalam Christians also might. All sorts of groups will make demands. The solution is to give more power to the army; give more jobs to educated Tamils; send Sinhalese to Tamil areas and Tamils to Sinhalese areas.

JR was in a good position to solve the problem, but it is late now. He should have been harder on the terrorists and given more powers to the army. But he wanted to be an International leader with "dharmista" policies. In 1971 Mrs. B. solved insurgency not because of her personal qualities, but because she gave full powers to the army.

Buddhist priests had lots of powers during time of Sinhalese Kings, but not now.

**(5) Staff Assistant  
(Christian — age 40)**

Tamils have a better share than equal rights warrant. They are hardworking.

There is no military solution because the army is not good enough. No Tamil will oppose separation. If terrorists are eradicated, no separation.

Regional autonomy will create added problems, what we need are good leaders. The present crisis is the fault of previous government's as well as JR.

Only the Buddhist priests prevent JR from giving in to the Tamils. JR is favourably disposed to the Tamils.

**(6) Clerk (Buddhist — age 50)**

Tamils have equal rights. They can start business even in Matara,



there is no discrimination in government's service. But now, after terrorism, there is a problem. It is the Tamils who are racial-minded not the Sinhalese. They can come here, but which Sinhalese can go there?

Against regional autonomy. That will create more problems. Besides why do they need it? This is a Sinhalese country. you can't go to someone's house and than ask for a part of it.

Only through political negotiation can this problem be solved. JR is not solely to blame although this problem exploded in his time.

Buddhist priests have no real influence. The politicians who are in power are the most important.

**(7) Clerk (Buddhist, — age 34)**

Tamils have equal rights. Look at Medical College, Universities, high government posts.

The terrorists are a small group and the army should be given more powers, but not to kill indiscriminately.

If all the districts get regional autonomy that is acceptable, but the Tamil areas alone should not be given it because they will think they are special and ask for more and more.

Buddhist priests get submerged by political forces. They only get into the newspapers, but no action is taken.

JR doesn't like to take decisions on his own. He wants everyone to share in the responsibility. "Dharmishta" policies lead people to violence because they don't fear punishment. Laws should be made more severe. JR is on the whole a better leader than Mrs. B, but she is straight and decisive, and so some people say that she is better.

**Interviews at firm of Chartered Accountants, Colombo — 22 March 84**

**(1) Accounts trainee (Buddhist — age 20)**

Tamils have equal rights. There is no discrimination. Look at the amount of Tamils in the higher

ranks. The Tamils have no reason for wanting a separate state.

No regional autonomy should be given because the Tamils should not be pampered. Not in favour of military solution, but army should be able to defend themselves. JR is too slow and he can't be trusted. Mrs. B will do a better job. The Buddhist priests aren't influential.

**(2) Accounts trainee (Buddhist — age 25)**

Tamils have equal rights. They even have their own universities. No discrimination in employment. Although many people think otherwise, all people should have equal rights in the country.

Regional autonomy isn't good because it will equip the extremists with more powers. And if given regional autonomy the Tamil masses will support the extremist in trying to separate.

Buddhist priests are influential, and when the political leadership fails the priests become more powerful.

There is no military solution. But neither will negotiations alone work. The solution is a combination of factors — military, cultural (inter-marriage) and distributing the Tamils among the Sinhalese and vice versa, and negotiations which include the extremists.

**(3) Chartered Accountant (Christian — age 30)**

Sinhalese — Tamil conflict part of a larger societal malaise. The new system of proportional representation and its abuse is the main reason for the stagnation of the situation. MP's aren't responsible to their voters; they can't cross-over and thereby make the government fall and force new elections and new solutions. The present system is a dictatorship without a dictator. The root of all our ills is politics and opportunism.

There is no military solution. Are we to shoot everyone?

**(4) Clerk (Christian — age 40)**

Although there is no discrimination in employment, by virtue of being a minority in a communally

polarized society the Tamils have less rights.

There is no military solution. But the Tamils will not settle for less than a separate state. Good leadership is needed.

Regional autonomy is dangerous. It will lead to greater demands. They might even form an army. But Tamils should be given equal rights as human beings.

JR can solve this problem. The anger of the Sinhalese against the Tamils has gone down after the July riots.

**(5) Senior Auditor (Christian — age 40)**

Tamils have no equal rights, like women. They have to come to terms with being a minority.

A political solution may not be possible because Tamil Nadu and Sri Lankan extremists will always pour petrol.

Not against regional autonomy if Sri Lanka is divided in to 4-5 districts so that no one can say that only the Tamils got regional autonomy or special privileges. Buddhist priests have more influence than the politicians and can provoke the people.

JR has waited too long to act, but he must stay on or else there might be chaos.

**(6) Peon (Christian, Sinhala — speaking — age 60)**

Tamils have equal rights. For example, see IGP, Ambassadors etc., They have taken full advantage of free education scheme started by C.W.W. Kannangara, a Sinhalese. They have no reason to agitate and they do so for selfish reason.

Communal problems cannot be solved militarily. The 1971 insurgency was different. For the sake of communal harmony regional autonomy is okay provided only a few powers are given.

Buddhist priests are more powerful than the politicians and in the past governments listened to them, but this government is not listening to them.

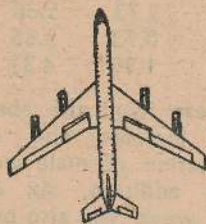


## Conclusions

- (1) The respondents have seemed more definite in their views, and less open to change, than the Balalla villagers interviewed earlier.
- (2) Although most of the Buddhists interviewed said that the Tamils enjoyed at least equal rights with the Sinhalese, the non-Buddhists (Christians and Muslims — no Tamils were interviewed) showed a greater degree of doubt on that score. Non-Buddhists to a greater degree than Buddhists, said that Sri Lanka was the country of all equally.
- (3) Although most Buddhists said that the Sangha was either powerless or less influential than the politicians, all the non-Buddhist respondents said that the Sangha was more influential than the politicians.
- (4) Although all the non-Buddhists were against a military solution most of the Buddhists, while opposing a military solution, stressed the need to give the armed forces more powers.
- (5) Although most of the Buddhists were against the granting of regional autonomy to the Tamils, the non-Buddhists showed a greater willingness to tolerate such a solution. The preferred solution is one of many regional governments and not just 1 — 2, so that the Tamils don't get something special.
- (6) (2) — (5) above indicate a greater sense of sympathy of non-Buddhist vis-a-vis problems of the Tamils, and also insecurity on the part of the non-Buddhist vis-a-vis the Buddhist majority. Of course such a conclusion is unrigorous and speculative given the ridiculously small size of the sample.
- (7) There is a strong perception that if terrorism is eliminated the Tamil problem will be solved. The casual relationship is inverted. Terrorism is seen as a parasitic external growth on the Tamil body and not a tumour, growing from within that cannot be surgically removed except temporarily.
- (8) The UNP, and JR in particular, retain substantial support among the respondents. Why, I don't know, because JR is seen as being slow, indecisive and unwilling to act on his own and is criticized for these shortcomings. His "dharmishta" policies are seen as words without substance. Perhaps because he is seen as a mature elder statesman in a leadership-starved country. And because his open economic policies are fundamentally more attractive than the closed.

(Concluded)

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# The April strike of the plantation workers in retrospect

M. Sinnathamby

Plantation workers won an interim wage increase recently after a strike that lasted for a period of nine days from 1st April, 1984. The strike itself came under severe criticism from some of the national newspapers. The striking unions and particularly the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) were accused of "ungainly and undisguised display of industrial blackmail", of "unpardonable callousness", of "gross betrayal of trust and a contemptible show of ingratitude" and of "a display of selfishness that must direct a great gust of national loathing in the direction of its architects". The strike called by the CWC was supported by all the other plantations trade unions, irrespective of political affiliations and ideological sympathies, the major exception being the Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union (LJEWU), a government backed union which claims to be the largest trade union in the plantations. It should, however, be mentioned here that the LJEWU was the first union to welcome the decision taken by the CWC to go on a strike and they even suggested a token strike. However, they withdrew from strike action two days before the strike was to commence. Though the leadership of the LJEWU decided not to join the strike, many among the rank and file did join the strike in defiance of the union decision.

The trade unions claim that they had time and again drawn the attention of the plantation corporations and the government to the plight of their members in the face of rapidly escalating cost of living. The CWC, it is said, made various representations and held discussions with the management during the last two years. But all these efforts to obtain a reasonable wage increase for their members failed owing to the indifferent and intransigent attitude of the management and the government. The CWC at its May Day celebrations held in Kotagala in 1983 resolved

on trade union action as a last resort should the employers fail to correct the wage anomalies within a reasonable period of time. Since this brought no response from the management side, the National Council of the CWC decided on 12th February, 1984 to resort to trade union action if its demands were not met within a period of a month. At the end of this period, they were left with no alternative but to call a strike. One week before the scheduled strike, the government came forward to implement the proposal for wage increase made by the JEDB in consultation with M/s Ernst & Winney, the Consultants. The offer made was as follows:

	Male	Female	Child
Tea	20.51	20.51	17.10
Rubber	20.76	20.76	17.10
Coconut	17.90	17.90	14.90

The resulting wage increases were as follows:

	Male	Female	Child
Tea	2.73	5.30	2.45
Rubber	0.73	3.65	0.57
Coconut	1.99	4.31	1.88

It is clear from the above that this wage increase also included the equalisation of male and female wages. In addition, six days of work per week was also promised. By offering the above wage increase and the elimination of the difference in wages between males and females, it seems that the government expected to avoid negotiations with the trade unions and hoped that they will abandon the threat to strike. But the trade unions were not prepared to accept this offer since the proposed wage increase fell far below their expectations. The failure, deliberate or otherwise, of the government to directly negotiate with other trade unions could have been another reason for this. The trade unions demanded the removal of all anomalies and disparities between the wages of

plantation workers and workers in the other sectors of the economy and pressed ahead with their campaign for a strike. The removal of anomalies and disparities meant an increase of the daily wage to Rs.35/-. Nevertheless, they were agreeable to a compromise formula based on the following lines:-

Immediate implementation of:

(i) The wages Board decision of June, 1982.

(ii) the unfreezing of the PWS and the grant of the Price-wage supplement in the manner suggested by the Consultants, Ernst and Winnie, to the two plantation corporations, i.e., the payment of Rs.2/70 as at the prices prevailing in January, 1984 and thereafter operating on a sliding scale. In the case of rubber, the existing collective agreement to continue, and

(iii) the setting up of a tripartite committee to examine the wages and related matters and report within a specified period.

Just before the strike was scheduled to take place, the government announced a further increase of Rs.1/- in the wages and this too was rejected by the trade unions. The government tried its best to prevent the strike, on the one hand, and to escape from granting a reasonable wage increase, on the other. After the strike began every attempt was made to break it but the workers firmly stood by their decision to continue the strike. When the government realised that it was futile to try to stop the strike, it initiated discussions with the trade unions under the chairmanship of the Minister of Plantation Industries. A formula was worked out at these discussions but it was not implemented. Instead, there was a call to return to work unconditionally. Looking back, it seems that the government was expecting and waiting for the strike to fizzle out. However, the



unexpected success of the strike action, the mounting losses to the economy (at a time when the tea industry was booming) and the disturbing developments in the North forced the government to come to a settlement with the striking unions. They were offered a wage increase of Rs. 2/- over and above what had already been offered by the government as an interim measure to call-off the strike. In addition, it was promised that the Presidential Sub-Committee that was to be appointed to go into the problem of wages and related matters would be required to submit its report by the end of May instead of September as had been announced earlier, so that further negotiations could commence without delay.

Besides the interim wage increase the plantation workers also won a long standing demand of theirs, namely, the equalisation of wages of males and females. This is a very significant achievement as it symbolises the recognition of the principle of "equal pay for equal work", irrespective of sex. It is, therefore, appropriate at this juncture to take a fresh look at the wages and earnings situation of the plantation workers, as it obtained before the recent wage increases were announced and to ascertain the legitimacy or otherwise of their claim for higher wages.

It is a well-known fact that the plantation workers are one of the most deprived sections of the working class of this country. This is clearly revealed by various socio-economic indicators relating to them such as infant, maternal and general mortality rates, expectation of life, literacy and nutrition levels, incidence of illness, housing and the availability of other basic amenities of life. In all these they figure at the bottom of the scale. They are indeed a socially and economically backward group deprived of many basic human rights enjoyed by the rest of the Sri-Lankan community. The rigid controls and the hierarchical structure of the plantation system has kept them as a captive labour force. The manager — worker relationship

still retains some elements of slavery which has contributed to a lack of upward mobility amongst them. It is against this background that the wages and earnings of these workers ought to be looked at.

Before the Second World War, the wages of plantation workers consisted of only a single component, a basic minimum wage. In 1945, however, due to the unprecedented rise in price levels, particularly of food items, the wage indexation principle was introduced. Under this system wages were supplemented by a "Special Allowance" that was designed to meet increases in the cost of living. These allowances were based on the basis of movements in the Estate Labour Cost of Living Index which was replaced by the Colombo Consumers Price Index in 1952. Prior to 1967, basic wages of tea workers were revised on a number of occasions mainly owing to pressure from trade union representatives on the Wages Board. However, since that year the basic wages remained stagnant due to the general repressive conditions that characterised the industry during this period. After 1979, basic wages were revised twice bringing them upto Rs.4/51 per day for a male worker (in tea) and corresponding changes were made in the wages of female and child workers. Although basic wages remained static since 1967 several allowances were added to the basic wages. In the payment of these allowances, however, the plantation workers were subjected to a number of discriminations. The instances of discriminations are so many that no attempt will be made here to enumerate them but to make brief mention about a few such instances of discrimination.

Tea estate workers are paid a cost of living allowance as referred to above. They are paid 3 cents for every 1.8 point increase in the cost of living index while workers in other sectors are paid Rs. 2/- per point increase which works out to about 9 cents per day on the assumption that they work for 22 days a month. In June, 1982 the Tea Wage Board after much

haggling adopted a motion to increase this allowance to 6 cents per point increase (worker representatives demanded 11 cents). This decision of the Wages Board was gazetted but the Board never met again to ratify this decision which thus remained in cold storage. The pattern of wages may vary for the various categories of workers, i.e. unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled, technical, clerical etc. But there is no justifiable reason to discriminate in the payment of the cost of living allowance. Much of the grievance of the plantation workers can be relieved by paying the same cost of living allowances paid to other workers since the COL of lower and middle grades of employees in regard to essential items of food, clothing, education, housing and medical is virtually the same. If at all, it is the plantation workers who have to pay more for some of these items (other than housing) because of the remoteness of most estates from urban centres. Immediate relief to these workers can be granted by rectifying the discrimination in the payment of COL allowance. In 1967, when all daily paid industrial workers were paid 40 cents as an interim Devaluation Allowance (IDA) the plantation workers were paid only 30 cents and that too after much trade union struggle. In view of the fluctuating nature of tea and rubber prices in the world market, a price-wage supplement (PWS) was introduced in 1970 for rubber workers which was extended to tea workers in April 1975. The PWS was to be paid on a sliding scale based on the Net Sale Average (NSA) prices for all mid-grown teas at the Colombo Tea Auctions. When the price of tea was Rs.6/60 per kg., PWS was determined at 30 cents per day. But since then the price has increased to Rs. 70/- per kg., and over but the PWS is frozen at the 1975 level of 30 cents, irrespective of the subsequent price increases. Had the scheme been extended to the present levels of the NSA, the allowance payable would have been very much higher than what is actually been paid.

(To be continued)



# The SLMP — another look

E. M. G. Edirisinghe

IN CONCEPTION and growth the SLMP is essentially an anti-establishment party. It is the only party in which the leadership is 'forgotten'; it is always referred to Vijaya's party, sometimes as the New party and never as Llangaratne's party or the SLMP. In fact, once I saw a poster at Kalutara announcing a SLMP meeting at which those listed to speak were Vijaya-Chandrika-TB in that order. Vijaya himself is anti-establishment, professionally, politically and personally. The strength of vibrant anti-establishment politics lies in its inherent mobility for rapid expansion and its ability to retain a sizable following throughout its existence; its weakness, the more important of the two lies in its inability to grow in depth and to encompass a vast spectrum of people graduating to maturity in experience and age.

Comparisons with previous mammoth rallies, produces other interesting results too. Two years after the most impressive rally in 1963, the senior partners of the ULF though further augmented by inclusion of the ruling party (SLFP), were defeated by the UNP. The UF rally just before the elections in 1970, though not so impressive, it scored a resounding victory over the UNP. JVP meeting in 1977, though an alltime big rally, couldn't collect even 300,000 votes at polls. So much for he rallies, their impact and the nature of what they reflect.

To assert that SLMP is the second force is highly imaginative and rather premature. The rank and file of LSSP and CP have lost so much courage and conviction, they feel politically strong, secure and encouraged only in the company of joint fronts and rallies. If there were separate rallies as last year, the result would have been almost the same. In contrast, the SLFP even when in power together with other parties, by its sheer mass base and strength, acted as if it was the government; hence, a separate rally is still a source of strength and courage.

Slogans calling for 'uprising' emulating the JVP were borrowed to fill the void created by the absence of the JVP. Thus the ULF rally provided a feasible and valid forum to give vent to sentiments of JVP vintage. When the SLMP tries to project a non-Marxist leftism, it only attempts to reflect the psychology of the electorate. Our electorate is essentially and basically anti-Marxist while at same time not anti-left too. Left associated with Marxism is anathema to them, today.

The SLMP, the youngest of the four parties (recognized within 2 months of formation) was mentioned last in all the publicity posters and communications. If Vijaya was bedecked with garlands, gives the impression that only Mr. Thondaman and Sellaraj could have given him a run!

For the SLMP supporters, SLMP is non-existent; there is no leader in Llangaratne. For them, it is only 'Vijaya' and that is the truth. It is his personal appeal and charisma that brought those thousands together. Whichever direction Vijaya may move, they too would follow him. At least, that is the position today. It is not an healthy development, politically, as there is no ideological base to sustain this vast following and lead them to confident future.

The presence of what has been described as disenchanting "dissident Premadasa constituency" at the purple section of rally is very significant since some people say that Vijaya enjoys Mr. Premadasa's implicit support. Class and social segments that appear to have clustered under SLMP are basically similar to those of the JVP; but without any ideological motivation for a 'struggle' whatever form it might take. Without its leader in their ranks, the JVPers who are a militant group and therefore cannot be contained, found refuge in Vijaya who too (for them) seemingly is of Wijeweera mould.

As at today, the SLMP could not be called a multi-class bloc; the peasantry is generally unmoved by the presence of either Vijaya or his party. SLMP is a left party in the sense that all Marxist-left parties have failed the people. The SLFP is generally identified as a (non-Marxist) left party. When the people, in disappointment move from right to left, they always move to a non-Marxist left. The Marxist-left is trusted to the extent of electing a few members to be at the vanguard of agitation or as allies of a 'trusted' and 'tested' national party. The biggest drawback for the SLMP today is that it, (Vijaya included) is not 'tested' yet to be 'trusted' in a Front which includes the Marxist-left.

Vijaya had dropped Bandaranaike policies from his speech not because he was on a platform together with 3 other parties of which middle path is neither the ideological nor the propaganda base, but because the Bandaranaike policies are identified with the Bandaranaikes (that is Mrs. B and Anura — Chandrika is now converted to Mrs. Kumaranatunga).

There is nothing phenomenal in the rapidity with which the SLMP expanded in so short a time. Prior to his entry to politics, Vijaya had a tremendous fan-following who almost deified him. Politically, he had the rare advantage of being married from the illustrious Bandaranaike family, and thus he was able to establish his credentials in national politics in Sri Lanka. He graduated from a SLFP platform at a time when its leadership was depleted. Then there was the JVP base battered at the elections and banned from national politics looking for a radical militant young leader backed by 'better credibility' than what Wijeweera had, Vijaya simply walked into his ready-made role. Nobody knows about any other leadership in the SLMP; they don't know what are its policies or its

(Continued on page 24)



# TYPES OF CRISES

Tara Coomaraswamy

Marx indicates a further source of crisis due to over-accumulation: exhaustion of the industrial reserve army. In his discussion of the development of capitalism Marx points to the continual creation and re-creation of the industrial reserve army ('artificial over-population'). It is thus no contradiction to find 'over — production of capital' side by side with 'relative over-population'. (This accords with the pattern of migration in Europe from 1870 onwards; there was net emigration from industrial centres to North America, South Africa, Australia, etc. alongside capital export. This process was halted by the end of the century).

The circumstances which increased the productivity of labour, augmented the mass of produced commodities, expanded markets, accelerated accumulation of capital both in terms of its mass and its value, and lowered the rate of profit — these same circumstances have also created, and continually create, a relative over-population, an over-population of labourers not employed by the surplus capital owing to the low degree of exploitation at which alone they could be employed, or at least owing to the low rate of profit which they would yield at a given degree of exploitation.

As capital expands, the reserve army dries up, and unlike other commodities, supply is relatively inflexible or inelastic; additional capital can't flow into the production of fresh labour Power; this frustrates the operation of the law value. The price of labour power rises and stays high.

The attainment of full employment thus inevitably heralds a future fall in the rate of accumulation. As wages are bid further up by competing capitalists withdraw inefficient equipment from production and are inhibited regarding new investment. Realisation problems occur, and the "accelerator" does the rest in bringing about the inevitable slump.

The increasing failure, by the early '70s, of Keynesian policies

(in staving off crises in the West), resulting in unemployment and idle capacity, suggested that the problem lay not immediately in the realm of consumption or realisation, but in the realm of production. Artificially created demand brought idle capacity in to use but little expansion of the productive forces, since production wasn't profitable due to high costs of labour. To the extent that Keynesian policies stimulate employment and purchasing power, they worsen the problem by exerting pressure on the rate of surplus value. They are also quite as likely to attract fresh imports as to stimulate local production. Keynesianism is therefore capable of relieving "under consumption" only at this superficial level; it can provide enough stimulus to keep the capitalist system going only in situation where labour is still fairly plentiful. As Marx himself pointed out in his criticism of the theory of lack of effective demand (or as he refers to it, 'solvent consumption'), crises are usually preceded precisely by a period of rising wages.

Therefore continued slump may have contradictory effects for capitalists by cheapening labour costs, but reducing purchasing power for new output in consumption goods industries, which in turn discourages investment in capital goods industries. To remedy this situation, both production and realisation problems have to be attacked simultaneously. For the individual capitalist, there would be no contradiction, since the reduced purchasing power of his labour would be a fraction of the total; their lower wages would improve his prospects for increasing surplus value without reducing the prospects for realising it. His ideal would be a situation in which his workers' wages were as low as possible and those of his competitors'

workers as high as possible in order to maximise markets.

Applying this principal at the international level, capitalists in one country would strive to depress their costs below those of their competitors' and expand production profitably by utilising foreign markets. Pressure would thus be brought to bear on the state to hold wages down and to adopt policies which would — in direct contradiction to Keynesian ones — generate unemployment by reducing state expenditure.

The logic of this was, in effect, put into practice by most developed economies in the '70s. However, the oil crisis and subsequent OPEC policy has created an "artificial" crisis (in which depletion of resources is overlaid by political factors) Accumulation is discouraged by the artificially high cost of one factor of production and the potential impact on inflation of expanded production. The link between growth and inflation operates equally to prevent expansion of production to take up existing slack in productive capacity.

It is safe to assume that in the absence of such an artificial conjunction of factors, the conditions discussed above would hold good — i.e., the link between rising real wages, expanded production and expanded markets.

In general it may be concluded that if the FTRP/OCC is (as has been said) the disease of capitalism's old age, the FTRP/RW is its death-knell, signalling the reaching "objective" physical limits to accumulation merely signify the inability to accumulate at a given rate of Profit).

This is not to propose a mechanical "breakdown" of capitalism, i.e., revolutionary change only attained with the apocalyptic moment when labour worldwide



would be absorbed into the capitalist system through imperialist expansion. The importance of crises lies in the socio-political forces released by disruptions to the accumulation process. The particular conjuncture capable of "over-throwing" capitalism cannot be mechanically determined.

According to Fine and Harries, crises are not... the simple effect of actual falls in the rate of profit which are themselves the simple manifestation of the TRPF. They result from the fact that accumulation inevitably causes both the TRPF and the counteracting tendencies to develop in such a contradictory way that smooth accumulation is impossible.

They referring here to the FTRP(or TRPF)/OCC. However, the FTRP/RW represents a more significant long-term check to accumulation than the former in itself. Moreover, rising OCC cannot be the starting point of an analysis of the falling rate of profit; it comes into operation after rising real wages. It is therefore one link in a casual chain which both begins and ends with rising real wage; but the TRPF/RW is in turn linked to underconsumption, as argued above. The accumulation process involves the operation of all three tendencies, and counter-acting tendencies, with a break at each round, and a leap into a new enlarged circuit of production and exchange relation.

It may be argued therefore that while crises are caused by interruptions to the production process through the falling rate of profit, their resolution is conditional upon expansion of exchange relation. Hence the TRPF (whether caused by rising OCC or rising real wages) operates concomitantly with a tendency to underconsumption. This is not a tautology, since the alternative would be a disproportionality argument of the type proposed by Tugan-Baranovsky: constant expansion of means of production with no reference to consumption requirements.

The ultimate reason for all crises always remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses as opposed to the drive of capita-

list production to develop the productive forces though only the absolute consuming power of society constituted their limit.

### Summary and argument

It considered impossible to separate "over-accumulation" from "underconsumption" in the long run though it may be possible to isolate particular factors causing a fall in the rate of profit in the short term (e.g. higher costs of raw materials, rising wages, etc)

Underconsumptionism is a recurrent and fundamental tendency which constitutes the real check on capitalism's extended reproduction. The possibility of generating expansion solely "internally" by raising real wages is denied.

Which tendency is the causal factor in imperialism? The answer must be: all three(FTRP/OCC, FTRP/ RW, underconsumption) at different stages of capitalism in the metropolitan countries, and within these stages, in cyclical fashion. (A periodisation will be attempted in the next chapter, arguing the relative importance of individual tendencies at particular stages of development of capitalism and world economy).

(To be continued)

### An agenda...

(Continued from page 8)

military or quasi-military options must inevitably result in the militarisation of political communication, political life and society. And increasingly all-pervasive pre-occupation with 'security' will compel policy choices that seek to serve the needs of security, as perceived by the Political Establishment, at the expense of development, democracy and national independence. Such choices will involve the diversion of scarce resources from economic growth and social welfare to 'security'.

The obsession with 'security' will result in still greater restrictions on political discussion and activity, and the free exercise of fundamental rights.

Sri Lanka's already extensive reliance on external sources of aid will be further widened to accommodate a new area of dependence — military aid, the international arms trade, foreign 'expertise' and new technology.

In the event of a total failure to achieve a negotiated political settlement soon, the cumulative effects of these already discernible processes will see the Sri Lankan state acquire some of the structural characteristics of 'the State of National Security', a familiar Latin American phenomenon.

As the Latin American experience demonstrates, such tendencies will not strengthen Sri Lanka's national security and national interest.

On the contrary, such changes will only swell the sources of social discontent and political instability, and enhance the threat to national security and national interest. Finally, the overwhelming evidence of Third World experience proves that such policy choices and priorities reinforce, not the security but the insecurity of imperilled power elites.

The Seminar expressed its confidence that despite the profundity of the crisis, given the good will of the people of Sri Lanka, if wise, rational and effective steps are taken by the political leadership, we would be able to surmount the present crisis and create the political structures that would ensure a secular, democratic and a United Sri Lanka in which all ethnic and religious communities will find full and harmonious expression of their identities.

(This report was prepared by four committees appointed by the Seminar participants among whom were Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratnasara, Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, Mr. Chandra Fonseka, Professor K. Sivathamby, Mr. Charles Abeysekera, Mr. Meryyn de Silva, Dr. Kumari Jayewardena, Dr. Ponna Wignaraja (UNU), Dr. Newton Gunasinghe, Dr. Radika Coomaraswamy, Mr. Laksiri Fernando, Dr. Bertie Gajameragedera, Mr. Dayan Jayatilaka, Mr. Jehan Perera Mr. Sunil Bastian, Mr. N. Balakrishnan, Ms Tara Coomaraswamy, Mr. P. Devaraj, Mr. P. Manikkam, Mr. J. Senartne and Mr. M. Sinnathamby).



## Nationalism, patriotism and racism

Qadri Ismail

'Obituary' is similar in context and ideology: the dead body of a Lankan is brought back from Arabia. It would appear that he was flogged to death, though the poet omits to mention why. Now I have an antipathy myself, a strong one, to rigid Quranic justice, which I see not only as inhuman but anti-human; but it must also be mentioned that the code requires eyewitnesses and guilt beyond all doubt before the application of such punishment' and is carefully practised in the Middle-East (unlike in revolutionary Iran or fascist Pakistan). The ideology of poems like this is especially pernicious, being one-sided emotive and dangerous. The crux of 'Obituary' is this:

Son of this soil  
Exported from your motherland  
Because she was too petty to  
hold you  
And contain that craving you  
had for 'foreign things'.

The poor man was killed by those bloody Arabs. The poem is intensely, unrealistically and unconvincingly (in the poetic sense—it develops no rational or logical argument) patriotic; this, especially in the present context, is most dangerous.

This, very strong, patriotic streak runs through the entire volume. In the opening poem she looks down 'From Balana' and cannot forget:

How,  
For one timeless moment  
My proud unbeaten race  
Held an empire at bay  
And sent tremors  
Through the Western sky.

The last two lines are an exaggeration, possibly demanded by her pride.

The reactions of such a sensibility (Sinhala Buddhist merchant-capitalist, as will become apparent shortly) to the racial conflict can be predicted. There are two poems on the subject. The first, 'That night the air split in blood' is short enough to quote in full:

That night in August 1977  
the air split in blood,  
as men reverting to original  
bestiality  
bared their fangs; tore limb from  
limb  
the streets crimson with innocent  
blood,  
the wraith-like cries of women in  
agony.  
The meditating Buddha enclosed  
and left to the curious tourist,  
This baliya of genocide to  
propitiate the devil.

This must be read in conjunction with 'I will not forget Dutugemunu', which opens:

Don't ask me to forget  
Dutugemunu  
Dear brother of the North,  
For I cannot and will not;  
You are asking me to forget my  
dreams  
My glorious youth and twenty  
hundred year  
Of gold-inscribed history.

In the middle section she accuses both sides of blood letting, then ends:

...Killing is not our creed, loving  
is:  
So here are my hands  
Held together in honourable  
'Na-masthe'.  
If you like we will purify our quarrel  
And build another, bigger,  
Dakshina Tupa.

But you shall not hold the kris  
knife over me  
And say "love me"  
I tell you my blood is pregnant  
With that which flowed in the infant  
Who bared his head to death  
And cried 'I will show you how to  
die.'

It is up to you whether we be  
friends  
Equal, not a condescension grudging  
By a sense of pseudo-intellectual  
superiority,  
Pride born of money made in  
foreign climes.  
A heart reaching out to another  
heart  
Because we are one stream  
Of one source and catchment area.

Wijeratne is obviously not a racist, the intention of the poet is obviously to be conciliatory and she seems sincere; the image she chooses to end the poem with (which could only have been written in post-Mahaweli project Sri Lanka) asserts a common humanity which cuts across race — but does not follow from the logic (both emotional and intellectual) of the poem (just as much as "Dear brother of the North" does not follow from "Don't ask me to forget Dutugemunu"). The poet, it appears, is fighting against everything Sinhala in her to make these concessions. That is to say, Wijeratne may be no racist, but is representative, even assertive, of that middle-class Sinhala nationalistic fervour which gives racism in this country a firm backbone.

All the composite elements of that attitude are present in the poems: the constant harking back to past grandeur ("my dreams/My glorious youth") in contrast, the shame of being subordinate, today, to newer, but richer cultures ("we owe...money"); the naively unyielding faith in a pristine Buddhism ("killing is not our creed, loving is") despite an awareness — never pondered upon for fear of consequence — that Buddhism here, when not a tourist attraction ("the meditating Buddha...left to the...tourist") only inspires "patriotic frenzies of plunder and pillage"; a tremendous and ironic belief in the race ("My blood is pregnant with... the infant who...cried 'I will show you how to die') — ironic because it is the mob (whom she has previously despised) "reverting to original bestiality" who are brave; and above all, a refusal to face the facts — there is no acceptance of responsibility for the massacres ("If you like we will bury our quarrel" and "It is up to you whether we be friends" — which follow from those "reverting to original bestiality" not being named).

Wijeratne's poetry is mediocre: her command of the technical resources of the language available to the poet is not good enough to enable her to communicate



effectively. But I have examined her first volume of verse at length—for reasons that would have, I hope, become obvious by now. She articulates, however ineffectively, the attitudes of a considerable section of public opinion in Sri Lanka which, if unopposed, would lead us to disaster. That is to say, if we are to progress, we will have to forget Dutugemunu; or, at least, interpret him less positively: he is a burden from the past we have not learnt how to handle.

This is why the responsibility, to society at large, of the Lankan poet and critic must be redefined today. Too many practising critics here are content merely to a 'practical criticism' of the work under scrutiny; they will demonstrate, to the best of their ability, what the work does, and how, and how successfully, and leave it at that. Apart from the fact that these critics ignore the ideological dimension all literature, being the product of a certain society at a certain time, has, we in Sri Lanka today cannot afford the luxury of "appreciating" literature, "refining" our sensibilities and falling back on "culture" — which, whether ancient Lankan or colonial British, is relevant to an understanding of our current problems but do not indicate, since they represent the past and not the future, where the solution lies.

For too long the Lankan creative writer in English has been preoccupied by "universal" themes (which reinforce, and are reinforced by, his use of "Standard" English); and the Lankan critic has acquiesced. What is so utterly wrong about such an attitude is that it fails to realise that, for instance, European poetry (which most of our writers take as model) arose out of specific environmental and cultural pressures; the pressures on a Lankan are very different. Today we live in a country that can erupt into senseless racial violence at the slightest provocation. No poet can be indifferent to the human suffering this can cause; and the work of any Lankan writer must vibrate with this commitment — to a society where all Lankans, regardless of race or class, can live with dignity. Since poetry is my immediate concern, I will conclude with what must be an axiom: that no Lankan poet, seeking to evolve through his work a Lankan

identity, can hope to do so without an equal commitment to the Lankan language. I do not expect miracles from them — not in any language and certainly not in English in Sri Lanka; but it can help create the new attitudes necessary. This would require a little extremism.

(Concluded)

## The SLMP. . .

(Continued from page 20)

programme of action. They are of the opinion that Vijaya is relentlessly anti-establishment and unreservedly anti-UNP. Mrs. B's present inability to lead an election campaign, the ultimate test of all politics, is a crucial factor in this new development unless Anura comes out as a leader to take over the defacto electoral leadership in the struggle.

Cry for "revolt" at the SLMP section dangerously puts it on the same platform with what the JVP was. The JVP was compelled to 'react' within less than a year of formation of the UF government and ended in total disaster. It shows the ideological limitations and boundless emotionalism that had crept into the SLMP ranks. Intellectual incapacity (because of vindictive politics) of the leadership to contain their heated emotions and the folly of introducing 'revolutionary' sentiments without grounding the membership disciplined indoctrination, would make them one day to overtake the leadership through overzeal or turn to right in disappointment as in 1971.

"Workers and peasants governments" have been promised for the last 40-50 years; we are yet to see it even after the Marxists forming a part of some regimes of the past. No party can come to power by a firm resolute pledge to a workers and peasants (atleast in the electoral process) themselves do not want such a government; they always look upon for a government by non-peasant non-worker aristocrats, capitalists and bourgeoisie intellectuals. In fact they look for benevolent capitalists.

## From Sinhala. . .

(Continued from page 12)

the restoration of Buddhism through state recognition and patronage, educational reforms and privileges to Buddhist properties as well as the promotion of Buddhist values through censorship of obscene books and films and the banning of horse-racing and the consumption of alcohol.

In addition, the monks organised agitation on the language issue and were the main spokesmen for the 'Sinhala Only' campaign. The monks felt keenly on this issue; they were educated in the Sinhala and its classics as well as in Pali, and were accepted by the Buddhists as the protectors of Sinhala culture. But they had neither recognition nor influence in areas dominated by the English-speaking elite, namely the administration, higher education and politics.

The resentment of all these sections of the Sinhala petty bourgeoisie against the English-educated was particularly strong and their campaign, which was focussed against the UNP as the party in power, included the charge that its leaders were Westernized and Christian in culture, much being made of allegations of degenerate habits, drinking, gambling and beef-eating among the ruling classes. Such themes of 'immorality in high places' (reminiscent of Dharmapala's fulminations of an earlier epoch) always evoked immediate responses by playing on the resentment and envy of those middle groups in society who delighted in exposing, in the rich, those 'vices' they could not themselves indulge in, and which they defined as un-Sinhala and un-Buddhist. The Sinhala people, once again fell prey to false consciousness; the capitalists were attacked for their language, religion, life styles and 'wicked' habits, rather than for their exploitation of the working people, minorities were seen as the enemy and the way was set, once again, for Sinhala petty bourgeoisie to forget its radicalism and to go rushing down the slippery path of chauvinism under the banner of 'Sinhala Only' — dragging the country into the mire of ethnic violence.

(To be continued)



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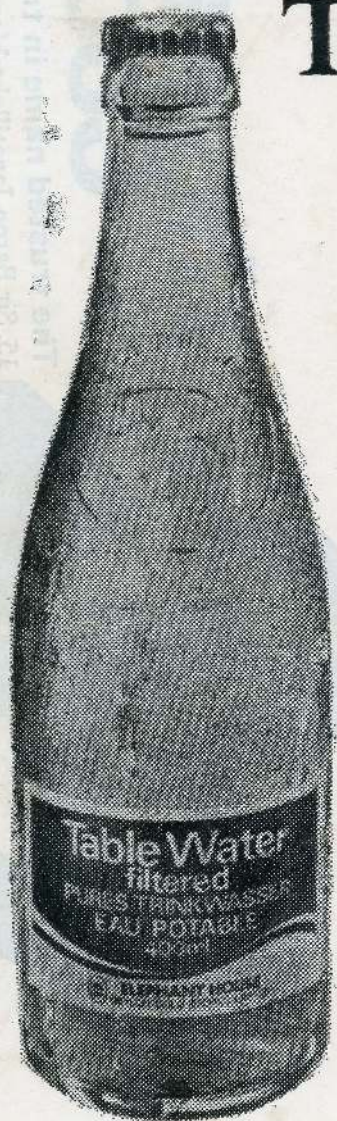
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