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# THE COMING CRISIS IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

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K. V. ...  
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Price 25c



V. Kandasamy of the Medical Department fell to the Police bullets on 5th June 1947 during the historic general strike.

**T**HE Public Servants in Ceylon, or rather those public servants who serve the public, and not those at the top-rungs who batten at the public expense, are today in the slough of despondency. The Government treats them with abject indifference while the public considers them to be over-pampered. The Press, monopolised and mainly confined to the Capitalist class, extends unreserved support to the Government. The Public Servant on the other hand is left defenceless against the calculated onslaught

by the Capitalist Press, the reactionary Government and a misinformed public. When the Opposition in Parliament, mainly the Leftists, take up the cause of the Public Servants, then the entirety of the Press and the Government join in the shrill chorus—"the Public Servants are pawns in the hands of self-seeking politicians."

These are mere deceitful devices to obliterate the real factors and forces that account for the repression of Public Servants both in the economic field and in the political field. They follow a certain pattern which is not wholly unrelated to the social and economic structure of the Capitalist Society which exists in Ceylon today, and which is indispensable if the existing system is to be buttressed in the face of ever-creeping decay and ultimate demolition.

In the following pages an attempt has been made to analyse succinctly and concisely the various factors that contribute to the parlous position of the Public Servants.

## REPRESSION

**G**OVERNMENTAL repression of public servants during the last few years has increased in intensity with the fall in the standard of living of public servants. Indeed it would be a curious phenomenon if it were otherwise, for a violent depression in their standard of living is possible only under conditions of violent repression. It is an elementary law of relations between employers and workers in capitalist society, amply illustrated in the history of all capitalist countries, that the degree of repression varies directly with the degree of exploitation of workers.

The more recent repressive measures of Government, such as the Trade Unions Amendment Act, AR 208B and AR 249 have sought to defeat the very purpose for which Trade Unions exist. What is the purpose of a Trade Union? As defined in the Trade Unions Ordinance (Cap. 116) it is an association or combination of workmen (or employers) having *among its objects*, the regulation of relations between workmen and employers. The regulation of such

relations does not exhaust the purpose and functions of a Trade Union, although Trade Unions often confine themselves to it, by a self-imposed limitation. But in the case of Trade Unions of public servants, the law does set very narrow limits to the objectives of Public Servants' Trade Unions.



Mr. T. B. Ilangaratne former President of the G.C.S.U. who was dismissed from Service for presiding over a Trade Union Mass Meeting in 1947.

What is the existing relation between employers and workmen the regulation of which is envisaged by the Trade Unions Ordinance? The relation is determined by the functions of workmen and employers in the economic system. The workmen produce the wealth of society. The employers appropriate all that wealth, by a claim to private property in the means of production, recognised and enforced by the laws enacted, directly or indirectly by them, and pass on to the workmen the minimum fraction of that wealth that will induce them to remain in employment. Workmen in capitalist society, incidentally, do not need much inducement or persuasion to remain in employment. The relation between employers and workmen under this economic system is therefore bound to be one of exploitation, and the Government has been forced to recognise after years of agitation by workmen that their relations stand in need of regulation.

In a capitalist society, the relations between Government and its employees cannot be different from similar relations in private enterprise, for Government cannot pay salaries in excess of salaries for similar employment in private enterprise without seriously dislocating the labour-market, the price structure and indeed the entire economic system. All talk of the Government being under obligation to pay higher salaries than private employers as a model employer arises out of the ignorance of the nature of the capitalist system. Indeed, Government being the bulwark of the capitalist system, is under obligation to private employers to set the tempo of relations between employers and workers, and to pay the minimum possible salaries to its employees, so as not to embarrass private employers. It is therefore clear that the agitation of public servants for higher salaries within the existing social framework, and their agitation for higher salaries detached from and uncoordinated with the agitation of other Trade Unions, have very little merit to recommend themselves. It is therefore not surprising that their agitation for higher salaries during the last several years has been totally barren of success. On the contrary, their living standard has in spite of persistent agitation, declined to most alarming proportions.

Before a Trade Union attempts to regulate the relations between employers and workmen, it has to determine whether the existing relation is a satisfactory one; whether employers as a class, should remain employers in perpetuity, appropriating a major share of the national wealth in the shape of profits, rent and interest without themselves producing any wealth, and whether the workmen, as a class, should remain perpetually 'the hewers of wood and drawers of water' in society. To determine the issue, the workers should first and foremost, know and know clearly what they want. Do they or do they not want to secure their permanent economic welfare, and freedom from exploitation? Do they want only a temporary relief of distress as and when it arises and the redress of an existing wrong? In order to secure their freedom from exploitation and their permanent economic welfare, they have to find out whether they can achieve them within the existing economic system, by regulating the existing relations between employers and workmen, or by radically changing, and even abolishing the pernicious capitalist system of exploitation and consequent repression. The public

servants will have to decide whether any useful purpose is served by regulating their relations with Government isolated by the Trade Unions (Amendment) Act 1948 from the rest of the Trade Union movement in the country. In the short run, they may succeed, if the Government is magnanimous, in getting a wrong redressed, or in obtaining temporary relief from immediate distress. But in the long run, the public servants can never succeed in securing their permanent economic welfare as long as workmen in private employment are subject to exploitation and repression. The impossibility arises from the nature of the capitalist system. The public servants can secure their lasting economic welfare, only in conjunction with



Middle class housewives marching in the procession to the Colombo Town Hall where a Mass Meeting was held in June 1950 to demand an increase in the living allowance.

Trade Unions outside the public service, and by the abolition of the capitalist system whose very existence depends on the exploitation and repression of workmen, whether in public employment or in private enterprise. Thus, there is really an identity of interest between employees in public employment and private enterprise; hence the necessity for close liaison between the two categories which has been artificially created in order to diffuse their corporate strength.

Any Trade Union that binds itself in advance to the regulation of existing relations within the existing capitalist framework has renounced its permanent economic welfare and taken the road to economic and social asceticism, for, as will be shown in the pages that follow, permanent economic welfare of workmen cannot be achieved within the existing economic system. The Trade Unions Amendment Act forbids any political objective for public servants' Trade Unions. The prohibition seeks to undermine the very *raison d'être* of trade unions. On the other hand the Act forbids the affiliation of public servants' Trade Unions with other Unions whether inside the public service or outside. This requirement, by isolating and weakening each single union of public servants, reduces it from the position of a collectively bargaining body to the position of an isolated petition drafting body, incapable in itself to bargain against the consolidated strength of the employers.

A trade union can be an effective body only if its collective bargaining power is at least approximately equal to that of the employer. In the case of public servants, the employer is the Government, which is the most efficiently organised and disciplined Trade Union of employers in the country, for each Head of Department who has to deal with his departmental union is backed up by the entire administration, and if necessary by the Legislature.

The nearest approach to equality of bargaining power between the Government and the public service, is when the entire public service as one body faces the Government. It should be borne in mind that the reactionary policy of Government is backed up by the capitalist Press, private employers, in fact by the entire capitalist class, and the Government in return backs them up with repressive legislation against workers. The obvious method of maintaining even a semblance of equal bargaining powers is to secure the affiliation of all Trade Unions in the country inside and outside the Public Service, as was provided for in Britain by the 1945 Industrial Dispute Amendment Act. The Trade Union Amendment Act 1948 of Ceylon is a monument to the undemocratic and inequitable features of a much professed democracy. It is at once an admission of cowardice and weakness on the part of the Government and a tribute to the potential power of the Trade Union movement. Therefore, it becomes an inevitable duty of



every Public Servant to fight for the repeal of the Trade Union (Amendment) Act.

Another vicious form of repression in the public service is A. R. 208B. While restricting the freedom of expression of public servants, it is an insult to the intelligence of this country. The public servant, oppressed by unequal forces, robbed of his standard of living, his family happiness, his social prestige and all that he holds dear in life, is forbidden from expressing in public his sufferings, from canvassing public opinion in his support.



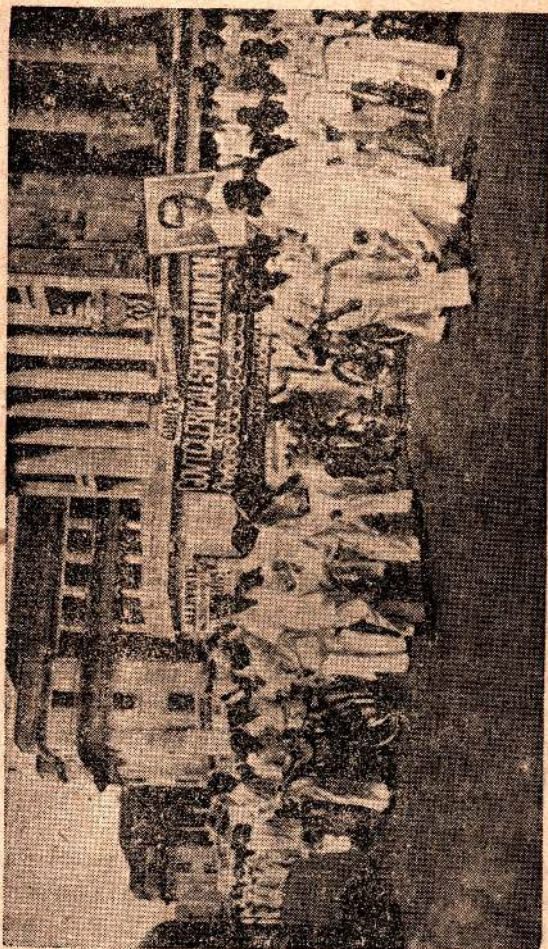
Public Servants and other middle class employees thronged the Town Hall meeting to demand an increase in the living allowance.

A Government that calls itself democratic, a Government that prides itself in following Great Britain in its constitutional aspects, acknowledging the supremacy of the Rule of Law and paying lip service to such Fundamental Rights as liberty of speech, liberty of assembly, liberty of association, freedom of conscience etc. should seek to muzzle public servants in the manner they seek to muzzle by invoking A. R. 208B is by far the greatest indictment any Government could pronounce upon itself. A. R. 208B is a gag

on public servants, to isolate them from public sympathy and support, as the Trade Union Amendment Act isolated them from the Trade Union movement of the country. The U. N. P. Government, in order to crush the public servants under the iron heel of its dictatorship has most effectively isolated them. The most pernicious form of isolation lies in the segregation of every public servant from every other, for it is an offence for public servants to discuss among themselves their suffering, its nature and its causes. They are expected, in their Trade Unions, to see each other, grin and depart. This may sound ridiculous, but these are the grim facts of the public service as demonstrated by the 208B and other dismissals. Those victims were dismissed, not for publicly expressing their grievances, but for expressing them to other members of their respective Unions. The Public Servant is expected to grin and bear all his grievances, however acute they may be, and not to express any of them, for it is not possible to express any grievance without at the same time bringing the government that is the cause of the grievance into disrepute. What is disreputable is undefined and is determined by the prosecutor himself who is judge and jury in the case. It is hard to imagine a more disreputable and a more humiliating and oppressive condition of service. The slaves of Athens and of ancient Rome, the serfs of the Middle Ages were in an enviable position in comparison with the public servant of Ceylon, thanks to the political up-startism of Mr. J. R. Jayawardene. Dismissals are only one form of victimisation for the so-called "insolence" and "impertinence" of public servants in complaining about their grievances. Union officials have been transferred to distant outlandish parts of the Island, so that they may pour out their sufferings to the birds of the air and to the howling winds, and seek solace in Shakespeare's words, "Blow, blow thou winter wind; thou art not so unkind as Jayawardene's mind."!!

The latest form of repression, embodied in A. R. 249, is a personal attack and a personal effrontery to Union Officials. It institutes the most primitive form of Inquisition and thought control in the public service. Its viciousness lies in its power to compel Union Officials to 'sneak' to their employers and divulge their plans and strategy. It places an obligation on every Union official to act as an informer against his own Union. The Government in the past attempted to obtain by threats, promises and open

***“Increase the Living Allowance!”***



The procession of Middle class employees on its way to the Town Hall meeting led by the G.C.S.U. President, Mr. K. C. Nythianantha.

intimidation, information from Union members regarding Union activities. This was an inconvenient, and not always successful method, because of the high standard of integrity generally prevailing in the public service, even though the Government came to the realisation that it had the supreme dictatorial power in its hands and could force 'confessions' out of Union officials. A case in point, is the confession extorted from the ex-General Secretary of the G. C. S. U., Mr. H. M. G. P. Banda, in connection with the publication of the Annual Report of his Union under threat of dismissal. Inquisition is possible in the 20th Century because the victims are gagged and cannot canvass public opinion. About 9% of the male population between 18 and 60 are effectively deprived of freedom of expression and association in this country, and it is a well-known fact that that 9% constitutes the cream of the country's intelligence. This regulation further reduces the right of association to a farce and makes the position of Trade Union officials untenable. An ordinary employer dares not impose such humiliating conditions on his employees for the simple reason that he cannot enforce them, but the Government entrenched in absolute power does not scruple to abuse the plenitude of the legislative and executive powers that it enjoys. It is in a position to enforce this regulation by wielding the bludgeon of dismissal over the heads of union officials from service, and the public servant has no legal remedy against the Crown in the event of wrongful dismissal. This is a blatant abuse of a political institution borrowed from Britain for the repression of public servants and the stifling of public opinion in Ceylon. A British institution in the hands of local flunkies has given birth to a medieval form of Inquisition in Ceylon, rendered more vicious than its predecessors.

It should be remembered that all this repression was utterly unprovoked in so far as the Public Servants were concerned. Of late years Unions had confined themselves to agitation, or rather petitioning, for their legitimate rights in the most peaceful manner conceivable. They had petitioned the Government for a Housing Scheme, a Co-operative Hospital and Health Insurance Scheme, for an increase in Rent Allowances, for certain facilities for recovery of dues on Pay Abstracts and for an increase of salaries, all of which were rejected with supreme disdain and, rejected without the slightest pretence to conciliating the public servants.

Amidst this series of repressive measures comes the sinister offer of Whitleyism by the Government, or rather its impertinent demand that public servants should accept Whitleyism, with a view to diverting their energies into sterile fields of activity of not the British form of Whitleyism, but a much more servile system, within the existing framework of the Trade Unions Amendment Act, P.S.R. 208B and A. R. 249. The Government does not agree to accept the decisions of the Whitley Council as in Britain, but retains to itself the right of veto over such decisions. In case of disagreement in the Whitley Councils, which is bound to be the rule rather



The Middle class employees assembled at the Town Hall grounds before the meeting.

than the exception under the existing framework, the Government retains the right to enforce its own decisions. What, therefore, is the necessity for Whitleyism? Let those public servants who are flirting with the idea of Whitleyism for the sake of its novelty have no illusions. It is a device to humble the public servants still more to the dust. It is a device to divide the public servants, to direct their energies into sterile channels, to water down their militancy, and to give them the illusion that they are bargaining with

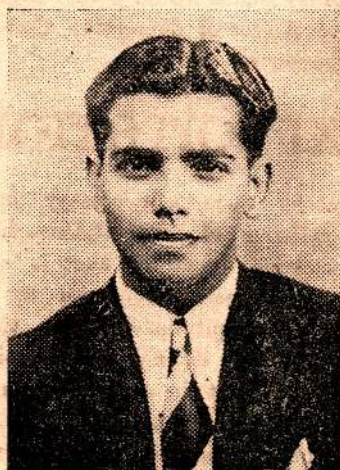
their employers and airing their grievances. Let them make no mistake about bargaining, for they will be only airing their grievances and petitioning a despotic body of employers, united in their resolve to crush and humble all public servants. Already isolated by law, as a body, from other Trade Unions inside and outside the public service, and individually from members of their own Unions, public servants pretending to parley on equal terms with Heads of Departments in the proposed Whitley Councils will only indulge in quixotry and become the laughing stock of the Government itself, which would pride itself in the hoax that succeeded !

### WHITLEY COUNCILS

In Britain, Civil Servants accepted Whitley Councils as a subsidiary, and not as the sole machinery for regulating their relations with their employers. Trade Unions of public servants are affiliated with other Unions, both inside and outside the public service. This was a source of immense strength to their Trade Unions. Conscious of their strength, they are in a position to utilise the Whitley machinery to advantage. That strength, the consciousness of that strength and the acknowledgement of that strength by the Official Side contributed to whatever success there was in negotiations at Whitley Councils. The Staff Side has either the actual or the potential backing of the massive strength of the British Trade Union Congress. Such a deployment of strength was conducive to compromise, and therefore agreement on both sides. The absence of such an atmosphere vitiates the entire proceedings of the Whitley Councils, supports the intransigence of the Official Side, and even inspires the Official Side with an air of condescension.

Decisions in the British Whitley Councils are arrived at only by mutual agreement. The decisions by convention are binding on both sides. In case of disagreement a question may be referred for decision to the National Whitley Council, and if necessary, is referred for arbitration to the Tribunal. The composition of the Tribunal, viz a chairman nominated by the Minister of Labour after consultation with both sides, and two members selected by the Chairman from two panels of members nominated by the Minister, one representing the Staff Side but excluding Union members and executives, and the other representing the Treasury, reveals on the surface a preponderance of the official element. But in practice the system has worked satisfactorily because the Tribunal is conscious, in the last resort, of the legal powers of

**Trade Unions of Civil Servants.** Whitley Councils did not die with the passing of the Industrial Disputes Act of 1927 because the high traditions and conventions of the British system were established in the period before 1927 when civil servants legally and in fact enjoyed unfettered powers of association and because the British Official Side, unlike our local bureaucracy, which is merely a perversion of the old colonial bureaucracy, respected and adhered to those high traditions and conventions. However, their legal fetters were removed in 1945. Trade Unions have access to the



Mr. N. A. Cader, former Secretary of the Air Ceylon  
Employees' Association.

weapon of a general strike. This enhances their bargaining power. In spite of such opportunities, the fact that civil servants have failed to secure much material welfare and that their standard of living has sharply declined recently is the most telling commentary on the ineffectiveness of the Whitley machinery as an instrument of negotiation between employers and workmen.

In Ceylon, the Government having reduced public servants to a state of utter impotence and despair, dangles the Whitley carrot to divert what little energy is left in them into barren sands. Whitley Councils within the existing narrow framework will be a

complete farce, and the form in which it is offered here is a mockery and distortion of the original system. The proposed Whitley Council is no better than a body to register the petitions of public servants, and if necessary to forward them to the Treasury. Whitleyism under the even heavier fetters imposed by the new Industrial Disputes Act 1951 which binds Trade Unions to decisions of Arbitration Tribunals, is a most ludicrous pantomime. Self-respect and honour should deter public servants from accepting Whitleyism. Whitleyism, in effect, will be only an exhaust to expel excessive militancy which would gather momentum inversely proportionate to the degree of depression that assails the great majority of Public Servants.

## EXPLOITATION

**R**EPRESSION is at once a necessary consequence and a pre-existing condition of exploitation. Exploitation arises in the payment of a wage or salary that is not commensurate with the value created or service rendered by the workman. It often happens in the capitalist system that the degree of repression varies with the degree of exploitation. It is no coincidence that at present in Ceylon the most intense form of repression co-exists with the most intense form of exploitation in the public service. Public servants are paid a cost of living allowance based on the working class cost of living index, i. e. on the living conditions of a labourer and his family with an income of about Rs. 50 per month. The standard of living of public servants in the income group Rs. 100 per month to Rs. 300 per month during the last ten years has fallen very sharply as is shown in Table III below.

Although retail prices in 1949 had risen up to about six times the 1939 level, the cost of living index (average for the year 1949) was only 258, i.e. a family that was spending Rs. 100 per month in 1939 would now spend Rs. 258 per month on the same items of expenditure in the same proportions. This is arrived at by a system of weightage for each item of expenditure such as food, rent etc. Even so, the cost of living allowance payable on a salary of Rs. 100 is Rs. 80.50 on the index No. 258. This allowance of Rs. 80.50,



which is based on the working class cost of living, is paid to an officer with a salary of Rs. 100 to bring down his standard of living to that of a working class man. It actually lowers his standard of living, at the 1949 level of retail prices and the weightages assigned by the Director of Census and Statistics, to that of a working class man in 1939 with an income of Rs. 69 per month. It is a popular fallacy, said the Director, to assume that the middle class cost of living is higher than the working class cost of living. By a readjustment of the proportional weightages, the Director could show that in fact the middle class cost of living is lower than the working class cost of living!

Although retail prices of essential consumer goods have risen 134% to 524% between 1939 and 1949 according to the Director of Census and Statistics, salaries during the same period have risen 26% to 105% in the case of public servants in the income group Rs. 50 to Rs. 300 per month as shown in Tables I and II.

**Table I Retail Prices\***

Unit of Item	1939 Price Rs. Cts.	1949 Price Rs. Cts.	Percentage Increase
Vegetables	1 27	4 61	263%
Currystuffs	1 08	4 85	349%
Spices	30	1 40	367%
Meat	78	2 00	155%
Fish	1 38	6 26	354%
Groceries	1 00	4 97	397%
Milk and Milk Foods	68	1 59	134%
Rice (open market)	26	1 16	347%
Bread	16	30	188%
Cigarettes	1 40	3 80	171%
Stationery	37	1 54	317%
Textiles (Longcloth)	83	3 86	365%
do (Mull)	81	4 31	437%
do (Drill)	62	2 93	372%
do (Tussore)	53	1 77	234%
Sarongs (fine quality)	4 78	22 54	371%
Silk georgette per yd.	1 03	6 43	524%
Miscellaneous (betel, soap &c)	67	3 26	386%

\*Extracts from the 1950 Statistical Abstract of D/C & S pages 276—279,

Table II. Comparison of salaries, 1939 &amp; 1949

Salary 1939. Rs. Cts.	1949 C. L. A. Rs. Cts.	Total Rs. Cts.	Percentage Increase
50 00	52 50	102 50	105%
100 00	80 50	180 50	80%
200 00	80 50	280 50	40%
300 00	80 50	380 50	26%

The above figures assume that the officer has received no increments from 1939 to 1949. They also assume that he has either remained unmarried, or if married has had no children during the ten years. Assuming that the annual increments off-set the extra liabilities arising out of marriage and child-birth (which is a preposterous assumption in view of the fact that retail prices have risen 134% to 524% during the ten years), even then the standard of living of public servants in the income group Rs. 100 to Rs. 300 per month has fallen 30% to 50% judging by the cost of living index of the Director of Census & Statistics arrived at by a system of weightage which assumes that a family with an income of Rs. 100 per month spends 63.66% of that income on food, 8.78% on clothing 7.26% on fuel and light, 7.06% on rent and 13.24% on miscellaneous items. Incidentally this allows for the entire family for the whole month 29 cents for amusements, Rs. 7.20 for house-rent, Rs. 8.95 for clothing and Rs. 1.78 for dhoby and a host of other things. Even on this ridiculous and fictitious basis of living, the standard of living of public servants has declined as follows:—

Table III. Standard of Living.

Salary 1949 Rs. Cts.	Salary due on Index No.258 Rs. Cts.	Salary Actually Paid Rs. Cts.	Percentage fall (approx)
100 00	258 00	180 50	30%
125 00	322 50	205 50	36%
150 00	387 00	230 50	41%
175 00	451 50	255 50	43%
200 00	516 00	280 50	46%
225 00	580 00	305 50	48%
250 00	645 00	330 50	49%
275 00	709 50	355 50	49%
300 00	774 00	380 50	50%

The standard of living of married public servants has dropped at an alarming rate. A married officer who was earning Rs. 100 per month in 1939 would be drawing Rs. 280.50 as salary and allowance in 1949 if his increments were at the rate of Rs. 120 per annum. If he had four children during the period, he should be earning a minimum of Rs. 516 per month to keep up his pre-war standard, assuming that a school-going child costs only half as much as an adult. His standard of living has fallen more than 46%, whereas according to the terms of his service his standard of



Mr. S. M. Silva, former President of the Government Press Printers' Union, who was dismissed under 208B, after nearly 26 years service.

living should have risen 50% assuming he had four children during the period. Incremental rates are computed on the basis that the cost of living is constant. So, instead of his standard of living rising 50% it has actually fallen about 46%.

The figures relating to total emoluments of all the clerical services of Government are even more revealing. The proposed Governmental expenditure during 1951/2 on the salaries of all the clerical services of Government viz General, Postal, Railway, Customs, Survey, Electrical Department, Government Press, Assistant Clerks, and Quasi-Clerical Services is only Rs. 18,770,000 out of a total expenditure of Rs. 1,307,807,300 i.e. 1.4%. Allowing 100% of the salary, at a generous estimate, for cost of living allowances, rent allowance and special allowances the cost of all the clerical services is only 2.8% of the year's expenditure. Before the war, when salaries of public servants absorbed about 60% of the budget, the clerical services absorbed

a very large proportion of Government expenditure. The percentage has declined in spite of the fact that the number of employees in these services has vastly increased during the last ten years.

## TRADE UNIONS AND POLITICS

IT has been shown that repression and exploitation have increased apace in intensity during the last few years. It now remains for us to examine whether it is possible for Trade Unions to achieve their long-term objective viz freedom from exploitation and repression, within the existing economic system. History gives the most emphatic answer, in support of the conclusions of economic analysis, that it is not possible for workers to be free from exploitation and repression in the capitalist system. In an industrially advanced country like Britain where the Trade Union Movement was a well-organised and disciplined movement, which steadily gathered momentum during the first half of this century, the share of the workers in the wealth they produced i.e., the proportion of real wages to national wealth has declined. (See G. D. H. Cole's "British Trade & Industry") This is so in the United States. This is so in the countries of Western Europe. That gives the lie at once to the theory that Trade Unions even with the efficient organisation of British Trade Unions can secure freedom from exploitation within the existing economic system. It is a curious fact that in spite of the existence of virile Trade Unions and their periodic successes in their agitation for higher monetary wages, there has been no corresponding increase in real wages. Trade Unions can express their demands for higher wages only in monetary terms, but the Government and the capitalist class in joint control of the banking and monetary system, while granting monetary increases, however niggardly, invariably see to it that wages are diluted, the currency is proportionately inflated, and prices rise to defeat the wage increment. The much maligned vicious circle of wages and prices is somehow set in motion after every wage increase, with the result that real wages are hardly affected, and often are affected adversely. Therefore, as long as the capitalist class is in control of the banking and monetary

system of the country, there is no security for the workers, and it is not possible to achieve either freedom or the certainty of freedom from exploitation.

Every problem that confronts a Public Service Trade Union, whether economic or social, necessarily resolves itself ultimately into a political problem. If it is an economic problem, like a fall of real wages, it can be understood only in the general context of the socio-economic problems of the entire society as e. g. the relations of productions between capitalist employers and workmen in society. If it is a social problem, like the denial of free speech and association, again it can be understood only in the context of the class-stratification of society arising out of the economic relations between classes. The socio-economic problems of public servants can neither be understood nor solved in isolation from the socio-economic problems of the entire society; for it is unthinkable that there can be an island in that society that is free and insulated from the problems of the rest of that society. The socio-economic problems of society can be solved only by political means.

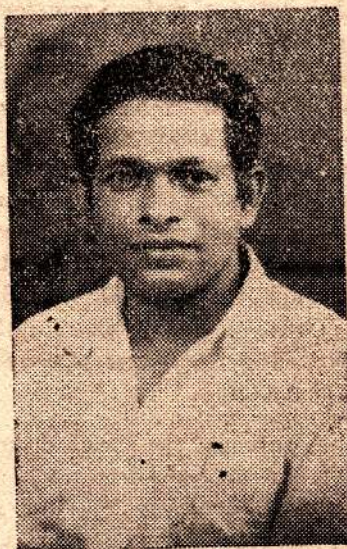
The struggle of the workers is essentially a political struggle, a struggle to gain control of the political institutions of the State, to recast and re-order the existing economic system and social relations in the state. The objective of the workers' struggle is to end the system of class exploitation and class repression by the only way open to it, that is the abolition of classes. The Trade Union Movement cannot be isolated from politics, as some official theoreticians make out with a view to rendering the movement isolated and sterile. The non-political Trade Unions of public servants in Ceylon have been totally barren of achievement in the past. A Trade Union movement divorced from politics is not only unrealistic and ill-conceived in theory, but becomes purposeless in practice. The opposition of certain trade unionists to political activity helps the Government to splinter the movement and defeat the struggle of the public servants. It is abundantly clear that agitation for higher salaries and better standards of living within the present economic system is utterly futile. The only way to be rid for all time of systematic exploitation and repression is to sweep away the capitalist system and establish socialism where there will be neither exploiters nor exploited; where the means of production

will be owned by the State, that is by Society as a whole; where production will be planned for the needs of society and not carried on without a plan for the private profits of a few capitalists with all its attendant evils of unemployment and poverty and restriction of production; where the civil and political institutions will cease to be the instrument of one class for the exploitation and oppression of the other and will become a means to promote the wellbeing of all elements in society; and above all where the State cannot be used by the local capitalist class as an instrument of foreign capitalists for the propagation of war and the destruction of the working classes of the world. In an era when every working man in the world is confronted with the choice between the destruction of human civilisation by war and world socialism, a purely economic end would seem a parochial approach to the present problem.

## THE LESSONS OF THE B.T.U. MOVEMENT

**T**HE defeat of the Labour Party at the General Elections in 1951 serves to bring into clear relief the unsoundness of British Trade Union theory and practice. In the realm of theory, the British working class and its leaders had no understanding of objective reality as expressed in history. Man can change his environments only by correct understanding of those environments and their necessary inter connections in their current development and in history. His understanding necessarily influences his practice. The experience of practice verifies his understanding and perfects his theories. The perfected theory reorientates his practice which in turn affects the development of his environments. The workers can change their economic condition only by correct understanding of the social forces around them as expressed in history. The denial of the class-structure of society and of the class-struggle, by the British Working Class, is due to a lack of understanding of social forces. Their belief in the inevitability of gradualness is a convenient distortion of history; convenient because it promises Utopia without a struggle. Their conception of the state as a social corporation is an "a priori" conception not supported by experience of actual practice. These theories were

in fact borrowed by the working class leaders at second hand from certain apologists of the capitalist system who passed for political theorists in ruling circles. The working class failed in the application of these theories in practice. Experience did not remould theory at every stage of the Trade Union development. Theory was a thing apart from practice. In fact working class leaders eschewed theory. Englishmen take a pride in eschewing theory and glorify expediency. The movement was therefore not a conscious movement, aware of its objectives and the purposes of its



Mr. S. R. Yapa, President of the Government  
Surveyors' Association.

existence. A middle class political theory coupled with short term expediency during half a century has left the workers of Britain disillusioned and not a little confused at the victory of the Conservatives.

The British workers have sustained defeat because their political theories were impracticable. Their political movement was based on the theory or rather the hope that Social amelioration can be worked out within the capitalist system, which itself would

gradually give way to socialism. They merely sought to regulate the relation between employers and workmen with a view to achieving progressive social amelioration within the capitalist system as a first step in the transition to socialism. It was an experiment in social democracy.

Nationalisation of certain key industries with compensation "during the period of transition" to democratic socialism\* left the bastions of economic power and hence the power of exploitation untouched. The huge sums paid to holders of bonds of the nationalised industries as interest, they did not realise, represented surplus value expropriated from the [product of labour, and was a perpetuation of the old evil under a new guise. It was not clear how socialism would be established at the end of the period. It was hoped that the capitalist class, seeing the success of nationalisation and the social amelioration it brought in its train, would feel ashamed of their own perversities, would be willing to surrender to the State their shares in the nationalised industries, and when in a fit of righteous self-chastisement, could be made to renounce all claims to interest. It didn't work in Britain. Similar experiments in 'social democracy' were a signal failure in France, Italy and Belgium. The experiment is now being proposed by certain newly sprung parties in Ceylon as well.

Sydney Webb, the author of the social democratic idea, after witnessing the utter failure of 'social democracy' repeatedly in every country where it was tried, finally confessed in 1947 that history had proved his idea to be false. The falsehood lay in the idealistic hope that decaying capitalism can be for ever patched up, and that by such periodic patching up, progressive social amelioration could be achieved; and that capitalists could be made to renounce their profits gradually in favour of labour within the present economic set up until at last they came to the level of the working class. The hope was inspired by a profound ignorance of the capitalist economy, the character of man in the present stage of social development, and the behaviour of the capitalist class in history. The hope was a negation of the theory of increasing misery of the working class in capitalist society which recent history has proved beyond a trace of doubt. The deepseated contradictions of the

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\* See Attlee, "The Labour Party in Perspective"



capitalist system proved fatal to all schemes of social amelioration and working class welfare.

The British working class had, from the time they embraced "social democracy", voluntarily accepted the existing relations between employers and workmen as the eternal order of society and fondly elected to remain for all time the toiling class of England with hopes of progressive amelioration in their working and living conditions, so that they and their sons could serve their capitalist masters appointed by heaven ! The British working class voluntarily forged its own fetters. It has been taught not to look too closely at the property relations in society that are enshrined in the 'sacred' laws of England. It is therefore not surprising that the movement has made very little contribution to the social and economic development of Britain. It has signally failed to remove the contradictions and the deeper causes of opposition between capitalists and workers which are the source of exploitation and repression. The fact that there were 11,000 strikes when the Labour Government was in power shows the discrepancy between the theory and practice of the British Labour movement. The entire movement was ill-conceived in theory and misdirected in practice, or rather the theory, what little there was of it was conceived 'a priori' in the minds of Fabians and other purists and had no bearing on realities. The Rule of Law was interpreted by the working class to mean the rule of the existing law. Such a fatalism blends admirably with the social inertia of the self-seeking individualism of capitalist society.

## THE SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

**T**HE workers' urge to associate in Trade Unions springs from his developing intelligence that shows itself in the form of social consciousness, just as primitive man's urge to live in society for his self-protection was the result of a developing intelligence. When the worker first became conscious of exploitation, he viewed his relations with his employer as one of personal antagonism, to be regulated by petition or other means. As his intelligence developed, he discovered, in the 19th century, that the antagonism is due to

certain social forces contained in the nature of the capitalist system, and it could be remedied only by the co-operation of all workers to polarise the forces of the working class and by opposing the forces of Capital. He realised that the antagonism can be resolved in the long run only by a complete social transformation, and not by any temporary reconciliation of the forces of capital and the forces of labour; for the forces of capital are destructive of the forces of labour in the absence of effective opposition. Capitalists, as a class, whether nationally or internationally have a class loyalty which is expressed in their class solidarity when confronted by labour.

By the collective action of the working class, the workers have it in their power to be free from exploitation and repression for all time. No one deserves greater understanding than those who have it in their power to be free but choose to be in bondage. In Ceylon the absence of that minimum degree of intelligence which shows itself as social consciousness in the public servants of Ceylon is the cause of Governmental repression of their associations. The urge to combine is absent. If the urge was there, it is not possible for any Government for any length of time to repress their associations, as has been proved by the history of the labour movement in Europe. It is no use their pointing their fingers sorrowfully across the Suez to workers in Britain and the rights they enjoy, for the British workers had developed that standard of intelligence that showed itself as an irresistible urge to combine in the last century. They stood solid behind their leadership. They paid up their subscriptions regularly. Their leaders, encouraged by the support and militancy of the rank and file behind them felt their hands strengthened in their dealings with the Government and other employers, in their plans of action and in their estimate of the power of the strike weapon which incidentally is the only effective and recognised weapon of all Trade Unions. The British workmen had the spirit of men in them. They did not starve in obscurity, or suffer in silence. They did not see their wives and children underfed, ill-housed, undernourished, underclothed and unshod and rest content. No. They took the matter up in their Unions and fought their employers, when necessary, regardless of personal consequences, regardless of prospects of promotion, regardless of the displeasure of their employers for they realised that the employers' pleasure could cost them all that they held dear in life. But not

so with some public servants in Ceylon. Self-seeking individualism, ignoble cowardice and intellectual snobbery has prevented the growth of a virile trade union movement in the public service. They would rather expect all rights and privileges to be conferred on them either for the mere asking or without doing even as much as asking. Let such among us remember, that the gains which the British working class won, were not gains conferred by benevolent Governments, but were gains won by sheer dint of battle, sacrifice and concerted action. That is the only way, by which any community of workers can progress. The position today is that the public servant suffers from a complex, which is largely the result of foreign domination. He imagines that his interests are more linked with the Capitalist class than with the working class. He imagines himself to be a capitalist. But the vital difference is that he is himself exploited by the same class to which he imagines, he belongs, in precisely the same way the working class is exploited. The duty of the Public Servant is clear. The degree of success he achieves will be in direct relation to the degree to which he bestirs himself and fights his oppressors.

## THE HISTORIC ROLE OF WORKERS

**I**t is the great responsibility of workers all over the world to save human civilisation from destruction by the parasitic class of capitalists, who live on the wealth produced by workers, appropriating that wealth under certain legal devices in the form of interest, rent and profits. The Roman civilisation perished and barbarism reigned a thousand years during the Dark Ages because the workers who produced the wealth of Roman Society did not resist exploitation and their consequent slow murder by the patrician aristocracy. They did not oppose the restriction of production under the narrow economic system of that time. Man's increasing mastery over nature and his increasing powers of production were stifled by the rigid economic system, as is the case today, for increased production would have broken the slave basis of the economy. But the serfs of the 18th & 19th centuries resisted exploitation, broke through the existing economic system and allowed man's increasing

knowledge to develop into the new economic system of the present capitalist civilisation. The choice before all workers today is clear. Will they perish like the Roman slaves or resist exploitation? Will they save human civilisation from destruction by the world capitalist class or will they let that class destroy civilisation? Every worker, public servant or not, will have to make his choice immediately in the present world crisis. In the face of issues of such magnitude, the quarrel of public servants over Whitley Councils, and their recoil from the political field are a nauseating display of parochialism. They manifest a lack of understanding of realities.

The lower middle class in all countries, unfortunately, has a sorry history behind it. It is clear that at the last British General Elections, they have betrayed the working class of Britain by voting Conservative. The lower middle class, consisting mainly of clerks, teachers, shopkeepers, technicians and peasants, has everything to lose and little to gain under the Conservatives. In Germany, Hitler came into power on the votes of the lower middle class through base political demagoguery. Mussolini, in Italy, came into power with the support of this class by a daring political adventure. In these two countries the lower middle class was deceived by the promise of Socialism. What they got was National Socialism and Fascism. Through certain false conceptions of its economic interests, the lower middle class falls an easy victim to every high-sounding political demagogue and adventurer.

In Ceylon today, certain political parties are promising the lower middle class a form of mild social democracy which is already a discredited and discarded political system in Europe. The lower middle class here will not be deceived by such promises as were the German, Italian and British lower middle-class. Only radical Socialism can solve the present ills of Ceylon in the context of local and international problems. Today the lower middle class in all countries is gradually realising that its true economic interest will be served only by full Socialism. Its economic problems are identical with those of the working class. Both classes are equally the victims of exploitation and repression, both are equally subject to the hardships of rising prices and rigid incomes, while the capitalist class amasses large profits during rising prices. The lower middle-

class suffers as much as, or even more than, the working class during war and re-armament. Depressions hit the lower middle class and working class alike. The interests of both these classes, on the other hand, are diametrically opposed to those of the capitalist class. They should not therefore be deceived by the promise of 'Socialism' by capitalists and their ilk. When these social democrats come into power, they cannot achieve any degree of social amelioration because the contradictions contained in the existing system and the law of increasing misery of the working class under capitalism are too powerful to be combated by half hearted measures. The utter failure of the British Labour Government affords the most convincing proof of this. The Labour Government was powerless to implement the ideal of the labour movement viz progressive social amelioration and the gradual establishment of Socialism. Not that these protagonists of 'social democracy' are necessarily traitors to the lower middle class and working class but the economic system is too rigid for mild socialists. Only radical and complete socialism can remove for all time the misery and suffering of the lower middle class and working class.

## THE PUBLIC SERVANTS' DUTY

It becomes therefore the sacred duty of every public servant to organise and fight, side by side with other progressive forces in the country, for the establishment of Socialism. The public service occupies a strategic position in the social set-up of this country. Public servants are in a position to accelerate or impede the social transformation that is taking place. They are in a position to betray the struggles of the people, as some are now doing by their apathy; and they are also in a position, by concerted trade union action, to secure the triumph of the progressive forces.

The apathy of public servants arises, in some cases, from a belief in the inevitability of progress and of the establishment of socialism. Most people in the West have been deceived by such an illusion. Although Socialism is the next stage of social evolution, there is no inevitability about the evolution. History is full of

examples of societies that have perished. The historical necessity of Socialism is conditioned by man's present activity and his developing social consciousness. History, like the Stoic god, leads the wise, and drags the fools. But it has always let the indifferent perish.

The birth of a new social order has always been attended by its birth-pangs. It is visionary idealism to expect a newer and a higher mode of life without having to pay the price. It is therefore the sacred duty of every public servant, as it is of every other member of society, towards himself, towards mankind and towards posterity, to organise and join hands with all progressive forces and fight for the overthrow of the evil capitalist system and the establishment of a higher and a nobler social system.

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