

# Through the Vistas of Life

by **V. S. M. de Mel**  
FORMERLY OF THE CEYLON CIVIL SERVICE



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THE  
VISTAS  
OF  
LIFE**

**V. S. M. DE MEL**

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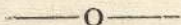
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# FOREWORD



These memoirs were originally jotted down by me when on holiday at "Garfield", Haputale, the salubrious climate of which is particularly conducive to literary or philosophical activity, surrounded as it is with mountain ranges, with a clear blue sky above for most of the time.

Though my achievements may be minimal, I considered it a duty by the youth of the country to see that they would be able to read at leisure what one of their compatriots thought and felt and how he was spurred into certain activities by the ruling events and circumstances of his time, in case they might deem these to be a matter even for emulation by them.

Although my achievements may have been minimal, as I have already stated, I have always felt that I have had the opportunity to act as a catalyst for others on a number of occasions for them to improve their conditions or even achieve great things. All these have, however, made me happier though the part I played therein may have been only an indirect one. Through out life, I have been buoyed up by the principle that he who expects little or no credit or kudos necessarily for himself can be of considerable service to humanity.

Ceylon was officially called Sri Lanka as from 22nd May 1972 with the inauguration of the Republican Constitution. However I have used the earlier terms Ceylon and Ceylonese in respect of all the events described in this book that took place prior to that date.

*V. S. M. de Mel*

15th June 1977

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## CHAPTER I

### EARLY CHILDHOOD

My birth took place at Moratuwa on 8th December 1910. both my parents being from long-standing families in the town, My father hailed from an industrial family, my grand father having been the owner of the best-equipped vehicle manufactory in the town. Horse and traps and carts were the principal modes of travel in the pre-automobile era. Yet my father himself did not take to industry till much later in life. Earlier he was content to serve as an officer in a mercantile establishment. The longest period of his service was for one of the biggest land-owners in the country R. B. S. de Soysa, the youngest of the sons of Ceylon's greatest philanthropist, C. H. de Soysa. My father's service according to public repute was marked by integrity and devotion to duty, characteristics which were becoming rare even in that unsophisticated age.

My mother Jessie Engeltina nee Fernando was a good wife and mother who had a kindly and genial nature and good Christian outlook, I remember her but faintly as she was removed from the earthly scene at the comparatively young age of 35 — incidentally about the average span of life at that time ! I was only 9 years old then. One incident distinctly stands out in my mind. We were living in Kurunduwatte or Cinnamon Gardens on the outskirts of Moratuwa. One day my younger brother who was about two years of age then, whilst crying held his breath for an unusually long time in my mother's arms. She was so alarmed at this that she asked me to fetch a passer-by from the road — our residence being by the road-side as there were no elderly inmates in at the time I carried out my errand. A little while later my brother regained his breath to our intense relief.

On another occasion, I believe it was about the year 1916 when the progress of World War I had begun to have its repercussions on local stocks of petrol and citronella oil was being freely mixed with petrol as fuel for automobiles, one of my uncles F. P. de Silva who was married to my mother's elder sister, on his way home one evening from his office in Colombo called at our home and on leaving took me for a drive in the car. He pretended that he was taking me to his home. He was indeed very fond of me and my mother also entered into the fun and kept up the joke. Being too young to understand the humour of the situation, I began to cry when the car had hardly covered a few yards. The car was then stopped and reversed to drop me at home. Incidentally the car refused to start again for a long while and I remember how my mother and I, young as I was, felt considerably embarrassed.

My mother's image sticks in my mind. There is no photograph of hers with which to verify it as even her wedding photograph had been spoilt by too much exposure and did not keep for long. It may not be out of place to mention one more incident which took place during my mother's life—time. This was even before we went to Kurunduwatte, when we were living at Rawatawatte, one of the hamlets of Moratuwa. A cousin of mine who was my best friend at that time fell into a well and was rescued with difficulty. Perhaps, I was of a philosophic temperament even at that young age and I remember how I was later chaffed for having remarked on that occasion that I had only one friend and that he too was nearly being taken away. I was only 5 years old at that time. I also remember being sent on various errands to neighbouring places. Once I was going with another boy of the same age - we were about 5 or 6 years of age then - when we were bitten by a dog at twilight. The treatment given for dog—bites at the time was perhaps a little crude and therefore painful. Slices of lime toasted in burning coconut oil

were applied to the wound, the affected limb being forcibly held down. Today a little savlon would be equally effective, unobtrusive and painless.

When about 5 years of age I remember going to the sea-beach of an evening with my mother. We used to pass the Lunawa Rest House where the Marathis who had been got down from India during World War I for security purposes had been encamped. I was greatly awed by the mien and appearance of these hefty men. Our elders would sometimes threaten to hand us to the Marathis if we did not behave !

My mother died shortly after the arrival of her youngest child after an illness lasting for about 3 weeks. Although even a specialist from Colombo was brought down, it was to no purpose. I remember how on the day of her funeral I and my elder brother went to the garden and even played a round of marbles in between sorrowing. I remember how I also felt like a martyr being a motherless child especially when some of those who attended the funeral looked at us in commiseration.

The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed an expansive and comparatively peaceful time. The British Commonwealth and Empire were in the heyday of its glory and a holocaust like the first world war was not even dreamt of at that time. The end of the decade saw the accession of King George V to the British Throne. The suffragette movement which was gathering force in England was a minor ripple in the even tenor of English life. In India, the culmination of the Morley-Minto Reforms provided for a greater measure of association of the Indian people with the British Raj in the making of important decisions. Ceylon herself was on the eve of the reforms to the Legislative Council which took place in 1912 with 11 official and 10 unofficial members, the new features introduced being the elective principle and the enfranchisement of the Ceylonese middle class. The cost of living was very low. The cost of good

Sambha rice from Burma was 6 cents a measure, eggs were selling at 2 cents each A fish monger was prepared to cut a slice of seer fish for 10 cents. A good crab could be had for 5 cents. Dry fish and vegetables were extremely cheap. In short an ordinary meal could be obtained for 10 cents !

It strikes me in retrospect that my father was prepared to give us more freedom of movement than we were perhaps prepared to give our own children. While this freedom took us through greater scrapes, it no doubt made us more selfreliant.

At that time many stretches of land in the Cinnamon Gardens area of Moratuwa which have since been developed consisted of virgin forest. We were allowed to go on shooting expeditions along with friends in these jungles going from bush to bush in search of birds. However, we could not do much harm as our only weapon was the catapult.

We greatly miss the verdant grandeur of these jungles which consisted of cashew grown wild madan trees with their purple berries and low scrub with their varied pods and flowers, the haunts of birds insects and butterflies. The glades, the parkland and open spaces have left vivid and pleasant memories which the latter days' more urban surroundings can never match Equally vivid can be the recollection of a quiet evening at the hour of sunset amidst green pastures on a coconut estate with a few heifers browsing on the luxuriant green and a man-made tank close by. In such surroundings it is not surprising that reflexions would have occurred even to a tender mind bringing thoughts of the future, of boyhood giving way to youth and youth to manhood and of the part one may be permitted to play therein.

Such natural amenities have largely disappeared but my home-town is still fortunate in that it has escaped total depredation. Indeed, Moratuwa enjoys a unique position on

the outskirts of Colombo situated as it is between the sea and the Bolgoda river. The most reliable version of the origin of the name refers to the vigils kept by army units along the coast against possible marauders, on instructions from the Sinhala monarch. Mura-Atuwa or the sentinels' loft gave way to the more sonorous Moratuwa.

The town consisted of eighteen hamlets, since increased to nineteen-each with a distinctive feature of its own. The main occupations are carpentry fishing and other manufacturing industries.

Many sons of the town have ventured out and successfully established themselves in various parts of the island. Many had gained such success in their planting and business ventures mainly arrack and toddy rents and plumbago mining that they soon found their native town too circumscribed for their needs and ambitions and emigrated to Colombo. The exploits of the de Soysas, de Mels and Peirises, alone among others, in the fields of planting, industry and commerce would suffice to fill the pages of an epic. The financial strength acquired by these entrepreneurs no doubt greatly helped in the subsequent economic development of the Island and of the Colombo town in particular.



## THE DE SOYSAS

Moratuwa was able to attain the position of one of the most literate towns in the Island thanks primarily to the educational institutions bestowed on it by the munificence of the de Soysas. At this point, I might as well mention how on 14th September 1976 I was called upon to propose the toast of the de Soysa family at the Centenary dinner of the founding of Prince and Princess of Wales' Colleges held at the latter institution. In my speech I paid a just and fitting tribute to the de Soysa family which I am reproducing below as far as I could recollect.

"It is appropriate to start with the Holy Emmanuel Church Moratuwa which was built and endowed by Jeronis de Soysa 116 years ago. This Church which has the design, charm and proportions of a Cathedral with a tower 120 feet high has ever since presided over the religious life of the Church of Ceylon congregation of Moratuwa. Jeronis' son Charles Henry de Soysa was brought up in a particularly religious atmosphere by his mother.

It was therefore but natural that the son should follow in the footsteps of his worthy father by founding the Prince and Princess of Wales' Colleges, an educational institution "for the glory of God and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ"

Charles Henry de Soysa's manifold benefactions which defy credibility in their catholic sweep and diversified orientation have acquired legendary fame. They covered all primary needs of man from the cradle to the grave. He built not only churches and schools but also hospitals charitable institutions

and bridges. He repaired temples, tanks and irrigation channels. He also made various other endowments in Ceylon without distinction of caste or creed as well as abroad. It could indeed be said that both literally and metaphorically he built bridges between the various communities in the Island.

Prince and Princess of Wales' Colleges have thrown up an army of men and women who have manned various services and have adorned all walks of life through a span of over four generations. In that sense it could very well be said that seldom in the annals of philanthropy have so much been owed by so many to so few. These institutions have produced principals of schools, priests, lawyers, doctors and administrators. As for scions of the de Soysa family itself, Amabelle Jayasuriya who passed through these portals now guides the destinies of the younger generation as Principal of Bishop's College, Colombo and Lankeswara Peiris is well recognised in the Banking profession, Cecil de Soysa our Chief Guest this evening and his brothers Terence and Ryle and his cousin Lancelot de Soysa among others are products of British Universities who have shone in the mercantile, planting and industrial spheres. Vincent de Soysa is well known in planting and industrial circles.

It can also be claimed in a special sense that one of the greatest benefactions of the de Soysa family to the country is the gifting of its son Harold de Soysa to the Church. Eschewing a worldly life he devoted himself in the Church of Ceylon Ministry to the service of the people until in course of time he was appointed to the high office of Bishop of Colombo.

The Holy Emmanuel Church and these two institutions have loomed large in the horizon of countless young men of this town. In fact, in this connection I am reminded of what Thomas Carlyle the famous English historian said to Queen Victoria on a memorable occasion. When asked by Her Majesty what he considered was the best road in the British

Isles, he promptly replied that it was the road from Ecclefechan, his home town, to Edinburgh. When asked what was the next best road, he replied, "why of course, the road back from Edinburgh to Ecclefechan." In the same way, large numbers of us in this town who have frequented the Holy Emmanuel Church and these institutions, if asked what the best avenue in Ceylon is would be inclined to say "The avenue leading from Holy Emmanuel Church to Prince and Princess of Wales' Colleges" and if asked for the next best avenue, say "Why, of course, the road leading back from these two institutions to the Church."

About 50 years ago, D. S. Senanayake the Father of the Nation was opening colonisation schemes in the Dry Zone in the interests of land development. In an earlier generation C. H. de Soysa was felling forests to cultivate tea, rubber and coconut and was thereby participating in the agricultural renaissance of this country. Indeed, these are conventional crops now thanks to the efforts of these pioneers.

There are a number of Firsts to the credit of C. H. de Soysa. He anticipated the Free Education Scheme by endowing educational institutions and granting scholarships lavishly to deserving students. Both C. H. de Soysa and his son L. W. A. de Soysa (later Sir Wilfred) did much pioneering work in popularising agriculture among the people. The Agricultural Association was started by the former and Sir Wilfred served as Chairman of the Low Country Products Association for many years. C. H. de Soysa was also concerned with the aspirations of the people and was involved in the founding of the Moratuwa Association in 1894. He also anticipated the cooperative Age by starting a Cooperative in his home town.

A marked characteristic of the de Soysa family has been its humility, integrity and humanity. Moratuwa was the residence for a long time of several of its sons. J. W. C., E. L. F., J. S. W., L. W. A., and R. E. S. were initials to conjure with. They were

outstanding personalities of the town but were loved by the people. It can be said of them in the words of Kipling that they moved with Princes but did not lose their common touch and moved with the crowd but did not lose their princely virtues.

A socialist age has deprived the de Soysa family of part of their wealth but no circumstance whatsoever will deprive them of their qualities of humility, integrity and humanity which runs like a golden thread through all their generations."

I had naturally to be as brief as possible but long enough to cover the substance of the most important toast of the evening and thereby do justice to the historic role played by that family in the renaissance of this country. However, this account should also make mention of certain outstanding endowments made by them. Induranwila Estate Ahangama 400 acres in extent, fully planted with coconuts and rubber was endowed for the upkeep and maintenance of the two educational institutions. Further, during his lifetime C. H. de Soysa made available in cash several lakhs of rupees for their benefit.



# THE DE MELS

The ancestor of the de Mel family is said to be a renowned general who played a prominent part in Ceylon history during the time of Nissanka Malla the Sinhala monarch during the 12th century A.D. He was known as Lak-Vijaya-Senevi Tavarunavan. He was also styled Ayasmantha or Abonavan i.e. "one who possesses long life", the Sinhala word *ā* being used in the sense of life-span and *bō* in the sense of much. The Sinhala King Nissanka Malla leaned heavily on this general who had earlier figured prominently in the account of the Pandyan conquests contained in the epigraphs of this monarch. The General quelled a revolt, which broke out in the reign of Vijaya Bahu II and made way for Nissanka Malla's accession to power. He is also credited with having raised successively Sahasa Malla and Kalyanawathi and Dharmasoka to the throne.

This General is called Ayasmantha in the Chula Vansa, Lak Vijaya Singha Senevi Abonavan in the inscriptions and Elulu Abo Senevirat in the Raja Valiya the terms Ayasmantha and Abo being synonymous for possessing long life. He is said to have belonged to the khandavarakula.

This general received as a reward for his distinguished service the gift of Laksapathy Mal Uyana from the Sinhala King. This was situated in the town of Moratuwa.

One of his descendants was elevated to the rank of Maha Vidane Ralahami (Chieftain) about the year 1610. The ancestral home and garden occupied by the latter was owned

at the turn of the present century by Henry Leslie Jacob de Mel one of his great great grandsons - about 10 generations removed from him.

My wife's grandfather J. Hendrick de Mel who was born in 1860 was a business man who speculated in plumbago mining and the plumbago trade. He was also a pioneer planter who was keen on cultivating his own lands from virgin forest. The story is told that on one occasion he was travelling to his plantation situated about 100 miles away from home - there were no cars then - along with some others. They stopped on the roadside along a jungle track for the night. They started preparing their meal and placed the pot of rice on what they thought was the root of a tree and two stones forming, as it were, a tripod. They lit the fire and when the rice was simmering noticed to their amazement that one leg of the tripod was moving away. They had mistaken a huge python for the root of a tree!

Hendrick de Mel was assisted in his plumbago trade by my wife's father H. P. Dickman de Mel, his eldest son. They acquired considerable wealth during the First World War when plumbago was at a premium, but their liberal nature and munificence outran any serious desire to amass a fortune. My wife's paternal uncle H. C. Gladwyn de Mel was my schoolmate for a few years. He captained the Prince of Wales' cricket eleven in 1923. On leaving school he set up as an industrialist installing a saw mill and paddy hulling plant.

My father-in-law H. P. Dickman de Mel was a large-hearted gentleman who was always liberal with his purse. He greatly assisted religious, charitable and other social causes. He spent a great deal of his leisure along with Dr. K. J. de Silva and Proctor A. V. Fernando, both of them prominent citizens of Moratuwa, in settling cases that came up before the Conciliation Board, then newly constituted in the Moratuwa area.

In an earlier generation, as early as 1814, V. Pedro de Mel had built a school at Duwewatte in Digarolla, Moratuwa whilst the Kandyan Kingdom was still under the suzerainty of the Sinhala monarch. It was the first Church school in that area. He had acquired wealth by engaging in a lucrative trade with India for which purpose he had run his own fleet of boats, which were moored at Moratuwella during good weather and in the shelter of the Panadura lagoon during the stormy season.

We have only nostalgic memories of the wide expanse of sea-beach that stretched between Moratuwa and Lunawa which was once the delight of both young and old, which has fallen a victim not only to the ravages of the sea but also to the depredations of man whom the arm of the law could hardly prevent, owing to legal loopholes, from exploiting the seasand, a national asset, for some fleeting gain !

His son Francisce de Mel farmed out arrack and toddy rents on a large scale and ploughed his profits into planting coconuts and cinnamon in the jungles of Chilaw and Jaela. He founded St. Peter's Church, Korallawella in 1883 for the moral and spiritual benefit of the Church of Ceylon congregation in that area. He was also a pioneer in service to the public in a political sense when along with C. H. de Soysa he founded the Moratuwa Association, a precursor of the Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha.

Three of his sons V. Jacob de Mel, V. Johannes de Mel and V. Manuel de Mel emulated their father's example and made a name for themselves in the planting and business sphere. V. Jacob de Mel was a Notary Public by profession, V. Johannes de Mel, a Renter and V. Manuel de Mel a Licensed Surveyor. All three of them were equally industrious and as each one's forte lay in a different sphere they devised a unique economic plan for their common welfare by pooling all their resources and earnings into one fund from which they financed their business, industrial and planting ventures, dividing their profits at the end of each year after allowing for necessary reserves. No wonder that as a

result of this rare device which savoured of an uncommon fraternal unity, their success was almost phenomenal and their descendants benefited largely from this united family system. Their joint enterprises comprised large scale plantations and plumbago mines in the North Western Province.

As regards Jacob de Mel's own firm, it owned and managed a large number of coconut rubber, cinnamon and tea estates in various parts of the island. Most of its produce was transported by canal on the firm's own boats to Colombo. It also owned some of the largest plumbago mines in the island, having started as early as 1870 to locate and operate graphite properties. Some of the principal mines were at Mematagolla, Ragedera, and Maduragoda in the Kurunegala District which were worked for several decades. They were the deepest in the island running down to 800 ft. in depth. It was at one of these mines that steam-gear for pumping and hauling was first erected in Ceylon. As much as 800 tons of graphite ore were extracted from the pit in one year. The Thitewelgolla mine at Maduragoda seventeen miles from Kurunegala was worked for about 25 years to a depth of over 600 ft.; it was the first mine in Ceylon where artificial ventilation was introduced. The firm also owned a further group of 10 mines in full working order in the same district. When raised from the mine, the plumbago was forwarded to the Railway Station by the firm's own transport, and thence trucked to Colombo. After arrival at the Colombo Stores it was cured, sized and sorted, several hundreds of people being employed in these operations. The plumbago thus made ready for the market was exported to London, the United States and other countries as well as sold in the local market.

At the Wattaraka mine, in the Kelani Valley, a twin-shaft section was being worked by very powerful pumping hauling and ventilating machinery; and specimens of the ore from this property had been proved by analysis to contain as much as 95% of carbon. Numerous plumbago lands and mines were also owned by the firm in the Pasdun Korale of the Kalutara district.

The then well - known cinnamon plantation at Kadirana in the Negombo District was acquired by the firm in 1872 for £ 15,000 sterling; and subsequently it purchased the Ekala Estate of some 300 acres in extent for £ 22,000. Various other cinnamon estates in Kalutara and Colombo districts were also owned by the firm, some of which were inter - planted with coconut. More than 1000 acres in these two districts alone were under cultivation with this spice. Peeling factories were established on the estates, and at Kadirana even bark-oil was distilled. A considerable amount of the cinnamon was exported to London and Bremen.

The firm of Jacob de Mel was also one of the largest employers of labour in Ceylon, having some 3000 men and women working in the mines, 2500 on the estates, and 500 at the various stores in Colombo making a total of 6000. The wages paid per annum in the mines amounted to Rs. 250,000; on the estates, Rs. 200,000 and in the Colombo establishment Rs. 50,000 making a total annual pay bill of half a million rupees which was a hundred years ago an exceedingly big sum of money.

Furthermore, the rice for feeding this small army of workers was imported by the firm direct from India. The honours gained by the firm at various international exhibitions include medals and diplomas for plumbago and cinnamon at the Indian and Colonial Exhibition, London, 1886; World's Columbia Exposition, Chicago, 1897; Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1900; and St. Louis Exposition U. S. A. 1904.

By sterling worth and honesty, coupled with high business capabilities, he increased his business until he became the owner of one of the largest commercial houses in Ceylon. One of the best known and highest esteemed gentlemen in Sinhala society at that time he was an ardent member of the Church of England being a member of the Anglican Synod and of the Sunday School Union. One of the largest supporters of various charities he also served on the committee of the Victoria Home for Incurables. He was also on the committee of the Horti - Agricultural Society of

Ceylon. He also had a scheme for training his own employees which to a great extent accounted for the high efficiency of his firm.

V. Johannes de Mel founded St. James Church, Egoda Uyana in 1903 and Holy Emmanuel Mattakuliya.

Two of his grandsons Frank J. M. de Mel of Colombo and C. Hubert de Mel of Moratuwa were popular figures greatly respected for their religious and social work and the contributions they made to such causes. The Rev. Chrisantha de Mel son of C. Hubert de Mel, after obtaining his theological degree at Oxford has devoted his life to Church of Ceylon work and has made handsome donations to religious and charitable causes.

Hubert's brothers Leonard and Clinton de Mel devoted their attention to planting and to local politics. The latter was also a member of well-known brokering firms which helped to promote the sale of agricultural produce.

V. Mathtas de Mel son of V. Manuel de Mel was one of the first Ceylonese to proceed to England for study. He was educated at St. Thomas' College Colombo and Trinity College Stratford-on-Avon England. After completing his studies and visiting the Continent of Europe, he returned to Ceylon to take over the management of his father's affairs and also became joint manager of the firm of Jacob de Mel. He developed the large acreage of coconut and rubber entrusted to his care. At the turn of the century, he opened a large plumbago yard and stores at Moratuwa, chiefly to provide employment for the poor and many men and women found work there in the various operations involved in preparing plumbago for shipment.

He also took a keen interest in the Moratuwa Association founded by his grandfather V. Francisco de Mel the "Grand Old Man" of Moratuwa. He was incidentally the first Ceylonese to introduce a Sinhala Typewriter into the island.

His son V. M. de Mel was also a very popular figure in Ceylon business circles owing to his exceedingly charming manners and magnanimous nature. He was guide, philosopher and friend to businessmen and his Estate Agency Vinitha's was a veritable haven to them in difficult financial situations.

V. Jacob de Mel's son Sir Henry de Mel carried on the tradition. He also participated in politics representing the Slave Island Ward in the Colombo Municipal Council for many years. He was also one of the founder members of the Low Country Products Association which through his energy and perseverance he fashioned into an efficient instrument for the development of low country products. He entered into commercial ventures in a big way including an Insurance Company successfully competing with foreign interests. He also represented the Puttalam Electorate in the Ceylon State Council. Melsiripura a town which he developed was named after him.

Sir Henry's eldest son the Right Reverend Lakdasa de Mel after a popular Ministry lasting over several decades in various parts of the island became Bishop of Kurunegala and was later appointed to the high office of Metropolitan of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon. One of his brothers R. F. S. de Mel took to Municipal politics and was Mayor of Colombo on several occasions and another R. H. de Mel is at present the Chairman of the Livestock Development and Coconut Boards.

F. B. de Mel another son of V. Jacob de Mel was also a well known figure who carried on the family tradition in the sphere of planting. So was his grandson N. L. A. de Mel.

Jacob de Mel's second son, F. J. de Mel, was educated in England and was a B. A. and LLB of Cambridge and a Barrister of the Inner Temple. On the day he was called to the Bar he was the youngest barrister in the United Kingdom.

Jacob de Mel's eldest daughter was married to Sir James Peiris, B. A. LL. M. of Cambridge, who obtained first class

honours in Law and Moral Science and was President of the Cambridge Union Society. The role that he played in the political life of the country is well known.

Canon Harold de Mel devoted many years to the teaching profession during which period he also played a prominent part in the Boy Scout Movement of which he was at one time Scout Commissioner for training Scoutmasters and participated in the 1929 World Jamboree. In later years he joined the Church of Ceylon Ministry in the Kurunegala Diocese training teachers and clergymen and is now a Canon. He was Vicar of St. Paul's Church Kandy and was at one time officiating Principal, Trinity College, Kandy.

My elder brother Wilfred M. de Mel had a long spell in the Ceylon Administrative Service and after his retirement has taken to religious and social service work. He has been for some time the President of the Friend-in-Need Society Moratuwa.

My younger brother Vincent M. de Mel also served the Government as a technical adviser in the Ministry of Industries and later joined the Education Ministry as a Senior Instructor in Technical Education, retiring as Vice-Principal of the Kandy Polytechnic.

H. E. P. de Mel has made his mark in the industrial field. He and his father Cornelius F. de Mel were pioneers of the Safety Match Industry in the island. After a visit to India in 1929, H. E. P. de Mel along with one of his trusted assistants who was of the ordinary type wearing cloth and tunic, a circumstance indicative of H. E. P's freedom from class-consciousness, started the Lanka Light Match Factory in Moratuwa. I shall relate later in these pages how he joined in the setting up of the Ceylon Industries Uplift Society and the first banian factory in the island.

He did not disdain the political field but entered the House of Representatives in 1952 as M. P. for Talawakelle, where he started several progressive measures for the betterment of his constituents.

He was also the live wire in the formation of the Ceylon National Chamber of Industries, which he housed in his own office free of rent for several years and nursed it until today it is the recognised Chamber for industries in the private sector. Its membership has now risen to about 400.

Speaking of the private sector, reference should be made to the various business houses that did an honest job of indenting for the necessary machinery and raw material needed by industrialists. Well known among these was the firm of Bristol Agency whose Managing Partner V. C. Wickremesinghe carries on a well organised, efficient and up - to - date service in accordance with sound business ethics.

I have myself served the Chamber as a Vice - President on more than one occasion. I was Permanent Secretary of Industries & Fisheries at the time the Chamber was inaugurated. Its beginnings were very humble and unostentatious. I can recall how A. Ratnayake a former Minister when invited to become the first President consulted me as to its credentials before accepting the offer. He still continues to advise and assist the Chamber in various ways.

R. A. de Mel pursued political and business career. He represented Colombo South in the State Council and was at one time Deputy Speaker. His son Vimal de Mel is engaged in planting and commercial activities.

Oriel de Mel had interests in planting and plumbage mining. His activities ranged much wider spreading into religious social and political fields, in which he spent his time, money and energy without stint in the service of the community.

Ronnie de Mel, after an eventful career, resigned from the Ceylon Civil Service after having served for some time as Director General of Broadcasting and took to a full time political career. He has been member of Parliament for Devinuwara for several years.

C. N. E. J. de Mel a graduate in Agriculture did signal service to the Department of Agriculture for several decades retiring as Deputy Director and his sister Florence Senanayake / nee de Mel was one of the first woman members of Parliament.

Lloyd de Mel who had a training in India in the manufacture of hosiery, which he further advanced on a visit to Japan, has established himself in the Knitting Industry.

V. E. H. de Mel was also one of those who left the Civil Service prematurely, probably not content to "be signing gun licences." He has since established himself in the private sector in tourism and transport,

Wimalasiri de Mel a prominent Trade Unionist entered the hustings in 1970 and became Member of Parliament for Moratuwa.



## THE PEIRISES

H. J. Peiris also became a legend even in his own lifetime for his enterprise and vision and his philanthropy. Farming of arrack rents was a risky adventure but his far-sightedness and organising ability were such that he made a great success of it. Even up to a few years ago a spacious and solidly built warehouse at Moratuwa stood as a testimony to this venture. He also embarked on another risky enterprise viz plumbago mining. Part of the profits made he ploughed into planting of tea, rubber, and coconut.

H. J. Peiris was the owner of large plantations and properties in many parts of the island, some of the well-known being Leeherayagama (400 acres), Kambukkuliya (500 acres), Kardipolle (400 acres), Muwanhela (600 acres), Millewa Group (2,000 acres), Yahalakelle (1,000 acres), and Bellapitiya (500 acres), planted in tea, rubber, coconut or cinnamon and situated in the Chilaw, Puttalam, Kurunegala and Kalutara districts. All these estates were completely equipped with up-to-date machinery and necessary appliances for the treatment of the produce, while on a large number of them fine residences and bungalows had been erected. All the products from his estates were brought to the Colombo Stores where they were cured and made ready for disposal, either sold in the local market or exported.

In addition to owning estates, he was also largely interested in plumbago, and was the proprietor of the well-known mine at Pussahena, in the Kegalle district, which was worked for several decades even up to a depth of over 750 feet. Here powerful steam pumping gear and hauling machinery were used, the whole of the operation giving employment to hundreds of

people. At another of his mines, Panangola, in the Kalutara district, heavy steam pumping gear, claimed to be the largest of the kind in the island, were installed.

His sense of Philanthropy responded to the social and religious needs of his people in a variety of ways. I reproduce below an article which appeared in the Ceylon Daily News of 8th November 1971 under the caption "Pioneer Entrepreneur".

"At a time when the genius of the Ceylonese business mind is being called upon to exercise its resources in the discovery of new areas of productivity that will enlarge the social well - being of our people there is a special relevance to the act of remembering the life of the late H. H. J. Peiris J. P. who was born a hundred and thirteen years ago today.

Like so many others of his time who made meaningful contributions to their country in later life, H. J. Peiris was educated at St. Thomas' College, then situated in Mutwal, around the area where the Cathedral Church of Christ now stands. Among his contemporaries were Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranaike, father-in-law of our Prime Minister, Dr. Gerald de Saram and George de Saram.

Reaching maturity, Peiris was inspired by the challenge of proving to a British colonial elite that Ceylonese possessed the acumen for business activity, and from the few areas then open to Ceylonese, he chose to go into arrack farming and plumbago mining.

Continuing hard work with the grit and dedication of a true man before a worthy challenge, he was rewarded for his effort s. 'Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon' records that by the turn of the century, his name was synonymous with the Panangala mine, the largest plumbago mine in the country, located in the Ingiriya district at which mine were being used the biggest steam engines Ceylon had seen. By this time, he also had mines in Kurunegala, Kegalle, and Galle districts.

While men of lesser fibre might easily have surrendered to the temptation of concentrating on this narrow success, H. J. Peiris was only spurred to greater adventure by the keen understanding of business operations he had now developed. His next endeavour was plantations. Starting with coconut in the Kurunegala district he soon went into tea in the Padukka area. Then he made one of the highly successful decisions of his life. Finding Padukka better suited to the cultivation of rubber, he pioneered its cultivation there, and was by the beginning of this century selling rubber at £ 1 sterling per pound.

Those inclined to the belief that H. J. Peiris was blessed by destiny to a life of success, will be sobered by the knowledge of the conditions under which that success was achieved. The narrative of obstacles and discouragement which he, together with other such pioneers, met with on their way, must best be reserved for a biographical treatment, which is sorely in need. However, among their many problems was the primary one of finance. Little encouragement did Peiris and his business contemporaries receive from a colonial banking system niggardly in its concealment of prejudice towards the local entrepreneur. As a result, many pioneers watched helplessly as recessions caused their enterprises to collapse around them. H. J. Peiris was fortunate in remaining unscathed.

Financial problems apart, these pioneers lived their lives under frontier conditions. In his *Life and Times of D. R. Wijewardena*, H. A. J. Hulugalle referring to H. J. Peiris and others gives us this evocative picture : These founders of fortunes were a sturdy type of men, who planted coconuts and rubber and mined plumbago, risking money even when interest rates were very high, living frugally, travelling in uncomfortable carts and shivering with malaria in the jungles which they cleared to establish their estates.

But H. J. Peiris was not merely preoccupied with business success for its own sake. Neither was he only obsessed with the desire to score a point off his colonial masters. He was quietly

sensitive to the urgent social needs of his own people. Numerous memorials, hospitals, churches, colleges, convents, schools and orphanages received the benefit of this sensitivity, and all these benefactions sprang from the demonstration of his faith in the ability of our people to achieve the highest levels of success, given an infinite capacity for hard work. Happily, this tradition has been continued by his family to this day.

At the time of his early death in 1917, H. J. Peiris was a giant among Ceylonese business pioneers. With the Prime Minister's call to us for 'Hard work and more hard work' today, the lesson of his life makes him "a man for our season".

His two sons H. W. and J. L. D. Peiris carried on the family traditions, concentrating mainly on agriculture and banking. They developed cultivation on scientific lines. J. L. D. Peiris was largely instrumental in getting a tea research centre for low country teas established at Ratnapura. He was also the initiator of the novel scheme of humidification of teas by air-conditioning, a method that has greatly improved the quality of tea and enhanced its value several fold.

H. W. Peiris brought to bear on the estates which he owned and managed a high degree of efficiency and under good business like management made a substantial contribution to the economy of the country.

As regards banking both of them were responsible along with others for making representations to Government and bringing about the necessary climate for the appointment of the Pochanawala Commission whose recommendations led to the inauguration of the Bank of Ceylon. However, as constituents were coming in too slowly, they led a house to house campaign for enrolling 750 account holders which brought in several millions of rupees to the nascent Bank.

Various religious, social and charitable causes throughout the island have benefited from their munificence.

Mr. J. L. D. Peiris can be described as personality who within the last four decades or more, has always aimed at the betterment of his fellowmen and the material prosperity of the land of his birth. His large scale philanthropy conferred lasting benefits on the Church of Ceylon and its institutions. Right throughout his career he has done very much to advance the interests of religious education and the principal industries of the country. He represented the Low Country Products Association and the Tea Research Institution of Ceylon. His useful guidance and broad and practical outlook on planting has always carried weight both with the Government and the planting industries.

The Peiris family helped in the cultivation and development of several thousands of acres of tea, rubber, coconut and cinnamon in various parts of the island.

H. C. Peirts my son-in-law is the son of J. L. D. Peiris. Along with his father he developed and improved the plantation industries and raised them to a high standard of efficiency.

As company director or Chairman he has also contributed to the development of several industrial and commercial ventures in the island. Though young in years he has made a name for himself in business circles not only here but abroad. He has displayed a wide range of interests in planting, industry, commerce, insurance, shipping and tourism.

He was responsible for influencing the Earl of Inchcape to invest his rupee funds in the Pegasus Hotel north of Colombo, this investment in turn largely influencing the B. O. A. C. and Trust House Fortes to participate in the Ceylon Project. This was the first time that the Inchcape Group invested in a tourist venture.

W. A. Peiris, younger brother of H. J., H. J. J. and Bastian Peiris, was born at Moratuwa in 1880 and educated at Prince of Wales' and St. Thomas' Colleges. In 1900 he went to England

and travelled extensively both in the United Kingdom and Europe. Upon his return to Ceylon he entered on a career of planting in Horana and Chilaw districts.

His beautiful residence "Belvedere" Moratuwa, constructed over 60 years ago was one of the finest and best appointed seats of the Western Province. The interior arrangements were on the then latest English lines, the walls dado, and floors being formed of a most delicate and pleasing series of pictures in mosaic, for which the materials were specially imported from England. The designs were done by the well - known architect of that period, A. L. Marikar.

W. A. Peiris was a member of the Agricultural Society, and captain of the Moratuwa Cyclists' Union and corporal of the "R" Company, Ceylon Light Infantry, Moratuwa, and took a keen interest in everything connected with cycling. His widow donated the Moratuwa Urban Council building and the Moratuwa Town Hall.



# AT SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY

I myself had the privilege of obtaining my early education at the Prince and Princess of Wales' Colleges. The latter was a mixed school up to the Fourth Standard and I entered it at the age of 4 years. The Principal Miss S. P. Marshall was a genial personality whose kind though firm disposition was sufficient to elicit the necessary obedience from her students. At the age of seven I went over to the Boys' School. I have only a hazy recollection of J. G. C. Mendis who was the Principal of Prince of Wales' College at the time I first entered the school but I vividly remember the personality of P. T. Jayasuriya.

I, particularly, owe a debt of gratitude to P. T. Jayasuriya for initiating me into the mysteries of the Greek language. Greek was not in the school curriculum then but when he found a few of us in a receptive mood, I remember how, one evening, he lost no time in detaining us after school and teaching us the Greek Alphabet and a few elementary Greek words. This was no doubt the beginning of my classical education.

By the time I proceeded to St. Joseph's College, Colombo my selection of Classics as my main subject had become fixed and I profited greatly from the scholarship of eminent teachers like Fr. Le Jeune and Fr. Joseph Perera both of whom looked after the classical section. The study of higher mathematics such as conics and calculus for the Intermediate Arts Examination of the University of London added greater spice to the school curriculum. I cannot but remember with gratitude the great help and encouragement given to us by V. A. Kandiah, Mathematics teacher and Marcus Perera who took lessons in English. They took every opportunity to discuss with us matters of general interest in the course of which they wittingly or unwittingly fired us with a sense of ambition for great things.

Ragging of new students was not an uncommon feature at the College. I had gone there from Prince of Wales' College and probably my classmates thought that this new Cambrian should not be allowed to settle down into the even tenor of student life all at once. For a few weeks a few prin-pricks and harassments took place which I was only able to withstand by a stolid indifference. In turn when a newer student turned up, all attention was then diverted on to him. It took me some time to get used to the daily routine of attending a school 12 miles away from home. The day's work started at St. Joseph's College at 10 a.m. no doubt to cater to the large and varied student population attending it from various suburbs. When College was over at 4 p.m. I felt particularly home sick, so much so, that for a difference of a few minutes, I used to catch the Express train from Maradana to Moratuwa and walk back to Lunawa.

Mr. J. P. de Fonseka who took English literature instilled in us a real love for the subject. He had a strong sense of humour and I remember how on the day that he passed out as a lawyer, he wrote on the black-board the Latin tag.

“ Advocatus non latro,

Res miranda populo ”

and asked us to translate it. One of us essayed a possible translation and said:

“ A lawyer who is no rogue,

Is a person much in vogue ”.

He was a great admirer of G. K. Chesterton whose singular style of writing he largely succeeded in emulating.

Anton Muttukumaru took some lessons in French and in his usual voluble manner imparted into us a lot of general information and instilled in us a certain hilarity of living.

He later passed out from the Cambridge University and joined the Ceylon Army in which he was, in due course, appointed Army Commander. He was also the first Ceylonese to be conferred with the rank of Major - General. Subsequently as a reward for his services to the Army he was appointed to the diplomatic service and served in Pakistan, Australia and Egypt.

Prof. T. L. Minor was highly respected by the students for his mastery of the English language which was the subject taught by him. I remember one incident in which he figured. He compelled a reluctant rickshawman to take him home after school was over. Possibly the rickshawman had better fares from casual customers and he preferred on that rainy evening to take them rather than his customary patron. The rickshawman gave way before Minor's insistence. In this instance he probably asserted a right to what he considered was a species of public transport.

Fr. Le Jeune was an institution in himself. A Classics scholar of Cambridge he brought to bear on his work a great deal of scholarship. Genial in temperament, he was skilled in the art of imparting knowledge.

Fr. M. J. Le Goc was the Rector of St. Joseph's College at that time. He was the great organiser who helped to build it up. A great botanist he made a signal contribution in popularising the study of botany in this country particularly with his masterly text - books on the subject.

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After passing the Intermediate Arts Examination, I left St. Joseph's and entered the University College Colombo. The period spent as an undergraduate appears in retrospect as an interesting and very stimulating experience. It was the first years of the University College, having been started in 1921, a temporary solution pending the establishment of a proper institution. The momentous question before the country at that time was as to whether the University soon to be established was to be a residential one and as to where it should be sited.

Controversy had already ranged for some time in which stalwarts such as Sir James Peiris, E. W. Perera, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan and Sir D. B. Jayatilleke had taken part. The ultimate decision fell in favour of the residential type of University on the Peradeniya site.

The exchange of views and aspirations among the students, the formation of friendships and the interplay of personalities were a novel and fruitful experience to an undergraduate population who would soon be called upon to take their place in key positions throughout the country. There is no doubt that the University education imparted to the Ceyloness youth between the inception of the University College in 1921 and the granting of the Donoughmore Constitution in 1932 largely helped in the provisional switchover of power from British to Ceylonese hands. It is indeed, ironical that both in Ceylon and India the very knowledge of political philosophy as enunciated by British political thinkers like Burke Fox and Gladstone and the socialist thinkers like Laski, Webb and others accelerated the process of emancipation from the political yoke.

E. W. P. S. Jayawardene - "Jew" to his friends - read for History Honours. He was a President of the Union Society. He subsequently took to law and became a legal luminary. He was to play an important part in the framing of the new Republican Constitution in 1971 and 1972 as Secretary to Dr. Colvin R. de Silva Minister of Constitutional Affairs. However, we differed in our respective approaches to the manner in which a democratic socialist constitution should be framed.

I myself took a great interest in the activities of the Union Society of which I was elected Vice - President for one year. I took an interest in Union debates ; The pros and cons of argument had always had a special appeal to me as the rational and practical means of settling human problems.

L. S. B. Perera was reading for a Science Degree. He later passed out into the Ceylon Civil Service and retired as a Permanent Secretary. Since then he served for some time as Ceylon's High Commissioner in Canada.

M. Tiruchelvam, C. X. Martyn and Arthur Dalpatado were all students of history. They started a magazine called *Isis* which dealt with matters of historical interest. I remember how on one occasion I contributed a poem under the title 'Daphnis' which I believe was largely motivated by my rather romantic frame of mind at the time. Both M. Tiruchelvam and C. X. Martyn have made notable contributions to the political life of the country. As for Arthur Dalpatado, his efforts at upholding fundamental rights will be dealt with in a subsequent chapter.

Cyril Abeynaike was also reading for History Honours. A characteristic I noticed in him even at that time was that he had set service as his motto and that he was devoid of worldly ambitions. It was no surprise to his friends when he later joined the Church of Ceylon Ministry where he has since been appointed to the high post of Bishop of Colombo.

Felix Bhareti had been a classmate of mine at Prince of Wales' College Moratuwa. After his degree in Classics he qualified as an Advocate and practised for several years.

O. L. de Kretser was also studying Classics with us. After leaving the University he took to law and later served on the Supreme Court Bench. He has blossomed out into politics recently as a prominent member of the Maha Jana Vimukthi Balavegaya.

F. R. Jayasuriya who was reading for his Economics degree was a great mixer and was popular among the students who were no doubt attracted by his infectious smile and his forthrightness which he continued in his later life even when he touched on the political field.

Samuel Whiteley was Professor Classics and Warden W. A. Stone the Lecturer. The latter had, of course, been a standing institution in the educational life of the country but the former had just arrived in Ceylon from the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. I remember Warden Stone telling us one day how he

had noticed Prof: Whiteley being disposed to lead his students by the hand, as it were, and initiating them gradually into the mysteries of the Classics, probahly going on the basis of his South African experience. Warden Stone had, however, assured him that the Ceylonese student was capable of taking it in larger doses.

I also recall Warden Stone's solicitude towards me in a personal matter. I had all along been using the initials S. M. He advised me that it would be better to use the full initials V. S. M. as the initials S. M. might not be appropriate in the event of my becoming a person of some consequence one day.

J. L. C. Rodrsgo also joined the staff later as Lecturer in Classics. He later succeeded Prof. Whiteley as head of the Classical Section. He was rather stocky in appearance, whereas Warden Stone was of great physical stature, Prof. Whiteley being of medium height. Some years later when Prof. Whiteley was leaving Ceylon, at a farewell party given to him, I hear, Warden Stone himself had made a jest as to how the Classical section had come to possess the requisite dimensions postulated by classical literary criticism, he himself representing height, J. L. C. Rodrigo breadth and Professor Whiteley depth.



## CHAPTER 6

# EDUCATION ABROAD

I graduated in 1931 obtaining a First Class in the Classical Honours degree of the University of London which I sat from the University College Colombo. However, the University Arts Scholarship awarded on the results of the degree examination in Arts went to D. G. L. Misso who also obtained a First in Classics. As I was still underage to qualify for it I had to sit the examination again the following year and I succeeded that time,

On the eve of my departure to England, a function was organised at Prince of Wales' College grounds by a few friends of mine. One of my friends Hector F. C. Fernando entered into the arrangements with great zest. There was a fair gathering of past teachers friends and well-wishers. The function was presided over by Dr. Walter Perera a former District Medical Officer of Moratuwa and a respected citizen of the town. He took the opportunity to refer to the exploits of Conrad B. P. Perera who had entered the Ceylon Civil Service a few years earlier and of Shelton C. Fernando who had just passed out into the same service - both sons of Moratuwa, and stated by way of jest in the course of his speech that should he happen to have another son, he would name him Conrad Shelton Samson Walter. I felt extremely sad when Hector F. C. Fernando who had by then passed out as a London qualified Ophthalmologist died some years later.

I embarked on the Orient Liner vessel Orsova on 28th December 1932. It was a trying experience to break away from the bosom of the family but at the same time it was an invigorating one. The voyage itself was pleasant but sea-sickness detracted from the comfort of the voyage and home -

sickness from any sense of elation at the prospect of breaking new ground. The bulk of the passengers were Australians going to England on furlough. But I can remember how a certain remark made by one of them, a young man of about 30, which was misheard by me and taken as an insult to the Easterner, was resented by me. However, I attributed it to the inferior position we then held as a subject race.

At that time a voyage to Europe was an exhilarating and somewhat rare experience although now, since independence, the fact that much larger numbers share this experience has reduced its glamour. Still most journeys are nowadays undertaken by air with the result that it falls to the lot of only a few to enjoy a sea-voyage which invariably allows one to adjust oneself, even temporarily, to comparative quiet and seclusion and to communion with nature. The vast and variegated expanses of ocean can give one as thrilling an experience as forests or mountain ranges.

The vast Indian ocean the unique position of the Red Sea wedged in between the Arabian desert and the arid wastes of North Africa, the neat profile of the man-made Suez Canal, the din and bustle of the Middle Eastern Port of Port Said, the deep blue waters of the land-locked Mediterranean with its romantic islands and the glamorous rock of Gibraltar stand out in my memory as indelible landmarks.

At last, after a voyage of about 3 weeks, I was within reach of my destination and the colourful coastline of Southern England silhouetted against the January mists brought intense relief. On landing at the Tilbury Docks London one is struck by the unobtrusive efficiency of the port officials.

I was met at the Victoria Station London by 2 friends from Ceylon J. V. Fonseka and Daya Hewavitarne, whose presence drove away, at least temporarily, the feeling of nostalgia. This attitude was further strengthened on arrival in digs run by an elderly lady of the Victorian tradition who had the knack of

making her boarders quite at home. It was a novel experience to sit before an English fireside and indulge in pleasant chitchat of any evening. One at once feels the difference between the bounty of the tropical sunshine so readily bestowed by nature and the acute struggle to keep oneself warm in temperate climes. Indeed, this brings to my mind a remark made by an English acquaintance who had served in the Indian Army when he once met some of us in London on a black wintry morning. "Out in the tropics," he said, "you live. Here we only exist."

Miss Fenn our land-lady was a typical middle class lady hailing from the Victorian age. She was well-informed on all matters and was an inspiration and a tower of strength to us in all practical problems besetting students newly arrived in a large city like London.

Mr. & Mrs. Jurgensen with whom I boarded for a period of about 1 year along with J. V. Fonseka, treated both of us as friends rather than as guests. Mr. Jurgensen was employed in the Stock Exchange in London and never failed to regale us with a new yarn each day. I understood that the Stock Exchange in between more serious financial activities, was a veritable mint of jokes and yarns right throughout the year.

I came across a number of English landladies who took a particular interest in the students who stayed with them. I happened to pay a visit to a fellow student who was staying in 'digs' as boarding houses were termed, when the landlady on hearing that I had just arrived from Ceylon hastened to inquire about Rajah, referring to Rajah Hewavitarné who had stayed there a few years earlier. I also recall how when I and my wife went up to Edinburgh in 1960 while on a holiday abroad - my son Priyanath also accompanied us - a Scottish landlady whom we happened to meet enquired from us about a student who had stayed with her about 30 years earlier, namely Dr. C. E. W. Mendis who incidentally happened to be my wife's uncle.

However in a rare case, a student if he carries a Western surname may be confronted with a humorous situation. For instance, E. T. Mac Intyre a Ceylonese had in response to an advertisement, written to a landlady for admission as a boarder and everything had been fixed up to their mutual satisfaction. However, as soon as he arrived and announced himself, the door was banged in his face, the landlady remarking aloud that she had thought he was a Scotsman. !

Speaking of landladies, humorous situations have also arisen in the lives of our students, who sometimes concentrated more on their landladies' daughters than on their studies. In recognition of their elevation even beyond the Bacalaureus status, they have been conferred the honorary degree of M. A. L. L. D. - "married a landlady's daughter" by their fellow students.

Two yeras in London particularly during student days was an exhilarating experience and indeed, a good training for life. In this hub of the student world at least as far as the British Commonwealth and Empire were concerned, there was the opportunity of meeting enterprising students of other lands and exchanging ideas with them. Even friendships formed with one's own nationals put on a special significance in a foreign land.

Several friendships formed by me during this period have continued unabated, Ernest Mac Intyre qualified as a finger - print expert. He had a charming personality and was a most valuable friend. He was also the personification of tact. Sandanam Nicholas who later took the name of Rajaratnam was as hilarious and vivacious a character as one could hope to meet. He qualified as an engineer and also passed out as a barrister. As he was living in a flat he had, perforce, to learn the culinary art and it was his boast that he would like to be recognised as an engineer, barrister and cook. It is sad to think that both Ernest and Sandanam who were so full of life passed away prematurely.

J. V. Fonseka who hailed from my own home town was my constant companion, during the earlier period of my stay in London. My feeling of nostalgia wore off only gradually and during this period he was a great comfort to me. He had been awarded the Ceylon Government Oriental Languages Scholarship and was studying for the Ph. D.

Godwin Saipath was studying Electrical Engineering at the City & Guilds and used to spend his leisure time with us at the Indian Students' Hostel in Gower Street. He always maintained an even tenor of life and never allowed cares or worries to ruffle his peace of mind. He was a friend in - need to other Ceylonese students.

Jermyn G. Fernando joined us in the early part of 1933. He had just won the Second Prize in the Irish Hospital Sweep Stakes and had come over to London to study Law and Economics. At his suggestion, he and a few of us visited Dublin and out of sheer curiosity went over to the Irish Hospital Sweep Stakes Office where the lottery is drawn and actually inspected the huge drum that had churned up the lucky ticket.

The industry of people living in temperate climes, in the face of handicaps caused by the elements is most outstanding. One would, at first sight, imagine that people inhabiting the tropics where nature is so mild and genial during both day and night and practically right throughout the year would normally be more inclined to work harder, under their more equable conditions. However, the reverse, in fact, seems to be the case and it is left to one's power of conjecture to essay the possible reasons for the industry of the former and the comparative lethargy of the latter. Perhaps, the harder struggle for existence in the one case makes people rise to the necessities of the occasion but then that would account only for a moderate degree of progress but certainly not for the vast strides taken by peoples of temperate climes. Perhaps one explanation is that it so happens that the countries situated in the tropics or countries adjacent thereto had, due to their climatic conditions, an earlier run on civilisation which has now ebbed after their heyday of glory and the time has now come to younger

civilisations situated further away from the equator. Besides, in the tropics the ravages of illness often sap the energies of people. I do not think that the popular notion that it is purely the bounty of nature that makes for indolence and lethargy is a satisfactory one.

Although I had intended to enter King's College London, I soon altered my plans owing to an overwhelming desire, due no doubt to nostalgic reasons, to be closer to the hub and axis round which eastern life then revolved viz Gower Street, Tottenham Court Road and Camden Town. So I entered the University College London in Gower Street and commenced studies for the M. A. degree in Classics which unfortunately I could not complete owing to the intervention of the Ceylon Civil Service Examination. I also gained admission as a Barrister student at the Middle Temple, though it actually fell to my lot, to complete the Bar finals only in 1962 whilst I was in the Permanent Secretaries' grade in the Ceylon Government Service

I cannot but recall with gratitude the fact how two Ceylonese friends who were householders in London signed a bond on my behalf at the Middle Temple Office which obviated the necessity for a substantial cash deposit otherwise required by the rules of the Inn of Court. They were Dr. A. P. de Zoysa and Daya Hewavitarne.

As the Ceylon Civil Service Examination was not being held in 1933, I had a shot at the Indian Civil Service Examination and but for a shortfall of a mere 50 marks might have got landed on the Indian Sub - Continent as P. H. Wickremasinghe and C O. Coorey had been on the results of the examination held sometime earlier. This itself might have been welcome as a unique opportunity but that similar opportunities were available in my own country in the building up of an undeveloped economy. It was also interesting to watch at first hand the fast moving events in my own country during the formative period which commenced in the 1930's and led through various vicissitudes of political fortunes.

Ceylonese students in England at this time did not have a smooth run. Financial, social and psychological problems had to be encountered and some students came out only second best. The establishment of a Hostel for Ceylon students by the Ceylon Government in recent years alleviates these problems to some extent. Most students then depended on a periodical allowance from home but in the case of the less affluent ones this could sometimes be spasmodic. However the more well - to - do often accredited their proteges to the care of the well - known Richardson & Co. who played the role of guide philosopher and friend. This firm was a bye - word with many a Ceylon student who proceeded to England at that time in that it afforded them the necessary protection and assistance by arrangement with their parents in solving their financial, educational and even psychological problems. In this respect those who proceeded on scholarship were well away as they had only to take a bus ride to Mill Hill where the Crown Agents Office was, to obtain their dough. In one instance, the de Soysa brothers, sons of L. W. A. de Soysa (later Sir Wilfred) ran a home with Ceylonese servants. I, too, sometimes enjoyed their hospitality which was really of the native variety with cooked rice seeni sambol dry fish and a variety of dishes cooked in Sinhala fashion.

We also felt quite at home at the Buddhist Centre in Camden Town which was run by the Ceylon Mahabodhi Society London. This centre was then managed by Daya Hewavitarne, a nephew of Anagarika Dharmapala, who was largely instrumental in founding the Society. It was at this centre that I met Amito Wimalakirti then a student at Vienna University who had come to London during the vacation. He at once struck me as a sincere and patriotic young man who had a genuine desire to serve his country. Wimalakirti is the only son of the well known businessman planter and plumbago merchant N. D. S. Silva, a brother of the Padikara Muhandiram N. D. A. Silva Wijayasingha of Richmond Castle Kalutara both of whom were well known for their religious activities and their munificence

The Buddhist Centre Hotel was the rendezvous of many a Ceylonese Student. There I met Dr. E. W. Adikaram, Dr. O. H. de A. Wijesekera and Dr. K. Kanapathipillai and Professor Ratnasuriya who have made distinct contributions to the study of Oriental languages and Dr. Nicholas Attygalle (later Sir Nicholas) who was one of Ceylon's well - known gynaecologists and Dr. Daniel de Silva who later set up in private practice in Kandy. Sir Nicholas had gone for post graduate studies and was guide philosopher and friend to the younger students. He was later to play a prominent role in the local scene as Vice - Chancellor of the University of Ceylon and as a President of the Senate.

I remember how D. G. L. Misso who had himself obtained a First Class in the Classics Honours degree of London University in 1931 and won the University Arts Scholarship for that year met me one evening, having come down from Oxford where he was reading for the Greats in the Classical Tripos. He had more or less set his sights on a lectureship in Classics at the University College Colombo on passing out from Oxford. However, he said he had come down to consult me on the advisability of sitting the Civil Service Examination to be held later that year. I felt highly gratified that he should of all persons have consulted me, his life - long rival, on this particular subject expecting to receive selfless and objective advice. It was, no doubt, due to a sense of confidence he had that any advice I would tender would be disinterested and devoid of personal considerations. I may mention that I did not hesitate in suggesting that he might as well sit the examination and later resign, if need be, from the Civil Service after securing his lectureship at the University College.

This attitude of mind which came more or less naturally to me was, no doubt, partly the result of the advice given to us by my father which he largely endorsed with his own example, that we may not do anything dishonourable in our relations with our fellow men whatever the cost.

He took my advice and competed in the Civil Service Examination held in July 1934. He was along with me one of the successful candidates and at his special request the Ceylon Government allowed him to stay on at Oxford and complete his Greats. However, it so happened that he continued in the service and rose to the rank of Permanent Secretary before he retired rather prematurely and emigrated to Australia with his family where he joined the Melbourne University as a lecturer thereby realising his earlier ambition.

The circumstances in the 1930's produced a particular fascination for politics among the student population. These were the after - glow of the Russian Revolution and the struggle for Indian independence. Among those who carried out the Indian struggle at the very heart of the Empire was the popular figure of Krishna Menon who could frequently be seen walking along London streets with his unshaven chin and dishevelled hair. The Indian question was always in the forefront and I remember attending several make - shift gatherings at Hyde Park on Sundays at which Indian speakers held forth. I also recall a lecture given by an eminent English speaker on the outskirts of London under the auspices of the Student Christian Movement. It had been organised to explain the British point of view. A point was made by the speaker which obviously needed rebuttal but as the others were holding their peace I rose up to make some pertinent comments when other Indian students also joined in the discussion. They were apparently greatly impressed by what I a Ceylonese had to say in support of the Indian cause as immediately after the meeting, I was invited to umpire a hockey match which had been organised by them.

Indian leaders, too, gave addresses in London which were largely attended. I can particularly remember the fiery and eloquent speeches made by Vallabhai Patel in the course of which he made a withering analysis of the case for India. His vehemence and patriotism were infectious and it is no wonder that the young Indian students were greatly spurred into action.

The difference between the Eastern and Western civilisations was a question that came up to the fore in our reflections as students on several occasions. The advocates of Eastern civilisation had a defensive role to play as the Eastern countries were still subject to imperial domination and were, to that extent, playing a secondary role in world affairs. But still it was not difficult to show the hallowness of pomp and military might especially after the terrific holocaust of World War I when highly civilised Christian nations had clashed in mortal combat. On the other hand the Eastern nations with their weaker military development had also waged constant wars amongst themselves although with less destruction of human life or material. In the case of Ceylon for instance there have been throughout her history innumerable wars though of a local and restricted nature, mostly between the Sinhalas and Tamils, the latter supported by South India - and this in spite of advanced Buddhist and Hindu civilisations. Nor can it be said that wars have been waged less ruthlessly in the East than in the West. Men every where have been capable of the worst forms of cruelty when occasion arose.

But it could at least be shown that the mere pomp and glory and the outward trappings of Western civilisation, though of a highly developed order, had not ushered in a better way of life and that real happiness and peace of mind seemed to elude them. On the other hand, Eastern nations with their less advanced material civilisations and greater insistence on spiritual values had so far played an insignificant and passive role in world affairs. Only a synthesis between the two civilisations, it seemed, could bring about a more realistic approach to world problems.

This synthesis was soon to occur. Indeed it had already started for the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and his quaint and simple methods of fighting militarism had already had its impact on the more materialistic outlook of the West. Never in the whole history of mankind had the forces of might and right, the one armed to the teeth and the other entirely defenseless met in so massive a conflict. It was a great object lesson for humanity that the forces of right had prevailed. It must also be added that

the outcome was all the more significant and valuable from a humanitarian point of view in that those who represented might conceded victory with good grace and probably, as subsequent events have shown, paved the way for greater co-operation between nations in the development of civilisation itself.

Events in Europe accelerated the pace at which the final denouement was to take place. The rise of Hitler on the wave of German nationalism and the stage set for a drama of gigantic proportions brought into sharp relief the impermanence of might and the hollowness of imperial domination.

It would not be out of place to mention here that these developments progressively transformed the outlook of the Easterner in the context of travel to Western countries. Earlier, a feeling of racial inferiority had necessarily entered his mind in his dealings with the Westerner. But soon the realisation of the inevitability of the rise and fall of nations and empires made him a little more philosophical and self-confident in his attitudes.



## I RETURN HOME

On passing into the Civil Service in 1934, my return to the Island took place shortly thereafter. At a public reception accorded to me by the residents of my home - town, which was held at the Moratuwa Town Hall in January 1935 I had occasion to mention in the course of my speech in reply to the felicitations offered to me, how as a member of the Ceylon Civil Service it would now afford me an opportunity to make my own contribution to the development of the country so that she may in course of time be fit to take her place as an independent nation. No doubt the result of a pent - up feeling that in entering a service which was up till then mainly for the maintenance of law and order - the idea of development, as such, had not pervaded it then - one was merely helping to maintain the status quo.

I remember how even this remark was considered by some elders as being too outspoken. After all, if one had chosen the civil service medium, one had to accept it with good grace. However, sometimes in life certain unusual situations arise into which one cannot help infusing a sense of bold realism which helps to synthetise one's inner contradictions. Although to the audience of 1935, the utterance made by me may have sounded rather far - fetched and unprovoked, it is almost incredible how it fitted into the subsequent pattern of events. By no stretch of imagination could anybody have guessed at that time that within 13 years of that date we were to achieve our national independence ! And the vital role that government officers had to play in the fast changing political economic and social background of that short period was fundamentally different from what could have been anticipated then.

The first station to which I was posted was Kurunegala which was once a capital of the Sinhala Kings and of considerable historical importance. But before proceeding there, I had to meet my future partner Phyllis de Mel who had patiently watched my progress and waited for me during my sojourn abroad.

It is customary to associate Kurunegala with its two rocks named after the Elephant and the Tortoise obviously owing to their shapes. Although these make the landscape picturesque, they shut off the breezes from that direction and in the evenings throw up the stored - up heat. A redeeming feature in this respect is the Lake believed to be man - made which covers a fair area of ground and helps to cool the atmosphere somewhat. A drive round this is always a pleasant exercise especially for a tired officer at the end of his day's work.

Kurunegala district is also well - known for the Ridi Vihare at Ridigama about 12 miles from Kurunegala town, said to be an ancient site for silver mining. Robert Knox lived in this district at Bandara Koswatta for part of his enforced stay during the reign of King Raja Singha II.



# EARLY YEARS IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

As a Cadet in the Ceylon Civil Service one has to start, as it were, from the grass - roots of government procedure. The Kachcheri, the office of the Government Agent is the hub of Provincial administration. It also collected and safeguarded the revenues of government. In fact the term used in India for the comparable post was Collector.

The system of accounting procedures with all the forms and registers involved had been perfected after a process of trial and error over many decades and were relatively fool - proof against error or fraud. It was the duty of the cadet to gain acquaintance with these at first hand so that as he goes up the ladder and accepts more responsibility his knowledge of what transpires at the base of the pyramid helps him to understand the ramifications of each problem.

A civil servant has to be a jack of all trades. As an officer of the staff grade, he had to give directions even from the word 'go' and for this purpose had to equip himself with an intimate knowledge of the system of administration adopted. He had also in addition to attend to all other organisational jobs of an official or demi - official nature that may arise.

All junior officers looked up to the Government Agent or G. A. as he was popularly called, almost as a superhuman entity capable of finding a solution to any problem that may arise at a moment's notice. The first G. A. under whom I had to serve was C. Harrison - Jones who was then almost on the verge of retirement. He was of an understanding nature though somewhat

quick tempered. I recall a senior officer at the station mentioning to me soon after I came how those with double - barrelled names which denoted good family connections were rather proud of them and how one should be careful to pronounce the names in full. It was sound advice for there was not only the G. A. but several planters as well who owned such names and as I had to meet them at least now and then at official or social level, any mispronunciation would have caused embarrassment to all concerned. In fact, I have noticed a fairly widespread weakness among certain people of pronouncing surnames in truncated form, not properly understanding what they stand for and thereby quite unwittingly causing considerable offence to others.

Political demonstrations were rare in those days and almost non-existent in relation to government officials so that one incident stands out in my memory. Several hundred peasants led by a Roman Catholic priest marched into the Kachcheri premises from a village several miles away to present a petition to the Government Agent Harrison-Jones and voice their grievances against a certain tax that had been imposed on them by the Village Council. The crowd was rather restive until the leader started making his address before the Government's chief representative in the province. Assurances of quick consideration of these demands were given by the G. A. and the procession marched away, satisfied with having ventilated their grievances.

C. Harrison-Jones was succeeded by Edmund Rodrigo whose reputation, as in the case of C. L. Wickremesinghe earlier, was high as one of those who had made the grade and earned promotion to high office. He is pictured as one who even in those colonial days carried out his official duties without fear or favour. It is said that, on one occasion, a European planter who was charged before him as Police Magistrate had refused to plead before a "nigger". It is stated that Edmund Rodrigo thereupon, without any further ado, started writing a minute on the case record the purport of which was that in as much as the accused was not prepared to plead before a brown magistrate he was conceivably 'non compos mentis' and as such needed to be kept under observation. So in obedience to the order the accused planter was

hustled by Fiscal's Officers to the House of Observation. This incident is indicative not only of his fearlessness but also of the subtlety of his mind. He was next appointed Director of Agriculture, the first Ceylonese to be so appointed and rendered a distinguished service in that field.

Three Assistant Government Agents successively served under Edmund Rodrigo viz. R. N. Bond, H. C. Cocks, a double First of Oxford University and C. H. Hartwell. All of them looked up to him as an able administrator from whose experience and sagacity of mind they could profit.

Mention might here be made in lighter vein of a humorous controversy between the Office Assistant C. H. W. Kannangara a brother of C. W. W. Kannangara one time Minister of Education who was responsible for free education the "pearl of great price," and R. N. Bond as to the sinhala translation of the term O. A. Kannangara maintained that it was දෙවැනි ඒජන්ත, whilst Bond the A. G. A. who naturally came second in the provincial hierarchy pointed out that this term should be reserved for the A. G. A. Kannangara's rejoinder was that the term A. G. A. should properly be translated as උප ඒජන්ත.

Edmund Rodrigo was succeeded by M. Prasad who was the District Judge of Kurunegala at the time. The appointment of a judicial officer as G. A. was a rare occurrence and caused no little surprise. It was but natural that he should temper his administrative decisions with a sense of equity. His was a genial temperament and he quickly won the goodwill of those with whom he came into contact.

D. B. Seneviratne Additional A. G. A. was one of those who had been appointed to the Ceylon Civil Service on his own merits and as a reward for his military service in World War I. He was a very energetic officer and devoted most of his time to the Ridi - bendi - Ela Scheme, a new irrigation project at Nikaweratiya.

Rogerson the next G. A. was a lovable personality who radiated geniality all around. I recall a singular feature about his

hand writing which consisted of large letters each about an inch high, resulting in sheafs of minutes pouring down the pipe line. His hand writing was quite in contrast to that of N. E. Ernst who had been District Judge earlier whose hieroglyphics were said to be so illegible that even the Supreme Court had insisted that records sent up from his court in cases of appeal should be always typewritten.

I remember how Mrs. Rogerson who was a very voluble person used to dominate the conversation at the Officials' Club. Words fell from her lips like the proverbial autumn leaves in Vallombrosa. One often wondered whether the unusual reticence of Rogerson was due to his wife's volubility.

When after our marriage in July 1936, my wife, too, came into residence at Kurunegala, Rogerson who may have observed that I was perhaps one of the first officers to get married amongst the junior civil servants at the time, on his own suggested to me one day that it would perhaps be a good idea if I got a transfer to the Land Settlement Department, where extra emoluments were forthcoming in the form of duty allowance, travelling and subsistence. He was himself instrumental in procuring this transfer by sending a demi-official note to the Chief Secretary at the Secretariat Colombo who was in charge of civil service transfers. I was myself enamoured of this suggestion as it meant resumption of residence in our own home at Moratuwa from where I could attend to land settlement duties. So in January 1937 we packed up our bags and returned home to stay there continuously for a period of 14 years until 1951 when I was transferred to Batticaloa as Government Agent Eastern Province.

J. R. Toussaint was sent from Colombo to help in the Kachcheri administration during one or two heavy spells of work. He was a fine draughtsman in English. I particularly admired him for a book compiled by him on civil service personalities which made interesting reading.

There are a few unimportant matters worthy of mention if the reader is to get an idea of the social background of life in

government circles especially in the outstations during the colonial period. If an officer was to avoid disfavour among the higher members of the hierarchy visiting was a must, the juniors making the first bid and so on in accordance with seniority. Club life, too, was useful for keeping in touch with other officials at a personal level. Contract bridge was the principal pastime and one's adaptability to Club life was often gauged by the interest one took in this king of card games and the skill one displayed therein. Sometimes the G. A. himself might invite one to join in a game, when, to have to declare one's innocence of it would leave a bad taste in the mouth.

Accordingly, I contrived to mug up a few rules of Culbertson and took the opportunity of playing with the junior officers for experience. Even this little knowledge came in handy when I had gone up to Nuwara Eliya one week-end where my fiancée, too, had gone for a holiday with her parents and was spending the evening at St. Andrew's Hotel where I met S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike then Minister of Local Administration who had also lodged there for the night. To wear off the dullness someone suggested that we make a four and S. W. R. D. with his usual humour asked me if the "Kachcheri" could partner him. I agreed and so we sat down with glasses of beer on the side. The other two were also experienced players but it was no fun as they could visualise several moves in advance. However, at the end of the game they did not appear to be disappointed at my performance.

The narration of jokes now and then, and yarns relating to official slips and peccadilloes also helped to relieve the boredom of outstation life.

L. H. de Alwis Police Magistrate, Emil de Livera, Divisional Agricultural Officer, J. A. de Silva, Assistant Conservator of Forests and V. Rasaratnam, Superintendent of Surveys made good company. They were not only good entertainers but also good raconteurs.

The record however would not be complete unless mention were made of the ravages caused to the villages of the North Wes-

tern Province by the Malaria Epidemic of 1935 and 1936, which took a heavy toll of life. It is tragic to think that many a villager went to his doom under the notion that the disease was communicated through the air - the misconception that had originally given the disease its name - and still quite incredulous of the fact that it was conveyed by the mosquito!

Practically, the entire staff of the Kachcheri was engaged on relief operations such as distribution of medicines and food stuffs and on employment relief works so that the villagers might do some work and earn wages for their subsistence rather than being put merely on the dole. This move was a very practical one as the people primarily needed nourishment in order to resist the disease and a little exercise would also help them to keep in good trim. When the epidemic was at last over, it had taken a toll of 60000 lives.

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I am rather thankful for the opportunity I had of serving in the Land Settlement Department as it helped to give me an insight into village life with its different systems of land tenure and their effects on the village economy. The Waste Lands Ordinances which had helped the planter at the expense of the villager had already taken their toll. Fragmentation of the remaining land had become a serious problem. Land was a basic factor on which depended the standing and welfare of the various families and disputes in regard to them gave an edge to recrimination and caused a flutter in the even tenor of village life.

The delimitation and settlement of fractional shares of land necessitated the preparation of pedigrees and examination of deeds and inspection of encroachments. It also involved careful siting of allotments and the mapping out of the unallotted land for pasture and other needs and for village expansion. My first

circuit was with M. W. F. Abeykoon one of the Senior Assistant Settlement Officers, in the Nalanda area. Here I got my first insight into the operations of the Land Settlement Ordinance.

It was indeed a great pleasure and a valuable experience to serve under a Head of Department of the calibre of H. E. Jansz, ( later Sir Herbert ) the Settlement Officer, He was a Senior Civil Servant who had held high administrative and judicial office, a man of great understanding and ability in dissecting problems and finding the necessary solutions.

Assistant Settlement Officers L. J. de S. Seneviratne, S. S. Navaratnam, R. Y. Daniel, C. B. P. Perera, C. F. Ingledow, N. Moonesinghe, M. W. F. Abeyakoon, R. T. Ratnatunga, Carlton S. Corea, N. W. Atukorale, R. W. Tennekoon and H. R. Van Dort had all been appointed to the department in a special effort by the Ministry to speed up the work of land settlement which was looked upon as a vital infrastructure for village development, which was largely retarded by uncertainties of title to land.

Land settlement work took me to several provinces and travelling for Assistant Settlement Officers was a part of the routine. I remember once having applied to the General Treasury for a loan to purchase a vehicle, which was turned down on the ground that the car I had at the time was not old enough to qualify for a loan according to Treasury rules. As the car, however, was not good enough I happened to refer to this matter in the monthly diary sent by A. S. O. to the Minister of Agriculture, D. S. Senanayake. The Minister who apparently read through our diaries minutely, had made a marginal note against it to the effect that " an A. S. O. needs a car for his work ". This acted as a guideline to the Treasury and the age for senile debility of an A. S. O's car was reduced.

We had to make plentiful use of Rest Houses and Circuit Bungalows for our official work as spring - boards from which

we shot out to the rural areas for inspections and inquiries. These bookings are generally made in advance so as not to conflict with claims of field officers of other departments. Once, however, there occurred a head on clash between two of our officers viz. S.S. Navaratnam and C. B. P. Perera Assistant Settlement Officers and an Officer of the Agricultural Department, Sammy Dias Bandaranaike Divisional Agricultural Officer, as to whether according to Provincial Road Committee rules under which Rest Houses were administered, one of the A.S.O.O. should not vacate Wariyapola Rest House on that particular day and give his room for occupation by the D. A. O. A verbal duel had occurred the aftermath of which had been the despatch of two telegrams to the G. A. Kurunegala containing hundreds of words by which each party presented its case to him as Chairman Provincial Road Committee on the respective stand taken by it.



## **PROMOTION OF INDUSTRIES**

In 1938 there was inaugurated by a few of us what was styled the Ceylon Industries Uplift Society the main object of which was to give a fillip to the establishment of local industries enthusiasm for which was still sadly lacking. The Society was expected to work on subscriptions by members and contributions and from the profits of a salesroom for local industrial products. No dividends were to be declared but all profits were to be ploughed back to a common fund and utilised for industrial development.

The opening ceremony of the Salesroom was performed by Wilmot A. Perera of Sri Palee fame Horana, having been the founder of that institution on the lines of Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan. Devoted entirely to the promotion of local industries Sri Palee had done pioneering work in instilling a sense of pride in our own products. When I happened to visit Shantiniketan in 1968 during a visit to Calcutta to consult with the Birla Bros. on a big textile project, and saw for myself the wonderful work done there in the propagation of national arts and crafts, I realised how invaluable such institutions are for nation building.

In pursuance of the aims and objects of the Ceylon Industries Uplift Society, my wife and I joined some of its members on a trip to India in 1940, the purpose of which was to promote an industrial venture in the form of an up to-date textile spinning and weaving mill though on the modest scale of 12000 spindles and 300 looms. We consulted M. Barucha a professional textile consultant of Bombay who prepared a complete blue print for a mill to be installed with Japanese machinery.

On our return home in August 1940, a public meeting was organised presided over by J. C. W. Rock, a retired Director of Industries and Commercial Intelligence at which the whole project was discussed and necessary support elicited. G. C. S. Corea who was Minister of Labour Industry and Commerce had promised full support from the Government angle. Everything was well set for launching the scheme when all hopes were dashed to the ground with the entry of Japan to the war in 1942, in that all our estimates had been based on Japanese machinery.

However, quite undaunted by this reverse our members organised a smaller project viz a banian factory which involved a fresh visit to India, this time to Calcutta from where the requisite knitting and sewing machinery was purchased.

We derived considerable satisfaction from this venture as the Ceylonese were figuring at that time in the world scene only as "hewers of wood and drawers of water". Ceylon was then only known to the rest of the world as "Lipton's Tea Garden". In fact when we were students in London in 1933 and 1934 we found it an extremely difficult exercise to explain to the average Londoner as to where our country was situated. Whatever pains we took were generally of little avail as we were also classified as Indians. We would sometimes hear ordinary working class English women referring to us in their conversation with one other, as we passed along the streets as "Pale Ale" meaning Indians from their familiarity with India pale Ale.

The members of the Society referred to above who proceeded to India consisted of H. E. P. de Mel, Jermyn G. Fernando, Christy Ferdinando, D. M. Perera, and C. I. Mendis. Of these H. E. P. de Mel had already established his name as an industrialist by pioneering the safety matches industry in Ceylon after an earlier visit to India. Jermyn G. Fernando has since established himself in the textile printing industry. D. M. Perera and Christy Ferdinando are company director and planter

respectively and Christie Mendis is a pioneer in the Paper Sacks industry. The rest of the membership consisted of L. E. J. Fernando Lakrajasinghe, Durand E. Fernando, Dr. C. L. X. Muttukumaru, E. P. A. Fernando, Harold de Mel, N. E. S. Fernando, Dr. W. W. J. Fernando, G. A. de Silva, Dr. J. L. C. Peiris, Mrs. L. C. Fernando, R. F. S. de Mel, R. H. de Mel, and J. Subasinghe. The Trustees were - G. H. Perera, H. P. Dickman de Mel and Wilmot A. Perera.

A direct result of the trips to India was as shown above, the establishment of the first banian factory in the island. It was a pioneer venture at that time. The formal opening ceremony was performed by G. C. S. Corea Minister of Labour Industry & Commerce who expressed great satisfaction at the fruition of this venture. I can also recall how D. H. Balfour who as Director of Industries was also invited to the opening of the factory, remarked how pleasant it was to see wheels turning. That was the beginning of the Ceylon Hosiery Company Ltd. which has since then undergone some vicissitudes of fortune. It was, however, the mother factory which gave birth to several other banian factories in the island, in the process affording employment, directly or indirectly to several thousands of workers.

Special mention should also be made of the invaluable assistance and encouragement afforded to us by Dr. C. L. X. Muttukumaru, a physician commanding a wide practice in Moratuwa. He was always prepared to support projects which were calculated to promote the country's economy. He has served this area as Medical Registrar for a period of 35 years, for which he was awarded the Queen's Coronation Medal and as a Medical Practitioner for about 50 years.

# PROMOTION OF LITERARY WORK

The Sinhalese Literature Society was started in 1938 in consultation with some friends with the object of promoting Sinhala literature for which there was soon going to be an increasing demand from the student population and the general public. Our President was Dr. G. P. Malalasekera, Dean of the Faculty of Oriental Languages, at the University of Ceylon. I functioned as the Honorary Secretary of the Society.

We also had with us Julius de Lanerolle and other Sinhala scholars. The Society published some books; among them were *Ehelepola Varnanawa*, a panegyric on *Ehelepola* in verse by one of his contemporaries. It was handed to the Society by Fr. S. G. Perera, who had edited the manuscript along with M.E. Fernando, *Apthopadesa* a book of Sinhala proverbs by James de Alwis of Uyana, Moratuwa and a small tract on the *Esala Perahera* by Dr. G. P. Malalasekera.

The Society had also acquired some lexicographical material comprising several volumes of manuscript compiled by M. Don Marthelis Silva of Panadura, the well-known Sinhala Scholar who had been conferred the title of Sri Vijaya Kaviraja Panditha by a Sangha Sabha. This material which had been prepared by him over a period of 50 years through dint of hard work and over which an enormous amount of trouble had evidently been taken by him, was formally presented by me to T. B. Tennekoon Minister of Cultural Affairs on 20th March 1977 at a ceremonial function held to mark the 50th Anniversary of the inauguration of the Dictionary Office, Colombo. Tributes were paid to Pandit Kaviraj by the Minister and the Editor-in-Chief Dr. D. E. Hettiaratchi.

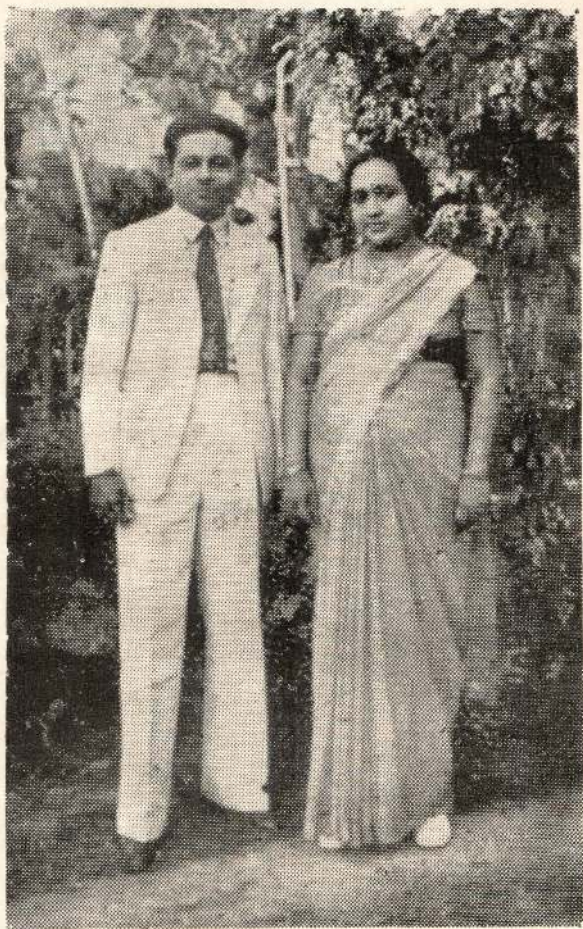
## CHAPTER 10

### A HOLIDAY HOME

My wife and I were in the habit of going for a holiday up country practically every year the usual haunts being Haputale and Bandarawela. Apart from the invigorating climate and the landscape of villages and mountain ranges, the very silence that one meets with in those remote areas is an element that conditions the mind to those sharper illuminations which can come only from communion with nature.

Whilst on a holiday at Buona Vista Haputale in 1942, we came to know that a bungalow called "Garfield" owned by Messrs Walker & Greig Engineers, which had a local branch at Haputale was for sale. We visited it and found that it was a semi-modern and semi-rustic building with modern conveniences but its speciality lay in its situation on the upper slopes of a range of hills which supported the Kahagolle Tea Estate the top of which fringed the 5000 feet level above which clearings were prohibited by the Land Development Ordinance, a provision intended to safeguard natural water-reserves and climatic rain belts.

Its situation was, indeed, unique in that it commanded a most magnificent view of an unbroken range of some of Ceylon's well-known mountains which commenced from Namunukula towards the East of Badulla, and stretched through hills on which nestled Bandarawela, past many a summit and peak via Hakgala belt and Pidurutalagala Ceylon's highest mountain. It then joins that azure range of hills whose steep Western sides dropped sheer towards the flat table land which stretched towards Tana-malwila, past numerous village tanks the largest of which is Hambegamuwa. The Haputale town itself has been built on the Eastern side of this same range of hills and is high enough to



**The author and his wife**  
**(Photo taken in 1948)**



command a view of the sea beyond Hambantota in the Southern Province on a clear morning even with the naked eye. It is indeed an exhilarating sight, the blue hills in light and shade silhouetted against a staccato sky of stationary white clouds. Furthermore, the natural beauty of this vast expanse is studded by new-grown tea bushes and albizzia and turpentine for shade, tea factories painted white and roofs of villas painted red, and estate bungalows and military encampments. Looking towards the north you see Adisham, once the residence of Sir Thomas Villiers, and now a Holiday Home for Christian priests. The view at night is no less lovely when electric lights from Bandarawela and Diyatalawa and from isolated spots on estates gleam into view. On a clear night, the scene is indescribably majestic with a myriad stars bristling in the firmament almost touching each other as on a King's diadem.

Sir Nicholas Attygalle the famous physician too had a bungalow adjoining ours. I remember him discussing the merits of climate and landscape at this spot with my father-in-law H. P. Dickman de Mel and patting each other on the back on having selected them. It was Sir Nicholas' view that of the three adjacent health resorts of Bandarawela, Diyatalawa and Haputale, the last mentioned had the most ideal conditions right throughout the year. He compared its climate to that of Switzerland.

I have often entertained the idea of taking up my residence at Haputale on retirement from Government service but this has so far not materialised owing to other preoccupations closer to Colombo. Whenever I go up there I think of the sentiments oft expressed by Jawaharlal Nehru in his writings regarding the strength and moral power that one could draw from contemplation of high mountains co-eval with the world itself. They also help one to be "away from the madding crowd", in the words of Thomas Hardy, a consummation greatly to be desired in the present day maelstrom of political and economic strife.

# TOWARDS THE WAR EFFORT

I was on land settlement duties in the Balangoda area of Ratnapura District in 1939. with Belihuloya Rest House as my headquarters, when I received a telegram recalling me to Colombo to assume duties as Assistant Telegraph Censor, in a Department newly set up in furtherance of the war effort. At that time my wife and my eldest daughter Indrani were with me, taking the opportunity of my official duties at Belihuloya to avail themselves of a holiday in that salubrious climate. So we packed up and returned to Colombo, bidding farewell as it later turned out to Land Settlement work.

Work in the Telegraph Censorship was onerous involving night duty. So after a period of about two years, I obtained a transfer to the Petrol Control Department which had also been set up to conserve the limited supplies of petrol reaching the Island during war time. J. N. Arumugam, Commissioner of Motor Transport and Registrar of Motor Vehicles who was obviously the authority best equipped to effect this control had been entrusted with the functions of the new department. This work brought me into close contact with large numbers of people of consequence throughout the Island.

Two incidents which occurred during this period stand out in my memory. One occasion was when the Minister of Local Administration, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike under whose portfolio the subject of Petrol Control was included, unwittingly rubbed shoulders with Sir Geoffrey Layton Comman

der-in-Chief of the Defence Forces of the island at the time of the Japanese air raid on Colombo. As Assistant Petrol Controller I had to see the Minister one morning at his residence in Edinburgh Crescent to obtain his orders on an application for petrol made by the Services.

Somehow, his reaction to the application was not hundred per cent favourable. He had sufficient grounds for taking that view as the stocks of petrol were depleted at that particular time and some of it had to be set apart for essential civilian needs in regard to which the Minister had a special obligation. Sir Geoffrey Layton, however, took umbrage at the Minister's order and complained to the Chairman, Board of Ministers, D. S. Senanayake. The matter came up for discussion even in Parliament.

I can recall how both in the discussion in Parliament and at a Conference held at the Petrol Control Office attended by the representatives of the three services at which the Minister presided he maintained his sangfroid and offered a lengthy and lucid explanation of the reasons that made him to take that view. Like a lion at his best when challenged, he rose to rare heights of eloquence withal tactful and diplomatic in his approach. The incident was closed. He got over what was in the nature of a predicament without loss of face.

The other incident was in connection with one of the usual monthly conferences held at the Petrol Control Office with representatives of the three services at which I presided as Acting Petrol Controller. The Navy was represented by Captain Philips. A heated argument arose over certain allocations of petrol made by me to the Navy which he thought were not adequate. He spoke disparagingly of the civilian administration indulging in surprisingly harsh terms and trying to use, as it were, the big stick in

an effort to brow beat, drawing his strength as it were straight from the imperial reservoir, seeing that Ceylon was still a Crown Colony and from a feeling of superiority of the white man. In the course of this discussion I felt an almost irresistible urge to chuck up my job and join the political forces fighting for national independence.

It is, however, interesting to note how this same Captain Philips arrived in Ceylon a few years later having retired from the Navy and as a member of a group on Moral Rearmament, as the very antithesis of the earlier man. He was now vehemently preaching co - operaton between nations and the brotherhood of man. I could not resist the thought that this transformation was the direct reaction to his earlier uncompromising imperialistic stance !



# I OPT TO JOIN THE INDUSTRIES DEPARTMENT

The Industries Department afforded opportunities for economic development of the country and for the provision of employment. I opted to join the Department and was asked to interview K. Somasuntheram, Deputy Director of Industries, who later recommended my appointment. When I joined the department as an Assistant Director in 1945, there were several government projects in basic industries such as cement, leather, ceramics and plywood. There was also a branch of the department manned by scores of technical men all keyed up for the development of cottage industries. It was a step in the right direction as in Japan at least at the time, 57% of industries fell outside the Factory Act. This was particularly so as the Japanese system provided for a large number of complementary units mostly housed in cottages which coordinated and supplied larger assembly lines.

Our cottage industries in 1945 were fairly representative, the main ones being handlooms, wetakeiya, mat weaving, pottery, sunn - hemp, silk - worm rearing and silk - weaving.

These provided employment either wholly or partially to tens of thousands of persons, mostly females. The products, however, did not have the finish or elegance of their imported counter - part, which was to be expected in the early stages of industrial development. Our people, too, did not have to go through the more exacting mental or physical processes of self - abnegation, as our neighbours on the Indian sub - continent had

to do, in order to win national independence. As such, except for one or two shortlived movements aimed at popularising khaddar or introducing the national dress no swadeshi or khaddar movement as such materialised in this country. So much so, that in order to sell our goods, the government had to resort to the ingenious device of the Industrial Products Regulation Act which laid down certain minimum conditions for enjoining the purchase of locally made goods in order to qualify for the import of similar goods from abroad. This method worked but the marketing technique to which the importer sometimes resorted to was a little derogatory to local enterprise. In following the path of least resistance he reduced the value of the local variety for easier disposal and made up for this by increasing the sale - price of the imported counterpart.

Those charged with the responsibility for industries at the time were G. G. Ponnambalam Minister of Industries, Industrial Research and Fisheries, and R. H. Bassett, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry, and D. H. Balfour, K. Somasuntheram, W. J. A. Van Langenberg, and E. C. S. Paul and myself among others in the department, all of whom rendered yeoman service in launching the ship of industrial development on the rough seas of local apathy and prejudice and competition from subsidised foreign goods. Private industry was shy and diffident, no special protection being afforded to it on the premise that foreign imports were cheap and popular and helped to keep the cost of living down. Foreign exchange was no problem of the sort that it became in the 1960s when it provided the necessary impetus for setting up of industrial units on a wide scale.

G. G. Ponnambalam brought to bear on the subjects included in his portfolio of Minister of Industries, Industrial Research and Fisheries the same keenness, hard work and concentration that he reputedly gave to his own work as a criminal lawyer and which made him pre - eminent in that line. In the course of my work as Assistant Director I had to send up

to the Ministry hundreds of reports on various industries, mostly small scale, which received the careful perusal of the Minister who always looked at them with a trained and critical mind. Perhaps having noticed that my reports were well reasoned out and generally ending up with practical recommendations, it appears that he had once remarked to one of my colleagues, who conveyed it to me, that I seem to be having my head screwed at the correct point.

Once I had sent up a report on staff vacancies and proposed reshuffles of subordinate officers. I was called up by the Minister and questioned in detail and at considerable length as to the grounds on which my recommendations were based. It was only later that I realised that I had been subjected to a gruelling cross - examination by an expert in that line. However, I was glad that he had no reason ultimately to reject any of my recommendations.

Sometime later after I was transferred to Batticaloa, he paid an official visit to Batticaloa District as Minister and inspected some of the cottage industrial units in the area as well as the great Paper mill at Valachchenai. In fact, he was good enough to enquire whether I would like to come back to the department as Director of Industries.

R. H. Bassett was always affable and of an understanding nature. He had earlier made a name for himself as Commissioner of Agricultural Marketing and was now devoting that same energy and enthusiasm to industrial development. In 1949 I had made all arrangements to go abroad on leave with my family but had to call it off at very short notice even after passages had been booked as I was called upon to buy up an ancestral property partly owned by my wife which the other shareholders were going to dispose of. When I explained my predicament to the Permanent Secretary R. H. Bassett, he at once appreciated it and remarked how he himself, a few years earlier, was faced with an

identical situation regarding one of his own ancestral properties in England. I felt how mankind was one in sentiment though hailing from different parts of this wide world.

I am particularly thankful to K. Somasuntheram who was Deputy Director of Industries in that he selected me to fill the post of Assistant Director of Industries from among a few officers who had expressed a desire to join the department. A keen Boy Scout - he became Commissioner of the Boy Scouts Movement - he was particularly keen on rural industrialisation. Keenly devoted to any cause sponsored by him, his enthusiasm was infectious. After he retired he became Chairman of the Ceylon National Chamber of Industries and rendered considerable service to the development of industries in the private sector.

D. H. Balfour, although he was mainly engaged during the latter part of his career in the Civil Service as a judicial officer, brought to bear on his new love, industry, a rare sense of practical realities, and technological grasp and an appreciation of priorities. Even after he retired from government service, he took to industry in the form of a rubber scrap crepe mill at Hendala. When I happened to ask him one day about this mill, he remarked jokingly that he started it so as not to be a nuisance to his wife after retirement by unwittingly interfering in the house - hold chores !

W. J. A. Van Lanvenberg with his engineering background had already mastered the technological intricacies of most of the industries. He had an unusual sense of joie de vivre, revelled in staff conferences and on plans and projects and never failed to interlard weighty discussions with witticisms that often helped in relieving the monotony of drab technological details.

E. C. S. Paul always worked at a hitch pitch of intensity and was a great asset to the department in that he was able to reduce the most intricate details of any problem into intelligible

and lucid prose at a moment's notice. I had a lot to do with him later when I became Permanent Secretary.

As a research centre for small scale industries was a prime necessity, D. H. Balfour asked me to look out for a suitable site. It so happened that there was at Velona Estate, Moratuwa an establishment which had been constructed by the Navy as a Supply Depot during war time and which had just been vacated by them. We decided to lease this out from the owner V. M. de Mel of Flower Road, Colombo and open a fairly well equipped research and training unit for small scale industry. We also housed therein a carpentry workshop for providing employment to over 600 carpenters and polishers. I must say that V. M. de Mel himself was enamoured of the idea and charged us only a nominal rent. This land 18 acres in extent has since been acquired by the government and is now the home of other units as well which have since been set up there such as an up - to date Bleaching and Finishing Plant, Mechanised Carpentry Unit and the Industrial Development Board Offices and Workshops.



## CHAPTER 14

# ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES; FROM COLONIAL TO SOULBURY ERAS.

At the time I entered the Civil Service, the Donoughmore Constitution had already been at work for about 3 years. Under the earlier dispensation, the Kachcheri Organisation had been the principal medium of internal administration. The Senior Officer in command had acted in every way as the Agent of the Government in respect of all matters placed under his control. He had powers of supervisory control over all activities in the Province. His power, however, had waned with the rise of strong central departments which entrusted their functions to their own representatives in the Provinces. Still they wielded great authority so long as they were responsible to one administrative head viz. the Colonial Secretary.

“ But the Donoughmore Constitution has cut into this scheme of things at right angles by creating central authorities<sup>1</sup> ”. This was the natural result of the growing administrative needs of a developing economy.

The Ministers newly appointed under the Donoughmore Constitution were treated by officials with great respect. Although they were only the heads of the Executive Committees and the departments under them sometimes dealt with incongruous subjects, heads of departments whether they were Ceylonese or non - Ceylonese generally extended their allegiance to them as the custodians of the newly won autonomy in so far as internal affairs were concerned.

1. Sessional Paper 14 of 1938, pp 120 - 1.

However, due to the dyarchical nature of the Constitution, sometimes, one head of department had to be answerable to more than one Minister and even to an Officer of State in respect of the different subjects under his control. Thus for instance in 1933, the department of the Registrar-General and Commercial Intelligence was largely under the supervision of the Executive Committee of Labour, Industry & Commerce. But in regard to Elections, it was answerable to the Attorney General, for registration of bhikkus and for regulation of holidays to the Home Ministry and for naturalisation of aliens to the Chief Secretary. Still, this did not detract from the authority and prestige of Ministers who were now intent on a greater pace of national development.

As more and more laws came to be passed by the country's legislature to meet fiscal, social and executive functions and obligations departments had to be created to cope with them. The effect of departmentalisation, however, was to tear the "seamless web of government into shreds".<sup>1</sup> To counter this, co-ordination between departments was necessary.

Lack of co-ordination had occurred even under the old regime. For instance, the Conservator of Forests had complained in 1927 that his department could not check chena clearing because permits for clearing were issued by minor headmen, duplicates of which were received in his department months later.<sup>2</sup>

But under the Donoughmore Constitution these inadequacies became highlighted not only because of the proliferation of departments but also due to the greater activities of government which brought disparities into greater relief. Thus the Land Settlement Department complained in 1935 that it could not keep pace with the Survey Department in regard to its own enquiries and settlements.<sup>3</sup>

1. S. E. Finer - Primer of Public Admn. p. 34.
2. Adm Rep of C. F. for 1931 - p. 1.
3. do do of S. O. for 1935

Such coordination could only be carried out by an officer holding authority above the heads of departments allocated to a Ministry. It could not be done by the Executive Committee for want of time for special study of the problems involved. Nor was the Minister in a position to do so for the same reason. Although the situation was remedied up to a point by the setting up of departmental and inter-departmental Committees which prepared recommendations on matters of policy, as the Huxham Cadres Commission Report of 1939 pointed out 'The main fault to be found with government departments as a whole is that there is a lack of adequate planning at the top and a lack of adequate supervision from the top'.

Mention must, however, be made of the invaluable part played by departments in working out important legislation. For instance, it was C. V. Brayne, Land Commissioner from 1931 - 1935 who took in hand the framing of the Land Development Ordinance under the direction of D. S. Senanayake, Minister of Agriculture. It was J. C. W. Rock, Registrar General and Director of Commercial Intelligence who first suggested the desirability of appointing a Trade Commission in India. In a few instances, departmental advice on policies was accepted in spite of political pressure. For instance, whilst members of the State Council consistently pressed for resuscitation of village works, the Irrigation Department laid greater emphasis on large scale irrigation projects, e. g. Gal Oya which the same Minister of Agriculture endorsed to his eternal credit.

Mention should also be made of the fact that in this transitional period of development between the colonial era and that of the Soulbury Constitution, the expansion of government departments entailed the recruitment of an ever - growing army of government servants. The Staff Officer ranks were filled from graduates who had passed out in ever - increasing numbers from the Universities of Colombo and Peradeniya in addition to those who had qualified abroad. In the absence of adequate training facilities most of them had to take up their posts equipped solely with such discretionary capabilities as their academic education afforded

them. The public service had long since become a privileged one drawing considerably higher salaries in relation to the average national income. It was also safe and in the absence of any large scale commercial or industrial interests to absorb those who were passing out from schools or universities, was the main source of employment. The public service became even more attractive owing to the economic depression of the 1930's when agricultural incomes fell steeply. As such, even those with relatively higher qualifications sought posts in lower grades, no doubt in the hope of securing promotion in due course within the service. Some of them were able to carry out much more onerous duties than they were called upon to perform. That was why the Huxham Commission had to comment as to "how the Government is in effect using razors to chop firewood".<sup>1</sup>

The inadequacies referred to above relating to the lack of coordination between departments under the Ministries had to await the advent of the Soulbury Constitution in 1948 to find a solution. This introduced the Permanent Secretary system which supplied the over - all head of department who was in a position to co - ordinate and streamline the work of the departments under his control. He provided the necessary link between the heads of departments and the Minister and was able to interpret Ministerial policy and its nuances to them at short notice thus eliminating delays in execution of work. He thus provided the necessary liaison between the Minister and heads of departments. Further, as the Chief Accounting Officer of the Ministry he was in a position to adjust budgetary needs and appropriations as between his departments.

## AS GOVERNMENT AGENT E. P.

In March 1950, I left the Department of Industries to assume duties as Government Agent of the Eastern Province. As I took over from M. Rajendra, the outgoing G. A., his last remark was that problems of the Province were now on my shoulders. However, in retrospect I can see that such problems as existed were rendered light by the cooperation extended to the Kachcheri by the people of the area.

It was not my first visit to Batticaloa. I had gone there earlier as Assistant Director Industries with Hector de Z. Siriwardena when he was Parliamentary Secretary to G. G. Ponnambalam. My wife too accompanied me then. We stayed at the Residency with the G. A., D. C. R. Gunawardena who took us after dinner to the Kalladi Bridge to see if we could hear the singing fish! I believe we were lucky on that occasion as the "fish" actually obliged. The sounds were like the strumming of a guitar but it was a moot point as to whether it was caused by the gush of water through the gills of fish or through chasms of rock so positioned as to create musical sounds. D. C. R. Gunawardena who as a rule was very knowledgeable in such matters was confident it was the fish moving in shoals and nothing else.

The Residency is a sprawling upstairs building which had been built by the Dutch over 200 years earlier to accommodate their commandant of the Eastern area. The garden was about 4 acres in extent and overlooked the Kalladi lagoon with a view of the Kachcheri at a distance. We noticed marks of about a 100 one-time wasps nests on the ceiling and were told on enquiry that these nests which had been built by the wasps during the DCR regime had been cleaned after Rajendra took over. DCR had allowed the wasps to build their nests at their will and

pleasure without any interference whatsoever. It was in pursuance of his policy of live and let live and on the Buddhist principle of ahimsa. In fact, we also heard on good authority that DCR - as he was popularly known in the province, slept whole nights unarmed and unperturbed on boulders well inside the Kumuna jungles, infested with wild animals and came out unscathed. When asked he had stated that he merely acted on the principle, that he who practises a himsa meets with ahimsa whether from man or beast. It occurred to me that this would be the corollary to the principle that he who takes up the sword dies by the sword.

Earlier this same DCR had done a singular act when as G. A. North Central Province, he had contented himself with the ground floor of the Residency for his entire family whilst consigning the upper floor to innumerable families of bats !

Incidentally it was in these same jungles that V. Coomaraswamy, whilst G. A. Eastern Province on an earlier occasion when he was camping out with his family near a place called Wagura, ventured on a bird watching stroll with his daughter and lost his way so irretrievably that search parties had to be organised from all over until they were spotted on the third day by a plane hovering overhead.

The district of Batticaloa was primarily an agricultural area the cultivation of which was ably looked after by Cooperative Agricultural Produce and Sales Societies aided by their own Cooperative Bank. The Kachcheri rendered all necessary assistance by way of irrigation and other facilities. However, grants in times of losses to crops by floods and pests were a regular feature.

Building of new tanks or restoration of old ones were going on continuously whilst at the same time the giant Gal Oya Scheme at Inginiyagala was under construction by Morrison Knudsen the American contractors. From an administrative level, we had a hard time trying to persuade the Veddahs and the other ancient inhabitants of the vast Gal Oya catchment area to leave their familiar haunts as they stoutly resisted the idea of leaving so

suddenly and so unceremoniously lest they be deserted by their ancestral deities who had protected them for many generations. Ellis Grenier A. G. A. was of invaluable assistance in getting this done with the least possible trauma on these ancient denizens of the jungles.

Shirley Amerasinghe now Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative at the United Nations and President of the General Assembly was Resident Manager of Gal Oya at the time and used to visit Batticaloa occasionally along with Dr. James Navaratnam, Medical Officer of Health, Kalmunai. They took the opportunity of dropping in at the Batticaloa Officials' Club whose activities were conducted in a very friendly atmosphere. On one occasion I remember how Shirley and James landed at the Kachcheri about midday and said that they were stranded in Batticaloa and were consigning themselves to me as "Receiver of Wrecks" - an official designation I had as Batticaloa was a seaport. I immediately telephoned my wife at the Residency and asked her to get ready two lunches - I was nearly saying launches, to rescue them from their plight.

The G. A. was the ex - officio President of the Club and was held in great respect. Bridge and tennis were the engrossing pastimes. Julius Philips the District Judge was the oldest member of the Club with Dr. M. D. S. Jayawardena the District Medical Officer next senior in age. The latter since became an appointed member of the National State Assembly.

Hunting and swimming trips on Public Holidays in which some government officers joined were most enjoyable. It is commonplace that Government officers really enjoy life in out stations and not so much in Colombo. In the former they are thrown together by the necessities of the situation, meet more often and are generally in closer touch with one another. In any case, one cannot but say that the Batticaloa Club had an exceptionally benign atmosphere. The building itself was a simple structure but the standard of bridge and tennis was of a high order.

A few anecdotes of incidents that occurred on the outings mentioned above may interest the reader. On one of our hunting trips we were stopped on the road by some Muslims who warned us not to proceed further on that jungle track for a while as they had just spotted some wild elephants a little further ahead. No sooner was the warning given than I found that the Assistant Commissioner of Local Government who was seated in the front seat of our vehicle between me and the driver had made his way quietly to the rear of the vehicle. When chaffed at this sudden retreat he said that it was merely to give more elbow room for my gun ! On another occasion, this same officer happened to be crossing an edanda - or long tree trunk laid across a stream - when some - one cast a pebble on to the stream shouting " crocodile " " crocodile " when he got so excited that he fell on to the stream in his full kit.

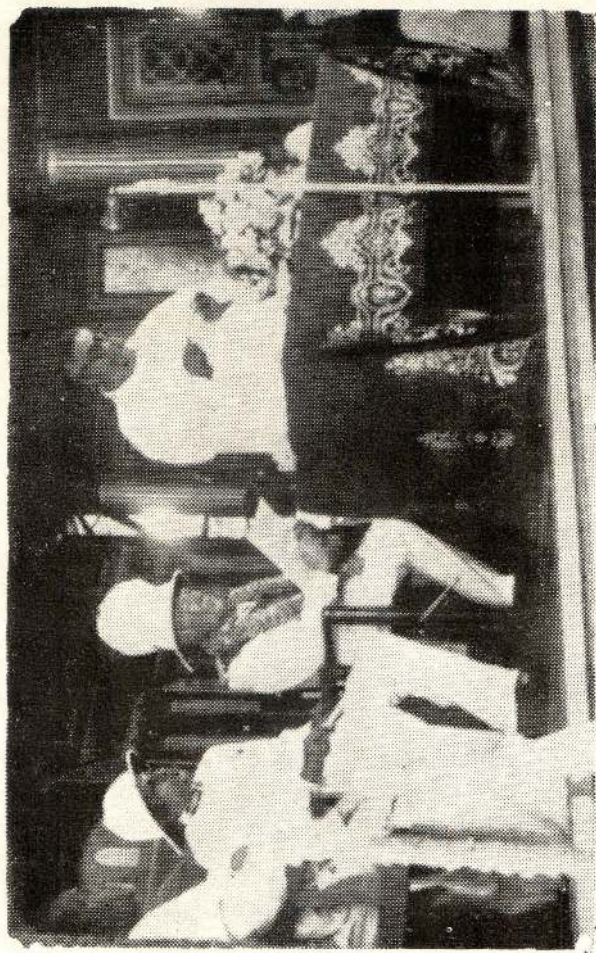
On another occasion, during one of our swimming excursions we were merrily bathing in a fairly deep stretch of sea when one of the officers bathing in our company started causing quite a flutter by attempting to reach beyond his depth. This would not have been anything unusual had it not been due to the fact that he had gone one too many on his drinks though it was not yet midday. Sensing the gravity of the situation some of the other officers approached me in midstream and wanted my approval seeing that I was the most senior in the company and the G. A. to boot for an extra - ordinary step they were going to take which was nothing short of bringing the erring officer to his senses by a thundering slap. The spokesman for these officers was no other than Dr. M. D. S. Jayawardena the D. M. O. Batticaloa.

After a visit to Kumuna, we were once bathing in the Kumbukkan Aru which forms the boundary between the Eastern and Southern Provinces. The waters were quite shallow and we were able to ford across. It was only after we had crossed that we realised that we had actually landed in "foreign territory". My Kachcheri Mudaliyar who was also with us then related how on a previous occasion, when M. K. T. Sandys G. A. Eastern Province was bathing in this same river, one of his officers had

pointed out when they were just past midpoint on the river, that they were already in the Southern Province, when Sandys had promptly returned to his own side of the river bed "as he had no permission to leave station"

When I was appointed to the Eastern Province, W. J. A. Van Langenberg who had earlier been A. G. A. there mentioned to me as the three most interesting things in Batticaloa, the singing fish, Kattankudi village and S. A. Selvanayagam. I have already referred to the singing fish. As for Kattankudi village it was the most populous village in the island, having within its 4 square miles of territory some 14000 souls. S. A. Selvanayagam was easily the heaviest man in the island weighing over 500 lbs. avoirdupois. I should add a fourth land mark in the person of S. V. O. Somanader, Principal of Methodist Central College Batticaloa, an authority on the special features of the district and specially on its birds. He was an educationist, writer and wild life enthusiast.

The humdrum life of Batticaloa was enlivened by a State visit paid to the district by his Excellency Lord Soulbury Governor - General of Ceylon in August 1950, accompanied by Hon. Joan Ramsbotham his daughter. Preparations for the visit had gone on for some time which included consultations with local officers and correspondence with Mytton His Excellency's Private Secretary, on various details pertaining to the visit such as official itinerary, menus for public lunches and dinners and special places of interest His Excellency would wish to see. My file on the subject came to fairly thick proportions as much detailed organisation and coordination between different departments had to be worked out. Having heard that P. J. Hudson Government Agent Northern Province had made a thorough job of it when H. E. made a similar State visit to his province earlier I made a request for his file with which he complied with great pleasure. It was perhaps the easy reference I was able to make to his record that enabled my file to remain at about 300 pages compared to the stupendous total of 800 pages that his file had attained.



At the civic reception to H. E. Lord Soulbury at Batticaloa Town Hall. The author, Lord Soulbury and S. A. Selvanayagam.



The most solemn occasion was the civic reception accorded to His Excellency by the Batticaloa Urban Council whose Chairman was S. A. Selvanayagam referred to above. This was the first occasion on which I had to wear my official civil service uniform, white tunic coat and trousers, with epaulettes on the two sides above the shoulders and insignia on the collars and topee hat and sword on the right. Selvanayagam made a moving address to which Lord Soulbury appropriately replied.

Receptions were also accorded to H. E. at Kattankudy by A. Sinnelebbe M. P. for Batticaloa, at Padiruppu by S. U. Edirimanasingham M. P. for Padiruppu, at Kalmunai by M. S. Kariapper, Divisional Revenue Officer for Kalmunai, at Pottuvil by Ebrahim Lebbe Hadjar M. P. for Pottuvil and at Inginiyagala by the staff and employees of Morrison Knudsen Inc. with whom was associated Terence Scharenguivel Chief Engineer detailed by the Irrigation Department to assist in the Gal Oya Project.

Other highlights of the visit were trips to Passikudah and Arugam Bay. Lord Soulbury and his daughter had a dip in the famous Passikudah Bay, and witnessed a display of Oriental dancing and firewalking at Arugam Bay. One little setback in this itinerary which though not of a vital nature I might have avoided had I been more meticulous has been rankling in my mind to this very day. It was the omission for want of time of the gubernatorial inspection of Vakaneri Tank, not far from Batticaloa Town which had to be skipped though not without reluctance on my part. Quite a number of Irrigation Officers and members of the public had assembled there so that to them it must have been a major disappointment. However, when I subsequently explained the position to him the District Engineer S. M. Arumugam who was leading the show there, took it in good part, sport that he was. H. E. was greatly impressed by the natural scenic beauty of Batticaloa district, particularly by its fascinating deep blue coast line.

There was one untoward episode which is worthy of mention. One afternoon H. E., other officials and I had gone on a visit to Mantivu Leper Hospital which was situated in an island on the Batticaloa Lagoon and access to which was by boat. That evening we had to attend a dinner at the Kalmunai Rest House. As Hon Joan Ramsbotham was not visiting Mantivu, we had arranged for my wife to accompany her and for both of them to proceed ahead to Kalmunai Rest House. Some demonstrators waving black flags had awaited the arrival of the official car conveying His Excellency apparently in order to create a diversion probably as a belated protest at the rejection by the Soulbury Commission a few years earlier of the Tamil demand for Fifty-Fifty representation in the legislature on a basis of parity between the Sinhalese and the other communities. They had darted out from their point of vantage as soon as they espied the official car conveying Hon. Joan Ramsbotham and my wife which they thought was in the van of the gubernatorial procession of cars but must have been taken by surprise when the other cars did not follow. The demonstrators were thus taken aback and had put up only a halfhearted show, so much so that my wife was able to get Hon. Joan Ramsbotham across without her even realising the significance of this incident. As soon as they got to Kalmunai my wife, who had not breathed a word of it to H. E.'s daughter, had immediately brought it to the notice of the Assistant Superintendent of Police K. S. Van Rooyen who had promptly sent some Police officers to disperse the demonstrators.

It is interesting to note that Lord Soulbury's eldest son the Hon. James Herwald Ramsbotham embraced Hinduism several years later and settled down in an ashram at Chenkaladi near Batticaloa and came to be affectionately known as "Sinna Anai - Kutti Swamy".

As Government Agent E. P. I had on one occasion to preside over the Cooperative Agricultural Produce and Sales Societies Annual Conference at Trincomalee at which the

various problems pertaining to the functioning of these societies were discussed at length and suitable solutions sought.

Edmund J. Cooray, the Chairman of the Cooperative Wholesale Establishment and Shelton C. Fernando Commissioner of Cooperative Development had made a special point to come down from Colombo to take part in the deliberations. One could not but be gratified at the thought that these two eminent scholars of London and Oxford Universities were devoting most of their time to the setting up of a cooperative network throughout the country that was calculated, if the movement's aims were properly appreciated and practised, of building up a wide spectrum of cooperators throughout the island, that could pool their resources in various spheres of economic activities comprising agriculture, fisheries, industries, trade and commerce, earning thereby a fair share of the nation's production, distribution and exchange.

The even tenor of provincial administration was broken by certain civil disturbances that occurred in early 1951 in the Inginiyagala area, which were triggered by the murder of the incumbent Buddhist priest of Nagdipa Vihare off Samanthurai on the Kalmunai - Inginiyagala Road. The assailant was actually a Sinhala Buddhist but dame rumour had it, as is not unusual in such cases, that the assailant was a Muslim of the area. In the result, feelings ran high between the two communities and sporadic incidents started to take place, threatening to flare up in a large way.

No major incidents or reprisals took place although for a short while there was a real danger of its spreading into a major conflagration.

As Government Agent it was my duty to maintain law and order in the district. With the help of the MPP concerned I organised a number of public meetings which were largely attended by both Sinhalas and Muslims to allay their suspicions and fears and appealed to them to co-operate in preventing breaches of the peace.

I was in constant touch with the Home Office in Colombo and kept R. S. V. Poulier the Permanent Secretary informed of developments. The local Police was reinforced and a military unit was even kept in readiness in Colombo for immediate despatch in the event of the situation deteriorating. I was glad that the steps that we took succeeded in stamping out the disturbances and in restoring normalcy in about a month's time. A special commendation was conveyed to me by the Hon. the Minister through his Permanent Secretary for having effectively dealt with the emergency situation unaided.

In this connection I must pay a special tribute to Mudaliyar M. S. Kariapper who was the Divisional Revenue Officer Kalmunai, the modern equivalent of the ancient office of Vanniyar who helped in the administration of the country. In some respects, one would think that he had just walked out of the pages of ancient history. For in temperament he was patriarchal, a stickler for ceremony and a keen host. He was an eloquent speaker and was perfectly at home in a crowd. He needed no training in diplomacy as it came naturally to him. He was extremely helpful in the organisation of those meetings referred to above which had the effect of calming the tense atmosphere which prevailed after the Digavapi incident.

It was his custom to entertain all distinguished official visitors to Batticaloa on behalf of himself and the minor headmen who, I understand, never failed to cooperate with him and even shared their own part of the burden, in order to sustain the fair name of Kalmunai area. There was a method in his seeming exuberance as no distinguished official visitor coming into those remote areas of the Eastern Province could altogether refrain from sentiments of gratitude after those sumptuous repasts. In the process they came to focus their attention more keenly on the requests made of them for aid or projects for the economic development of this area and seemed visibly moved when replying to the toasts made in their honour. Indeed, Mudaliyar Kariapper had made it a fine art, that appeal to official sentiment to recognise the due aspirations of the Batticaloa district in general and the Kalmunai area in particular. He often ended his after

dinner toast with a jest as to how a certain lady wrote to the Superintendent of a Zoo with a view to getting down a pair of mongooses. She wrote a letter saying, please send me two mongooses. However, as this did not ring too well in her ear she altered it to "please send me two mongeese". Still dissatisfied as the plural jarred in her ear, she resorted to another method which she thought was at least free from grammatical inexactitudes. She asked the Superintendent of the Zoo to send her a mongoose and signed the letter but hastened to add a postscript to say "please send me another mongoose". After the roar of laughter among the guests has subsided, Mudaliyar Kariapper addresses the Chief Guest and adds "Now Sir, this is the postscript "Batticaloa needs your help and we have no doubt you will give it in ample measure".

I remember how Mudaliyar Kariapper tried it on two distinguished visitors during my time. They were Dudley Senanayake Minister of Agriculture and Lands and G. G. Ponnambalam Minister of Industrial Research & Fisheries both of whom were placed in very good humour by Mudaliyar Kariapper's tactical approach,

Floods in Batticaloa district were a common feature after rains. On one occasion the whole of Kalmunai and Amparai areas were cut off from Batticaloa so that the usual weekly provisions could not be sent across to the Co - operative Unions from their main stores at Batticaloa Town. We were faced with a situation where unless food supplies could be promptly despatched certain village areas would have been reduced to starvation. The two main causeways before Kalmunai viz. Kalawanchikudi and Ondachchimadam were submerged in 6 feet of running water. As there were no helicopters at hand our only solution was to use a Euclid for the operation.

A certain firm in Batticaloa had a Euclid which had about 8 foot clearance but although I requisitioned it in my capacity as G. A. the proprietors thought that the operation was far too risky and would not release the driver. In the result it became a matter of prestige to leave unutilised a vehicle already requisitioned. A

this juncture, I was greatly relieved when Joe Perera, Manager, Transport and Navigation of the Gal Oya Development Board who was specially released by the Board for the purpose of transporting food supplies, agreed to man the vehicle.

The two trips he so skilfully negotiated over the turbulent and rising flood waters in the Euclid with a 40 foot trailer attached relieved the marooned areas and saved them from starvation. Both K. Kanagasundaram who was Chairman of the Gal Oya Development Board and Shirley Amerasinghe the Resident Manager who were responsible for the welfare of the marooned areas were overjoyed at the success of these operations. Joe Perera has since blossomed out into a boiler Engineer under the Factories Ordinance.



## HOLIDAY IN EUROPE

In June 1951, I handed over to H. C. Goonewardena who had been appointed to succeed me as G. A. Eastern Province and proceeded to Europe on furlough. My wife, three children and my father accompanied me. We enjoyed a pleasant sea - voyage on the Orient Liner Orcades. My father was 73 years of age at the time but in reasonably good health. Even at that age he was personally managing his saw mill and was to continue to do so till about his 90th year. He celebrated his 97th birthday in April 1975. He attributed his good health to regular habits, avoidance of excesses and exercise in the form of walking. I also noticed that one of the secrets of his health was his ability to rise above worry. He was able to do so as he was blessed with a philosophical frame of mind.

It gives me a great sense of pleasure to recall how I was instrumental in getting my father to embark on industrial activity after he was well over 60 years of age. I was able to give him not only the necessary encouragement but also part of the capital needed for the enterprise which was an up - to - date saw mill in Moratuwa. It does not readily strike the eye to what extent the people of this town depend for their employment on this elemental raw material supplied by our forests. The crude log which is seen growing in the jungle in varying shapes and forms assumes a very elegant and respectable place in the boudoirs and drawing rooms of big mansions and Five Star Hotels. However, there should be a limit to the process of denuding our forests in order to supply man's needs.

He usually wore the trousers and cloth, which though somewhat fashionable amongst the middle class during the last century, is practically out of vogue nowadays. However, as we

approached the English coast my children managed to persuade him to doff the cloth for the duration of the trip as it would have appeared such a strange apparel in a foreign country where such dress was completely unknown.

Lyn Mendis a cousin of my wife's, who was an engineering student joined us on a trip to several European countries by car. Our itinerary included France, Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium, and Holland. The Vauxhall Velox car which we used for the trip had just been bought by my friend Leslie de S. Seneviratne of Kurunegala, then resident in Moratuwa who asked me to take it out from the Vauxhall Show Rooms in London and bring out with me to Sri Lanka. I remember how I drove out the car with trepidation straight on to a busy London street.

The children who accompanied me were my daughter Indrani who later married H. C. Peiris of Flower Road, Colombo Priyanath and Dayasiri, the two other daughters Praemini and Sunethra had not been born then.

My elder son Priyanath is an Assistant in our industrial establishment viz. banian factory. My second son Dayasiri, after his Economics degree in London is now a working director in a commercial and industrial establishment in Colombo and my daughter Praemini is since married to Dr. L. E. N. Fernando, Senior Economist Central Bank of Ceylon since seconded to the Ministry of Finance.

Shortly after our arrival in London after a brief stay in a hotel, we managed to take a flat on rent. This afforded us a welcome opportunity of making ourselves at home, dressing informally and cooking our rice and curry meals after our own fashion. We also had the opportunity of inviting English and Ceylonese friends for dinner. The former, however, relished such preparations more in the form of curry and rice and that, too, with only a slight infusion of chillies. My wife was adept at making some delicious curries and I can recollect some English friends referring to this and remarking

that, should we be left high and dry at some future date, we had only to return to London and start a restaurant there with Sinhala menus.

I might mention that whilst we were in London my father was anxious to meet J. V. Fonseka who had left Ceylon about 20 years earlier and had practically settled down in London and was working at the British Broadcasting Corporation office as the announcer for the Sinhala broadcasts to Ceylon over the BBC network. So we paid him a visit at his B. B. C. office, and my father and J. V. were quite overjoyed to meet each other, both being fellow-townsmen from Moratuwa. Incidentally, J. V. took the opportunity to ask me if I would like to give some Sinhala broadcasts, which offer I gladly accepted thereby earning a few pounds by way of remuneration.

## AS G. A. PROVINCE OF UVA

On my return from furlough, in October 1951 I was Deputy and later Acting Land Commissioner for some time and the following year I proceeded to Badulla and assumed duties as G. A. Province of Uva. The home of the illustrious Monerawila Keppetipola, it has still not fully recovered from the depredations it suffered both in manpower and material in the course of the suppression of the Uva insurrections. Uva is the largest province in the Island stretching from Weragantota in the North to Tanamalwila in the South. It has since been sub - divided into two districts, Badulla and Moneragala, a necessary step for the development of this huge sprawling area.

As soon as I was appointed to Uva, I got a letter from R. H. D. Manders who was G. A. Colombo at the time, inquiring from me as to whether, if the Government was agreeable, I would like to exchange places with him. When his letter reached me I had already sent part of my furniture ahead to Badulla ; besides, Uva had a special fascination for me and work in quiet rural surroundings had its own charms. So I replied to Manders declining his kind offer.

Uva, too, is primarily an agricultural area ; it had much scope for the development of its agriculture through the expansion of its irrigation facilities. There was already a flourishing agricultural colonisation scheme, Bathmedilla, where a large number of peasant families had been settled in what was once the haunt of leopard and bear. It was now a town in itself with its drives and restaurants, post office and other amenities. The virgin soil aided by the irrigation network had afforded the colonists grain in ample measure so much so that when Dudley Senanayake Prime Minister paid an official visit to the colony he could not help remarking how most of them could very well be contributors to the country's inland revenue.

Irrigation projects were started at Yudaganawa, Okkam-pitiya and other sites as preliminary steps to the establishment of similar agricultural colonies. B. Sellahewa the Divisional Irrigation Engineer was an energetic officer who promoted these schemes with great enthusiasm.

Uva has always had a fascination for me. When I was about 16 years old. I went up to Bandarawela on a holiday on the invitation of the Rev. W. J. P. Waltham, Vicar of Church of the Ascension Bandarawela. He was an old bachelor about 70 years of age at the time. There I met J. A. Quintus Mendis of Moratuwa my wife's uncle who was then a medical student and who had at our request assumed the role of honorary tutor in religious knowledge to some of us, students at Prince of Wales' College Moratuwa, who were sitting the Cambridge Junior examination in 1924. Incidentally I obtained a distinction in that subject at the examination.

Rev. W. J. P. Waltham was a great disciplinarian and never failed to make an impression on the young men whom he invited from various parts of the island to partake of his hospitality. Even to this day I sometimes recall the rules of etiquette and good manners that he instilled into us in the course of the daily routine. I still remember the very first opportunity I gave him by a weak hand shake which at once betrayed my shy disposition.

Quintus Mendis on passing out as a qualified physician proceeded to the Denepitiya Medical Mission near Weligama and for moderate remuneration did great service to the poor folk of that missionary circuit. His brother the Rev. F. R. E. Mendis studied theology at Sidney Sussex College Cambridge and after his return to the island in 1926 took a great interest in the Student Christian movement. He served as Vicar of Holy Emmanuel Church Moratuwa and Principal Prince of Wales' College Moratuwa. Their elder brother J. Anicetus Mendis of the "first in the world in geography" fame in The Cambridge examination, went to Queen's College Oxford and obtained a degree in English Honours. He devoted his life to the teaching profession. He was a poet and was a member of the London Poets' Club. It would be of interest to reproduce below some verses he had written on my wife Phyllis his niece when she was still a babe.

## INFANT LORE

(To Phyllis de Mel)

“ Like as a blossom, bathed in glistening light,  
Foretelling all the splendour of the May,  
Like as a star, that gilds a gloomy height,  
Meek herald of the glories of the day,  
The smiling babe her heaven of joy prolongs,  
And babbling of the bliss of Purity.  
In never ending, still beginning songs  
Enchants me with her guileless witchery.  
Rapt in a spell of wordless eloquence,  
My spirit cries for blessings long lost,  
But hark, to allay the smart of inward sense,  
Soft speaks the Angel of mine Innermost :  
“ A newborn childlike heart is all the price  
Of rearing new thy ruined Paradise.”

Another young man whom I met at Fr. Waltham's in Bandarawela in 1926 was Leslie de S. Seneviratne who since then has been a life-long friend of mine. He is a native of Kurunegala who subsequently took up residence in Moratuwa. He has always been forthright in his nature, preferring to call a spade a spade. In the process he eschewed humbug and carried out his duties without fear or favour.

Seeing much poverty around particularly in the villages, there was a lot of incentive for rural development work. I made a special study of conditions prevailing in two village headmen's divisions in the Koslanda area at the time (1952), which was more or less typical of the Uva hinterland.

One of the primary causes of this backwardness was the poor state of communications. Even rough cart tracks were not available for entering any of the interior villages. All the hamlets were scattered and each was situated 3 - 4 miles from each other. Every hamlet had to be reached on foot through a jungle track. It was a pathetic sight to see the sick being carried on improvised stretchers through these tracks to the nearest dispensary or hospital which was in most cases many miles away.

98% of the houses were ill - lit, ill - ventilated and insanitary. Out of the total number of houses in the whole area except for a few village Committee wells some of which were also in a state of disrepair, 94% of the people depended for their drinking water on unprotected and insanitary wells or surface streams. The habit of using boiled cooled water for drinking was not in vogue.

Attendance at schools was poor. Besides the lack of interest and means, the inaccessibility of schools to most of the outlying villages made it almost impossible for the children to attend school. For instance, in some cases the children had to cover 5 miles of jungle tract before reaching the nearest school. 94% of the adult population was ill - literate. This made development work almost a matter of despair. Due to their ignorance, the parents thought it more profitable to keep the child at home so that he may be a potential wageearner by the time the child passed the 10th year. Koslanda Government School which had existed for over 20 years by that time could boast of only a dozen children who had studied beyond the stage of the 5th standard during the entire period.

As regards paddy cultivation the average villager was a mere ande cultivator with ill-defined rights. The rearing of buffaloes which was ancillary to successful cultivation was also the monopoly of a few. Fields are cultivated only once a year due to the low yield. These factors aggravated the poverty of the people and resulted in the exodus of the village people, thereby making the villages still poorer.

The land used for chena cultivation was Crown property situated 4 - 5 miles away from the village settlements. When the chena work was in progress the cultivator leaves his own village and resides in the chena until the harvest is gathered. During this period any cultivation started in his own premises is neglected or destroyed by cattle. Thus there was little incentive for any permanent form of cultivation.

The seed material and implements for chena work are obtained on loan. More credit has to be obtained for the subsistence of the family until harvest time. All the loans thus obtained have to be paid in kind out of the harvest. This results in exploitation by middle-men in the absence of suitable credit facilities.

There were hardly any industries except for a crude type of pottery although ample scope was available for starting industries based on cane, indikola, pan, kana, wetakeiya and rattan.

Against the catalogue of backward conditions cited, the most tangible remedy was the intensification of rural development operations. G. K. P. Wickramasekera Rural Development Officer Koslande had already done valuable work by making a detailed assessment of the problems that had to be remedied. George Stambo Supervisor Rural Development only waited for the greenlight to go ahead in a big way. These officers were best calculated to coordinate the work of the various departments whose cooperation was essential to cover the various aspects of the socio-economic problems of the villagers. It was quite evident that only a multi-pronged attack on this rural backwardness could help, involving communication, medical and educational facilities, health and sanitation, food production and industries and even repopulation of villages.

In the course of my rural development activities I had occasion to address hundreds of rural gatherings in Badulla, Batticaloa and Colombo Districts. The meetings often coincided with the inauguration or completion of a project, when the enthusiasm of the rural folk would be at its highest. There was no dearth of village leaders to promote or propagate our activities and their fluency in Sinhala - the only medium in which they had, as a rule, been educated in the rural areas - was sometimes astounding. Our own rural development officers had acquired a sound knowledge of Sinhala and even developed their oratorical powers.

The Government Agents had also perforce to keep pace with these developments and make an impression on the crowd.

Demands are often made on the limited Rural Development vote. Once at Mallehewa, a remote Uva village an insistent demand was made for a radio set for the local community centre when there weren't enough to go round. The local Head Teacher who had an unusually powerful voice had made out a case for one and the people were all keyed up. I quietly consulted my Supervisor, Rural Development and found that all radio sets available had already been distributed. So I got over the predicament by announcing that fact and adding in jest that, in any case, I saw little reason to rush a set there as their head teacher had such a powerful voice that any other loudspeaker propaganda was uncalled for. The head teacher sat back smitten perhaps by a dart of flattery and we had a respite until the new round of sets arrived from Colombo. I came across that head teacher D. P. M. Jayasuriya very recently in Colombo and he reminded me, over 20 years later, of the wise crack I had then uttered !

In 1952 Dudley Senanayake Prime Minister paid an official visit to Badulla district. His itinerary included, among others, inspection of a Housing Scheme near Badulla Town, of a new road built by a Rural Development Society near Diyatalawa and Bathmedilla agricultural settlement.

As already stated, he was particularly interested in the Bathmedilla colony the prosperity of which he considered was ample vindication of the policy of his late father which he followed and extended whereby ordinary peasants were elevated from the position of mere ande cultivators or protected tenants to that of lessees and potential owners of a sizeable extent of paddy and highland. Both father and son believed in a land owning democracy exercising their democratic rights and individual freedom subject to the law of the land. The Bathmedilla settlers were, as noted earlier, all doing extremely well. It was also a glorious consummation of the provisions of the Land Development Ordinance which had been introduced by D. S. Senanayake, an enactment unique in the annals of land development and economic uplift of rural folk in any part of the world.

Like his father he believed primarily in agriculture as the most important factor in developing this country, by uplifting the rural economy of over 20000 villages scattered throughout the length and breadth of the island. That was where the real prosperity could be built up in the first instance to make the country self-sufficient in food and as an infra-structure to promote and supplement industrial projects, as regards raw material, availability of man-power and consumer potential.

As such, there was a spontaneous bond of common interest between him and the tillers of the soil who form the majority of the population. The significant contribution he made to the development of agriculture by the massive Gal Oya Development Project captured their imagination and endeared him further to the hearts of the people. The great irrigation works such as Parakrama Samudra, Minneriya, Kagama, Nuwara Wewa, Nachchaduwa, Minipe, Elahera and Giritale which were either projected or completed under their leadership have elevated the Senanayakes in the mass mind to the position of great benefactors of the people.

This keen interest in agriculture through the development of irrigation works was particularly relevant in a country that was well-known for its unique engineering skills in this field. Take for instance, the historic Jaya Ganga, built by King Dhatusena in the 5th century A. D. to carry the waters of the Kalawewa to the city tanks of Anuradhapura, 57 miles away whilst feeding a number of village tanks on the way: this channel was famous for its gentle gradient of 6 inches per mile for the first 17 miles and an average of 1 foot per mile throughout its entire length !

As Government Agent it was my duty to see that the Kataragama festivities worked off without a hitch. The tens of thousands of pilgrims who attended this festival had to be provided with the necessary sanitary facilities as well as a modicum of shelter from rain and sunshine. Various government officers who had to oversee the arrangements had to be housed, so that contracts are given every year allowing sufficient time for the putting up of the necessary temporary sheds. In Sri Lanka these

sheds can come up like mushrooms at the drop of a hat thanks to the ubiquitous arecanut and the availability of cadjans. The G. A. himself customarily spends a few days there at the height of the festival.

On February 4, 1953, we celebrated Freedom Day with great gusto at the Badulla Esplanade with sports, school children's rally, some items by the Veddahs as well as an Elephant race which was the highlight of the day. There was a big crowd from all over the district both old and young who must have found the day a most enjoyable one. When I went to office the following morning, a junior staff officer of the Civil Service grade saw me th get orders on some matter. As I had not seen him at the meet the day before, I questioned him as to what happened and whether he had been on leave, "No Sir," he replied promptly, "I saw some elephants lining up for a race, I thought it was a bad joke as elephants sometimes run amok and left the place immediately". I admonished him as to how he could be expected in due course to administer the affairs of a Province in the absence of some degree of courage and faith in such activities.

One of the first things that struck me as I went about the Province on my circuits was as to what extent denudation of trees and flora in general had taken place in forests and chenas mostly by being wantonly burnt down in the course of the day to day activities of the villagers. The value of the trees had never been ingrained in them so that valuable trees can be cut or burnt down by them at their whims and fancies without their even realising what they have done. The forests of Buttala near Moneragala were the herb granaries of the ancient Sinhala Kings, specially cultivated for the people's needs. There are several thousands of acres planted with different kinds of herbs among which the most preponderant are aralu, bulu and nelli on which villagers in the peripheral areas were drawing for their needs. These forests have potential to yield not only timber and herbs but also play their part in the ecological sphere, even inducing much needed rain.

The Sinharaja question which is now to the fore is a matter that needs careful thought. It is a primeval Wet Zone Forest Reserve about 25000 acres in extent and has a standing volume of 100 million cubic feet of timber. At Sinharaja, felling of trees has been on a large scale with the use of mechanised and sophisticated equipment under the Canadian Mechanised Project which has since been taken over by the Timber Corporation. Its value and potential as a foreign exchange saver should be weighed against the national, global and other longterm economic benefits and its possible value as a surviving bastion of a unique rainforest and as a biological entity. In this connection, the conclusions of a team of Sri Lanka Scientists who recently made a report to the International Hydrological Body are of interest. The research team consisted of G. E. M. Gomez, Divisional Irrigation Engineer (Hydrology) Department of Irrigation, Dr. A. Kandiah, Lecturer, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Sri Lanka and D. K. Ponnadurai, University of Sri Lanka, Peradeniya Campus.

The team's study was to ascertain the extent to which forest cover influences hydrological parameters and climatic conditions like rainfall, erosion and landslides. The study which was financed by the National Council of Sri Lanka and the Department of Irrigation, began its study in January 1975.

The team has also reported on the tendencies for earthslips to occur as a result of the direct splashing of rain water on the soil.

The report adds that official sources have indicated the need for intensive research on the phenomenon of varying weather and climatic conditions which is having a direct bearing on the country's agricultural development and expansion of industries. This has become the subject of much discussion and analysis. The consequences of large scale de - forestation and the absence of selective logging are some of the reasons adduced for the changes in climatic and rainfall conditions in the country.

Already the Government has launched a tree planting campaign throughout the country to meet the threat of prolonged drought. This is in keeping with similar campaigns in most parts of the world.

In the areas where there is felling the Forest Department has begun planting trees like mahogany and pinus trees. These are likely to take 15 years to reach a height or girth that will have an impact on the weather, the committee reported.

The effect of change of vegetation and range cover on climatic conditions have never been studied in detail in Sri Lanka. This scientific study is therefore the first of its kind. The report will be studied in detail by the International Hydrological Body which will be receiving similar reports from a number of other countries.

The IHB is likely to hold a conference sponsored by UNESCO in August to review these studies and make recommendations to Government.

The vast destruction of the forest cover of this country has created a phenomenon in changing weather conditions adversely affecting not only the country's agricultural production but also causing impacts on the environment as a whole.

Hydrographic studies with regard to the influence forest cover has on rainfall clearly indicated that there was a certain degree of variation which has been attributed to the clearing of forests.

Impact on the general environment has also been monitored and studied. The destruction of trees and even herbs, all part of natural vegetation has turned a moist environment to an arid one; in addition, it has caused land erosion and the washing away of fertile sediments of the earth into the oceans through rivers and streams.

## AS GOVERNMENT AGENT W. P.

The Government Agency of the Western Province to which I succeeded in April 1954 was a highly important office in the old colonial days when it even supplied a member for the Governor's Executive Council. Now, however, it is like any other Government Agency but that it may carry a certain prestige in that it is in the metropolis, the seat of the Government. Whilst Colombo Municipal administration covered a fairly extensive and populated area, even the remainder of the Colombo District was the most densely populated in the Island, the entire district containing as it did a population of 1,707,872 according to the 1957 census divided into 10 Divisional Revenue Officers' Divisions and about 575 Village Headmen's or latterly Grama Sevakas' Divisions.

While the volume of land and irrigation work was less than in other districts, it had a disproportionate amount of acquisition and requisition work which involved large sums in compensation. These were largely attended to by the two AGA'S, only the more vexed problems being put up to the G.A.

The Assistant Government Agents who worked at the Colombo Kachcheri during my time were A. St. V. Wijemanne, U. A. Gunaratne and A. S. Navaratnarajah, all of whom attended to the multifarious duties which they had to perform with efficiency and tact.

Administration work was particularly heavy in view of the large number of headmen's divisions and the large population involved. Gun licensing occupied a fair part, which although it

had been proverbially looked upon, since the time of C. Sunthera lingam's resignation, as a subject hardly worthy of a civil servant's pen, had perforce to be included in the Kachcheri routine so long as it was considered important enough from a security point of view.

The frequent retirements of Village headmen on reaching the age of retirement as well as dismissals for disciplinary reasons rendered new appointments a regular feature. These involved a sort of ceremonial interview of candidates, examination of their credentials and even the soliciting of oral testimony for and against them from members of the public interested in the administrative division concerned. Whilst the system was rather primitive dating from the colonial days it had the merit that it generally prevented aspirants with 'skeletons in the cupboard' from being appointed to the highest village office which involved important administrative and even minor judicial functions.

Floods in the north of Colombo which lies adjacent to the Kelani River were a regular feature involving several thousands being rendered homeless for days at a stretch and having to be fed on rations. The Colombo Municipal Council had to bear the brunt of this devastation but the Colombo Kachcheri also had a part to play in the organisation of relief. It was chiefly in connection with mutual problems in which both the Kachcheri and the Colombo M.C. were concerned that I first officially met Dr. N. M. Perera and William Gopallawa who were holding the highest positions in Municipal Politics and Administration respectively.

Two important changes took place whilst I was at the Colombo Kachcheri both introduced by B. F. Perera, Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs at that time. The first was the substitution in place of the Headmen system of what

was termed the grama sevaka service which was more in keeping with modern concepts. This was the fruit of long years of agitation and debate both within and outside Parliament.

In the time of the Sinhala Kings, the sub-divisions of the country were ruled by headmen chosen for their caste and birth whose work was to collect revenue, enforce the service tenure system and 'rajakariya' and lead the local militia to battle. In return for these services, they received lands which the people cultivated for them. They were also judges of the people and received dues from the litigants and were entitled to recover fines for themselves.

The Portuguese and the Dutch modified the system to suit their views, but made great use of the headmen system. The British in their turn continued the system, as it furnished a handy and economical way of conducting the government of the country. The abolition of service tenure and rajakariya and the establishment of courts of law reduced the work, the perquisites, and the influence of headmen. Accordingly, they were made salaried servants of the government, but retained all the dignities and the ancient names of their office. These appointments were generally conferred on men of influence, and in the lowlands they were called 'mudaliyars' in the highlands 'rate mahatmayas', in the Tamil speaking parts 'mudliyars' 'maniagars' 'udaiyars' and 'vanniyars'. Subordinate to them were minor headmen, unpaid but who received remuneration for specific services and commissions on collections. This system smacked too much of overlordship and feudalism and was no longer consonant with the democratic rights of the people who were sovereign.

The second was the introduction of 22 independent administrative districts with a Government Agent each in place of the earlier system of 9 Provinces with appertenant districts. This was a beneficial change with a view to expediting development work throughout the country.

When I was at the Colombo Kachcheri I had frequent contacts with S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike who was the M. P. for Attanagalla, in connection with matters pertaining to his Electorate. As stated earlier, I had met him whilst in the Petrol Control department when he was Minister of Local Administration and was in charge of that subject. However, when I met him at the Kachcheri he was in the Opposition. He was always extremely courteous in his dealings with me.

Mr. J. R. Jayawardene, now the Leader of the United National Party and Leader of the Opposition in the National State Assembly was then Minister of Agriculture and Food and M. P. for Kelaniya. In consonance with his programme for stepping up agricultural development, we launched an energetic drive in Colombo District for the eradication of Salvinia which was clogging many canals, channels and rivers. Salvinia was reportedly introduced into Ceylon during World War II by the Armed Services in the interests of camouflage so that familiar landmarks in the form of water courses may be obliterated in order to confound enemy reconnaissance. Although, no doubt, it served its purpose admirably during war time, its peculiar ability to spread out its tentacles rapidly was as disastrous during peace-time as it was beneficial for the earlier objective. J. R. Jayawardene whom I invited to attend one of our campaigns for salvinia clearing in the Kelaniya Electorate of which he was M. P. was present and entered into the operation with great gusto. He had already earned a well deserved reputation as the co-author with Sir Percy Spender of Australia of the Colombo Plan which has conferred innumerable benefits both to Ceylon and the rest of the developing World.

The G. A. Colombo District was the Returning Officer for 14 Electoral areas. On 12th April 1956, the first day of the General Election, S. W. R. D. was an early arrival at the

Kachcheri. He was himself visibly surprised when such a large number of seats fell to the Maha Jana Eksath Peramuna of which he was the President. From what he said in the course of a long and relaxed conversation in between counting of votes I gathered that he was highly conscious of the responsibility of having to steer the ship of State on socialist seas whilst at the same time keeping it off the shallows of totalitarianism.

I was later agreeably surprised when even after he became Prime Minister he paid a visit to the Kachcheri as was his practice in earlier days to discuss matters pertaining to his electorate. With the rise of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, Sir John Kotelawala took his exit from the political arena.

The personality of Sir John Kotelawala had stamped itself on Ceylon politics for 25 years until the defeat of his Party at the General Elections of 1956. As Minister of Communications & Works in the State Council and Minister of Transport & Works and later as Prime Minister in Parliament, he showed great dynamism in the framing and execution of policy. During a crucial period in Ceylon's political history, he kept at bay the forces of militant totalitarianism. Although a few of his acts may have lent colour to an autocratic temperament, it cannot be gainsaid that by and large he made democracy safe in this country. The manner in which he took his defeat comparable to Churchill's in 1945 and his subsequent actions confirm this view.

As an international figure too, he made his mark both as an originator of the Colombo Powers Conferences and by the independent and courageous stand taken by him at Bandung.

He represented in full measure the national aspirations of the Ceylonese people and played a vital role in the achievement of independence.

A. P. Jayasuriya who became Minister of Home Affairs after the MEP victory of 1956 and was in charge of provincial administration also extended to me the highest courtesy in all matters. I had known him for several years at a personal level. One of the six to cross over with S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike when the latter left the United National Party, he was still his most loyal lieutenant. Owing to the spectacular services of the Party of which he was the Secretary at the General Elections of 1956, he earned the name of "Architect of M.E.P. fortunes." Demure in speech and conversation, he knew the art of listening to and inwardly digesting whatever friend or political opponent may have to tell him. He was a democrat at heart; owing to his temperament and background democratic socialism came to him easily although slogans were, no doubt, distasteful to him.

Shortly afterwards, I remember having a serious difference of opinion with Philip Gunawardena a member of the M.E.P. Cabinet when he wanted me to interdict a village headman forthwith for having worked against him at the elections. However, as no prima facie case had been made out against the accused officer, I did not take the step of interdicting him but fixed the usual disciplinary inquiry. The Minister was quite hurt but there was no alternative. At the inquiry itself there was no evidence to justify a conviction and the accused officer was discharged. When the Minister protested again, I explained to him respectfully what the position as disclosed by the notes of inquiry was and said that I was sending the file on the subject to A. P. Jayasuriya Minister of Home Affairs who was in charge of provincial administration so that he may verify how far my decision was justified. I did not hear about it anymore. I do not think that he bore me a grudge as he conversed with me cordially when I met him later.

I may mention in passing that about the year 1954, C. P. de Silva who was formerly of the Ceylon Civil Service saw me in my office at the Colombo Kachcheri. He was then a mere M. P. of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party which was then in the Opposition. He was founder member of the Party to which his former administrative experience in government service would have been an asset. Even when he was in the civil service he was one of the few government servants whose names were occasionally mentioned in Hansard.

As a trusted officer of D. S. Senanayake, then Minister of Agriculture and Lands, he had been placed in charge of large scale agricultural operations in the Polonnaruwa area. Later he continued to be in charge of Land Development work under Dudley Senanayake who succeeded his father D. S. Senanayake to the same portfolio but estimates vary of the actual extent of the services he succeeded in rendering. Perhaps partly due to alleged strained relationships with his superiors, he retired from government service, in the exercise of the option granted under the Soulbury Constitution. Since then he was engaged mainly in political activity in the SLFP in addition to some cooperative activity as President of the Tabbowa Cooperative Society in the Puttalam District where he turned cultivator in respect of paddy fields owned by him.

He was indeed a great patriot devoted to attainment of a free society in which individual freedom would prevail, a fair redistribution of wealth would be achieved and man is free to follow his instincts and cultural traditions without rigid ideological trammels.

On the eve of my departure from the Colombo Kachcheri on appointment to the Ministry of Industries, the Kachcheri Recreation Club arranged a farewell function at which Sir Arthur Ranasinha Secretary to the Treasury and the doyen of the Civil Service was present on invitation to unveil my photograph which now hangs along with those of other occupants of the same post



At the unveiling of the author's portrait at the Colombo Kachcheri in 1957. Also in the photo are W. M. de Mel, Shelton C. Fernando, Permanent Secretary Home Affairs, Sir Arthur Ranasinghe and A. P. Jayasuriya Minister of Home Affairs.



over the entrance to the G. A's office. This function was for the dual purpose of bidding farewell to the Office Assistant A. S. Wijeratne as well.

I cannot help but recall a remark made by D. A. de Costa Office Assistant who was also one of the speakers on behalf of the Kachcheri staff as to how on a certain occasion when he had come to my office room in the afternoon to accompany me to the registration of a marriage, he found that I was setting out without even washing my face. When he reminded me about this, I had asked him to look into the wash basin where a large number of black ants had settled probably in search of water, and tell me as to how I could possibly have washed my face without sending them to their doom. He construed this as a case of thoughtfulness, sympathy or even of ahimsa. It reminded me of what D. C. R. Gunawardena had done in his Batticaloa and Anuradhapura days, already described by me earlier in these pages.



## WORLD PEACE

The World Peace Council Conference was held from June 10th to 16th, 1957. I was the Government Agent, Colombo at the time. I took the opportunity of participating in the Conference. I reproduce below the speech I delivered on this occasion. I had always held the view that the division of the world into two camps was a most unhappy phenomenon which could produce unsavoury and unexpected results. :-

“In the first place I must express my gratification at the fact that we Asians are free today at this critical juncture in world history to voice our sentiments on this important subject of World Peace.

The large number of delegates that have assembled here from the furthest corners of the earth, at such inconvenience and discomfort to themselves is a sure sign of the ultimate success of this campaign for peace. No doubt much has been achieved since the inauguration of the World Peace Council about 8 years ago. How is it that such a large concourse of men and women throughout the world could not achieve more during this period? Is it because our cause was not just? Certainly not. In the whole history of the world, never did mankind espouse a nobler cause than this. Then let us see whether we have not exerted sufficient zeal and enthusiasm in our activities. Probably this is true to some extent, but the main cause to my mind is that we have not yet perhaps found the highest common denominator or to use a simple household word, the key that could open the hearts of the nations particularly of those nations who are most concerned in that they have taken greater strides than others in developing nuclear weapons.

Now, what is this key? Let us examine it carefully. It is nothing else but an earnest psychological approach from an absolutely neutral body that has no other interests, political, religious or otherwise, than the preservation of world peace on the basis of justice for all.

The delegate from Great Britain, in the course of his speech, stated that some people in Britain are wondering whether the call to stop the atomic tests is a call sponsored by the Communists. If so why allow this state of uncertainty to continue. The first step should then be to clarify this and instill in the minds of the peace loving peoples of the world that this is a call from the ordinary mass of humanity who have no ulterior motives but the pure disinterested motive of world peace. This Peace Conference should make it clear that it has no vested interest in supporting any particular political ideology. This clarification can by no means be called superfluous or premature. It is being sought in many quarters through the medium of the press and otherwise.

If we are sincere about peace, we must have the courage of our convictions and proceed on the strict basis of neutrality and impartiality. A greater responsibility has been placed on the present generation, on whose behalf we are discussing and debating here, than on any previous generation in history. We have to combat the tremendous force of nuclear weapons which, if unchecked, would undoubtedly annihilate mankind. We can hope to succeed only if we develop a moral force as powerful as the forces which it is intended to check. We have no other weapons. That moral or soul force can come only through love and freedom from hate and prejudice.

Those of you who are Christians and others who have read about it have only to recall Christ's Sermon on the Mount which has had its universal appeal for no other reason than its pure and unprejudiced love for humanity. Lord Buddha's teachings are also pre-eminent in this respect and have on that account maintained their universal appeal.

In our own generation Mahatma Gandhi succeeded where others with mightier weapons failed because of a unique quality that he possessed viz. freedom from hatred and prejudice even against his enemies.

In the same way, let us steer our course without prejudice or bias and then our ultimate goal will certainly be achieved. Peace can be won only if we succeed in resolving the differences that exist between nations. This can only be done by eliminating whatever causes of friction there may be. These are: First, colonialism and economic and political servitude. It is the paramount duty of this Conference to condemn these obnoxious features wherever they may exist whether it be in Africa, Asia Middle East or Europe and there should be no difference whether it manifests itself in the form of imperial domination, economic supremacy, suppression of freedom or even infiltration pure and simple. Secondly, racialism - all races are said to be equal but it is still the case that certain races try to assert a superiority over others. We should unequivocally declare at this Conference that we deem all races to be equal.

There is also a third factor that leads to international friction. It is strange but true that certain nations in the world have developed what may be called, in the absence of a better term, a crusading spirit whereby they consider that they have a sacred duty to spread their form of government, which in a spirit of optimism and pride, they consider to be superior to that of other nations, into other parts of the world. Now this must be condemned as being mischievous and inimical to world peace.

Once the ground is thus cleared we have to focus our attention on the basis of co-existence. We have the requisite principle as enunciated at the Bandung Conference and in the Panchaseela Doctrine to guide us in this respect.

Further, to eliminate, as far as possible, the further causes of friction between nations it is incumbent on us to throw our weight on the rapid development of all countries without

exception on progressive lines. Now there are two lines on which such progress can be made so as to satisfy mankind's aspirations viz. economic progress on socialist lines and the fullest development of the individual personality and maintenance of personal dignity under the aegis of truly democratic laws.

Further, we will do well to go on the assumption that all countries are equally anxious to reach an honourable solution. After all, unless there is a lurking fear in its mind, it is ordinarily unthinkable that any nation would spend a disproportionate amount of its wealth on weapons that go up in flames. If we are to be realistic, it is our duty to ascertain what this lurking fear could be.

Then could it be that they are frightened that if further development of nuclear weapons is suspended, the status quo will be unfavourable to them in that others are in a more advantageous strategic or geographical position? Or thirdly, could it be that there is a lurking fear that even after some agreement on disarmament is reached some nations will still carry on their experiments on the sly and mutual inspection will be a farce? This is a question, which we, as thinking men, cannot overlook.

When we consider these various aspects of the problem, it would appear that the solution lies only in creating the necessary climate of peace in the world. Then let us in this Peace Conference take necessary action to see that the masses of the people particularly in U. S. A., Soviet Russia and Great Britain declare in unequivocal terms that they will not countenance any future wars. Such a declaration of their peoples will compel the Governments of each of these countries, even if any of them should be inclined to warfare, to desist from such activity.

As we all know, one of the principal dangers to world peace lies in the existence of military pacts and treaty organisations in Western and Eastern Europe. So long as this juxta — position exists, tension between the nations concerned will remain. Our clamour for World Peace will not fully succeed unless our efforts are directed towards the elimination of this sore spot in Europe. I would strongly

recomend that we pass a resolution at this Conference calling upon the N. A. T. O. nations to disband their organisations and simultaneously call upon Soviet Russia to terminate their defence pacts with the countries of Eastern Europe, at present occupied by them.

Then let us turn to the danger spot in the Middle East where Western countries and Soviet Russia are vying with each other in creating spheres of influence. I would strongly urge that we call upon both parties to leave the Middle East severely alone from a political point of view and if they are eager to help in the development of this area in a disinterested manner, to make the necessary arrangements for such assistance jointly through the U. N. O.

To sum up, the basis of a lasting peace can only be found in the following measures:-

1. A call of this Peace Conference to all nations concerned to abolish colonialism in all its forms by whomsoever practised, such as imperial domination, economic supremacy, political tutelage, suppression of freedom or so-called peaceful penetration.
2. Abolition of racialism.
3. The acceptance by all nations of the principles of Bandung and Pancha Seela.
4. The removal of possible conflict in Europe by:
  - (a) disbanding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation by the western Powers,
  - (b) disbanding of all defence and military pacts with East European countries by Soviet Russia.
5. The removal of possible conflict in the Middle East by the withdrawal by the Western countries and Soviet Russia of their respective spheres of influence and the development of this area through the United Nations Organisation
6. The admission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Organisation.

7. Necessary measures to see that the masses of people particularly in the United States of America, Soviet Russia and Great Britain declare in unequivocal terms that they will not countenance any future wars.

It is my earnest hope that the objective of peace, so dear to our hearts, may not elude us through any dimness of vision or lack of realism on our part. We need statesmanship of a very high order if we are to successfully bridge the differences that exist in a wide and varied world. May the nobility of our cause inspire us with the necessary courage, vision, freedom from prejudice and the determination to achieve our goal. May it inspire us to develop a moral force strong enough to combat these forces that divide mankind and which, if uncontrolled, may lead them to their doom".

Subsequently, after my retirement from the government service, I prepared a tract on the Democratic Socialist approach to World Peace in which I said.-

"As the world has lived from crisis to crisis during recent times especially in the face of the nuclear peril it is necessary that there should be an ultimate and secure means of preventing wars. World Government based presumably on co-existence between capitalist and communist nations has been advocated. However so long as capitalist nations think the communist countries are exploiting the human spirit and communist countries feel that the capitalist countries are exploiting the human body and both possess a missionary zeal to save humanity from exploitation, so long there will be antagonism between the two groups, Mere resolutions and promises of coexistence will not settle these animosities. Even if the memories of recent crises deter the two groups from stirring trouble owing to the fear of mutual destruction, history has shown that danger to life or property has seldom been a consideration when passions are aroused. Motives such as nationalism or chivalry, martyrdom, freedom or slavery can easily upset the mental equilibrium of peoples plunging them headlong into conflict before wiser counsels can prevail. Even more dangerous than animosity would be missionary zeal when imbibed or displayed by powerful govern-

ments. It would be something akin to the mediaeval crusades convert what each side considers to be infidels. If conflict is to be prevented it is necessary that something should be done to remove the animosities and missionary zeal and substitute in their place feelings of mutual contentment and satisfaction.

Would this not be found in a very simple compromise between the two world ideologies based on the highest common denominator between them, namely Democratic Socialism, sincerely and truly introduced into all the countries of the world? Democratic Socialism, incorporates the freedom on which the western nations are setting such a big price as well as the fair distribution of wealth and opportunity on which the communist nations set so much store. Of course, it must be worked out in all good faith without any mental reservations which would give a hidden advantage to any one group. If properly worked it would develop both the human spirit and the human body so that the aspirations of both the groups will be met and satisfied. The ideological conflict would then be dissipated.

Further the so-called "effete" capitalist powers had proved that they had not exhausted the possibilities for effective development. Secondly, war in the nuclear age has ceased to be an instrument of political expansion or world conquest for any one. Communist countries could no longer expect the democracies to wage war against each other for mutual destruction on any large scale.

It is evident that in order to meet the psychological demands involved in the use of nuclear weapons, USSR herself has been compelled by circumstances to do a lot of re-thinking in her political philosophy.

On the other hand, it may be argued that no such chinks appear on the Chinese armour. However, Maoism is new and does not have the Soviet experience of four decades.

Furthermore, the absence of China from the UNO may have made them rigid in thought and outlook, a factor which will necessarily have to be remedied if and when a Democratic Socialist Plan for World peace is accepted by the nations and worked upon.

Marxism taught the inevitability of wars which were necessary and indeed desirable for changing the social order. This premise, however, would not be valid any longer so that it will become necessary for Marxism to alter its approach in regard to the changing of the world order. From now on the changes of social order will have to be forged on the anvil of peace and understanding and not of war.

A democratic socialist plan for world peace can take into account the areas of friction and take necessary action to eliminate the obnoxious features. For instance, Communism stresses its anti-feudal and anti imperialist character. In fact communism has been the very antithesis of feudalism and owes its origin to the extreme feudal conditions that obtained in Czarist Russia. However, it can now be said that practically all countries have realised or accepted the principle that feudalism is anti social. Further, with the liquidation of empires on a substantial scale we are in a position to state that the imperialist idea is outworn and outmoded and its final disruption is almost in view.

Now this is exactly where democratic socialism will meet the case. Once it is introduced there would be no void or vacuum for anybody to fill. Of course, it must be introduced by consent between the opposing parties. To enable this to be done the value of Democratic Socialism as a substitute for either capitalism or communism and its greater merits as compared to either will have to be appreciated. It is not considered that there would be any difficulty in achieving this as its merits are almost self explanatory provided the opposing countries value human development above other issues.

This step would but be in keeping with the evolutionary process that is now taking place, though in slow degrees both in capitalist and communist countries. For instance, in Britain an

advanced degree of Socialism has been introduced transforming the erstwhile capitalist structure into a new pattern. Similarly France, Denmark, Scandinavia, India, New Zealand, Ceylon. On the other side of the coin, a parallel development is taking place in USSR where the Modern Military revolution caused by the invention of nuclear weapons has had a deep effect on the ideological political and psychological spheres as well.

The conditions are thus ripe for the substitution of a rapid evolutionary process for revolution. The old contexts in which revolution could have been effected by violence have largely changed. Areas of violence can no more be localised. Recent history has shown that in such cases only the intervention of the UNO has been effective in preventing widespread conflict which can easily expand into global war. The Communist belief that the ideological struggle would inevitably lead to the complete destruction of one or the other side is no longer tenable as the only foreseeable outcome is the complete destruction of both sides leading to the extinction of civilisation itself. It will thus be agreed on all sides that the only hope for social change today is the adoption of peaceful methods.

A Democratic Socialist Plan For World Peace would incorporate the following principles.-

(a) The adoption of representative government in all countries based on the periodical exercise of the ballot in such a way that the people will be the ultimate and effective arbiter of the destiny of governments.

(b) The preservation of fundamental rights and the rule of law.

(c) State ownership of large utility industries so as to eliminate great irregularities in wealth and social power.

(d) Free enterprise in other fields subject to controls by the State in the interests of the Community.

(e) Avenues for Employees' participation in management and shareholding by employees.

(f) Highly advanced social services in the fields of education, health etc.

(g) Unemployment Insurance and Agricultural Crops Insurance.

(h) A democratic legal system the benefits of which will be equally available to all.

Such a plan can eventually be introduced, if general agreement is forthcoming, under the auspices of United Nations Organisation."

## PEACE COUNCIL

In this connection, I may mention that under the auspices of The National Welfare Association a public Meeting was held at the Forum, Y. M. C. A. Colombo presided over by H. W. Amarasuriya, former Member of Parliament and Minister of Commerce and Trade and the President of The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress on the subject of WORLD PEACE.

Resolutions passed at this meeting were forwarded to Heads of different Governments. The main theme of this resolution too was World Peace through the Democratic Socialist Approach which is calculated to eliminate friction among the nations of the world. Encouraging replies were received from national leaders of certain countries.

I am glad to find certain developments throughout the World which if continued could lead to greater rapprochement between countries that have acute differences today on ideological grounds. The Euro-Communist Summit Conference was held in Madrid in March 1977 at which Santiago Carillo Secretary General of the Spanish Communist Party welcomed Party Chieftains Enrico Berlinguer of Italy and Georges Marchais of France. The Conference was a significant event in the development of Western Europe's own brand of Communism.

For years Berlinguer and like-minded comrades have claimed that they are:

- (1) independent of Moscow and
- (2) devoted to the democratic process

At the Madrid Summit, even if it did not go very far in stating to what extent they were prepared to go in cutting Kremlin's apron strings, they reiterated their commitment to a "Democratic way of life", at the same time approving the Helsinki accord on human rights.

The dissident campaign in USSR by intellectuals like Solzhenitzyn, Sakharov, Geinzbey and others against the restriction of human rights and that in Czechoslovakia by the 500 signatories of charter 77 are significant. It is of interest to note that among those who denounced the Czechoslovak government's move against these Chartists were the French, Spanish, Italian and British Communist Parties, the European Economic Community and the leaders of the Socialist International. Even Peking's 'People's Daily' lauded the Czechoslovak people's "unflinching battle for independence." Further, Groups of dissidents in Poland and Hungary expressed solidarity with the beleaguered chartists.



## MINISTRY OF INDUSTRIES & FISHERIES.

My next appointment being in the Permanent Secretaries grade had to receive the sanction of His Excellency the Governor-General. Although Government Agencies in themselves were important and had a special glamour in the eyes of the public which perhaps no other post carried, a government officer always looked to the post of Permanent Secretary as the acme of his official career. W H Moore had sent in his papers for retirement and I took over from him in July 1957. We exchanged a few words of light banter and then of more serious official jargon and parted with mutual good wishes for the future.

I straightaway paid a courtesy call on P. H. William de Silva, Minister of Industries & Fisheries who was by no means a stranger to me, as I had met him in London during our student days in 1933 and 1934. He was then reading for the Bar but used to visit the Indian Students Hostel at Gower Street, where he often joined in a game of billiards. He is a man of few words in private conversation but was an eloquent speaker in the hustings. He had also along with Philip Gunewardene Minister of Agriculture ridden to victory on the crest of the MEP wave under the leadership of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike.

A veteran in politics and level-headed by nature, he gave the assurance of political stability. Although he belonged to the small V. L. S. S. P Group, he was calculated not to lend himself to sectional manoeuvres. Self-seeking or political intrigue was remote from his nature.

The first major project I had to deal with was the Kantalai Sugar Factory. Tenders for it had already been invited and received. The lowest acceptable tender was from Techno-Export

Czechoslovakia, amounting to approximately Rs. 18.5 m. The period of erection of the factory was to be 1½ to 2 years and was to be on a turn-key basis. However, before acceptance of the tender, I considered it my duty to bring to the notice of the Minister how it was important to ensure the availability of the necessary grist for the mill in the form of sugar-cane. He agreed and we promptly placed our renewed request for the necessary raw material requirements before the Minister of Agriculture & Food. The latter held the necessary consultations with the officers of the agricultural department and assured us that the question of raw material should be no impediment to our acceptance of the tender as there was a distinct project for the development of 5000 acres of land in sugar-cane within the requisite period. If the factory has not worked according to schedule, it points to the difficulties that are sometimes encountered in coordination between departments.

It was very strange that the only textile mill in Ceylon up to then was the Wellawatte Spinning & Weaving Mills Ltd. which was an old mill started several decades earlier by an Indian entrepreneur. N. U. Jayawardene, too, had acquired an interest in the mill and was its Chairman. As related earlier, we had tried to set up a brand new mill in 1942 but had failed owing to the entry of Japan into the war. It appeared as if there was almost a hoo-doo attendant on the setting up of a Ceylonese textile mill.

Be that as it may, it now fell to my lot to organise the first Government Textile Corporation which was set up under what was then the Government Sponsored Corporations Act. It started as a Spinning Mill which we equipped with Rieters world reputed machinery. It was indeed a particularly happy day for me when I signed the contract with Ibcons of Bombay as our consultants for the designing, construction and running of the plant. I felt as if a life long ambition had been achieved.

The Minister was keen on systematising the industrial development of the country by demarcating industries into basic and non-basic the former being reserved for the public sector

and the latter for development by the private sector. In pursuance of this we also took steps to expand the basic industries existing at the time and already in government hands so as to size up progressively to national requirements. These included Cement, Plywood, Leather, Ceramics and Caustic Soda in addition to textile spinning which was just then being established. The paper factory at Valachchenai had already been established on a fairly large scale with a rated capacity of 4000 tons per annum but its actual output was about 300 tons for the whole year. Something drastic had to be done if it was to be a success. The Minister gave me full authority to do what I felt was best.

I realised that a change of bowling was required. I accordingly saw to it that the entire board sent in their resignations, thus giving us the opportunity to select a new board. It was then that we invited K. C. Thangarajah to come in as Chairman. We had to overcome several bottlenecks at the factory before we increased the output to as much as 3000 tons within a comparatively short period, leaving room for further improvement. When I was in London in 1960, I joined the Chairman and Bernard de Silva one of the directors in discussions with Sandwells the Canadian Consultants for the paper factory at their London office. I am glad to find K. C. Thangarajah still continuing as its Chairman and that the Corporation has entered on its second stage of expansion with a new mill at Embilipitiya.

Up to then, the manufacture of salt had been carried out by the Salt Department in its salterns at Hambantota, Puttalam and Paranthan. The Salt Corporation which was set up to take over this work had to undergo several vicissitudes of fortune until a commission under the Chairman-ship of P. O. Fernando formerly of the Ceylon Civil Service had to be appointed to go into its affairs.

Where a Board is appointed to run an industrial corporation, although the Minister has power under the State Sponsored Corporations Act, since amended to State Corporations Act, to

issue general and special directions, he does not deem it fit to interfere in its running at every turn but leaves it to the good sense of the Board to work out its own programme. This was also in keeping with the policy of government when it enacted the State Sponsored Corporations Act of 1957 to allow business ventures to exercise a certain degree of autonomy uninhibited by the financial regulations of the Government.

However, the animadversions made by the P. O. Fernando Commission on the Salt Corporation show to what extent a Corporation can, in certain circumstances, deviate from practical business like policies. Excerpts from the Commission's report are reproduced below:—

\* "On 17th June 1959 Mr. Tisseverasinghe who was salt Commissioner as well as Chairman of the National Salt Corporation informed the Permanent Secretary that the Salt Department had in stock about 40,000 tons of salt and expected to produce another 80,000 tons by the end of 1959 making a total of 120,000 tons. This was well over two years' demands and quite ample for all Ceylon's requirements. He added that stocks of salt at Elephant Pass were creating a serious storage problem. He therefore suggested that the Permanent Secretary authorise the National Salt Corporation to negotiate with Japan for the disposal of 50,000 tons of this surplus salt. The proposal was not approved by the Permanent Secretary, and therefore the sale of this salt did not take place. Had the proposal been approved the shortage of salt in Ceylon would have been felt about one year earlier than it did and the loss to the Ceylon Government would have been about Rs. 3 million."

\*\* "In the Report of the Board of Directors for the year ending 31st March 1958, the following paragraph appears:

"The only way to learn to swim is to swim and this is exactly what the Corporation intends to do in the application

\* Para. 8 of Chapter XVI Sessional Paper IX — 1963

\*\* Paras. 1 & 2 of Chapter XVIII Ibid

of the Development Scheme at Hambantota. In India Pandit Nehru has urged all officers of Government to keep on experimenting whatever the results may be and this we feel is the only possible outlook for a country without experience trying to come up abreast of modern development”.

“During the period 3rd December 1957, to 31st March 1961, the Board carried out a series of experiments. From the number of experiments carried out it would have been more appropriate if the Corporation was named not the National Salt Corporation but the National Experiments Corporation. It is distressing to record that practically each one of these experiments ended in failure. We give below a list of the experiments which were carried out by the Board. It has not been possible from the documents of the Corporation to ascertain the actual cost of each of these experiments as separate statements had not been maintained of the manpower employed in each of these experiments:

- ( 1 ) The use of batalee cribs in the construction of the harbour.
- ( 2 ) The use of weld mesh cribs in the construction of the harbour.
- ( 3 ) The use of coral to construct the proposed harbour.
- ( 4 ) The brine gallery at Mirijjawela.
- ( 5 ) The use of rubber wood in the construction of houses and in lining channels and tunnels.
- ( 6 ) The construction of a timber crane.
- ( 7 ) Preparations of hollow concrete blocks to be used in the construction of the harbour.
- ( 8 ) The purchase of a fibre glass boat to survey the area in question.
- ( 9 ) The purchase of condemned lorries and buses for the purpose of transporting boulders from Keligama to Pattiraja.

- (10) The employment of unreliable and inexperienced contractors for various purposes;
- (11) The employment of untrained and inexperienced officers both in office and in the field.
- (12) The purchase of condemned generators which were found to be useless.
- (13) The purchase of equipment through brokers and others without calling for tenders.
- (14) The construction of low cost houses without proper consultation and advice.

"We have not examined the working of Corporations other than the Salt Corporation and any observations we make should not be regarded as an attempt to criticise the working of other Corporations. But it appeared to us that the present supervisory control of State Corporations is not adequate. In the case of a private commercial undertaking the Directors would own large numbers of shares and each Director would be personally interested in making a success of the enterprise. If the business fails, the Directors would not receive dividends on their shares. Further the market value of the shares would also go down. There is therefore an incentive for the Directors to take an interest in their work not only to ensure that there is no financial loss but that there is a substantial profit. In a State Corporation, on the other hand, Directors have no financial interest. They do not gain by the fact that the Corporation has had a successful year nor do they lose in any way if the business ended in failure or no dividends were declared. We therefore consider that State Corporations should be subject to greater supervision than at present."

"We therefore recommend the appointment of a Permanent State Corporations Commission consisting of three members. If such a Commission was appointed, the work mentioned in the previous chapter could be attended to by the Commission instead of by the Minister. It would be the duty of the Commission to ensure that all necessary returns are received in time from the Corporations. It would also be the duty of the Commissioners to examine the working of the Corporations to satisfy themselves

that there is no unnecessary expenditure of funds and that no irregularities are committed either in the making of appointments of officers or in the purchase of equipment or in the selection of tenderers for various purposes."

Dr. G. P. Malalsekera Professor and literateur turned diplomat, was able to do a good turn to the country when as our Ambassador in the U. S. S. R. he arrived in Ceylon towards the end of 1957 with a whole delegation of Russian industrial experts who arrived at the invitation of our Ministry to work out plans for setting up a number of industries in the public sector. The Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike himself was present at the initial discussion with the delegation.

Industries set up under this aid-programme included the second cement factory at Puttalam, Steel Factory at Oruwala, Tyre Factory at Kelaniya and the State Flour Milling Factory.

It also fell to my lot during this period to examine and approve the necessary blueprints and establish the following major industrial schemes:-

Mineral Sands Corporation

Second Stage of the Ceramics Corporation

Second Stage of the Leather Corporation

Second Stage of the Plywoods Corporation.

The Minister also readily agreed to my proposal to obtain financial assistance from the United States Operations Mission in the form of a grant of Rs. 5 m. for the setting up of our first industrial estate at Ekala in the Jaala area. The scheme involved the acquisition of 50 acres of land and the setting up of factory buildings to be rented out to industrialists, equipped with all necessary amenities such as electricity, water supply, roadways, stores and postal facilities, which constituted the infra-structure needed for stimulating the growth of projects in the private sector. The site at Ekala was selected by me as being along a transmission line connected to the main Electric Grid and as having all important underground water reserves to sustain several scores of

industrial projects that might eventually find a habitation on the estate. The site selected had a further advantage in that it was off the busier suburbs of Colombo and was almost maiden ground for industrial development so that existing traffic congestion would not be aggravated. Indeed by a happy coincidence the autobahn now connecting Colombo to Katunayake which received an impetus from the recent Colombo Summit Conference of the Non-Aligned Nations passes through the outskirts of Ekala and reduces the travelling time to Colombo almost by half.

A scheme of this nature helps the private sector to embark on industries with a relatively smaller investment outlay than would otherwise be necessary, thus giving a much needed fillip to industry. It can, indeed, be described as a hot house for industrial incubation. Besides, some industries housed on an industrial estate can be complementary to others and supply the necessary tools and spares. Industrialists can also benefit from each other's experience and in some cases even have common transport and marketing arrangements. Before launching our scheme, we made a preliminary study of the information supplied to us by the Stanford University of U. S. A. and also literature regarding the Industrial Estate at Guindy in the Madras Presidency closer home. On a subsequent visit to Guindy which I made in 1968, I was amazed at the vast progress it had made over a wide range of industries. I am particularly gratified at the setting up of such industrial estates in some other parts of the country in the ensuing period.

I am very happy to place on record the able assistance and courtesies extended to me by Rienzie Wijeratne and E. C. S. Paul Director and Deputy Director and later Director of Industries respectively during my tenure of office as Permanent Secretary. In fact, while I was still at the Colombo Kachcheri, E. C. S. Paul rang me up soon after my appointment as Permanent Secretary was known to congratulate me and assure me of all support. I had worked with him earlier when both of us were in the Department of Industries. He had a voracious appetite for work, quick grasp of problems and an extra-ordinary felicity of expression. I asked him one day how he was able to combine such hard work

with chain-smoking, and found that the secret was simple; he never inhaled his cigarette but merely puffed it out - which I jokingly remarked was a wastage of good tobacco !

Rienzie Wijeratne's engineering, Paul's legal acumen and the experience and horse-sense I was able to bear on any question enabled us to work out all problems that confronted us with ease and expedition and I must say with the maximum of economy. Whether it be renovation or expansion of existing state-owned factories, the preparation of blue prints for or the setting up of new factories, negotiations with foreign delegations, preparation of contract documents or the bills of incorporation for new State-owned corporations, or statements of industrial policy — whatever questions arose out of the multifarious ramifications of industrial development, we were able to dispose of them with perfect aplomb. We had, in addition the capable assistance at Ministry level of C. Abeysekera and C. Chanmugam who identified themselves with the subjects with which they were dealing and had entered fully into the spirit of industrial development.

In all these we were fortunate in our Minister P. H. William de Silva who was quick in the dictation or settlement of policy, granting of approval for specific projects or signifying any changes he wished to have incorporated in them and in all other matters that came up for ministerial decision or ratification.

I may mention in passing how on one occasion a foreign Envoy accredited to the Ceylon Government from one of the Iron curtain countries saw the Minister and requested him to use his authority to intervene in a court case relating to an industrial project that was then pending before the District Court of Colombo and ensure that it was determined in favour of a state-owned corporation of his country, who were a party to the litigation. I can recall how the Minister held up his hands and observed that we in Ceylon are a democratic country and that interference in Court decisions was just taboo!

As regards fisheries the usual jibe is that with the sea surrounding us, we do not harvest enough for our requirements and have even to import dry fish and canned fish from abroad. Whilst a lot of work remained to be done, in three distinct ways steps were taken by us to promote the industry.

A cold room, a gift of which was obtained by us from Canada and installed at Mutwal was a sine qua non for the preservation of fish whether brought ashore in trawlers or other means. This also helped to organise marketing procedures both in Colombo and the outstations. Secondly, a start was made with inland fisheries on a wide scale with the introduction of quick breeding varieties such as pilapiya and gourami. Thirdly, mechanised fishing was introduced with the necessary know-how from Japan. The Japanese Government was good enough to send down in response to our invitation, a technical team to study our coastal fisheries and potential harbours. We introduced mechanised boats on the basis of a report issued by them. These motorised boats caught on rapidly and conferred a great boon on the fishermen with a vast potential for the future. Two boatyards Taos and another opened by V. A. Sugathadasa M. P. for Colombo North sprang up, supplying the much needed boats for the fishermen who under a loan scheme inaugurated by the Department of Fisheries were able to purchase them. This process was helped by the steady development of fisheries harbours along the coast under the Japanese Plan.



## MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND NATIONALISED SERVICES

I met Sarath Wijesinghe for the first time when I assumed duties as his Permanent Secretary in September 1960. My first impressions were extremely favourable. In his observations on men and matters he showed much discernment. A planter and businessman turned politician, he had been appointed to the Senate for the part he played in the S. L. F. P. victory of 1960, and had been made Minister of Labour & Nationalised Services.

Shirley Amerasinghe who was Acting Permanent Secretary became Additional Permanent Secretary in addition to his duties as Chairman Port (Cargo) Corporation. Later when he went as Secretary to the Treasury, I took over his duties as Chairman Port (Cargo) Corporation as well. The other nationalised service under this Ministry was the Ceylon Transport Board.

The very day I took over, I came across an order just signed by the Minister directing me to disband the Trincomalee Tea Administration. This was a project which had been sponsored by the Ministry some years earlier to provide for the uninterrupted flow of export teas, our principal foreign exchange earner in the event of a contingency occurring in the Colombo Port. It was working efficiently and was accounting for a fair percentage of our export cargoes. As soon as I received this direction from the Minister I went up to him and asked him if he were really keen on the closure and what would happen if a contingency were to occur in the Colombo Port again. He at once tore up the order and said he heartily agreed with me and asked me whether I had looked at the date of the minute. It was one month old then. He had kept the typed order unsigned till the day that my

predecessor was leaving as he could not bring himself to sign it. A major strike occurred a few months later and it was the Trincomalee Tea Administration that came to our rescue !

Both the Port and the C. T. B. were vast undertakings, each of which had been unified and centralised from the hands of a number of individual operators, who were paid compensation. These were two large-scale measures taken in pursuance of the nationalisation policy of the late Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. It was thus a tremendous challenge and had to be made a success which in the last resort was to be judged by the profits made.

There were, however, certain snags inherent in large state owned schemes providing employment on a big scale. Labour, by and large, could not be disbanded even when it was patently redundant. Where this was not the case, there was the tendency for accretions to labour taking place even where vacancies did not strictly exist, by the operation of political patronage. In these circumstances, the odds were very heavily weighted against the management. The Chairman C. T. B. was R. T. de Silva who had considerable experience in transport matters.

Another matter on which Sarath Wijesinghe agreed with me was as regards the payment of compensation to certain mortgagees of buses that had been taken over by the Ceylon Transport Board. The Motor Finance Co. (Ceylon) Ltd. had to get Rs. 998000/— as the balance due to it from the erstwhile bus operators who had taken loans for purchase of these vehicles. On the basis of a memorandum that had been submitted some time earlier, the Cabinet had agreed to the Minister's recommendation that no payment should be made in respect of these. When the Company appealed I re-examined the position and found that whatever the strict legal implications may have been, it was patently in-equitable to take over to the Corporation vehicles whose value had been pro tanto enhanced by the amount of these loans without payment of compensation therefor.

A fresh Cabinet memorandum was accordingly prepared with the sanction of the Minister and on the day that it was to come up for discussion in the Cabinet, the Minister asked me also to attend the Cabinet meeting. When the matter was taken up, the Minister after a few preliminary comments, called upon me to state our case. Felix R. Dias Bandaranaike who was then Minister of Finance put forward the opposite point of view and in conclusion stated "I can argue the matter backwards and forwards, V. S. M. de Mel can argue the matter forwards and backwards, Madam Prime Minister, you have heard the arguments on both sides, the decision is yours." "Don't you think we should pay" remarked the Prime Minister Sirimavo R. D. Bandaranaike. The Cabinet memorandum was accordingly approved.

Sarath Wijesinghe suddenly took ill in 1962. He had suffered a stroke and an expert medical consultant had to be flown out from London. It was soon evident that he would not be able to carry on as Minister. So his Parliamentary Secretary M. P. de Z. Siriwardena took over as Minister.

The new Minister worked with a sense of urgency to consolidate the gains already made in the running of the Nationalised Services, particularly the C. T. B. He brought his business experience to bear on its problems. We held several conferences with the officers of the C. T. B. and representatives of the Commuters' Association and introduced plans for its more efficient operation through a process of decentralisation.

Successive Ministers of Labour, their Permanent Secretaries and the Commissioners of Labour can take credit for a vast amount of progressive labour legislation that had been placed on the Statute book. The names of C. B. Kumarasinghe and L. Abeywira Commissioners of Labour are worthy of special mention in this connection.

In the course of my duties as Permanent Secretary in the Ministries of Labour & Nationalised Services, Communications & Labour and Housing, I have had the privilege of participating

in a number of Conferences pertaining to the subjects under the Ministries or to matters discussed at Permanent Secretary level at which Sirimavo R. D. Bandaranaike the World's first woman Prime Minister presided. She was always genial and understanding in her ways, quick in grasping the implications of problems and in reaching decisions.

Sam H. Silva the Commissioner of Motor Traffic and Registrar of Motor Vehicles, saw me now and then and obtained instructions regarding matters pertaining to his department. He was a particularly enthusiastic officer who approached whatever task was assigned to him with single - minded purpose and even missionary zeal. These qualities of his were brought into prominent relief later in his magnum opus, the establishment of the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation in 1961 and the nationalisation thereafter of the three oil companies which were then operating in Ceylon.

Ceylon had become a member state of the Industrial Labour Organisation as early as June 1948. The Ceylon Government has so far ratified several Conventions. When a Convention is ratified the Government is obliged thereafter to introduce its labour laws and regulations to fall in line with the provisions of the Convention. Sometimes ratification of Conventions is found difficult because local customs and conditions vary from country to country. Some of the Conventions that have been passed are perhaps more suitable for industrial nations rather than for developing nations like Ceylon. Besides, Ceylon like many other Asian countries, has problems of different races, languages, religions, problems of unemployment and so on which do not permit the adoption of some of the Conventions. Nevertheless, in the framing of laws consideration is given to the Conventions. Recommendations and Resolutions passed by the I. L. O.

In consonance with the above, we have passed the Wages Boards Ordinance for minimum wages, Maternity Benefits Ordinance, Factories Ordinance for health and safety of workers, Industrial Disputes Act for settlement of industrial disputes,

Shop and Office Employees' Act for regulation of hours of work and remuneration, Voluntary National Service Act for provision of employment opportunities for youth and the Employees' Provident Fund Act for provision of provident fund benefits for workers on retirement, a body of legislation strictly enforced by the Department of Labour, that have placed this country on the labour map at least of the developing world.

In 1966 I published a booklet entitled "The Ceylon Trade Union Movement" under the auspices of the National Welfare Association the primary object of which was to show its democratic origins. In that booklet I pointed out how the Ceylon Trade Unions form part of a nation-wide movement which expresses the needs and aspirations of millions of wage earners and their families. They are organisations formed by working men and women not only to improve working conditions but also to advance the workers' desire for a better life. It is over five decades since the first trade Unions were formed in this country and the conditions of workers have vastly improved since then. In fact, it can be said without fear of contradiction that Ceylon has made greater strides in the field of labour legislation than any other Asian country.

A worker primarily needs food and clothing and a home for himself and his family. To enable him to do this, he has to maintain and improve his wages. He requires not only the bare necessities of existence but the amenities of a civilised life, a better education for his children. These things are the concern of trade unions. When workmen join the unions it gives them strength to promote and defend their interests. This strength is derived from association in a body in the same way, for example as a Ratepayers' or Commuters' Association gives strength to the latter to fight for their rights. But it is not merely a question of material interests. With the development of democratic institutions and the growth of their own organisation, working people have acquired a desire for higher things. But it is necessary that if the trade unions are to achieve their real goals,

they should not allow themselves to be distracted by other interests which, by and large, run counter to their genuine aspirations.

It may be stated that a trade union is essentially a democratic organisation which depends on the collective rights of their various members formed into an association for the purpose of protecting their rights. Decisions are taken by majority vote and each member is free to express his views. Each union owes a duty to the nation not only to protect the rights of the workers in the industry but also to maintain the industry at an efficient level so that its full economic benefits may be enjoyed by the people. The effective function work and the policy of trade unions should not be to establish standards of labour in the narrow sense but to build up for the worker his proper place in the industry and thereby the national economy in the context of a better life and a wider culture in relation to the general welfare of the nation.

To take his proper place in a democratic set-up, it is essential that a trade union should use the trade union machinery in a democratic manner. Given goodwill and definite rules of the game a trade union can hope, by and large, to achieve its aims in any given issue provided they are just and reasonable. But should its aims be warped with ulterior motives, the cause of the worker will be betrayed and the strength of the trade union worker undermined.

What a glorious bulwark of democracy and shall we say of human dignity and what a forceful organisation for national welfare our trade unions would have been but for the fact that they have in many instances allowed ulterior motives to creep into their counsels by offering political saboteurs a chance to play decisive roles in their organisations. The latter have acted as agents of various political parties, that in fact, have no faith in democracy in order to use the trade unions to gain their political ends. How serious and how reprehensible this practice

is, can be gauged when we consider that in totalitarian countries where democracy as we know it is not practised, trade unions are mere bodies of yesmen who have willy - nilly to conform to the dictates of their political bosses, who in a one party state have no rivals or competitors. Such people entice trade unions to align themselves with their parties to fight their battles fully knowing all the time that if and when victory is achieved by them the latter will enter their parlour as mere emasculated bodies toeing their master's line.

The burden of official life is sometimes relieved by incidents of a humorous nature. On one occasion I sent one of my senior assistants to represent me at a conference of Permanent Secretaries convened by the Secretary to the Treasury, Jinadasa Sam rakkody. My Assistant who was apt to be rather voluble in his conversation had held forth at the conference reducing the Permanent Secretaries to a mere audience. When I next met the S. T. he described what had happened and suggested that in future, I merely keep away from the conferences if I was not free, without bothering to send any one else.

On another occasion this same officer was stealing the thunder even from the Minister himself at a largely attended labour conference when I had to intervene rather diplomatically and hand the cue back to the Minister. After a few introductory remarks I had left the Minister to express the official view on the question in hand when the officer's volubility had got the better of him and made him poach on the Minister's time. A few minutes later, when the officer again encroached, I had to repeat the same procedure this time without the officer even noticing what had happened. I mentioned to him later that it was our duty to boost the Minister whenever we could rather than take the wind from his sails !

I vividly remember how on one occasion the President of a Labour Tribunal had declined to carry out a direction of the Commissioner of Labour to hear a case in respect of which he had earlier, too, indicated that he could not hear it on grounds of possible prejudice.

The Secretary of the Labour Tribunal, however, under the Commissioner's instructions fixed the case for inquiry once again and the President had, in open tribunal delivered his reasons for continuing to desist from hearing the case. The Ceylon Daily News flashed this order in their columns and followed it up with a leader commending the independence of the Tribunals in administration of justice.

Consequent on this, a proposal was put up to me as Permanent Secretary to take disciplinary action against the President of the tribunal for disobedience. However, for my part, having gone fully into the details of the episode, I felt that the core of the matter was whether disobedience was justified in the circumstances of the case. I was satisfied on this point and refrained from taking action. As for the publicity the matter had received, it was in the natural course of events and only to be expected and had no relevance in the matter of deciding the issue placed before me.

This particular President rejoined the Bar sometime later and has blossomed out into one of Ceylon's leading industrial lawyers who has done intensive research into the various ramifications of the subject.

On this occasion, too, I felt gratified that my innate sense of balance had prevented me from going over the deep end and causing any harassment to an officer exercising an independent sense of propriety which might at first glance have appeared to be disconcerting to those concerned.

In May 1962 I completed the Bar Finals by sitting the examination held in Colombo and thereafter took my oaths as an Advocate of the Supreme Court.

# I RETIRE AND ENTER POLITICS

Whilst in the Ministry of Labour and Nationalised Services, I had the opportunity of acting as Permanent Secretary Ministry of Finance and Secretary to the Treasury during the absence of leave of H. E. Tennekoon. I was No. 2 in seniority in the Ceylon Administrative Service. However, by February 1965, I made up my mind to retire from the government service taking advantage of a minute of the Permanent Secretaries Grade which permitted retirement on a notional reversion in point of salary for the purpose of calculation of pension to Grade I of the Civil Service - a considerable sacrifice from a monetary point of view.

Psychologically it was no easy task to break away from a service in which I had served for 30 years. But I had felt for some time that democracy as I had come to understand it was being assailed on all sides. As for the service, there were numerous officers in it who could step into the breach that I was creating there but any little work I could do from outside the service to sustain the principles of democracy would, I thought, be of some value.

The General Elections of March 1965 was on. So I waived the three months period of leave preparatory to retirement which was available to me and undertook some electioneering work at Sri Kotha, the Headquarters of the United National Party under the able direction of Dr. M. V. P. Peiris, General Secretary of the Party.

Subsequent to the U. N. P. victory of that year the need for organising some party publications was keenly felt. Accordingly, the Jathika Peramuna Publications Ltd. was formed with

C. E. L. Wickremasinghe as the Managing Director. Propaganda is a very effective instrument used by leftist countries and leftist parties the world over to disseminate their party views. Indeed they observe no scruples in the process, the only purpose being to gain their objectives. Their ideology itself permits them to go on the principle that the end justifies the means. In Ceylon this policy was being exploited to the full at that time.

Their propaganda machine largely makes use of persons dedicated to their cause especially youth both as objects of indoctrination as well as agents for dissemination of literature.

Democratic propaganda, on the other hand, is not used by democratic Parties with the same fervour or intensity there being a tendency to treat it as a casual instrument during periods of electioneering only or when a danger signal is hoisted. Further there is sadly lacking that sense of dedication to an ideal which alone will give that extra zeal so essential for the spread of a vivid democratic message. It is not envisaged that indoctrination in the communist sense should be resorted to ; but it has been clearly proved by recent events that there are large masses of democratic youth who if properly directed can bring a sense of unfettered dedication to their cause. What is required for the preservation of democracy is the realisation that democratic propaganda should not be regarded as a haphazard or casual affair but as a systematic continuous and dynamic factor for putting across the democratic message to people who if properly guided would in the last resort elect for a free society.

This process involves not only the lucid conveyance of democratic policies and principles but also the counteraction of any false and mischievous propaganda by other parties.

Propaganda would involve oral, written as well as audio - visual methods. We are mainly concerned here with written propaganda. These include newspapers (Dailies as well as weeklies) leaflets, pamphlets, handbooks, magazines, etc,

Talking points for oral propaganda as well as cinema slides for audio - visual propaganda could also be usefully developed in course of time, the latter particularly in connection with any National Campaign of some significance.

The following activities were set in motion :—

The publication of a daily newspaper 'Vinivida' which would be an effective counter to opposition daily papers like the "Eththa" and 'Janadina'. It must be borne in mind that there were nearly a score of newspapers published by the opposition parties all aimed at the national government. In fact it was hardly necessary to over emphasise that without one or more dailies to effectively counter the spate of leftist propaganda the cause of democracy might go by default.

This type of literature could be devoted to setting out the policy and programme of the national government as well as measures that had been put into operation for the economic progress of the country, for instance, steps taken to achieve self sufficiency in food and to solve the unemployment problem. The attention of the people could be drawn to the attachment of the national government to democratic principles. The development work carried out by each Ministry could be separately highlighted.

Leaflets and Posters could also be used as a medium for evoking the enthusiasm of the people towards national development schemes. These could particularly be directed to obtaining the best results from the "Grow More Food Campaign".

In view of the large numbers of youth that would be added to the registers of voters each year it would be advantageous to direct special propaganda to win them over to the democratic socialist way of life. Youth Leagues could be harnessed for this purpose. Suitable propaganda could also be addressed to educated youth both in schools and universities.

Literature could also be directed, particularly towards the working classes intended primarily to increase the strength of the national government. General literature on democratic trade unionism would also be necessary in order to wean unions from sinister political influences. Publication of Handbooks would also be a necessary feature.

I was placed in charge of these operations under the direction of the Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake and Dr. M. V. P. Peiris, General Secretary of the Party who was also Minister of Trade. An Advisory Committee was appointed with W. Dahanayake Minister of Home Affairs as Chairman and R. Premadasa and A. C. S. Hameed as members.

It may be mentioned that the necessary propaganda was carried out by this organisation catering in particular to the several bye - elections which the National Government had to contest.



## THE NATIONAL WELFARE ASSOCIATION

On retirement from Government Service the occupation of one's free time in some activity seems to be common place nowadays. So along with some others, who also had time to spare, we founded what was called 'The National Welfare Association', of which I was elected President. Among the members of the Executive Committee were D. B. Ellepola, Dr. M. P. M. Cooray, M. Rajanayagam, J. D. L. Abeywickrama Ananda Semage, H. E. P. de Mel, K. A. Dalpatadu, R. E. Jayatilleke, H. C. Peiris, Priyanath A. de Mel, H. D. Fernando and Noeyal Peiris. The Honorary Secretary was M. Theodore Perera.

The activities of the Society ranged over many subjects pertaining to National Welfare which although they fall within the purview of various Government Departments and Local Bodies often received scant attention, for instance, vandalism practised in relation to our sea - coast, which had suffered by the wanton removal of sea - sand, in most cases illicitly by persons who are anxious to make a quick turn over in the building trade, the inevitable result being the erosion of the sea - coast, destruction of houses and even the elimination of fishing areas, which provided employment for hundreds of fishermen.

Illicit Immigration and smuggling of goods from our shores to India, is also a problem which is of perennial concern to this country. Our Association gathered many startling facts and figures regarding these matters and brought them to the notice of

the Ministry of External Affairs and the Inspector General of Police. We impressed on them the urgency of introducing the Identity Card System. so that no Illicit Immigrant may easily go undetected. We are glad we were able to make a contribution to this all important legislation.

A delegation of our Association also gave evidence before the Standing Committee that was appointed by Parliament to hear the views of the general public on the Higher Education Bill in August 1966. It was our submission that whilst there may be abuses in the present set up of the Universities, in the process of curtailing the autonomy of Academic freedom, care should be taken to see that the remedy may not be worse than the disease.

Democracy had barely come of age in this country and there are, no doubt, stresses and strains to be overcome. However in doing so, it is for us to decide whether we are to maintain faith in human nature and by precept and example allow the youth to evolve in a disciplined manner or impose a system from above which will by and large militate against the necessary autonomy in the higher echelons of education.

In this connection, we cited Lord Atlee's Statement in the House of Lords in 1957. "When I was in Office, I steadily refused to increase the influence of the State in the University. I know the objections heard that it is quite illogical to set up a body . . . give it money and do nothing to control it. There are matters in which I think it is better to have trust, and I think this is one of them".

We also realized what a tremendous scope there was for an Association of this nature to combat ant - social practices prevailing in the country, such as Bribery and Corruption Abuse of authority by State Employees for instance C. T. B. Drivers and Conductors, Ant - social entities like Booby traps on roads

and culverts for the unwary motorists and pedestrians, violation of Price Control Regulations and the wanton destruction of Wild Life.

All these activities became possible through the generosity of several members of our Association and other public spirited citizens who contributed regularly to the funds of the Association

I have also been able to contribute my mite to the religious life of the Church of Ceylon as a Warden of Holy Emmanuel Church, Moratuwa, as a delegate elected by the Parish of Holy Emmanuel to the Diocesan Council and as a member of the Standing Committee elected by the Diocesan Council for varying periods. In all the activities entailed in these assignments I have always endeavoured to act on the basis that it is of paramount importance for the progress and welfare of the Church that a sense of spiritual and moral values should permeate all members of the congregation and that they should rise above petty considerations in serving the larger purposes of the Church.



## CHAIRMAN INSURANCE CORPORATION

In August 1967 I was appointed Chairman of the Ceylon Insurance Corporation and functioned in that capacity for about an year. In this connection, I may mention how on the 3rd of December 1976, there took place a small function at the 6th Floor of the Ceylon Insurance Building, Union Place, Colombo. It was quite an informal one convened by Jinadasa Samarakkody, Chairman of the Ceylon Insurance Corporation, for the purpose of unveiling the portraits of the former Chairmen of this Institution who in the chronological order of their periods of office were :—

A. E. G. Moragoda Civil Servant  
 M. Rafeek, Advocate  
 Myself  
 G. V. S. de silva, Economist  
 S. W. Walpita, Advocate and Judge.

Jinadasa Samarakkody addressed the gathering which consisted of the former Chairmen, Directors of the Corporation and their wives and some staff officers, in the course of which he referred to the origins of the institution which was the result of the unification by law of the various Insurance companies that operated in the private sector. He also referred to the phenomenal progress of the Corporation, which had acquired in the process considerable financial strength.

A novel method of hanging the portraits was improvised whereby the portrait of the first Chairman was hung by the next incumbent of the office and so on. It fell to my lot to reply on behalf of the former Chairmen

thanking Jinadasa Samarakkody for the kind gesture that made him to organise this function which we considered was a signal honour in as much as no greater honour could be bestowed on a person than to be invited to be present at the unveiling of his own portrait. I also thought it opportune to mention how the post of Chairman needed a high sense of values and sound judgment and a high degree of moral responsibility. For whether it be a legal matter pertaining to a question of insurable interest or a matter dealing with the financial intricacies of re-insurance or whether it be a question relating to the declaration of a dividend to life holders or the determination of the quantum of compensation to be paid in the case of a motor car accident, or a mere ex-gratia payment, it became the duty of the Chairman as the Chief Executive Officer, in the last resort, to exercise his judgment in such manner as to hold the scales evenly between the Corporation and the insured. It was desirable that in as much as the Corporation should not be aggrandised at the expense of the insured, similarly, the latter should not reap an under advantage over the interests of the former. It was, therefore, but natural that we as Chairmen who served the Corporation at different periods and helped to advance the Institution in turn on the path of progress should feel a sense of elation at the thought that our portraits were being hung in silent testimony to whatever service we may have been able to do to the Corporation.

Among the services that I was able to render to the Corporation may be mentioned the reorganisation of the Legal department of Chief Legal Officer, which greatly reduced the legal expenditure incurred by the Corporation on legal fees, the streamlining of the Life department, the reorganisation of the Motor department with a view to not only more expeditious despatch of work but also the saving of considerable expenditure and the minimising of exaggerated or even fraudulent claims arrangements for the speedy settlement of marine and fire claims and the inauguration of an agricultural crops insurance scheme.

It also fell to my lot to take the necessary steps under the directions of Dr. M. V. P. Pieris, Minister of Trade within whose Portfolio the subject of insurance fell, for the appointment of the Sansoni commission to make recommendations for the revision of salary scales of insurance personnel.

J. L. Silva, Working Director who had come to the Corporation with much experience of insurance work in the private sector was of great assistance in the quick despatch of insurance business, M. S. Wijenaike who was an F. C. I. I. handled the intricate problems of re-insurance with skill and Dr. A. R. B. Amerasinghe chief legal officer brought his legal acumen to bear on insurance problems with a view to their just and speedy settlement. The Branch Managers, too, were experienced men who were in a position to cope with the various ramifications of insurance work.



## NON - ALIGNED EFFORTS AGAINST TOTALITARIANISM

It may have stemmed partly from an inner philosophy of life, partly from a desire to see one's surroundings so moulded as to enable one's free will to have sufficient scope to assert itself free of trammels; whatever it may have been, whether in government service or outside, I never could reconcile myself to a system whereby men's minds were sought to be regimented by others who had perhaps misguided an interest in a different scheme of things.

So in the first instance the struggle for India's and Ceylon's independence had a special appeal to me, aiming as it did at the emancipation of two nations from subjection to a foreign yoke. It was in this same spirit that any type of totalitarianism, too, whether it be a little bit or more, was repugnant to me. My outlook on life has been individualistic and it was my firm belief that whether one looked at it from a scientific cultural or religious view - point, to deny a person the opportunity of developing his individual personality was tantamount to depriving him of his birthright.

In a complex society, this freedom of development should, of course, be subject to regulation in the interests of the community. On the other hand to make him one in a herd and subject him to the exigencies of the state would inevitably reduce him to a mere cipher without a personality or individual potency of his own. This is happening in too many countries of the world today to be good for the progress and welfare of mankind.

So it was with a sense of relief that I watched the activities of certain compatriots who strove for the maintenance of a free society.

Whilst the ding - dong battle was going on between various political parties for popular appeal and eventual ascendancy, there were a few persons who, whilst being non - aligned to any party, were openly carrying out propaganda against totalitarian tendencies in the political fabric which reared their ugly heads from time to time.

In this connection, mention must be made of Darrell Peiris and L. E. J. Lakrajasinghe of Moratuwa. Both were wedded to democratic principles and were prepared to undergo any hardships to propagate their ideals. During times of crisis e. g. during the period when the extreme left wing of the Maha Jana Eksath Peramuna were making a bid to introduce measures of a totalitarian nature they bestirred themselves bringing pressure thereto through public opinion. The resignation of the M. E. P. left wing from the Government in 1958 was partly the result of such agitation.

Darrell Peiris was an exceptional personality who after a degree in Classics from the University of London proceeded to the USA on a lecture tour which embodied subjects relating to Asian history philosophy and culture. His extensive knowledge and gift of the gab made him a persona grata wherever he went. His enthusiasm was highly infectious.

A complete tee - totaller and vegetarian who at one time even advocated the use of cold water as a panacea for all ailments, he led a life of strict discipline. In the process he acquired an inner strength and confidence which he applied with full force towards the achievement of any object to which he devoted himself whether it be rural reconstruction, religious instruction or the propagation of his political philosophy. He devoted several years to rural reconstruction work then in its infancy.

The criticism has been levelled against him that he started a movement but left it too early leaving it to others to carry on, before it was fully consolidated. This criticism is to some extent correct but is occasioned by the fact that his enthusiasm for causes runs in front of him and his followers whom he leaves behind lacks the same zeal that he himself generates.

Darrell Peiris prefers to be called by the name of Dayananda Priyadarsi. In his earlier days, during one of his sojourns abroad, he had spent several months in a Burmese temple as a Samanera. A confirmed bachelor he has devoted his life to the cause of his country's regeneration.

Noeyal Peiris brother of Darrell, was also an assiduous worker and devoted his whole attention on whatever project was in hand. He also helped in the non-aligned campaign against totalitarian moves. Besides, he evinced a keen interest in ancient Buddhist culture and civilisation both in Sri Lanka and in the sub-continent of India so much so that he proceeded to India on hearing the news of the discovery of the lost city of Kapilavastu and took part in the ceremonies to mark the 2600th birth Anniversary of Prince Siddhartha in May 1973.

L. E. J. F. Lakrajasinghe a businessman with a practical turn of mind was a perfect complement to Darrell Peiris when both of them were engaged in the same campaign. His political philosophy was also non-aligned to any political body and turned on what he conscientiously believed was a prime necessity for the preservation of moral values viz. individual freedom. To attain this a general frame-work of democratic freedoms had to be ensured which was essential even for the preservation of religion. He just could not visualise a society where religion was thrown overboard.

Lakrajasinghe, therefore, willingly underwent any hardship that may be necessary to carry out democratic propaganda among the people at times when the fabric of democracy was being threatened.

The Group had sprung into activity, in 1958 as a result of the attempts by Philip Gunawardena Minister of Food to capture power with totalitarian aims - witness his manoeuvres in relation to the Paddy Lands Bill. Letters and Circulars to various Paddy Associations and other democratic societies in the country appealing to them to send strong representations to the Prime Minister and other Ministers and MPP., the holding of public meetings in Colombo and outstations, the passing of resolutions through local bodies such as U. Cs and V. C. s. and personal interviews with Ministers of State to bring home to them the snares of totalitarianism - all organised by the Group at considerable expense had tipped the scales in favour of a more acceptable bill by the deletion of its more obnoxious features.

Further attempts by the same Minister in the form of port strikes and lawlessness against public officers who were intimidated in the performance of their official duties had necessitated the whipping up of public opinion through the medium of various societies. In pursuance of this a meeting of representatives of various organisations in Moratuwa was held under the auspices of the Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha and resolutions such as the following were passed and conveyed to the Prime Minister, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike.

(1) "This Conference calls upon all democratic organisations of Sri Lanka to unite to uphold the principles of democracy and the Middle Way so valiantly safeguarded in our hallowed isle.

(2) The Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha views with concern the serious situation created in the harbour by the clash of rival trade unions inspired by revolutionary political parties causing untold loss and damage to the national economy and therefore calls upon the Prime Minister to take immediate steps to remedy the situation "

At a further meeting held in Dematagoda, Colombo strongly worded resolutions were passed to the same effect.

A further propaganda method by the Group had been to cause letters and telegrams to be sent to the Prime Minister and other Ministers through various groups, societies and individuals throughout the country relating to the controversy raging at any particular time. These peremptory communications had a marvellous effect.

Events were marching to a climax and the Premier was at every turn giving way to his Junior partner in his alliance with Philip Gunawardena. At the instance of the latter, the Prime Minister was even being coerced to exempt harbour thugs who assaulted a Government official from the arm of the law. Philip's men were even interrupting and upsetting public meetings. Philip was even toying with the idea of dictatorship and declared at a meeting held at the Wellawatte Polytechnic what he would do if he were dictator. It was at this juncture and in order to combat these grave tendencies that a number of meetings had been held by the Group culminating in the Colombo Town Hall meetings which were largely attended held on 5th February and 1st March 1958.

As things were not improving, this Group aroused the Sinhala Maha Sabha, the Prime Minister's old political party to pass a series of resolutions among which was the now famous "Sack Philip" resolution demanding the "Immediate dismissal of the all time insubordinate, and dictatorial Food Minister".

Other activities of the Group had been propagation of the Loganathan Plan, opposition to haphazard and hare-brained schemes of nationalisation and opposition to the political activities of certain Embassies. For instance a resolution by the Group called upon the Prime Minister to set up a public commission to investigate the alleged activities and instances of abuse of diplomatic privileges. Promotion of rural welfare and food production activities had also been done in the course of the same campaign.

Certain interested elements were also trying to cash in on communal disturbances and religious unrest to throw this country into chaos. To forestall this the Group had set about actively working full time on strengthening Buddhist Christian amity. For this purpose arrangements were made for clergymen of both religions to go from house to house meeting especially those who held extremist views, to explain their aims. A number of group meetings were held with clergymen of various denominations, and over 300 priests had been personally contacted. The Group was also lending its full support to the Buddhist Hindu Brotherhood which had been formed a short while earlier.

Last but not least the Group took some steps in the formation of some fundamental rights societies with the object of preserving fundamental human rights and civic liberties. As this campaign advanced it was the aim of the Group to demand from Government the setting apart of a day to be called the "Fundamental Rights Day" for celebration by the masses as a complement to May Day which carries a special significance in relation to Trade Union Rights.

The objectives for which this movement stood were :—

1. The preservation of democracy.
2. Resistance to totalitarian moves and manoeuvres.
3. The establishment of fundamental rights on a sound foundation inculcating an appreciation of individual freedom in the minds of the masses.
4. The arousing of political and social consciousness to combat the evil forces of racial and religious disunity and the menace of dictatorial tyranny.
5. The upholding of the Rule of Law.
6. Opposition to hare-brained schemes calculated to end in economic chaos.
7. To expose the irreligion and materialism of Communism as totally repugnant to Ceylonese traditions.

## UNITED RELIGIONS ORGANISATION

L. E. J. F. Lakrajisinghe also formally started about the year 1960 in Moratuwa what was at that time a unique organisation called "The United Religions Organisation". Not only had such a body not existed before, but even the priests of these different religions, the principal ones in Sri Lanka being Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam had even looked askance at each other. Buddhists and Christian priests, particularly, did not have very cordial feelings towards each other. Although the Buddhist Christian controversy in which Migettuwatte Gunananda Thero of Panadura and The Rev. David de Silva figured was now a thing of the past, still the priests of either religion had not developed cordial relations towards one another. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that if two priests one Buddhist and one Christian happened to pass along the same road, they would have judiciously avoided even looking at each other.

The objects of the organisation were to promote harmony between the different religions of the island by drawing attention to the areas of agreement between them and to the common service they have to render to the community in the field of morality. This had a special appeal as it was indeed opportune to close their ranks in view of the various iconoclastic tendencies gaining currency.

The effect of this unity appeal was almost electric. The various religions as represented by their priests drew close to each other and began to shed their suspicions. This was amply demonstrated by the peaceful manner in which the Fatima Church incident in Dean's Road was settled. Perhaps comparatively few people are aware that the Roman Catholic Church

situated at Dean's Road Maradana was the venue for what might have flared up into a very serious situation had not these conciliatory measures been adopted.

When Lakrajasinghe met with an untimely death in 1966, the post of President of the United Religions Organisation, Moratuwa fell vacant and it fell to my lot to be elected to it.

We have since expanded the scope of our activities to include service among the youth with a view to inculcating in them the value of a moral life lived according to the precepts of each one's respective religion. These include respect for parents and teachers and for elders in general, moderation in habits such as refraining from excessive drinking and smoking, eschewing violence in the solution of problems and the useful occupation of one's time.

This last becomes rather theoretical when one considers the position today regarding the problem of unemployment. Not only are 65% of the island's population below 30 years of age but a large section is unemployed. The position is aggravated with more and more persons leaving the Universities and schools each year. Family planning can help to contain the problem up to a point but the spectre of unemployment is a challenge to all future governments.

In the meantime, it is not reasonable or practical to adopt a pessimistic or defeatist attitude. Youth must be disciplined to meet all odds against a moral background so that unsavoury and chaotic conditions may be avoided. Our leaflet for our youth campaign contains aims and objects which are primarily directed to building up youth on moral lines and weaning them from slogans based on sheer opportunism.

We have held several meetings at which the attendance has been predominantly of youth. One is struck by the highly responsive attitude of the young men who realise the value of a moral basis for their actions.

In my view, youth will not mind being guided by the more experienced provided they feel that such guidance is given without selfish motives. They would be most receptive if such guidance is in consonance with our own national traditions which are time tested and which have in the past weathered many a storm. The debacle which marked the events of 1971 is fresh in their minds and they would not want such a thing repeated.

Unrest among youth is a world-wide phenomenon and is not confined to the undeveloping countries alone. Thus, it does not necessarily arise from economic causes. Youth generally pose the question as to what is wrong with a world where some men in authority both big and small crave for palm oil to carry out what they are already paid to do and that too heedless of the grave and ignominious sentences imposed on their colleagues. They ask what is wrong when the government and society as at present constituted cannot cope with the spiralling rate of crime or clamp down on the sale of illicit brews or prevent excesses in the enforcement of the law by those in authority. They ask as to why those in charge of public organisations intended to cater to the needs of the people, divert these benefits to a chosen few. They ask as to why jobs do not, as a rule, go according to merit but are distributed on political grounds.

The United Religions Organisation is affiliated to the Congress of Religions which is an island wide organisation with similar aims and objectives. The prime mover of the Congress of Religions was Neville Wijeyekoon, barrister-at-law who apart from his practice of the law also held the post of Chairman of the Ceylon Ceramics Corporation. I had met him on several occasions when he saw me as Permanent Secretary of Industries regarding matters connected with the administration and development of the Corporation. He always impressed me as an extremely capable fairminded and genial officer who had the interests of not only his employees but also of the general public, the consumer, at heart. It was, indeed, no surprise to me when shortly afterwards he blossomed out into one of the most convincing bridge-builders between the various religious sects inhabiting this country.

It is the view of of the Congress that the development of religious harmony must inevitably lead to a closer co-operation between the adherents of the different religions for the progress of the community as a whole. Dialogue is important as a mode for bringing this about and it has organised many platforms on which such dialogue can take place for mutual good. It could also work on a multi-lateral basis towards a World Community. Nor need it be confined to religious men and women alone but may also be accepted by people who are motivated by secular ideologies.

From these considerations, the untimely death of Neville Wijeyekoon is indeed a national calamity.

As President of the United Religions Organisation Moratuwa I have also had occasion to communicate to the Congress of Religions a proposal that an organisational body for coordinating and actively promoting World Peace be set up in Sri Lanka since it may well be that at the rate that proliferation of nuclear weapons is taking place, the sand in the hour-glass may well run out.

## 2

R. E. Jayatilleke who also carried on a sustained campaign for the maintenance and preservation of democratic freedoms was also non-aligned to any political party although in the earlier part of his career he had been a politician in his own right having represented Nawalapitiya in the State Council during the period 1942 to 1960. He had also been a member of the Ceylon Labour Union at the time.

The Talalla incident which occurred towards the end of 1964 where a motorcade of Buddhist monks and others which he had organised from Colombo to Kataragama in protest against the impending curbs on press freedom was stoned when passing the above mentioned village in the Southern Province made him famous overnight. He was a founder member of the Sri Lanka Prajathanthra Arakshaka Peramuna and organised a number of

meetings during the time of the proposed Republican Constitution to protest against the curtailment of freedoms. I also spoke at two of his meetings organised at Ambalangoda and Mt. Lavinia.

In the course of his campaign R. E. Jayatilleke travelled thousands of miles all the time in taxis whose metres shot up sometimes to astronomical figures, which would have been enough to shock persons made of milder stuff. However, in his case, used to the strains and stresses of public life he faced all problems with equanimity never, at the same time, disdaining a well-cut and well-ironed suit to match the occasion, a habit not born out of ostentation but a sense of decorum. His powers of endurance and his unruffled demeanour were indeed marvellous and reminded one of the proverbial Trojans of old.

Arthur Dalpatado School Principal turned company director also entered whole-heartedly into the campaign. Whilst maintaining a neutral stance in politics, he was unable to stand by when the main tenets of his political philosophy were being assailed.

So was Victor L. Wirasingha, retired Permanent Secretary who also addressed meetings organised by the Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha and the Sri Lanka Prajathantra Arakshaka Peramuna

The principal target was the totalitarian concept of government which was being gradually introduced into the country. The Christian, Hindu and Islamic points of view were well-known. However, there was some confusion of thought expressed in certain quarters as to the relative position of Buddhism vis-a-vis Marxism. I reproduce below excerpts from an article published by Jermyn G. Fernando, a keen student of Buddhist philosophy which explains the Buddhist point of view:-

“Let us now examine the main question. It is necessary at the outset to define the terms “Buddhist” and “Marxist-Leninist.” There is no doubt that all will agree that a Buddhist is one who accepts the Teachings of the Buddha and a Marxist-Leninist

is one who accepts the teachings of Marx and Lenin. One who does not believe in morality and karma, for example, cannot call himself a Buddhist. There is Revisionism that was tolerated in respect of the Teachings of the Buddha as evidenced by the proceedings of the Convocations which were held from time to time and recorded in the history of Buddhism. The teachings of the Buddha constituted Eternal Truths. They had no temporal or spatial frontiers.

When we look at the main Teachings of the Buddha there can be no question that He considered mind pre-eminent. His insistence on Morality has no meaning if this is not so. The whole theory of karma fails if volition is ruled out. In the Abidhamma the Buddha speaks of Chittaja-Rupas - matter caused by mind. In the Dhammapada the two opening stanzas explain the pre-eminence of mind and a complete vagga is devoted to the culture of mind. Readers, moreover, will recall the stanza which epitomizes Buddhism - "To refrain from all evil, to do all good, to purify the mind, this is the Teaching of the Buddha". It will be, therefore, apparent to anyone that a person who cannot by conviction subscribe to this pre-eminence of mind cannot call himself a Buddhist. If he does he cannot be true to his convictions. If he does, he does so with an ulterior motive. With the example of the Vaitulyans before us, we must be ever vigilant actively to combat infiltration tactics. The Maha Sangha and devout laymen must be fully alive to this threat to the Sasana and our Culture which is our heritage.

Now, on the other hand, what does Marxism - Leninism teach? The basic assumption in dialectical materialism is that mind is a derivative of matter. There is no place for free - will or volition independent of material circumstances. Morality and Karma must play the part of Bogey - men. No wonder, then, that Religion is the opium of the masses. People's belief in morality and karma militates against the spread of heretical views. Marxism - Leninism has been repeatedly and decisively rejected by the masses in this country. Readers can determine whether any doctrine can be more diametrically opposed to

Buddhism than Marxism - Leninism. The Buddha called this view Uchcheda Ditthi - a Niyata Michchaditthi (False view with a Fixed Destiny) as distinguished from Sassata Ditthi (the view of those who believe in an enduring Egoentity, but also in an here - after). He considered the latter view not so bad as there is always hope of escaping from error. Those who hold the view that mind is a derivative of matter cannot by conviction be Buddhists. Within the framework of Marxism - Leninism, however, it is possible for Marxism - Leninism to embrace Buddhism, not by conviction, but in pursuance of the celebrated Marxist - Leninist strategy that the end justifies the means.

In conclusion it must be said that Marxism - Leninism is not a new teaching expounded for the first time in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It certainly became a new political device in the 19th and 20th Centuries. As a political device it has met with a measure of success in certain countries but nowhere has the political objective been gained without the accompaniment of violence. As a view it existed at the time of the Buddha and He categorically refuted it along with other heretical views. It is not necessary to find new arguments to combat this view. One has only to reiterate the Buddha's arguments. Marx, Engels and Lenin had their forbears as contemporaries of the Buddha."



# BANDARANAIKE POLICIES & THE REPUBLICAN CONSTITUTION

The joint Election Manifesto of the SLFP - LSSP and CP United Front issued in 1970, declared that it sought to implement the measures outlined by them in order to carry forward the progressive advance towards the establishment of Socialist Democracy which was begun in 1956 under the leadership of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. One of their stated objectives was to "resist all attempts at authoritarianism and to safeguard and broaden the democratic structure of government and democratic rights of the people". The victory of the United Front at the General Elections of 1970 showed that the majority of the people were prepared to accept the political philosophy of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike.

We cannot think of any better method of ascertaining what S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike had in mind when he spoke of socialist democracy than to go back to his own utterances made in this regard. In the course of his Convocation address to the University of Ceylon on 8th November 1957 he stated :-

"There are experiments going on all over the world, experiments in government, here a Fascist state, there a Communist state, here a semi - Fascist state, there a semi - Communist state, and various varieties of democracies ranging from Capitalist Democracies such as that of the United States, to liberal democracies such as that of England, to socialist democracies such as those of the countries of Northern Europe."

Again on the 16th May 1969 shortly before his untimely death, in the course of his presidential address at the Annual Sessions of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party of which he was the leader, he restated the fundamental principles on which his party was based :

"Politically we are democratic as we believe that the democratic way of life is the most suitable for human progress. Economically we believe in the socialist approach, as we are of the opinion that it is only in this way that justice can be done to the mass of the people. A third factor in our policy is our belief that cultural and religious values must be preserved and fostered.

It will thus be seen that we are opposed to both Communism and Fascism to Capitalism and Materialism. Our Party stands against any attempt to impose any of these on the people of the country".

Further at the very first Annual Conference of the SLFP in December 1952 he had declared.

"As the term democracy is very often loosely used it may be as well for us to have a clear idea of what it really means. It consists of an agglomeration of freedoms in the classic definitions e. g. freedom of speech, freedom of expression and public meeting freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of the press and freedom of the vote but also certain other collective freedoms recently enumerated e.g. freedom from fear, freedom from ignorance, freedom from disease, freedom from want; in a word freedom to be really free. This is the true spirit of democracy and this is the freedom for which our party stands".

A final quotation would also be helpful. Addressing the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference on 2nd December 1957 he said:-

"The British idea of free elections, the idea of the independence of the Judiciary, the idea of an administration that is efficient and impartial, and which is not unduly hampered by inter-

ference by the Executive are all ideas that have made valuable contributions to human institutions in the modern world. That I venture to think will be the verdict of history as the chief contribution that Britain has made to human welfare."

When the Draft Basic Resolution relating to the proposed constitution of Ceylon were made available to the public in 1974 it was soon evident on a perusal of the document that on a number of vital issues these were repugnant to the principles set out by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike which the United Front professed to follow e. g.

(a) In the administration of justice, appointment of judicial officers by the Council of Ministers was unsatisfactory. Judicial officers have to settle disputes between citizen and citizen as well as between government and the citizen and should therefore be in a position to be impartial. As the common saying has it administration of justice should "not only be fair but also seem to be fair."

(b) No Provision was made to guarantee fundamental rights promised in the United Front Manifesto.

(c) The Constitutional Court provisions practically shut out the ordinary citizen from having recourse to it. The Public had to be constantly in touch with Bills introduced in the National State Assembly or act through a party leader or through a quorum of members of the Assembly within a week of the first reading.

(d) The vesting of all powers e. g. legislative, executive and judicial in one body viz. the NSA was unsatisfactory. If all this power is concentrated in the hands of the National State Assembly it could make it a frankenstein monster which would devour the rights and freedoms of its masters viz. the people who are supposed to be sovereign.

In England as Wade and Philips have laid down the constitutional position is that "in the exercise of judicial patronage the Lord Chancellor acts on his own responsibility and the question of collective ministerial responsibility does not arise "

It will be seen that the Lord Chancellor's office is in the nature of a judicial office. He does not have to face the hustings at Election time.

This principle is of importance not only in matters which arise between the State and the subject but also in matters between subject and subject in order to prevent any patronage being extended to one of them for political or other reasons.

(e) The period of the functioning of the NSA was to be increased to 6 years.

(f) The escape clause (8) (2) of the Basic Resolutions negatived whatever rights had been set out. The clause said that all fundamental rights shall be subject to such restrictions as the "Law presents in the interests of national unity and integrity, national security, public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others ", matters which cover practically the entire field of legislation of any Parliament, so that fundamental rights set out can be varied by subsequent legislation. As such they could hardly be called fundamental. What was then the ultimate security that we had as a democratic people ?

There was a grave danger that our rights and freedoms might be taken away at the whims and fancies of politicians.

Furthermore, it was a foreign ideology that was sought to be introduced into this country, which was totally opposed to our religion, culture and traditions. Our watchword should be " Socialism without fetters ".

It was clear that the draft basic resolutions if passed without amendment would have created in Ceylon a state just like any of the communist countries of the world, a consummation that would have been completely repugnant to the Bandaranaike policies. And that, too, in spite of a categorical statement issued under the hand of the Prime Minister Sirimavo R. D. Bandaranaike shortly after the issue of the U. F. Manifesto of 1970, that the assurances given in the U. F. Manifesto were straight forward and had no hidden meanings. “එහි අර්ථ සැකවුණු පද නැත”. It was, perhaps, well - intentioned but that the leftist alliance in the United Front came to dominate the thinking on constitutional issues.

Although a mixed economy i.e. the co - existence of the public and private sectors is vital for the preservation of democracy, the draft resolutions did not provide for a private sector.

Meanwhile the Ceylon Daily Mirror under the caption “Eternal Vigilance” had editorially commented on the passing scene.

“The salvoes of public protest fired at the Draft Constitution are indicative of the people's concern and anxiety over what they fear is the seizure of their individual liberties and freedoms. Their echoes must surely shake the smugness, not only of the Steering Committee but the Government as well.

The drafting of the Constitution cannot be dismissed as a political exercise or intellectual manoeuvre on the part of a party or a few individuals. The Constitution is defined as “a fundamental organic law or principles of a government of a Nation, State, Society or other organised body of men embodied in a written document or implied in institutions and Customs”. It is an indestructible document for all time, a sanctuary of individual safeguards not for today and tomorrow only but for ever. It is in this light that both the architects of the Constitution as well as its recipients must view it.

The people must therefore alert themselves to the sacred duty of standing sentinel over their own rights and freedoms. "Eternal vigilance" as that fiery Irish patriot Curran said "is the price of liberty". The citizens of a Nation are as responsible for the fashioning of a Constitution as its makers. Their indifference, their negligence, their irresponsibility can burden not only themselves but their children and children's children with a vicious and autocratic Constitution which not all their later regrets or grief or tears can destroy. The time for correction is now. The time for protest is now. The time for the articulation of their fears is now. Unless and until the people of this country realize and react to the realization that they have every thing to lose, and nothing to gain if they permit the noxious clauses in the Draft Constitution to remain, they will be guilty of betraying the trust reposed in them not only as citizens but as forefathers of generations yet unborn.

The Minister of Constitutional Affairs has often appealed to deputations to have faith and trust in him. While we echo his appeal, we must also remind the people of the warning of that great freedom fighter, Thomas Jefferson: "In questions of power let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution". Power lust is a dangerous passion and that lust reeks in the clauses of the Constitution in its draft form. It is for the people to douse the flames of that lust with a relentless shower of sensible protest.

The Constitution, as we keep telling the public, is a matter of life or death. If the Constitution goes through in its draft form, it will doubtless switch off the lights of liberty in this country. In this connection we commend the words of that famed cartoonist, Sir David Low :-

"If any man come to you from the Right or the Left and promise you economic security on condition that you first surrender your personal and political liberty, kick him down stairs. You won't get the security and what is more having surrendered your liberty, you will then be in no position what ever to argue about it".

# THE CITIZENS' COMMITTEE

I was also a member of the Citizens' Committee (Constitution of Sri Lanka) organised under the Chairmanship of Sir Cyril de Zoysa with T. Sri Pathmanathan as Secretary. Among the other members were:

M. C. Sansoni  
V. Manickavasagar  
P. Navaratnarajah, QC  
G. P. Malalasekera  
H. A. de Silva  
L. G. Gunasekera  
N. K. Choksy, QC  
Sangarapillai Pararajasingham  
M. Rajanayagam  
R. E. Jayatilleke  
V. L. Wirasinha  
K. A. Dalpatadu  
J. Austin Coorey  
A. H. C. de Silva QC  
V. Siva Supramaniam  
D. B. Ellepola  
A. B. W. Jayasekera  
T. P. P. Goonetilleke

In this connection I may recall how I had the privilege of initiating this movement along with J. Austin Coorey Attorney-at-Law, when we met Sir Cyril de Zoysa and suggested that it was only through such a body that we could effectively put across to government the views of at least a section of the public on the vital issues. In fact, in casual conversation with me later he used to refer to this Committee as "Your Committee".

The Citizens' Committee made a declaration in the following terms: -

- (1) In response to the invitation of the Minister of Constitutional Affairs to the public for comments on the Basic Resolutions to be presented by him to the Steering Committee, meetings of representative citizens of Ceylon were held on several dates.
- (2) These meetings after a full and free discussion of the basic resolutions decided that clarification of the resolutions should be sought from the Minister.
- (3) The Minister was pleased to grant an interview to a delegation on 29th January 1971 and explained to the delegation some of the more important resolutions.
- (4) We have given careful and anxious consideration to the basic resolutions in the context of the clarifications which the Minister was pleased to make.
- (5) Whilst endorsing with satisfaction the proposal to establish a free, sovereign and independent Republic, we are conscious that the United Front was returned to power with an overwhelming majority as the voters believed that the United Front had committed itself irrevocably to the implementation of the policies laid down by the late Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, which policies the Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike and her party assured the public would be duly implemented by them.
- (6) We state that whilst it is the bounden duty of every citizen to adhere scrupulously to the principles laid down by the late Prime Minister, some of the Basic Resolutions are a violation and a negation of the principles which underlie the Constitution drafted by the late Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike for the creation of a free, independent and democratic socialist state.

- (7) We submit that, to keep faith with the people of Sri Lanka the National Constituent Assembly, has no alternative but to adopt the Constitution drafted by the late Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike with such additions and amendments as are not inconsistent with the principles underlying his draft, for the establishment of a free sovereign and independent Republic.

The Committee forwarded a copy of the draft made by the late Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike for reference which draft had been subscribed to by most of the leftist leaders. Their contention was that this draft had provided for the generally accepted individual and collective freedoms and its principles could reasonably have formed the basis upon which the Republican Constitution could be built.

The activities of the Citizens' Committee made no appreciable dent on the draft Basic Resolutions of the Republican Constitution. However, it was of great value in that the opposition point of view was placed on record. In fact, the activities of the Committee are referred to in hansard when it was raised by Felix R. Dias Bandaranaike Minister of Home Affairs, Local Government & Administration in the National State Assembly.

His reference to the Committee which consisted of retired Judges of the Supreme Court and District Courts, Senior Lawyers retired Permanent Secretaries and Heads of departments, University Professors and other politicians as a "Gallery of Rogues" was of a disparaging nature but pinpointed the fact that they could not be ignored. They were only anxious to see the continuance of democratic freedoms such as freedom of association, speech and the press and the inviolability of justice and the rule of law.

## BANDARANAIKE POLICIES IN THE BALANCE

Those whose lot had fallen in the present generation owed it not only to themselves but to posterity to assert sufficient public opinion to assure that their freedoms were intact.

The people breathed a sigh of relief when on 17th Februray 1971, the Prime Minister Sirimavo R. D. Bandaranaike in the Presidential address at the 20th Annual Conference of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party held at Amparai declared :

“ We are now engaged in the great task of framing a new Constitution as envisaged by the late Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. In the working of the Constitution to be drafted in a manner safeguarding democratic human rights, it would be possible to ensure greater vocational and political rights ”.

The Daily Mirror under the Caption “ Resurrection of S. W. R. D.” editorilly commented as follows :-

“ One of the most invoked and most abused phrases in the political vocabulary of Ceylon is “ Bandaranaike policies ”. From the time of that distinguished Liberal leader's tragic death his name has been used as an ‘ Open Sesame ’ or mantram both by pollscarred politicians who want to bask in the glow of his name or adventurers who flaunt it as a passport to the charmed inner circle.

“ Bandaranaike policies ” emerged from their grave yard when at the SLFP sessions at Amparai full - throated pooja was paid by leading lights of the SLFP who resurrected the revered leader's name, swearing fulfilment of his policies. Indeed

Minister Maithripala Senanayake, in particular, besides Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike fired a fusillade of well - aimed shots at those who paraded the term "Bandaranaike policies" with impunity to suit their self - propulsion but did naught else about it. "We often pay lip service to the Bandaranaike name while forgetting the true meaning it holds for us", he said

Nothing, in the context of his name could be truer. The true meaning of his policies was laid to rest with him. Mr. Bandaranaike was a Great Democrat and a Great Liberal. "Let it be realized", he once said, "that the democratic machinery itself may be utilized in this way to destroy democracy and enthrone in its place totalitarianism with all its horrors. The votes of a people may overnight effect this revolution and the entire people may be caught unawares".

There was a prophetic ring about this far - sighted democrat's warning and it appears that this prediction hovers ominously over Ceylon today particularly in the process of Constitution making and State monopoly.

Peering once again into the future, the late leader said on Independence Day, 1959, "On the purely political plane there have been many disquieting manifestations of the tendency to drift towards Fascist courses of action, culminating recently with an assault on even that last citadel of democracy, the independence of the Judiciary".

Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who has consistently articulated Government's desire to implement the Bandaranaike policies, mowed down all conjecture at Amparai about her delay in pursuing these policies when she, in clear - cut categorical terms assured the nations that : "We are now engaged in the great task of creating a new Constitution as envisaged by the late Prime Minister, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, to be drafted in a manner safeguarding democratic human rights . . . ."

The people, shackled by fear at some of the draft clauses of the Constitution breathed more freely since the SWRD Draft epitomises socialist democracy with all the required safeguards for fundamental rights.

The invoking of S. W. R. D's policies at Amparai must be viewed as much more than an emotional cry. It demonstrates beyond all doubt that there are people in the land - and a large mass of them - who hunger for the policies they voted for but are not pursued currently by the Government. They echo his desire for democracy as expressed by him thus : "In a free democratic society, there is no room for totalitarian Communism as also there is no room for Fascist tendencies."

The SLFP sessions at Amparai have re-sounded the bugle of Bandaranaike's policies. They cannot now ignore the clarion call they themselves have sounded. The people now more sharply alerted will watch whether this Government continues to pay lip service to S. W. R. D's policies or give them life and blood, flesh and muscle."

In May 1971 an attempt was made by certain non-aligned members of the public to get the decision of the draft basic resolutions postponed in view of the emergency conditions then prevailing in the country, to a more appropriate time. The signatories to the letter addressed to the Prime Minister were :- Hema Basnayake, former Chief Justice, W. K. Wijemanne, J. Austin Coorey, V. L. Wirasinha, L. Jayasundera, R. E. Jayatileke, K. A. Dalpatadu, S. Lucian J. Silva and myself.

Protests were also made by the Maha Sangha at a well-represented meeting of the Sangha held at Dematagoda on 7th June 1971. Representatives of the three Nikayas and of Buddhist Dignitaries were present. The meeting which was held at the Patanagara Maha Vihara was presided over by the Ven. Molligoda Ariyawansa Nayake Thera, the Sanganayake of the Kotte Sri Kalyani Samagri Dharma Maha Sangha Sabhawa. The meeting had been primarily convened to protest against the draft Buddha

Sasana Mandala Bill which had been presented to the Sangha Sabha by the Minister of Cultural Affairs S. S. Kulatilleke for their approval.

The Sanganayake of the Colombo Navakoralaya, the Ven. Parawehera Pananada Nayake Thera speaking on the Bill and the basic resolutions on the proposed Constitution pointed out that a transition was taking place in the administration of this country. In view of that everyone had to act with restraint and consideration.

His opinion on the proposed Buddha Sasana Mandala Bill was that it held a threat to the future development of Buddhist culture in this country and that it was not correct to rush through with it at a time when the country was being administered under Emergency regulations. It was the same with the Constitution. For over 2300 years there was a democratic system of life in this country and the formulation of a Constitution at that juncture would mean harm to the Buddha Sasana and the country as a whole. He told the meeting that the question now before them was how to get the government to delay the Bill and the Constitution.

## CHAPTER 30

# A CHORUS OF PROTESTS

There was a chorus of protests from various parts of the country, from associations and individuals who could not believe that Bandaranaike policies could yield basic resolutions of this type. The Bar Council, the Law Society, Civil Rights Association, the National Workers' Congress, Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha and eminent public men well versed in legal and constitutional affairs such as Senator Nadesan, Q. C., H. W. Jayewardene, Q. C., A. H. C. de Silva, Q. C., K. C. Nadarajah, Q. C., Sir Senerath Gunewardene, Ceylon's former representative at the United Nations, and Shirley Corea former Speaker of the House of Representatives among others, joined in these protests.

The Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha held a number of public meetings both at Moratuwa and in Colombo. I was largely instrumental in getting the Sabha to organise the meetings the object of which was to present the public point of view. These were held under particularly inhibiting conditions in that an emergency was on and special permission was necessary for holding of meetings,

I was a Vice-Patron of the Sabha; the President was S. Lucian J. Silva, P. M. C. Fernando was a Vice President and L. A. de Silva the Hony. Joint Secretary. The general membership gave full and whole-hearted support for its activities which were started on the basis of a resolution that was introduced by me in the Sabha. But special mention may be made of Rev. E. W. Mendis, Major D. M. Colombage and C. W. de Mel in this connection.

The first meeting was held at the Buddhist Hall Moratuwa on 8th February 1972. Among the special invitees who spoke at this meeting were Sir Senarath Gunewardena, Austin Coorey and

Walter Wijemanne, Attorneys-at-Law. Incidentally Sir Senarath had been one of Ceylon's Ambassadors to the United Nations and had also served on the U. N. Commission which reported on the suppression by Soviet Russia of the Hungarian bid for independence. The following resolutions were passed copies of which were forwarded to the Prime Minister Sirimavo R. D. Bandaranaike and other members of Parliament:-

1. "This meeting resolves that Sec. 40 of the Draft Constitution which deals with the duration of the National State Assembly should be amended to provide for the next General Elections of the National Assembly to be held on the expiry of 5 years from the 27th of May being the date of the last General Election and the duration of the National Assembly should not exceed 5 years.
2. That in as much as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations of which Sri Lanka is a member, includes the right to travel out of the country and return thereto, such rights must be specifically provided in the Constitution.
3. In as much as Section 52(1) and 52(2) of the Draft Constitution enable the enactment of laws inconsistent with the Constitution and contain other implications, these sections should be deleted.
4. In as much as Art. 23(4) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which this country has subscribed, provides the right to form and join Trade Unions specific provision be made in the proposed Constitution for this purpose and accordingly suggest that Section 18 (f) of the Draft Constitution be amended to provide for the formation of such and other organisations.
5. This meeting resolves that in as much as provisions of Sections 126 to 133 will destroy the independence of the judiciary and bring it under executive control, these sections be deleted and be replaced by the provisions of the existing Constitution relating to the Judiciary.

6 Since the public are unable to discuss the provisions of the proposed Constitution which is a matter of paramount importance for the future of the country, due to the prevailing emergency, this meeting resolves that the consideration of this momentous document be deferred until the present emergency is lifted and the conditions return to normal.

7. This meeting resolves that provision be made in the Constitution for a citizen to pursue his profession trade and industrial or agricultural undertaking.

8. This meeting resolves that in as much as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Art. 17 provides that everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others and that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property, that the same be embodied in the Constitution."

A word about the Civil Rights Movement and the National Workers Congress would not be out of place. The Civil Rights Movement was committed to the protection and promotion of the civil rights and liberties of the people. The Association regarded these as a necessary accompaniment to social and economic change and the march towards an egalitarian society. It concerned itself with the maintenance of constitutional rights and the restoration of certain rights and liberties that had been suspended. Associated in the formation of the organisation were university professors, Catholic bishops and bishops of the Church of Ceylon, Buddhist Prelates, Trade Union leaders, artists, lawyers and teachers, among others.

The National Workers' Congress was primarily a Trade Union organisation that adhered to the principle of trade unionism within the ambit of full fundamental rights to its members outside the concept of a totalitarian society. It was affiliated to the World Free Trade Union Movement. Its President is W. K. Wijemanne.

At a meeting convened by the Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha on 12th February 1972 at the New Town Hall Colombo, presided over by the Rev. Parawehera Pagnananda Maha Nayake, in

which Bishop Oswald Gomis of the Roman Catholic Church and Rev. C. M. Peiris of the Church of Ceylon also participated the following resolutions were passed :-

1. "The Noble Brotherhood of Monks have guarded the Dhamma, and the freedom and rights of the individual in Sri Lanka

At every point of crisis in our history, The Brotherhood has emerged from seclusion to clarify national dangers and to keep open the paths to reason and to truth.

Individual freedom, which is the path to Nirvana must be preserved.

We consider it to be the paramount duty of the Maha Sangha to spare no efforts at this critical juncture of our history, to ensure that the human goals set out by the Lord Buddha himself, should be directed according to the paths He advised. The necessary environment must therefore be created to enable such fulfilment.

2. We note with deep regret that the proposed draft Constitution is bristling with provisions which negate the tenets and principles which we have referred to above, and which are calculated to relegate our people to a position of subordination and ineffectiveness as individual persons, and negative the people's advance towards self - realisation.

It is absolutely essential that the provisions of the draft Constitution should be carefully examined and subjected to the full focus and consideration of the general public in an appropriate atmosphere. This is not possible on account of the prevailing emergency regulations.

We need not stress that a Constitution is a vital and momentous document, and indeed, the life blood of the people. As such, to proceed hastily, without affording the necessary opportunity for widespread public discussion would be tantamount to depriving the people of Ceylon of their birthright.

We, therefore, at this most critical juncture in our country's history, call upon the government to give definite assurance to the people that the draft Constitution will not be finalised over their heads, but will be postponed for public discussion after the emergency has been lifted."

These Resolutions were also duly forwarded to the appropriate authorities for consideration and necessary action.

A further meeting was held at the Y.M.C.A. Colombo on 24th March 1972 to explain the scope of the provisions of the Draft basic resolutions and how far they impinged on fundamental rights. The following addressed the meeting: -

Moratuwe Premaratana Adikarana Nayake Thero, G. P. Kariyawasam, President Aganuwara Eksath Bauddha Bala Mandalaya and All-Ceylon Handloom Weavers' Association, Y. P. Muthukumarana, Hony. Secretary, All Ceylon Trade Chamber, B. P. Justin Silva, Hony. Secretary All Ceylon Federation of Authorised Dealers' Associations, V. L. Wirasinha, Representative, Council of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Ceylon, Rev. E. W. Mendis, Walter Wijemanne, S. Lucian J. Silva, Gunasekera Senanayake President Chamber of Commerce of Ceylonese by Descent and myself.

The following resolutions were duly passed unanimously by those present:

1. "Defer Constitution until emergency is over.
2. Incorporate the following important features in the Constitution:-
  - (a) Holding of Elections every five years dating from May 1970.
  - (b) Right of travel abroad and return to the Island.
  - (c) Independence of the Judiciary by provision of an Appointments Board fully independent of Executive Control.
  - (d) Press Freedom.

(e) Trade Union Rights.

(f) Right of private property subject to social control in the interests of the community."

Nimal, wife of L. S. B. Perera, former Ceylon High Commissioner in Canada was of great assistance to us in organising these meetings, in which she evinced a keen interest. My wife Phyllis and Nimal also encouraged us by attending some of these meetings.

Had some Members of Parliament so far forgotten their role as representatives of the people, said to be sovereign, that they were acting over the heads of their principals? Perhaps it might be appropriate in some future setting to style them "Representatives of the People" (PRR) rather than MPP as a perpetual reminder that their powers were derived from the consent of the People, chosen for a term to look after their interests, in strict accordance with their respective mandates.

On 7th May 1972 the Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha had occasion to write to the Prime Minister expressing its satisfaction that in response to public opinion one or two aspects of the draft basic resolutions had been modified such as in the case of the Board proposed in place of the Judicial Service Commission suggested by us which would not be totally subject to the control of the Executive. However, there were many other aspects which were unsatisfactory and an appeal was made to her to look into these matters.

A special appeal was also addressed to the George Rajapakse Committee regarding the matters which were within its purview one of which was the period of office of an elected National State Assembly. Representatives of the Mahajana Sabha were called up for an interview. In response, no doubt, to one of the persistent representations made by the Sabha at various meetings and through the medium of correspondence George Rajapakse the Chairman of the Committee announced that they had decided to make one concession namely to reduce the period of the first N. S. A. to 5 years so that it would not go on after 1977.

## CHAPTER 31

# PRESS COUNCIL BILL

Meanwhile another bombshell was thrown over the public in the form of the Press Council Bill. The U. F. Manifesto of 1970 had stated : " The freedom of the press will be ensured. Independent newspapers will be encouraged as a means to end the present domination of the daily press by capitalist newspapers ". Chapter 6 of the Constitution also provides : Every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression including publication "

However, the Press Council Bill which was gazetted in August 1972 had traces of totalitarian thinking in its context. The Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha had occasion to write to the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers on the following lines :-

" The Press Council Bill heralds the beginning of the end of democracy in this country. It is a shame that a Government that styles itself as a People's Government is bringing in legislation to protect itself from the people.

Although the people cherished the hope when the Government withdrew the earlier Press Council Bill that the obnoxious clauses would be totally withdrawn, it seems that it is still persisting in spite of national opposition in retaining Section 16 of the Bill which relates to Cabinet decisions, which may not be published without prior approval. Another most obnoxious clause is the one that requires journalists to divulge their sources of information.

Further it is persisting in its proposal to subject the Press to State Control, It is therefore, not to be autonomous, but will have to comply with any general or special directions issued by the Minister - in - charge.

The Composition of the Council, too, leaves much to be desired. The membership of the Council should be enlarged and greater representation allowed to working journalists.

The public, too, should be represented on the Council as they have a great stake in it. As one time chairman of the British Press Council, Lord Devlin said, "other professions of medicine, law engineering can regulate their conditions according to purely professional standards. But the press helps to form and to express public opinion, and it is therefore important that its standards should take public opinion into account."

It was only in May this year that this country was declared a free sovereign and independent republic. The relevant clauses of the Constitution guaranteed freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of publication. The people were assured that under the new Constitution they were to enjoy these cherished freedoms which they valued so much. Now the Government is bent on snatching these freedoms from the people, even before the ink was dry on the Constitution. It is quite clear that the people have to fight hard to safeguard these freedoms not only for their own sake but for the sake of their children.

If the proposed Press Bill is passed, the working class would also be equally affected. If the freedoms referred to above are curbed it would amount to control of thought. The press is the most important medium through which the working class could express their grievances and demands. If the Bill is passed, it would deprive the trade unions of their freedom. It is incredible that a Government elected by the people and by the working class should try to pass a Bill of this nature calculated to rob them of their much - valued freedoms.

Newspapers in spite of faults which could very well be remedied by a democratic and independent Press Council, do a great service by exposing corruption and various other malpractices. They keep the people informed of what is happening in

various Government Departments and Corporations and other public or private bodies. We are all out for a fair just and democratic Bill on the lines of the Press in England or in India.

It is thus clear even to the blind that a Press Bill of the type contemplated by the Government would sound the death — knell not only of democracy but also of the trade unions in this country.

We consider that the fight against this vicious Bill is a fight of all freedom loving people including the working class. Surely the Government cannot, in these circumstances, expect the trade Union movement in this country to fade out or commit hara - kiri.

The trade unions have a right to fight for the amelioration of their conditions of service. A priori, they have even a greater right to fight for their very existence. As such, we consider that it is our sacred duty at this critical juncture to resort even to trade union action, if need be, to resist this Bill and thereby preserve and maintain our trade union movement as a free and democratic one as it exists today.

We, therefore, respectfully call upon the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers to cause all obnoxious clauses in the proposed Bill to be deleted and enact a truly democratic Bill and thereby obviate any necessity for us to engage in an avoidable life and death struggle for the preservation of our rights and freedom and our very existence."

Should the free press be controlled, incidents of corruption within the Government could not be exposed.

"The Press is the watchdog of the Nation and its freedom of expression must always be assured" said the very Revd. Bede Fernando Secretary of the Catholic Board of Education of Sri Lanka when he addressed the members of the Parish Council of Kurunegala and a large number of Catholics on the role of the

Press in a democratic country. He further said that the Press Council and the Press Bill was not solely a matter for the government and the representatives of the press, but it also concerned the rights of every free citizen of this country.

Dr. M. C. M. Kaleel President of All Ceylon Muslim League pointed out that the gagging of the press and the freedom of speech of the people was one of the first steps that any totalitarian state took in order to control and direct public opinion. It was one of the fundamental rights which freedom conferred on the people and any interference with the dissemination of news destroyed that freedom.

S. Thondaman, President Ceylon Workers' Congress stated as his view that the Press Bill heralded the beginning of the end of Democracy in this country. One could not understand why this government was afraid of the press publishing Government news! The people had a right to know what was happening. Was it the desire of the government to let the people know only what it wanted them to know. Newspaper exposures which led to the Government taking remedial measures will come to an end. In fact, the Government was losing a close friend who brings to its notice and that of the country waste, hypocrisy, injustice and the woes of the people. During the time of Fascist Mussolini, news papers were required to reveal sources of information and here the same law was threatening to enter the Statute Book of this country. The right not to reveal the source of information was enjoyed by our press even during colonial days.

"Once the proposed Press Council Bill was passed and implemented the freedom of the press that existed in this country for centuries would be buried for ever" said the Ven. Godamunne Sri Nagasena Dhammananda Mahanayake Thera of the Asgiriya Chapter of the Siamese Sect in a statement issued to the press.

The Sri Lanka Catholic Diocesan Union also called upon the government to withdraw the Bill and present a fresh Bill which would be :

(a) “consistent with the freedom of speech and expression including publication as guaranteed in the Constitution ;

(b) consistent with the principle of state policy ;

(c) that the Bill be broad based in its composition and independent in its orientation.”

If would not be desirable that all persons in the country should be beholden to the State for their sustenance and welfare. If so there would be nobody strong or independent enough outside the State to be able to express an opposition point of view. Then the party in power would be supreme. It was also the duty of the private sector to maintain itself and secure a clean and honourable place in Society.

Citizens interested in the maintenance of a free society voiced their sentiments through the medium of the press which was yet free for a while. They posed the question as to whether their freedom itself was not being taken away under the guise of introducing socialism. This was the keynote of a press release issued on behalf of several organisations by Sir Senarath Gunawardena, V. L. Wirasinha, Rev. E. W. Mendis, S. J. Lucian Silva, J. Austin Coorey and myself among others. They also pointed out that the fettering of the press would be a sad development in a primarily Buddhist country where freedom of thought and expression was the very essence of life.

The full text of the handout is reproduced below :-

“It is nether fun nor pleasure to have to criticise the Government on obvious matters where the citizen ordinarily expects it to carry out its obligations under its election pledges and under the Constitution which it has itself promulgated.

“The question is whether our freedom itself is not being taken away under the guise of introducing socialism. Any fettering of the Press such as making it subject to ministerial

direction or controlling publication of cabinet directions except on permission, will just have that result as surely as night follows day.

That would indeed be a sad development in a primarily Buddhist country where freedom of thought and expression should be the very essence of life.

“The public cherished the hope that the mantle of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike had fallen besides the Premier, on Felix Dias Bandaranaike the architect of the Press Council Bill. But what is sought to be done would certainly have been anathema to the late Premier who like Voltaire of old would have said on every occasion “I disapprove of what you say but shall defend to the death your right to say it.”

“Have we fallen on such unfortunate times that there are no persons big enough to introduce changes in the economic fabric without fetters? Given the choice no citizen of this great and ancient land will opt for slavery in return for even the choicest things of life.

“Surely is not democracy going haywire in a country where it is even attempted - not to say done - to subject the independent press, the bastion of all freedoms to the general and special directions of a Minister and even to control publication of Cabinet decisions?

“We beseech those who seek to introduce these measures to think of their children and future generations who would miss and be the poorer for the loss of that free climate, which alone nurtures free men as distinct from robots who will have to dance to the tune of every passing politician in power”.

More protests flowed in. The Jaffna Lawyers' Association condemned the proposed Press Council Bill. The Association's President A. V. Kulasingham who moved a resolution to this effect said that the sponsors of the bill apparently wanted a Slave

State in Sri Lanka and asked who was behind the present move which was a serious conspiracy against the rights and liberties of the people.

Even the Sri Lanka Freedom Party V. C. Chairman of the Kanda Palla Korale and Chairman, Matale District V. C. Chairmen's Association A. Wanasinghe voicing his sentiments at a meeting of the Association held at the Matale Madasiya Pattuwa North V. C. office stated that the press was the democratic weapon of an independent people and that if it was gagged, it would mean that the nation would lose its freedom. In a democratic state the people have a right to criticise the Government and the proposed Press Bill would deprive the people of this right.

Reggie Siriwardene, Secretary on behalf of the Civil Rights Movement criticised the Bill at a Seminar held in Colombo. Most of the provisions in the Bill, he said, would lead to a permanent censorship of the press. If the Government was honestly concerned with breaking the monopoly of the press, it should diffuse its ownership on a co-operative basis.

Bala Tampoe, President of the Ceylon Mercantile Union and Edmund Samarakkody, leader of the Revolutionary Lanka Sama Samaja Party also participated in the Seminar. The former quoted the United Front Manifesto which pledged to maintain the freedom of the press - an unqualified undertaking.

Edmund Samarakkody said that the Press Council Bill was a frontal attack on the freedom of the Press. It would be a creature of the government and as such, it would not be in a position to take impartial decisions as the Bill stipulates that it should obey the directions of the Minister.

The Tamil Employees' Union stated that it was hardly necessary to emphasise the importance of a free press in a democracy. Only a dictatorial government would think of muzzling the press.

A memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress called the Press Council Bill a most obnoxious piece of legislation because it sought to curb public opinion and freedom of thinking and living. It also pointed out that the proposal to arm the Press Council with judicial powers would create a situation which made a mockery of the provisions of the Constitution relating to fundamental rights that "all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law". It also urged the Government to make suitable amendments to the Bill preferably on the lines of the Indian and British Press Council Bills and thus make the Sri Lanka Press Council Bill a truly democratic institution.

Following the representations a new draft was prepared in September 1972 dropping the provision that sought to make it incumbent on journalists to divulge their sources of information. It, too, was roundly condemned by the Press and other organisations.

The Press Council Bill was the first piece of legislation to be canvassed in the Constitutional Court. The Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha retained H. L. de Silva Attorney - at - Law. He stated that the total effect of the Bill would infringe fundamental rights and set out his reasons for this contention.

S. Nadesan Q. C. appearing on behalf of Reggie Siriwardene Secretary of the Civil Rights Movement of Sri Lanka also made submissions to the Court. He said that he did not think that the constitution gave the people fundamental rights by one hand and took them away by the other. He did not consider it to be a camouflage. However, he pointed out how the Press Communique itself, which was issued by the Government on the Press Council Bill stated that the Press Council was meant to implement government policy. "Will it be ever government policy to criticise its own Ministers" he asked.

H. W. Jayewardene Q. C. appearing before the Constitutional Court on behalf of J. R. Jayewardene Leader of the Opposition in the National State Assembly argued that the freedom of the Press was the essence of liberty and this was the source of all other liberties. If this freedom was suppressed restrained or controlled, then the foundation for autocracy was laid. He also pointed out that in so far as this country was concerned, freedom of thought and freedom of expression is engraved as part of their religion and mode of normal life and to interfere with this freedom was to destroy a nation's heritage.

These eminent lawyers supported by a whole phalanx of brilliant and experienced attorneys - at - law sought to show how the Press Council Bill was repugnant to the provisions of the Constitution.

Strangely enough, the Bill excluded the radio from its ambit; the radio was thus left free to broadcast what it wanted.

The constitutional court comprising Justice T. S. Fernando Justice H. Deheragoda and Mr. J. A. L. Cooray, did not give its ruling on the Bill within the two - week period laid down by the Constitution because it had not heard all the submissions and arguments.

But this attempt to go beyond the the time - limit led to a clash with the National Assembly; the members resigned and this was followed by the appointment of three new members, Justice Jaya Pathirana, Mr. C. V. Udalagama and Mr. T. A. de S. Wijesundera Commissioners of Assize.

The Bill which was held to be consistent with the Constitution was taken up for consideration by the Assembly on February 22, 1973 and passed the next day by 112 votes to nil, the U.N.P. and T. U. L. F. members taking no part in the debate,

The composition of the Council, too, leaves much to be desired. The membership of the Council should be enlarged and greater representation allowed to working journalists.

The whole nation welcomed socialism but at the same time also valued its freedom. It was not their desire to see socialism introduced into their midst only to find themselves an unfree people shorn of their democratic rights which free peoples had fought for and wrested from kings, feudal lords and dictators, throughout the ages and had since enjoyed for several centuries in democratic countries. "Power corrupts, Absolute Power corrupts absolutely" "Let us save this country from such an eventuality" was their watchword. Sri Lanka, too, had enjoyed these basic freedoms of democracy such as freedom of speech, writing and association, freedom of the press, freedom to periodically change Governments for several decades.

This sentiment was in keeping with the emphatic views expressed on innumerable occasions by the late S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and endorsed by the present Prime Minister, Sirimavo R. D. Bandaranaike.

# INTERPRETATION (AMENDMENT) BILL

The introduction of this Bill in the House of Representatives was, no doubt, occasioned by the desire of the government to prevent citizens from unnecessarily invoking the power of the Courts to delay the revolutionary measures now being brought into effect particularly in regard to land. But the question uppermost in the minds of the people was as to whether the National State Assembly, consisting of the representatives of the people were now going to prevent the people from obtaining their remedies which existed under the law from arbitrary acts by the bureaucracy who are in turn paid from taxes contributed by the people.

Further the Bill contained provisions of a highly involved and intricate nature. In view of the public agitation, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice had stated that public expression of views in regard to the Bill would be welcome. In response to this the Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha organised through the medium of the Jathika Subasadaka Sangamaya a mass petition signed by people from various parts of the country, which was handed to the Minister of Justice through his Private Secretary by a deputation of leading citizens consisting of both clergy and laity.

A public meeting was also held under the auspices of the Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha at the Red Cross Society Hall on the 17th April 1972 to protest against the Bill. Among the speakers were Sir Senarath Gunawardena, Walter Wijemanne, Leslie Fernando, S. Lucian J. Silva, G. P. Kariyawasam, V. L. Wirasinha and myself.

Shortly after the Bill was introduced in the National State Assembly, a number of public citizens from various walks of life addressed a letter to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice on the following lines :-

“ In the course of the debate in the House of Representatives on the above Bill, it was quite evident that it was not only a Bill of far - reaching importance, as regards Fundamental Rights of the People, but that it was a Bill which contained provisions of a highly involved and intricate nature. The Government Members and the Opposition were at variance as regards the interpretation of some of the provisions and their implications. In fact the implications are so wide and far - reaching that these provisions cannot be elucidated, or suitably worked out in the heat of debate.

In view of the above, we consider it fair and reasonable that this Bill be referred to a Standing Committee of the House so that the implications of the controversial provisions and the proposed amendments be examined in a calmer atmosphere. It may also be easier for such Standing Committee to suggest ways and means of amending the existing law with a view to bringing about development without unreasonably affecting the Fundamental Rights of citizens.

Since the Hon'ble the Prime Minister and Hon'ble Minister of Justice have invited the views of the Public on all important public questions, such a Standing Committee, can consider the various view points on all controversial aspects with due regard to the principles of Justice and Fairplay, and submit their Report and recommendations to the House as early as possible ”.

The signatories to the memorandum were :-

Moratuwe Sri Premaratana Anunayake Thero, Pundit Warakagoda Seelaratna Thero, S. Lucian J. Silva, President, Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha, Moratuwe Sri Deepananda Thero,

W. K. Wijemanne, President, National Workers' Congress, Weligama Seelanada Thero, R. Jesudason, Administrative Secretary, Ceylon Workers Congress, Rev. E. W. Mendis, P. M. C. Fernando, J. P., G. P. Kariyawasam, President, Aganuwara Bauddha Bala Mandalaya, V. L. Wirasinha, Retired Permanent Secretary, J. Austin Coorey, J. P., Proctor & Notary, C. W. de Mel and myself.

In the course of the debate in the National State Assembly, the Minister of Justice Felix Dias Bandaranaike referred to the petition handed to him by the Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha and whilst welcoming public representations on such matters stated that it was a pity that the Sabha had asked for the withdrawal of the Bill instead of suitable amendments to it. He proceeded to peruse some pages of the petition and noted that it had come from various parts of the country. In fact, about 5000 signatures had been collected from various parts of the country within the space of a few days. This was in marked contrast to the result of an earlier effort made by the Sabha in 1971 to obtain signatures protesting against the Draft Resolutions on the Constitution, when only 22 signatures were collected in 6 weeks! The persistent agitation by the public in the face of all odds seemed to have reassured the people and driven off their earlier vestiges of fear.

Thereafter the Minister passed it on to the M. P. for Moratuwa Wimalasiri de Mel who was also present in the House.

Thanks, no doubt, partly to the representations made by the Public certain amendments were made to the Bill at Committee Stage, chief among them being the retention intact of the powers of the Supreme Court to issue mandates in the nature of writs of Habeas Corpus, a right which was embodied more than 7 centuries ago in the Magna Carta of 1215 A. D.

The Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha in all held 8 meetings on the Constitution, the Press Council Bill and the Interpretation (Amendment) Bill and in addition went before the Constitutional

Court on the Press Council Bill - a part of the organisational work involved fell on me, not to speak of the bulk of the arrangements necessary to finance the campaign.

Our campaign had evoked much public interest throughout the country and justifiably created the impression that Moratuwa could very well become a centre from which the cry of "socialism without fetters" could continue to be launched.

I may recall how at a meeting of the Sabha held after the conclusion of the campaign, P. M. C. Fernando one of the Vice - Presidents brought forward a resolution to thank me for the valuable work that I had done in the course of which he referred to my having helped the Sabha through it during a strenuous period.

## CHAPTER 33

# SILVER SPOON OF OPTIMISM

Positive thinking and the mentality of a tough minded optimist were no doubt responsible for my being able to tide over a number of difficult situations. For instance, on one occasion there was a crisis in an industrial concern with which I was connected. A friend of mine very seriously suggested that we dispose of it as it was eating even into our personal economy. It was indeed a trying moment when one's qualities of toughness are tested to the hilt. However, by temperament I was never a quitter ; so I informed my friend that I would rather sell what I have and put my bottom rupee into the concern rather than dispose of it. There was a particular circumstance, too, why this tough attitude should have been pitched at its highest point. It was a concern which rivals had tried their best to demolish. The reader would be interested to know how this concern subsequently fared. It stood on its feet of course after considerable difficulties but the question of closure was completely forgotten. It was, indeed, a renewed and redoubled pleasure when the concern branched off into a new line of production having consolidated the old. I noticed that the friend who suggested disposal of the venture though tough in his services to the common weal did not have the same persistence when it came to a question of private enterprise.

In fact, I had on one or two occasions to boost up his morale. I remember how on one occasion he had come to a difficult pass in a textile venture in which I, too, had encouraged him earlier. One of his main consolations appeared to be to meet me regularly and discuss the problems that were agitating him for the time being. In due course we were able to work out solutions for the main issues involved which put our minds at ease.

It was the same spirit of toughness that motivated me and a group of friends to agitate for the preservation of a certain degree of fundamental rights on the occasion of the publication of the draft of the new Constitution in 1971. Though all the odds were against us, I remember how in the first instance I and Austin Coorey, Attorney - at - Law met Sir Cyril de Zoysa, a former President of the Senate and a recognised public figure to urge on him the necessity for the general public to express their views, particularly, on the question of fundamental rights. The organisation of the Citizens Committee and the agitation through the Moratuwa Maha Jana Sabha have been dealt with elsewhere.

Subsequent events have justified the value of such persistence especially when you consider the fact that the political party that produced the architect of the Republican Constitution is now no more in the United Front and differences have already emerged which tend to show how the rigid economic framework envisaged by the constitution is being modified to suit a more democratic trend of thought. The main burden of our agitation was to have socialism with freedom which to our minds was fundamental if man is to remain a free and individual entity and not a mere cipher. Perhaps I was born with a silver spoon of toughness and optimism in my mouth.

Life's battle is a tough one and as an anonymous poet has put it

“ If you think you are beaten, you are,  
If you think you dare not, you don't.  
If you'd like to win, but think you can't,  
It's almost a cinch you won't.  
Life's battles don't always go  
To the stronger or faster man  
But soon or late the man who wins  
Is the one who thinks he can ”.

It does not, however, mean that one can bulldoze through; action has to be tempered with judgement. However, there has never been anyone who has not had to face countless setbacks. As Theodore Roosevelt put it,

“ Perhaps there is no more important component of character than steadfast resolution. The boy who is going to make a great man, or is going to count in any way in after - life, must make up his mind not merely to overcome a thousand obstacles, but to win in spite of a thousand repulses and defeats”

Quotations from other eminent men may inspire the youthful reader.

“ I have but one merit, that of never despairing ”.

— Marshal Foch —

“ The great aim of education is not knowledge, but action ” — Herbert Spenser.

“ I have lived eighty six years. I have watched men climb up to success, hundreds of them, and of all the elements that are important for success the most important is faith”.

— Cardinal Gibbons. —

## SOCIALISM WITHOUT FETTERS

Writing in June 1977, I may state that at the present moment a battle for supremacy is being waged by the different political parties, the chief among which are the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, the United National Party and the United Left Front. The real contest, however appears to be between the first two parties, both of them standing for democratic socialism.

The S. L. F. P. was the major partner in the United Front that ushered in the Republican Constitution. However, for the reasons that have been set out earlier the Constitution lacks several important features that make for socialism without fetters. Leaving aside the "freedom to be really free" by which S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike the author of Bandaranaike policies summed up the content of freedom, do we in this Constitution and cognate Legislation introduced by the Government such as Press Council Bill and the Interpretation (Amendment) Act, have the freedom even in several other respects vital to man if he is not to be a mere cipher or a cog in the legislative and executive process set in motion from time to time by his representatives in Parliament elected by his vote.

Under the present Constitution fashioned by a distinguished representative of a party that avowedly does not have faith in democracy of the Bandaranaike type, the people of this country seem to be sovereign only during the intervals between elections, when the National State Assembly stands dissolved and even any Emergency Legislation that may exist cannot be revalidated.

Whichever party comes into power it is our earnest hope that the obnoxious clauses in the Constitution and the other enactments will be repealed or so amended as to install in this country Socialism without fetters.



