

THREE PRIME MINISTERS
OF CEYLON

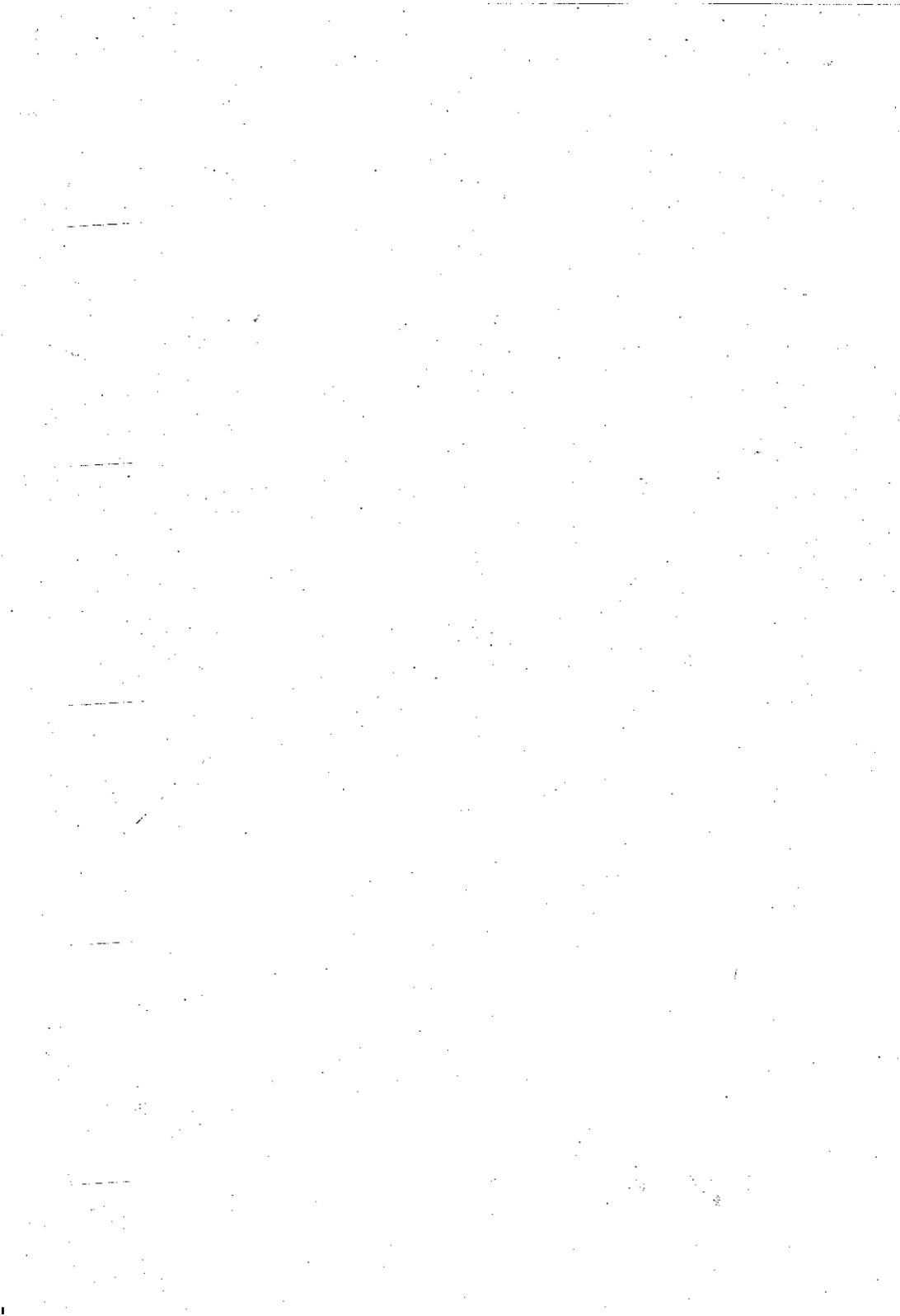
An 'Inside Story'

by

J. L. FERNANDO



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CEYLON



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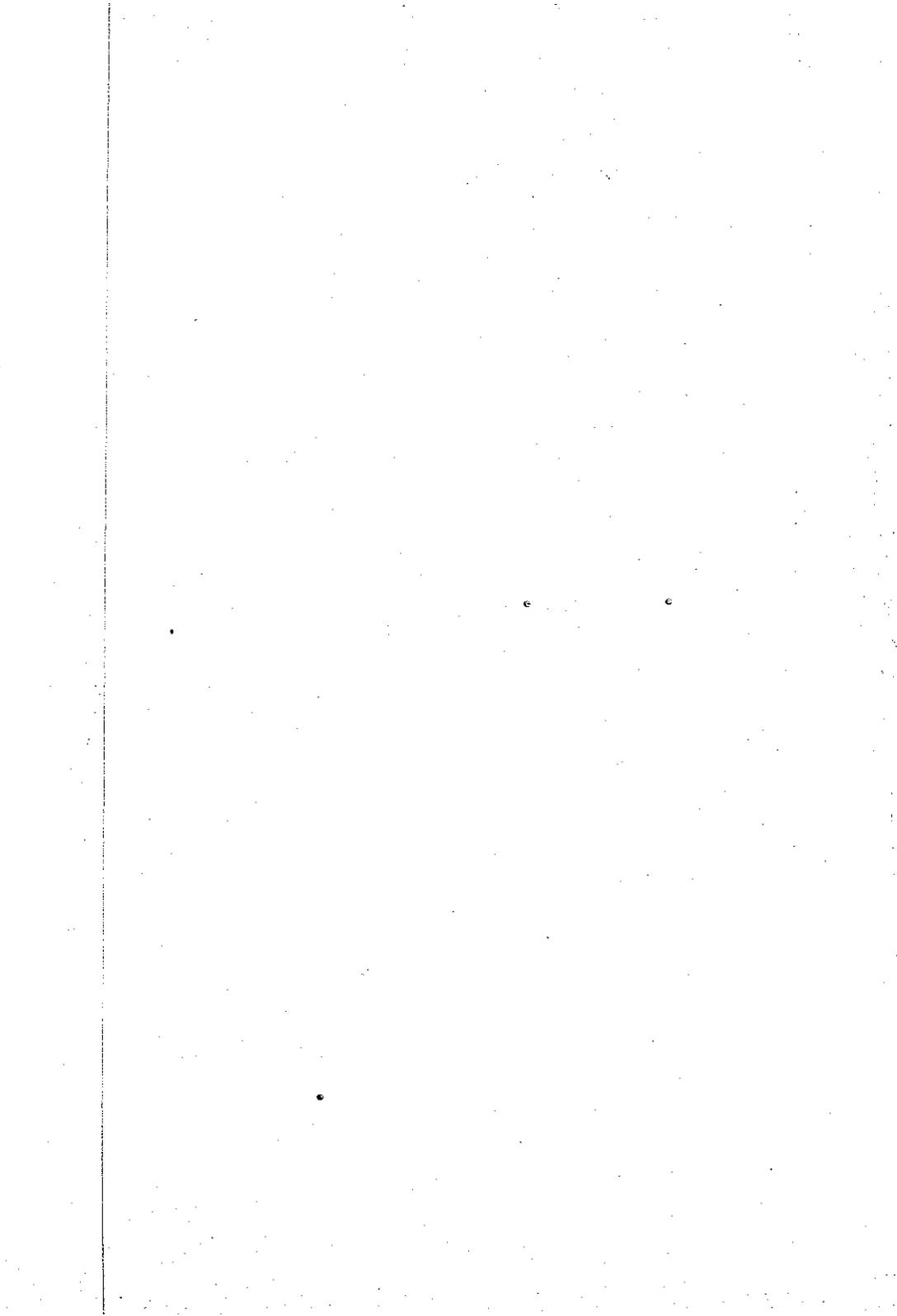
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To
My Wife
for suffering years of
political 'verandah'
conversations



INTRODUCTION

It was in 1932 that I entered the exciting world of newspaper production and publication. The Grand Old Man of Ceylon journalism, D. R. Wijewardene, picked me out to follow politics and the political development of the country. So for several years I wrote the Lobby Correspondent's column in the *Ceylon Daily News*, the foremost political journal in the country. This involved a close study of proceedings in the country's central legislature, at first the State Council and later the House of Representatives, meetings of which I had to follow from the Press Gallery. This work also induced me to establish personal contact with political personalities both in the lobbies of the State Council and later of the House of Representatives and in their homes. In subsequent years, during the period 1947 to 1956, this personal contact with political figures, which I maintained always behind the scenes, increased. It was during these years that D. R. Wijewardene posted me to write the *Political Correspondent's* column too and that column appeared every Saturday in three languages in the *Ceylon Daily News* (English), the *Dinamina* (Sinhalese) and the *Thinakaran* (Tamil).

As a newspaperman I have, therefore, had a rich experience of politics and the ways of politicians in Ceylon for 26 years and more. But what I record in this book are mostly incidents and matters of history within my personal knowledge — what I have personally seen or heard of from reliable sources or experienced. My credentials for embarking on this task are not only my long connections with the largest newspaper organisation in Ceylon but, fortunately for me, my close contact as a newspaperman with the first three Prime Ministers who ruled over the destinies of our country. My personal contact with the Prime

Minister of the land ceased with the exit of Sir John Kotelawala from that office in April 1956, and at my request I was permitted to cease writing the *Political Correspondent's* column in the morning newspapers of the Lake House Press. So if mine is an "inside story" of public men and public affairs, it refers to the regimes of D. S. Senanayake, Dudley Senanayake and Sir John Kotelawala though I might have extended over those confines to record personal experiences with leading political figures.

In writing this book I have departed from the strict policy of anonymity which the Old Guard of Lake House very properly observed. This excellent newspaper convention which, I must say, saves newspapermen both from swollen heads and other more serious vices, is, alas! no longer observed.

While writing for newspapers one has naturally to keep within the bounds of the policy of the newspapers concerned. But I must state in fairness to myself that I fully agreed with the Rightwing politics of the Lake House group of newspapers and that what I wrote for them contained comments and political assessments which I honestly believed to be fair and true. However, when you write for a press organisation there are, as I state, certain boundaries within which you are compelled to keep. No such restraint governs the writing of one's memoirs. It may happen that this record of an "inside story" of over two decades might reveal that certain public figures who in the eyes of the people were idols of their time, had feet of clay. The truth often hurts but the valuable experience one has gathered while closely following politics for 26 years would not be worth recording unless one recorded the truth as one saw it.

It is my duty to record my gratitude to the late D. R. Wijewardene who made it possible for me to gather all the experience out of which I have drawn

material for this book. He was not only a first-rate coach for a student of politics, which I was in 1932; he was moreover a man of the highest standards of integrity whom any young man on the threshold of a career in the newspaper world could have respected. My thanks are due also to Esmond Wickremesinghe, who directed the editorial section of the Lake House group of newspapers after D. R. Wijewardene's death. Working with Esmond Wickremesinghe whom I assisted in his very responsible task, was a pleasant experience, and he always encouraged me to maintain my behind-the-scenes contacts with the three Prime Ministers round whom this "inside story" revolves. I must make it clear that I did not consult either him or any of the other directors of the Lake House Press about what to include or exclude in my story. The text is entirely mine. As you read on you will realise why I should not have consulted anybody and made them share the responsibility for any heart-burning that this record of political history might cause.

I must also record my thanks to H. A. J. Hulugalle, former editor of the *Ceylon Daily News* and later Ceylon's Ambassador in Rome, who read my manuscript. In the years past he was my "guru" on newspaper writing and no young newspaperman could have had a better "guru" for it was he who once warned me against committing the crime of excessive criticism by pointing out that just because one has been given the right to use the pen one should not by using it hurt another. That is mature advice which I pass on to a younger generation of newspapermen, which includes my son. No newspaperman can earn lasting respect if he is only a destructive force, if he looks at every event from the point of view of its news value alone and not from the point of view of his country's interests. This reminds me of the devastating denunciation of a newspaperman by a former Prime

Minister of Ceylon who said that if that newspaperman happened to see a dog criminally assaulting the newspaperman's wife, he (the said newspaperman) would first rush to his office to write the story and then return to save his wife!

I wrote this book during October—November 1960. The delay in publication is due to the frank advice of a loyal friend who, having read my manuscript, wrote me the following letter:

“My dear J.L.,

You have done me a great honour in asking me to express my views unreservedly on your manuscript. I have read it with the uninhibited delight of one innocent of POLITICS and HISTORY, and therefore, unprejudiced by either. I set out my views deeply conscious of the importance of its publication both to yourself as well as to the country at large.

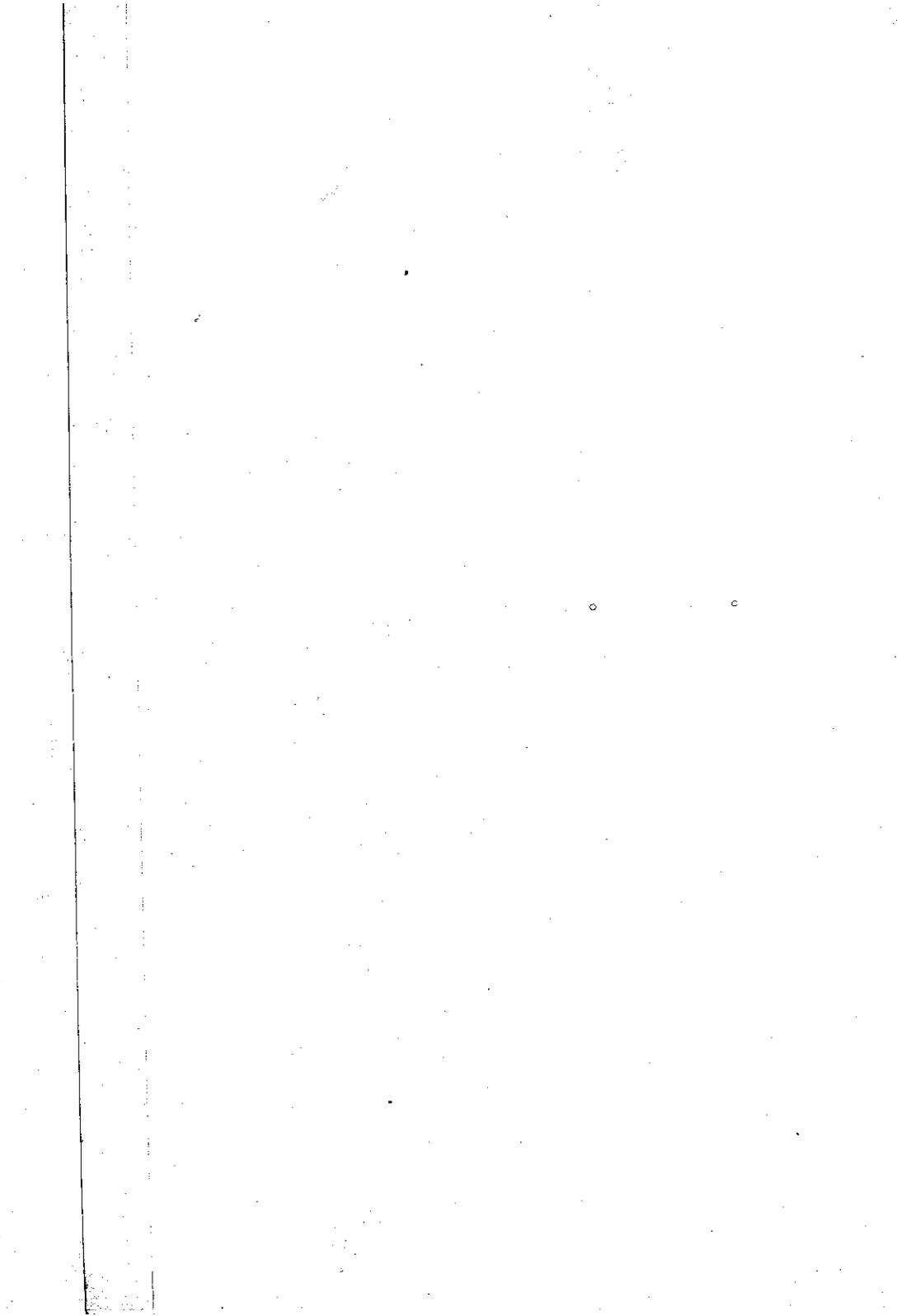
So intimate a background to the politics of our time will be of rare value to the future historian only if its publication is postponed until its contents can be judged by the accepted canons of historical objectivity. Premature publication is liable to infringe both journalistic propriety as well as political expediency.

A further but no less weighty consideration is the impropriety of exposing contemporary politicians to public ridicule—a recent journalistic vice of which the less said the better.

Publication now will doubtless earn you the applause of the many who live in and for the Present alone. However, in the humble opinion of a sincere friend, so brilliant a personally-woven history more richly merits the gratitude of historians yet to be, which will be the deeper, if less spectacular, reward of postponing its publication until its chief characters have faded out of politics into history.

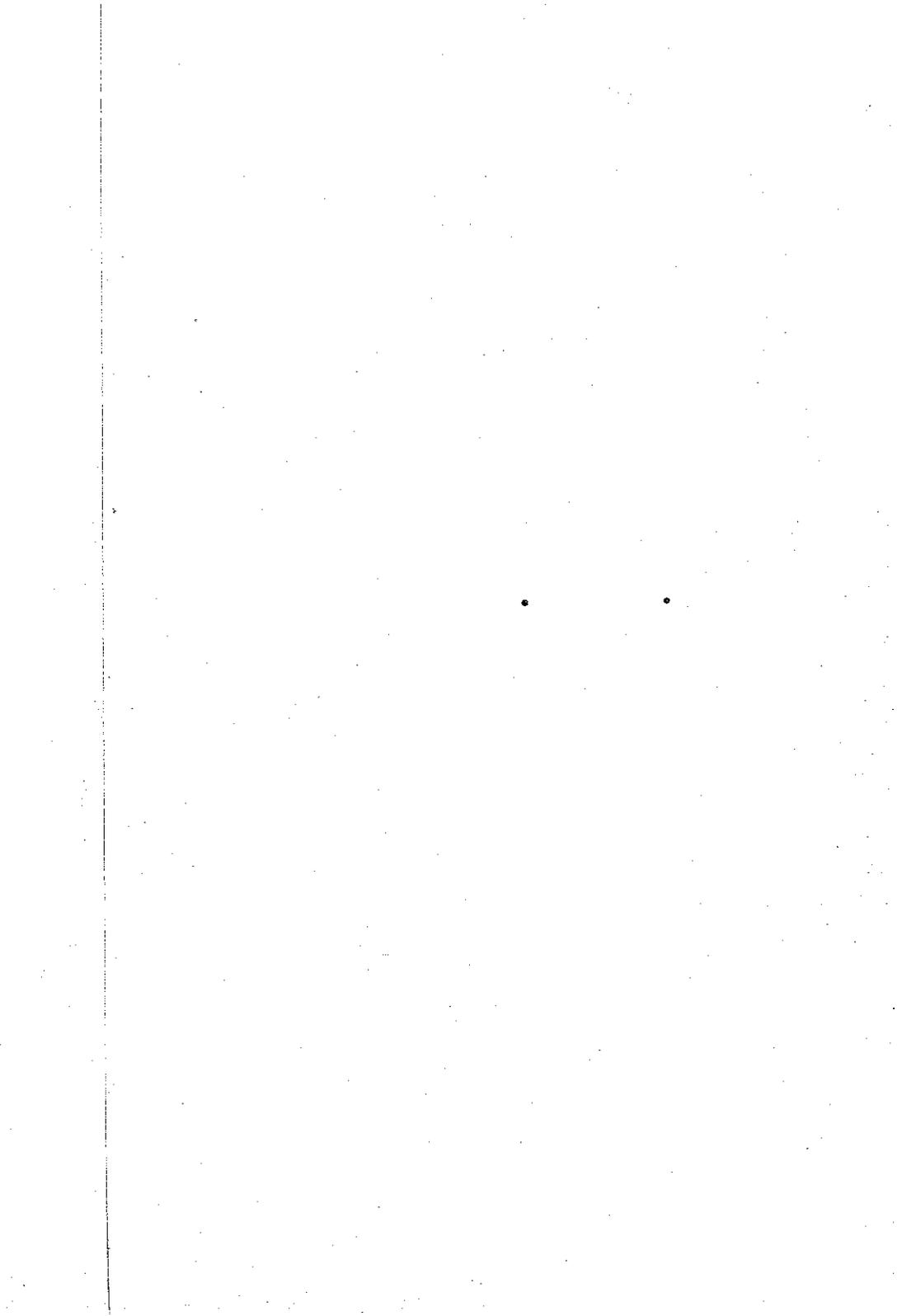


D. S. SENANAYAKE,
first Prime Minister of Ceylon, October 1947 - March 1952.



The views expressed in this letter are entirely mine, but you will no doubt observe that the language is that of a student of Politics and History—my wife."

I cannot divulge my friend's name but I have been biding my time for several months in deference to his wise counsel. However, the "chief characters" he refers to have not yet faded into history, and one would like to see a book in print before one fades away oneself. A further reason for publication now is that I have retired from Lake House.



CHAPTER I

IN terms of history I have witnessed the transition of a country from a stage of semi-independence to full self-government. In 1932 Ceylon was half way on the road from colonialism to complete independence. The Donoughmore Constitution had given the country an elected legislature known as the State Council. Manhood franchise had come to stay, although even among the Ceylonese there were critics who considered that the country was not ready yet for adult franchise. Despite the fact that the State Council was empowered to pass legislation the British Governor's powers of vetoing legislation, the fact that the Secretary of State for the Colonies in the United Kingdom had finally to assent to legislation and also the presence of three Officers of State in the State Council itself (the Chief Secretary, the Legal Secretary and the Financial Secretary) bore testimony to the fact that the proconsul of Britain and his chief in Whitehall were still the real rulers of the country. While the State Council was empowered to pass laws without exercising sovereign power over the State, the executive power, again subject to the overriding authority of the Governor, was vested in a Board of Ministers, each Minister being the Chairman of an Executive Committee composed of members of the State Council. Here again the fact that the Chairman of the Board was an official, namely, the Chief Secretary, while one of the elected Ministers was merely vice-chairman, was further evidence that power lay with officialdom and not with the elected representatives of the people.

One benefit, however, which the Ceylonese derived from the State Council period was that elected representatives received a training both in legislative and executive functions.

With this experience there grew an increasing desire to wrest sovereign power from the hands of the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the British Governor in Ceylon, the local representative of the imperial government. It was not only the constitutional impediments which the Donoughmore Constitution had devised which increased the appetite of Ceylonese elected representatives for supreme legislative and executive power. Both in the public administration and in the commercial and planting sections of the country the Ceylonese still held a lower status. Members of the Board of Ministers themselves, while exercising executive functions, had bitter personal experiences with some British officials, although it must be recorded to the credit of British officials of that period that most of them, excellent representatives of a disciplined race, co-operated with the policy of the British government to train colonial Ceylonese in the art of self-government.

Outside the government services, the attitude of some die-hard British planters and commercial tycoons acted as a spur on the Ceylonese politicians to become masters in their own country. It was just a repetition of a historical pattern. Boadicea, the British warrior queen, had rounded up the Britons against the Romans ruling over her country. Hereward, "the Wake", had raised the standard of revolt against Norman suzerainty over Britain. Robert Bruce had persevered in leading the freedom-loving Scots to overthrow the overlordship of the English. Those historical characters to whom we were introduced in our schooldays by the British administration which opened the doors of knowledge to colonial Ceylonese, had shed blood in their search for self-government. So did the Indians in neighbouring India. The Ceylonese politicians of the State Council period in Ceylon did not shed their blood: they used their brains or wits or their cunning, if you like to call it that. They had suffered the same kind of humiliation

that Boadicea, or Hereward, "the Wake", or Robert Bruce would have suffered, or Gandhi and Nehru in India.

Sometimes from our armchairs we return the verdict that independence came too easily to this land and that, therefore, we have not made sufficient progress as a self-governing country. It may be correct that we have not made sufficient progress but if the leaders of a subject people avoided shedding the blood of their people in achieving sovereign power for the people's representatives must they be found fault with? I made that mistake in 1932 when I was a raw recruit for newspaper work. I too thought that the Ceylonese leaders of the time were never as picturesque as Boadicea, Hereward and Robert Bruce of the English books we had been taught in school or Gandhi and Nehru of whom we had read in newspapers because our folk had not used swords or been lathi-charged in opposing imperial Britain. But mine then was the judgment of youth and of inexperience. If the Ceylonese leaders of the 1930's, adopting the same constitutional methods used by a band of their predecessors in the days of the former Legislative Council over which a British Governor presided, won independence for Ceylon without Ceylonese blood being shed was it a crime?

The younger generation of today who do not know what it was to be a subject people in their own land, who have never felt the searing of the soul which arises from the knowledge that foreigners get a better deal than the "natives", may not be able to appreciate the value of the national services rendered by Ceylonese leaders of the 30's, and those who preceded them, to restore the self-respect of a people who had been ruled by Portuguese, Dutch and British for over four centuries. It is true, however, that when the peaceful but dogged efforts of those patriots changed colonial Ceylon into independent Ceylon, political power passed from the

hands of British rulers into those of the English-educated and land owning classes. That was the first period of transition and D. S. Senanayake, a representative of that period, was on the one hand patriot and nationalist and on the other well accustomed to wearing the top hat, tails and striped trousers for functions. The iconoclasts or stone-throwers often marked only the incongruity of a nationalist in top hat and tail coat, the ceremonial garb of the British even in the orient. But we have to pass judgment not on the oddity of dress but on the painstaking labours of D. S. Senanayake and the others who went before him, to wrest political power from foreign rulers. Did they also after achieving the transition of power into Ceylonese hands exercise that power to give to all Ceylonese the benefits of self-government? That is a question for historians of the future to answer.

CHAPTER 2

D. R. WIJewardene and D. S. Senanayake possessed one outstanding qualification in common. Each of them made the most meticulous private investigations about the background of a person if they had any intention of placing their trust in him. Fresh from Oxford and, therefore, full of conceit about my own worldly wisdom I was greatly impressed by D. R. Wijewardene when he called me for a first interview. Short and dapper, he looked so much like the Austrian Chancellor, Dolfuss, who was then in the news. But I was more impressed at the second and final interview when he produced evidence of having between the two interviews gathered a full dossier about myself.

I had a similar experience with D. S. Senanayake, Minister of Agriculture in the State Council, on whom I called with a letter of introduction from his friend, Wijewardene, who had recommended that as a recruit to the newspaper world I should be given all possible assistance by Senanayake to keep in touch with politics. D. S. Senanayake arranged to have a political chat with me once a week. On my second call on him he told me all about myself, starting with his personal knowledge of my grand-parents! I was somewhat amazed by this technique of thoroughness in screening the man with whom he was expected to talk freely about affairs of State. Today recruitment to responsible posts is on a less methodical basis. Educational qualifications alone serve as the passport and those who recruit have often had the bitter experience of realising that they have placed in positions of trust educated rogues and time-servers.

From that time in 1933 to the week of his sudden and tragic death in March 1952, I had a confidential chat with D. S. Senanayake once a week, on Wednesday mornings, whenever he was at home. When he moved to Temple Trees as Prime Minister this Wednesday

morning breakfast conversation had become almost a ritual. Always there were "string-hoppers" on the breakfast table, the white variety for me and the brown variety for him to suit his ever-present diabetes. Always we served ourselves in total silence and then, just as he had brushed aside his moustache with his left hand and taken his first huge mouthful with his right, he would say, "Well, what's happening?" From then onwards I would studiously draw out what was happening although it was he who had asked me the question.

He would tell me of many confidential matters with the warning when necessary "Don't publish this." Besides the political and other government news I gathered during these Wednesday conversations, he regaled me with a never-ending fund of anecdotes concerning the past, telling me frankly of the private and public misdeeds of the dead and living. One gathered a great deal of worldly wisdom listening to the "Old Man" as he was popularly referred to. It was wisdom that could not be garnered from books.

I remember the occasion when he asked me to read for him the script of his prize-day speech at his old school, St. Thomas', Mount Lavinia. The script had been prepared by somebody else to whom he had apparently given a few ideas on what to compile. Senanayake followed one copy while at his request I read aloud the other. Somewhere in the body of the speech there was a paragraph which began "As Herbert Spencer said..." Gingerly I paused here to suggest that it would be better if he did not quote from Herbert Spencer. "Yes, man, cut it out", he said, indulging in a popular Ceylonism, and added, "Who is Herbert Spencer?" to which question I did not offer a reply.

D. S. Senanayake did not know who Herbert Spencer, the philosopher, was, but D. S. Senanayake could have taught Spencer himself a couple of things about the reactions of human beings to particular actions.

Indulging in anecdotes he displayed a puckish sense of humour. I remember his story of a man trained in one of the more ancient universities in England who had on his return home taken to public life in the State Council period and proclaimed to be a socialist. His socialism, related Senanayake, took a practical form when he started inviting to dinner the young female rubber tappers on his estate. "Our employer is a true socialist" ran the report in the neighbourhood from where the tappers came to work. "But you know", related Senanayake, "this practice of socialism had to stop when a couple of women had to enter the maternity hospitals!"

Of another friend of his, who was a public man and had the reputation of being a methodical libertine, Senanayake once made a memorable though ribald jest. There were three of us seated at dinner at his coconut estate in Narammala. The third man was entertaining the two of us with intimate though the most scandalous gossip about the exploits of the libertine in question who had been in the news in a big way. Addressing me while old Senanayake roared with laughter that inveterate story-teller insisted that our roué though celebrated as a Don Juan had certain anatomical deficiencies due to surgery. I refused to believe this fantastic tale but Senanayake amidst laughter confirmed the report. Late at night the estate superintendent complained to Senanayake that a pair of elk whom he had sent to the estate were of no value as they were not breeding. "Bring them to the field tomorrow morning," said Senanayake who took the two of us next morning on a bullock-cart ride on the estate. When the pair of elk were let loose all what the majestic male did was to nuzzle against the female. And Senanayake, turning to me, chuckled "I say, J.L. (L pronounced like 'al' in pal) that's like....," (the name of the celebrated libertine).

Indeed, D. S. Senanayake was a very human personality. That was really the secret of his success. In the government parliamentary group over which he presided it was not only his seniority in age which helped him to get his orders and rulings accepted. The charm of his personality was often too irresistible. Also he was not afraid of hard work right round the clock, and the man who works hard in public life is always respected by the glib talkers who do not like work. He was not without guile and what one would call village cunning. He himself told me the story of how he saved a mining property owned in common by the widow of his brother, F. R. Senanayake, and her sister, Mrs. Alice Kotelawala.

Advised that women could not manage graphite mines, they had signed an agreement to sell out to a British business syndicate. When D. S. Senanayake who knew the potential worth of graphite mines, became aware of this proposal to sell out, he moved in to cancel the agreement. Friendly overtures to the foreign syndicate proved fruitless. Then he turned to an old village ruse. Titles to ancestral properties are often not too sound. He rounded up a small-time landowner in the neighbourhood of the mine in question and influenced him to claim a share of the mine land and also to file a partition action against the owners of the mine. This traditional trick in the art of litigation worked. A partition action involves years of delay. The syndicate dropped out of the deal and the mine which was to become a famous graphite-producing centre continued to be Ceylonese owned.

This type of cunning D. S. Senanayake employed in politics, even when he strode the political scene like a colossus. He had his handymen to do his work, like that village landowner. In politics they were O. E. Goonetilleke, later Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, and J. L. Kotelawala, later Sir John Kotelawala. If there was any

work to be done which called for artifices like simulation, dissimulation or just plain legerdemain he posted Oliver Goonetilleke on the job. There was no better artist for that role. If Goonetilleke's technique brought success the result was a further increase of the influence of the Big Boss, Senanayake. If it failed those on whom he tried it accused Goonetilleke of being a rascal quite unlike the genial and honourable D. S. Senanayake.

Senanayake posted Kotelawala on other types of assignments which called for a show of intimidation. Kotelawala was one of those close to him whom he addressed more often in Sinhalese than in English, using the term of endearment "*Umba*". I remember how he used to make occasional suggestions to Kotelawala to ask embarrassing questions from S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, during the time the latter was in the U.N.P. fold. When the expected reaction took place and Bandaranaike flared up and used his vitriolic tongue to good effect, sending Kotelawala in turn into a rage, old D. S. Senanayake intervened to roar an order, not at Bandaranaike, but at Kotelawala, "Stop it! You sit down!"

These two, Goonetilleke and Kotelawala, formed the inner Cabinet with D. S. Senanayake after the parliamentary system was established. The inner Cabinet meetings were usually over late lunch in Prime Minister Senanayake's office in the Senate building. All the moves and counter moves were planned at those lunch discussions.

I can recall an incident during one of those lunch hours when Sir Oliver Goonetilleke was not present. Actually Goonetilleke who was then Minister of Home Affairs had suddenly left Ceylon that morning—July 22, 1948—fixing for himself the office of High Commissioner designate in London although G. C. S. Corea was then functioning as High Commissioner. The

event was as sudden as it was odd and I called on Prime Minister Senanayake during his luncheon time. I found Kotelawala too at lunch while one of Senanayake's intimate friends and pet story-teller, John M. Senaviratne, was also there, entertaining the two distinguished members of his audience. Senanayake waited till his guests departed. They were hardly outside the door when he said, "I know why you have come. It's about Oliver, isn't it?" And then he told me the "inside story" — how Goonetilleke had telephoned him the previous evening and told him of a very urgent personal problem concerning a daughter who was in London. He had explained that he had to leave Ceylon immediately, giving up his Home Ministry portfolio. The only solution was to allow Goonetilleke to take over from Corea in London and fortunately Corea had asked for a month's leave. Then, he told me all about Goonetilleke's personal problems. There was a touch of pathos in the rough voice when he explained, "you know, he has solved so many problems for the country and for me but he can't solve his own problem. According to our religion that is what you call '*Sansara*'!?"

Next day's *Ceylon Daily News*, of July 23, 1948, carried an article from me entitled "A Minister's Goodbye". It included the following paragraphs:

"At 7 o'clock yesterday morning when Tata's plane left Ratmalana it wrote the epitaph of a man who could have continued to be the 'master of political chess' within the country and Ceylon's super-diplomat abroad. As High Commissioner in London neither will he have a board to play political chess, nor can super-diplomacy be practised within the restricted functions of a High Commissioner."

"Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, ex-Auditor General, ex-Civil Defence Commissioner, ex-Financial Secretary and ex-Minister of Home Affairs always liked a touch of mystery in what he did."

“The Prime Minister alone, I understand, knew of Sir Oliver’s resignation. He had to know. The Minister of Transport knew what was happening when a message was sent to him from Sir Oliver at the aerodrome. And the man who was the right hand of the Prime Minister, interpreted, promoted and influenced political moves, confounded visiting diplomats, was a peer among this species abroad, will now take his orders from the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of External Affairs. ‘Sansara’, said one observer, commenting on what had come to pass.”

“Many critics of Sir Oliver would imagine that he has left Ceylon of his own choice. But those who know, know that the man who found the solution for many a problem of the country had now a problem of his own to solve.”

D. S. Senanayake met me in the Parliament lobbies the day this article appeared and growled, “I say, Jay-al”, pronouncing my initials as usual in his peculiar manner, “you are a hell of a fellow. You published what I said of Oliver”.

But the old warrior was not displeased.

While Sir Oliver and Sir John formed with D. S. Senanayake the inner cabinet Prime Minister Senanayake had a most loyal and efficient official Secretary in N. W. Atukorala whom he had handpicked from the Land Settlement Department to fill this important post of trust. That trust was not misplaced. Atukorala was like an oyster in keeping the Prime Minister’s State secrets. His Chief’s confidence in him grew as the years went by and the time came when Atukorala would dictate to the stenographers his own replies to letters received by the Prime Minister, bring the letters to his Chief, explain their contents and Senanayake would sign automatically. I have seen the ceremony with my own eyes.

My first contact with Atukorala was a memorable one. By arrangement with my old friend, D. S. Senanayake, I was seated in his Ministry of Agriculture office in the Old Secretariat building waiting for advance information of the names of those to be appointed to his first Cabinet in 1947. He called for his Secretary, Atukorala, and to my delight and Atukorala's obvious annoyance registered in the wry face he made, Prime Minister Senanayake asked for a spare list of Cabinet names to be given to me. Till that event Atukorala had never seen nor met me and he was unaware of my association with D. S. Senanayake behind the scenes, but in the course of the years I earned his confidence and friendship. It was in view of the great influence that he wielded over his Chief that he was known as "The Mahout" in the inner circles of the time. Mahouts are the elephant-keepers who control these giant beasts. Small-built Atukorala if he did not control at least greatly influenced his big-made boss, Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake.

On one occasion D. S. Senanayake posted me too on a difficult assignment. Sir John Kotelawala and Sir (then Mr.) Cyril de Zoysa, two good friends in D. S. Senanayake's United National Party, had suddenly become bitter enemies after some disagreement. D. S. Senanayake was very much concerned as both Kotelawala and de Zoysa were influential and valuable supporters of the Government party. During one of those Wednesday morning conversations he told me of the enmity between his two stalwarts and suggested that it would be a good thing to try to restore peace between the two of them. This I set out to do, although conscious of the fact that both Sir John and Cyril de Zoysa were tough customers of robust physique who could not easily be tackled by mild-mannered peacemakers. I made the first move with Sir John who as I expected started to roar his denunciations and then

agreed to have breakfast with de Zoysa. The latter on his part shied at my suggestion that he and I should call on his former friend, and I had to spend a long time persuading him to agree. I knew that in their hearts both Kotelawala and de Zoysa regretted the break-up of their friendly association and were secretly happy at my mediation.

Even when I called at de Zoysa's Melbourne Avenue home to pick him up on the appointed morning he was reluctant to accompany me. Then at the turn from Galle Road to Sir John's residence at Ratmalana, Cyril de Zoysa insisted that I should halt my car and let him out. Again I had to use peaceful persuasion on him.

When we stepped into Sir John's home the host had not yet come down. As I heard his steps coming down the stairs I was wondering what my own plight would be if these two, both of them reputed to resort to fisticuffs during their younger days, went for each other. If that happened, a man of my girth might as well have tried to separate two fighting bull-elephants. While those were my thoughts a strange thing happened. Sir John advanced and clapping de Zoysa on the shoulder said "How are you, you devil?", which sounds richer in the Sinhalese that he used. Cyril de Zoysa thumped Sir John on the chest and he too said: "How are you, you devil?" in the same language. I breathed a sigh of relief and we sat at Sir John's table and ate a huge breakfast, and not a word was said of the cause of the temporary breach of friendship. Several years later when Sir John was Prime Minister it was on his recommendation that Cyril de Zoysa was awarded a knighthood, proof enough that he bore no illwill towards de Zoysa.

D. S. Senanayake chuckled with glee when I told him of my successful peace-making effort and how I had entertained fears of bodily harm to me!

Senanayake's political moves also were shrewdly executed. In his first Cabinet he excluded representatives of the Tamil Congress which had been led by G. G. Ponnambalam who campaigned adroitly for 50 per cent representation for the Tamils in Parliament although the Tamil population was a small minority in the country. Senanayake's reply was to leave the Tamil Congress out of his first Cabinet, a step which stunned Tamil Congress personalities. Gradually they came to realise the value of office which had been denied to them. The younger men of Senanayake's own ranks, J. R. Jayawardene and Dudley Senanayake, were very keen that Ponnambalam should be taken into the government. They realised his worth as a first-rate debator who would be an asset to the government benches to withstand the debating powers of the Marxists in the Opposition. To all appeals in favour of giving Ponnambalam Cabinet office, D. S. Senanayake turned a deaf ear. I remember being asked by that younger set to plead with Senanayake myself. But the old tactician allowed these knocks at the door to continue unheeded for long weeks and, while the guessing continued, he did not open the door.

The newspapers were themselves keen on the scent and one afternoon I was asked to check with Prime Minister Senanayake. On my way home I called at Temple Trees together with a friend and found the Prime Minister in. To my inquiry whether Ponnambalam was being given a place in the Cabinet, Senanayake's cryptic reply was "Sit down and you will see". A few minutes passed and we heard a motorcar running into the portico. Senanayake rushed out of his room, warning us not to be seen. When we heard the car door shut and the car moving away my friend and I came to the verandah and seeing Carolis, the Prime Minister's faithful valet, I asked him, "What happened?" It was a historic reply that we heard, "Sir, the Tamil worshipped

the '*Sinhaya*.' He described how Ponnambalam on seeing Senanayake coming out to the verandah had bent down low and made obeisance in Oriental fashion to the Prime Minister.

In the eyes of Carolis who kept in close touch with current political affairs, the "*Sinhaya*", (emblem of the "Lion Race" from which the Sinhalese are alleged to be descended) had been victorious in the end.

I surmised that Senanayake and Ponnambalam had gone to Queen's House, the residence of the Governor General, for the swearing-in of the new Minister, and I tipped off Lake House to rush newsmen and press photographers to the precincts of Queen's House.

Later, when I met Senanayake I told him a story that my friend and I had seen how Ponnambalam, his former political enemy, had greeted him. Senanayake got me to promise that I would not describe that incident in the newspapers. Once Ponnambalam was on his side, Senanayake stood by him loyally in his characteristic way.

I shall always remember D. S. Senanayake's pardonable pride in the pioneering work he did in reclaiming the jungles of the North Central Province of Ceylon, rebuilding the ancient tanks and turning the arid land into green paddy fields and orchards in order to increase the country's food supply. He told me the story of when and how he was inspired to begin that monumental task.

During the old Legislative Council days when Ceylon was still tied to the apron strings of imperial Great Britain D. S. Senanayake was one of several members of the Legislative Council who rode in the first train running on the new railroad extension to the Eastern Province. On the way the official train had been halted near the fringe of the thick jungle at a place now known as Hatamune and the councillors and other officials

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REFERENCE

had got off the train to loosen their limbs. Senanayake had left his colleagues and walked into the jungle searching for a secluded place to empty his bladder and then he had seen an expanse of gleaming water through the giant trees. Going towards the water he had come upon the remains of an ancient tank. It was there, pondering on the banks of a former Sinhalese king's tank that inspiration came to Senanayake "Why shouldn't we rebuild the tanks and the irrigation channels and make the North Central Province the granary of Ceylon as in the days of the ancient kings?"

When the reclamation of the jungles was well on its way and Senanayake was Prime Minister I took a visiting editor of "*Dawn*", the Pakistan newspaper, to call on Senanayake. The visitor questioned the Prime Minister on his irrigation schemes of which they had heard in Pakistan, and I asked Senanayake to relate again the story of his first visit to the banks of the Minneriya tank. The Prime Minister obliged but discreetly avoided repeating the real reason of his unscheduled excursion into the jungle that day. Would the history of the North Central Province have been altered if the old warrior had not felt the pressing demand of a call of nature that day?

Senanayake was out of the country when the Minneriya colonisation scheme was ceremonially launched in 1933. His protegee, Sir John Kotelawala, then Mr. J. L. Kotelawala, the acting Minister of Agriculture in the State Council, acted for the chief architect of that ambitious project to reclaim the dry zone territories from the jungle and the malaria mosquito.

I was specially assigned by D. R. Wijewardene to go to the spot and write a descriptive article on the ceremonial opening. Turning back newspaper files I traced a somewhat lyrical piece of writing of mine in the *Ceylon Daily News* of May 2, 1933—lyrical as it would have been from the pen of a raw university man.

These are some illuminating extracts from the article which has the date line Hatamune, April 30:

“The demons of the jungles and millions of mosquitoes to boot must have been disturbed by the thunderous boom of a rocket that signalled the trek of peasant colonists to the clearing off the Hatamune railway halting place. If drums could screw up courage and ‘*sadhus*’ dispel doubts, the valiant band of over two hundred villagers carrying their scanty-belongings could not then have had any qualms of conscience.”

“A few priests were also there to invoke the aid of religion while a ‘*kapurala*’ grew frantic in trying to propitiate the ‘*devios*’ of the district. All the while a relentless, scorching sun, the like of which is more than rare, beat down upon the crowd, but the peasants shouted back their defiance and the echoes murmured through the still, awesome jungle. The clearing by the railroad, once a portion of the forest that leads to the borders of Maha Sena’s giant tank, was turned into a place of ceremonial splendour this afternoon, and the priest and headman, Government Agent and Acting Minister with some ubiquitous Mudaliyars and Rate-mahatmayas thrilled a peasant crowd with a strange mixture of religion and hoary custom. . . .

“Today the spirit of Maha Sena hovered in the air and memories of Parakramabahu came back in a flood. But tomorrow, with the allotment of land, the real task begins and the whole scheme will stand the test of time and the public know whether their money has been well spent or not.”

That was in April, 1933. The doubts raised by me in that article were well founded at that time. Then it appeared to be an almost superhuman task to rid that country of the deadly malaria mosquito, to re-build the derelict tanks of the ancient kings of Ceylon, to

reform the irrigation channels along which water had once run to feed paddy fields and above all to populate the area with families drawn from other parts of the country.

Several errors, costly ones, were made in the beginning. One such error was the omission to build cottages for the peasant colonists who were provided with funds and free forest timber to build their own homes.

To be uprooted, willingly no doubt, from one's own ancestral village and to be suddenly transferred to an unknown territory was a trial in itself. To have no ready-made cottage to walk into increased the personal problems. But despite the tribulations of the early months of 1933 and the next year or two D. S. Senanayake's indomitable will to make the dry zone territory once again full of rice fields produced successful results. He was battered with criticism in the State Council on the ground that he was wasting money and risking human lives. But long before he died he had realised his great ambition and the North Central Province — Minneriya, Kalawewa, Giritale, Parakrama Samudra schemes — was covered with green paddy fields, flowing water and colonists' settlements.

He had a willing band of government officials to help him in this magnificent conquest of the dry zone lands. Without being invidious I must record the name of C. P. de Silva, now a Cabinet Minister and a critic of D. S. Senanayake's political theories, who at that time expended his limitless energy to supervise and expedite the execution of D. S. Senanayake's projects in these areas. C. P. de Silva was then a Government Agent. I remember the first and only occasion I met C. P. de Silva when he was engaged in that task in the dry zone. Senanayake who knew that I had been a witness at the ceremonial launching of the Minneriya colonisation scheme took me along with a few others in 1947 to show me the vast progress made. C. P. de

Silva as the senior official on the site joined the inspection party and he and I were lodged in the same Rest-house room for the night. I can still recall the torrential flow of words from my room-mate till late that night and then once again at the crack of dawn. Even while I shaved in the morning and moved to and from a mirrored dressing table to a wash basin, C. P. de Silva was moving with me, talking all the time. And all that he talked of every minute was in regard to the colonisation schemes of D. S. Senanayake in the Dry Zone lands. I never met C. P. de Silva after that but I shall always remember the ceaseless talk of an official who was imbued with the spirit of his chief.

I wrote of that journey of inspection in a centre page article entitled "The Old Man from Botale conquers the N.C.P. Jungle", in the *Ceylon Daily News* of February 8, 1947. Here are a few extracts:

"The Old Man from Botale has conquered what was once thought the invincible jungle of the N.C.P. In 1933 I went as a sceptic to witness the inauguration of the Dry Zone colonisation effort and there was a vein of scoffing in what I recorded in the *Ceylon Daily News* of May, that year. Of that ceremonial opening of a national campaign to convert the jungle into paddy field I wrote with rather callow irony.....

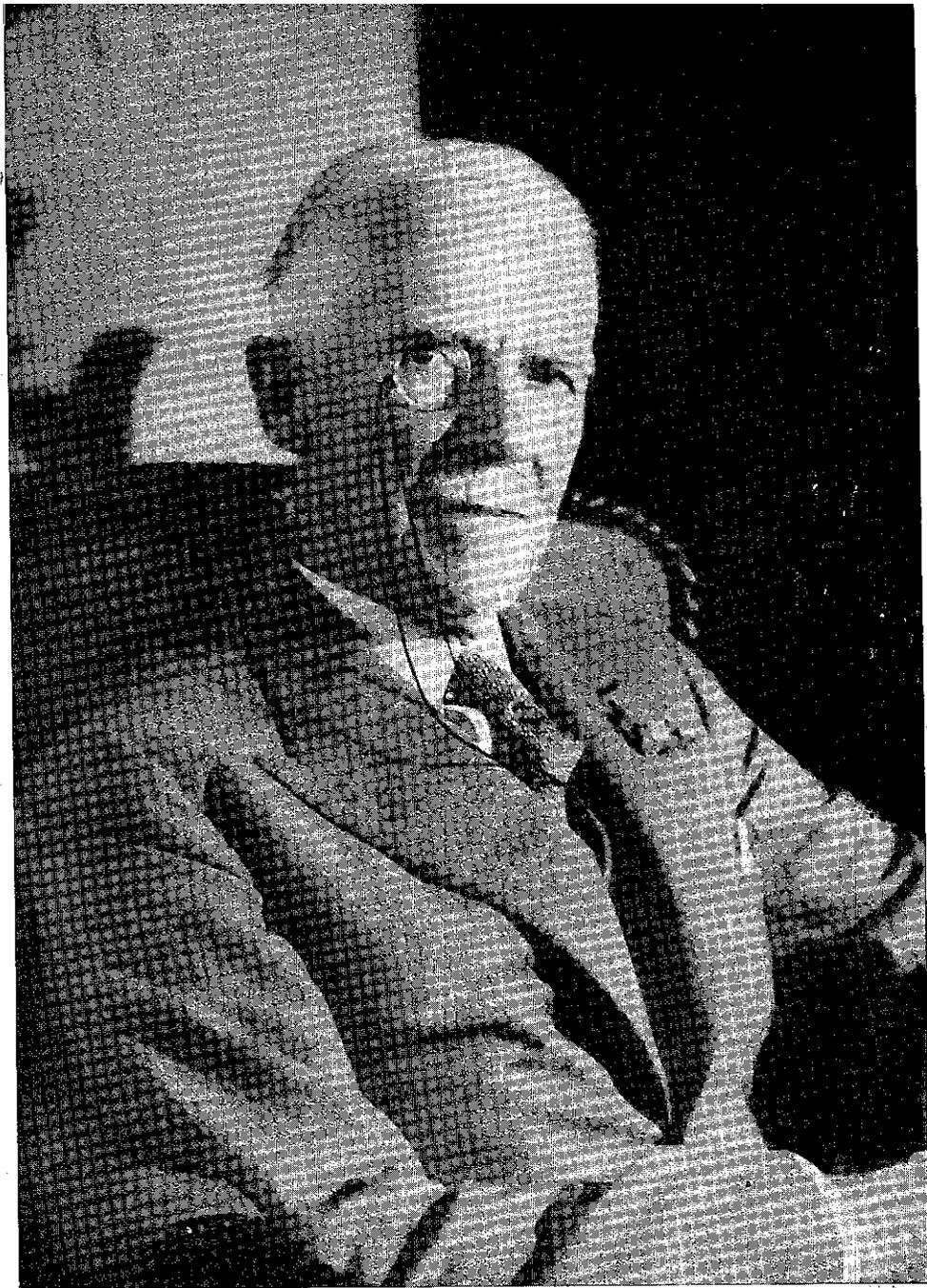
"Obviously I was a scoffer then. But last week, fourteen years later, I toured the Dry Zone again, and where I once scoffed, now I pray that the Chief Architect of these colonisation schemes will live to see the day when his million acres will be in cultivation under irrigation. For even today the jungle of the N.C.P. has been beaten back by the stupendous energy of the Old Man from Botale—energy which defies the need for seven hours sleep at night and the call for regularity of meals by day

.....

“However tremendous the force of energy at the centre Mr. Senanayake’s efforts would go awry unless he had the personnel imbued at least with a fraction of his enthusiasm to execute his plans. Here again he has been fortunate.”

“As his chief worker, acting as liaison between headquarters and revenue officers and field supervisors, he has found a man who ought to have an N. before the C. P. de Silva. For be it daybreak, noon or night, he talks of nothing but of the vast possibilities of the N.C.P.....”

There was no doubt that one reason which impelled Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake to appoint Dudley Senanayake, Minister of Agriculture in Ceylon’s first Cabinet was his belief that he could continue to keep an eye on the Dry Zone colonisation schemes if his own son presided over the Ministry in charge of them. There was some public criticism of the appointment of Dudley Senanayake, the son, to the Cabinet by the father. One morning when I returned home after my daily walk I heard that D. S. Senanayake had left a telephoned message to call him back to his home, Woodlands, at Kanatte. When I called him I was quite embarrassed by his comments on a letter to the Editor published in the *Ceylon Daily News* of that morning, criticising the report of the news that Dudley Senanayake might be appointed to the Cabinet. “Must I keep him out of the Cabinet because he is my son?,” growled D. S. Senanayake, picking on me though he could have as easily telephoned his friend, D. R. Wijewardene, or H. A. J. Hulugalle, then the distinguished Editor of the *Ceylon Daily News*. I remember mumbling my ignorance regarding the letter which I had myself seen before I left on my morning walk. Some days later I recall his explaining to me the reasons for appointing Dudley Senanayake to that particular Minis-



LORD SOULBURY,
Governor General of Ceylon, 1949 - 1954.



try. Whatever the reason there is no doubt that Dudley Senanayake's record in that Ministry fully justified his appointment.

If D. S. Senanayake felt that his intentions were honourable he was not easily deflected from the path he had decided to tread. Often during my Wednesday morning breakfast talks with him he told me of the great debt that Ceylon and he owed to Ivor Jennings, then Principal of the University of Ceylon, for the free advice and help that celebrated constitutional authority had given to Senanayake in the latter's negotiations with the British to secure independence for this country. In that role Dr. Ivor Jennings had no official standing: he acted merely as D. S. Senanayake's friend. Owing to that very fact D. S. Senanayake could not, he told me, pay public tribute to a British constitutional authority who in his private capacity helped a former colony to break away from the imperial domination of Great Britain.

Then had come the day, November 11, 1947, when the Defence Agreements between the new Dominion of Ceylon and the British Government had to be signed at a historic though simple ceremony at Queen's House. The last in the line of British Governors of colonial Ceylon, Sir Henry Monck-Mason Moore, was to sign the agreement on behalf of the United Kingdom and D. S. Senanayake on behalf of Ceylon. On a Wednesday morning Senanayake told me the story of how he had suggested to Sir Henry Moore that Dr. Ivor Jennings should be invited to be present at the ceremony and be included in the photograph of those present which was to be taken after the ceremony. Governor Moore had immediately raised the issue that Ivor Jennings had no official status in that business but tough old D. S. Senanayake had insisted on his demand. Moore had given way and an official photograph of those present at the ceremony shows the following persons in the picture:

Governor Moore and D. S. Senanayake seated, and behind them standing are J. A. Mulhall (Secretary to the Governor) Sir Allan Rose (Legal Secretary) Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, Dr. Ivor Jennings, A. G. Ranasinghe (who had accompanied Senanayake on the Whitehall mission) and N. W. Atukorala.

Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake was able to pay both his and his country's debt to Ivor Jennings in a more tangible way when he recommended the Knighthood for the latter. It was a pity that Senanayake was not living when Sir Ivor left our shores for good for had he been alive he certainly would have seen to it that the Britisher who helped a colony to achieve independence would not have left Colombo harbour with just a handful of Ceylonese to see him off.

In those days one often wondered at the close association between Dr. Ivor Jennings, the intellectual from Cambridge, and D. S. Senanayake who had graduated only in the university of life. There is no doubt that a constitutional authority of the standing of Dr. Jennings could not and would not have worked behind the scenes with a complete ignoramus. Even Dr. Jennings must have realised that the rich experience of D. S. Senanayake in trade, planting and mine management and in public affairs had made him a well-informed man while his inherent qualifications for leadership fitted him to grapple with any problem however intricate it might have appeared to an ordinary person. Those were his qualities one noted when D. S. Senanayake expressed privately his views on big national and international questions.

I can recall Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake's judgment on a move made some years earlier in the State Council by J. R. Jayawardene to make Sinhalese the official language of the country. The motion submitted by J. R. Jayawardene read as follows:

“That with the object of making Sinhalese the official language of Ceylon within a reasonable number of years this Council is of opinion:

- (a) That Sinhalese should be made the medium of instruction in all schools;
- (b) That Sinhalese should be made a compulsory subject in all public examinations;
- (c) That legislation should be introduced to permit the business of the State Council to be conducted in Sinhalese also;
- (d) That a commission should be appointed to choose for translation and to translate important books of other languages into Sinhalese;
- (e) That a commission should be appointed to report on all steps that need be taken to effect the transition from English into Sinhalese.”

The motion came up for discussion in May, 1944, and the motion, as amended, with the inclusion of “Tamil” after the word “Sinhalese”, with the object of making Sinhalese and Tamil official languages of Ceylon within a reasonable number of years was accepted by 27 votes to 2.

Talking to me on J. R. Jayawardene’s move, Prime Minister Senanayake argued that to make Sinhalese the only official language would in years to come harm the Sinhalese rather than benefit them. The entire educational system would naturally be tied up with the official language and the Sinhalese would be made proficient in a language spoken by just a few millions in the world while the Tamils already had a language spoken by 40 millions in India with their Tamil books up to the university grade. Who then would suffer in the future?, asked D. S. Senanayake whose view was that while Sinhalese and Tamil should be given their due place in this country every child in Ceylon, rich and

poor alike, should be taught English. Politicians who have created language problems in our country for political ends and those Sinhalese who suffer from that old colonial inferiority complex vis-a-vis the British might not agree with D. S. Senanayake's views.

D. S. Senanayake himself had good cause to dislike the British because he too, like some other Sinhalese Buddhist men of standing, had suffered at the hands of the former British colonial administration after the communal riots of 1915. But in the course of time as he grew in stature as a national leader he had realised that the requirements of his country must override any personal animosity which he had reason to have against the British. So there was no inferiority complex in him to warp his judgement when he negotiated with the British government on the subject of independence for Ceylon.

Later, as Prime Minister, he saw clearly the need of a small country like Ceylon, placed in a strategic position in the East, for friendship with England and the Commonwealth. There was a wealth of meaning in his reply to Pressmen in Bombay who had questioned him on November 5, 1948, on his way back home from a Conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers in London, on Ceylon's policy vis-a-vis the Commonwealth;

"Ceylon will remain in the Commonwealth of Nations as long as we feel our place is safe and our interests are not jeopardised."

In his personal conversations D. S. Senanayake spoke freely of his wish that Ceylon, a small dot in the map of Asia, should always retain and promote her friendship with Great Britain and the Commonwealth. That was wise talk.

The newspapers of the period over which D. S. Senanayake ruled as Prime Minister bear ample testimony in the shape of news and views to prove that the diffe-

rent communities and castes and followers of diverse religions looked up to the Old Man, as he was sentimentally referred to in his absence, as a just ruler. He also acquired a widespread reputation as a man of wisdom, wisdom gathered by experience not from books. I know how estranged friends and families were taken to him by mediators for judgment on private disputes. I remember a learned Queen's Counsel describing D. S. Senanayake's innate ability to adjudicate between right and wrong. "You don't want lawyers for questions like this," Senanayake had said to the Queen's Counsel who had been discussing with him what appeared to be an intricate legal issue, "you look at a thing like this; you see what is right and what is wrong and you give judgment for what is right." D. S. Senanayake's English phraseology might have been wanting in perfection but in the course of years he had acquired much wisdom.

I remember myself seeking his help to mediate in a matrimonial tangle which would have led to more than one respected family appearing in the Courts of Law and suffering the shame of publicity. He dealt with the matter with such finesse that not only was the litigation withdrawn but both opposing parties were delighted with his judgment and one party, the wealthier, insisted on taking me from Temple Trees to Galle Face Hotel where he tried to force champagne on me late in the afternoon in token of happiness.

Such efforts to do good turns to those in trouble might not strictly be within the functions of Prime Ministers, at least not in the West. But in the East these things are done and D. S. Senanayake by sparing the time to attend to such meritorious deeds came to be regarded as some old patriarch to whom those in trouble turned for help.

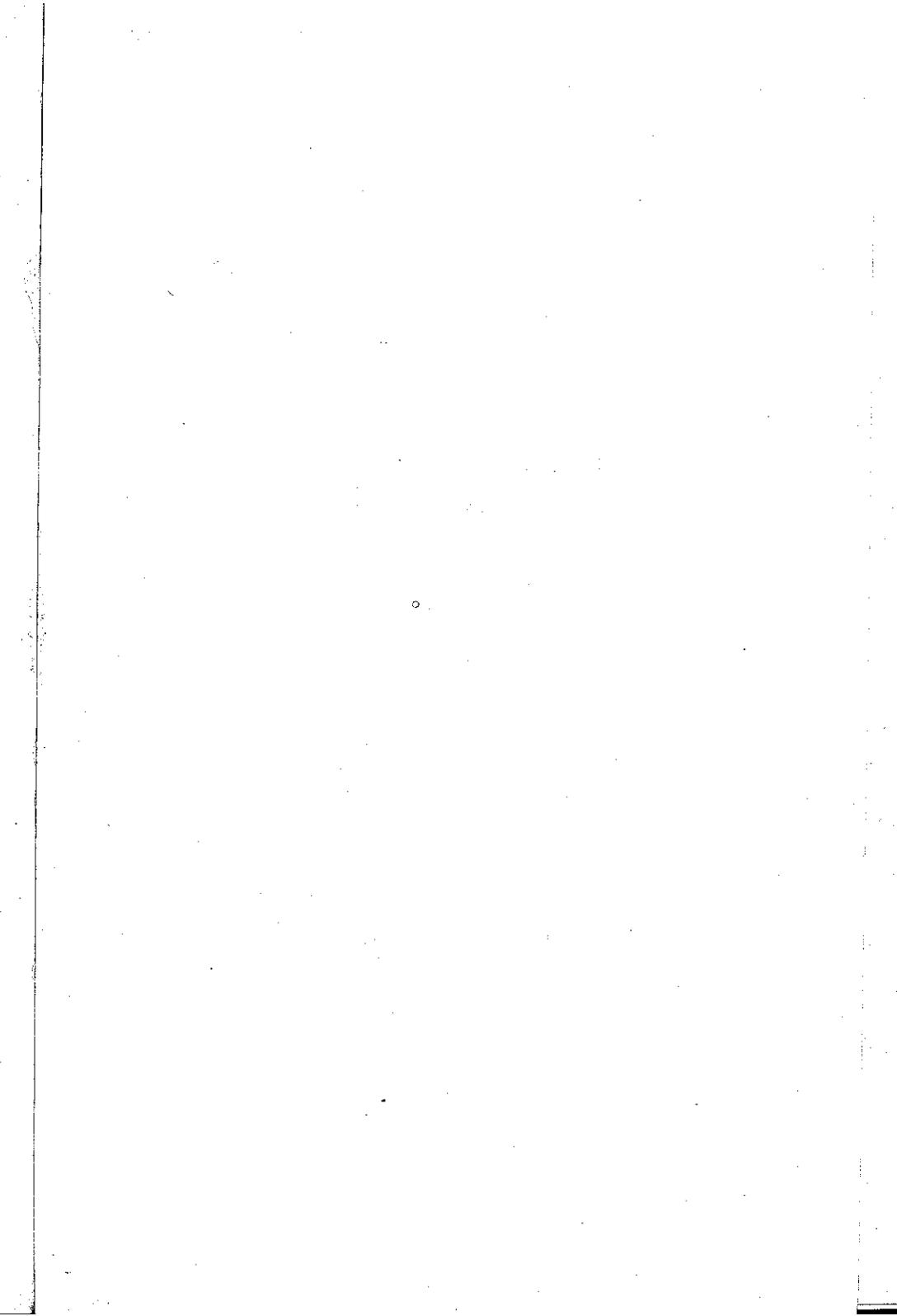
When the year 1952 dawned, D. S. Senanayake was recognised both at home and abroad as an outstanding

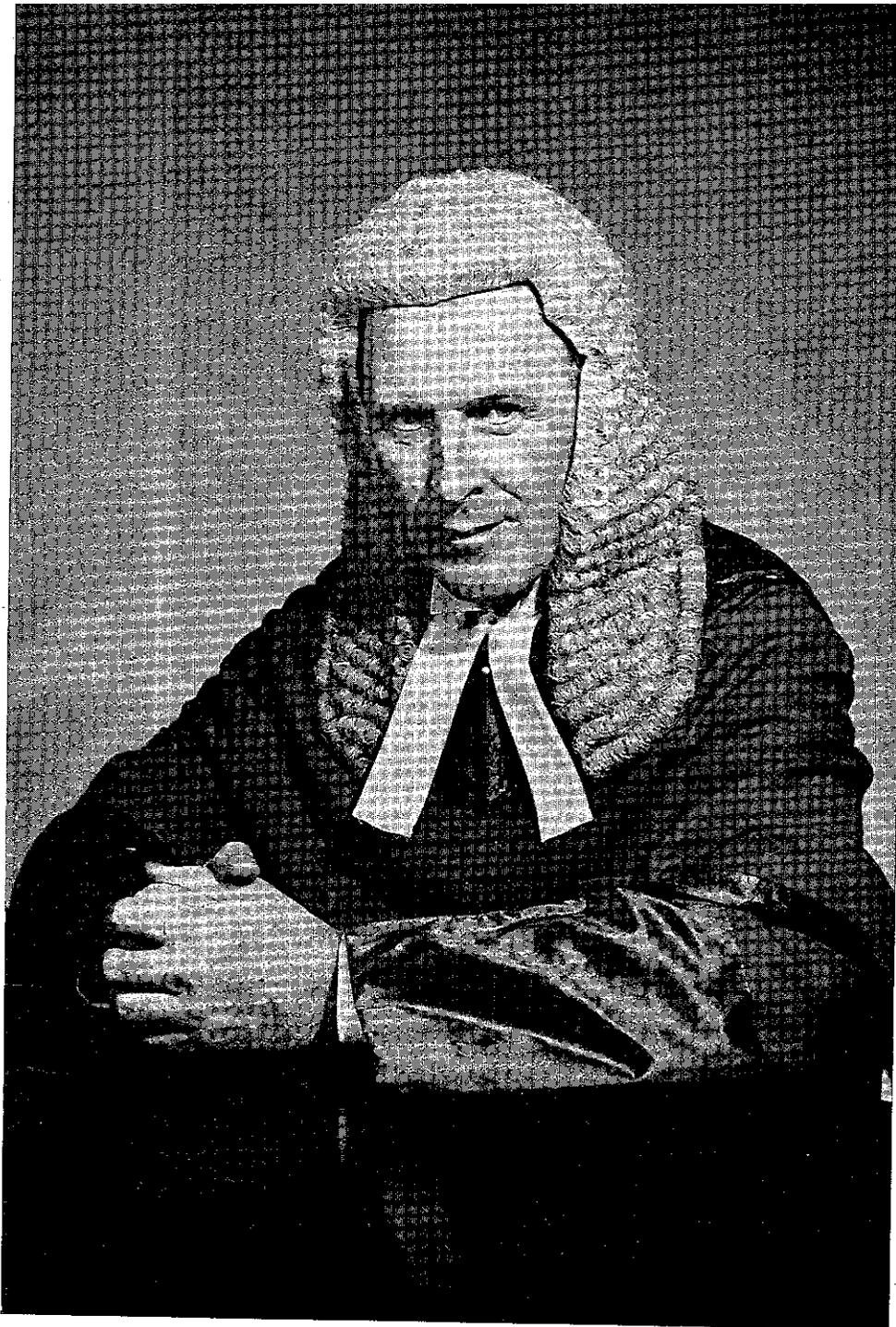
personality. I still saw him at breakfast every Wednesday morning whenever he was in residence. Newspaper organisations have a rather macabre habit of keeping a confidential check on the health of political leaders, specially if they happen to be Prime Ministers, because succession is big news. Aware of my close association with D. S. Senanayake I had often been asked by Lake House about Senanayake's state of health. Since the beginning of 1952 I had noticed that during our early morning Wednesday conversations at Temple Trees the Prime Minister was showing signs of the physical debility that is associated with very old age, his head trembling slightly as he conversed with me. His was then not the sturdy nuga-tree-like physique I was accustomed to see. So in consultation with the newspaper organisation to which I belonged I confidentially "wrote up" my old friend and my "copy" was with Esmond Wickremesinghe, who directed the editorial section of Lake House after D. R. Wijewardene's death.

Writing a man's obituary before his death would appear to be a frightful deed to laymen but newspapermen will understand.

I met D. S. Senanayake as was customary on Wednesday, March 19, 1952. He had resumed his morning rides on the Galle Face promenade after a long spell of rest owing to poor health. He returned home to Temple Trees earlier than usual that Wednesday morning as he knew that I would be waiting. I can recall how while his faithful valet, Carolis, pulled off his riding boots he said to me that his whole body was aching and I suggested that he should keep off his morning rides for a few days. He, however, said that that would not help: he must go out every morning and that would remove the aches, he explained.

That was on Wednesday. On Friday morning he fell off his horse on the promenade and died during the





SIR ALAN ROSE, Q. C.,
*who was acting for the Governor General of Ceylon when Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake
was fatally injured by falling off a horse while riding.*

forenoon on Saturday without regaining consciousness. The information I provide above of my personal impressions of Senanayake's state of health at the time should help to decide the controversy whether Senanayake fell off a horse owing to bad horsemanship or whether he had a stroke while riding and, therefore, fell off his horse. He knew too much of riding to be unhorsed like that.

On Saturday morning while the whole country was anxious about the injured Prime Minister's condition, when I returned home from my daily morning walk, I was given a telephoned message from J. R. Jayawardene that Senanayake's condition was low. I telephoned the news to Esmond Wickremesinghe and told him that I was hurrying to the private hospital where the Prime Minister was. He asked me to pick him up at his home which I did and the two of us rode in my car to the hospital.

On the first floor where the unconscious patient's death rattle came wafting out of his room there was a mass of visitors, all waiting with anxious faces. They were allowed to pass through the patient's room to have a last glimpse of the dying leader. The two of us paid our own respects and then stood against the wall in a corner of the lounge outside. Then occurred one of those "inside story" incidents which have never been published. As we stood there three leading politicians of the Government of the day came close to us, one after another. They were E. A. Nugawela, A. Ratnayake and J. R. Jayawardene. I did the talking and asked each in turn "What's going to happen now? Who will be Prime Minister?"

Each of the first two produced a list of possible successors, Dudley Senanayake's name the first in order and Sir John Kotelawala or Sir Oliver Goonetilleke next. But J. R. Jayawardene's reply when he came near

us was much more precise. He appeared quite surprised that I should have asked such a question. In reply he said that Dudley Senanayake would be Prime Minister, that the Governor-General, Lord Soulbury, who was at the time out of the country had informed the acting Governor-General, Sir Allan Rose, of the late Prime Minister's advice to Soulbury that he should in the first instance send for Dudley Senanayake to form a government if anything untoward happened to D. S. Senanayake. J. R. Jayawardene stated further that once Dudley Senanayake was appointed Prime Minister Parliament would meet, Dudley Senanayake would address Parliament and then advise the Governor-General to dissolve Parliament so that the new Prime Minister could go to the country to get the people's mandate. Thereby an impending by-election scheduled to take place on March 27, 1952, at Akuressa, a stronghold of the Communist Party, which that party was again contesting, would also be avoided, explained J. R. Jayawardene.

Jayawardene's reply, given in that attractive diction which has acquired fame for him as an orator, was breath-taking in its clarity. But I had to ask the further question, "What about Sir John?" because Sir John Kotelawala, the Leader of the House, the "strong man" of the United National Party (the government party) and also the organiser of their party propaganda would naturally have been expected to succeed D. S. Senanayake in office. J. R. Jayawardene appeared to be somewhat dazed by my second question and he did not vouchsafe a second reply.

When he moved off our range of vision I told Esmond Wickremesinghe that something very strange appeared to be on foot and that we better move out of the scene. As we went down the stairs we met P. Nadesan, Sir John Kotelawala's official secretary, and I asked him whether he had doubts of his chief succeeding to the

office of Prime Minister. He had no doubts at all. Outside the hospital gates I saw Sir John riding in his car which was leaving the hospital. Leaving Esmond Wickremesinghe to go back to Lake House to give orders for the release of a special Prime Minister's death edition which was by then in the page proof stage, I halted Kotelawala's car and said that I wished to speak to him. He asked me into his car, suggesting that I should accompany him to his ministerial office at Transworks House. Nadesan, his Secretary, got into the car with me. We did not speak much on the way but once inside his office I asked him whether he had any information to suggest that he would not be called upon to fill the office of Prime Minister when D. S. Senanayake, who was then breathing his last, died.

Sir John had no such doubts whatsoever and he brushed aside my theory that something strange was happening. In fact he pulled out from his pocket the draft of a speech-to-the-nation he hoped to deliver on the Government radio as Prime Minister-designate and asked me to peruse it and suggest any necessary changes. I took the paper back with me to Lake House where I had to read the page proof of my own article on D. S. Senanayake which was to appear on the centre-page of a special supplement.

The news of Senanayake's death was flashed through to Lake House soon after I had read the proof of my article and in a matter of minutes the press was rolling out the news of the death of the man who had been recognised as the Father of the Nation.

Personally I had lost a dear friend from whom during those early Wednesday morning conversations I had gathered more knowledge than what I had found in all the books one had read at Oxford. Going home very late for lunch on that fateful day, March 22, 1952, in the secrecy of my bathroom, for first time in my adult life I wept, a fact I am not ashamed to record.

The special edition of the *Ceylon Daily News* of March 22, 1952, and the issue of the *Sunday Observer* of the next day carried my tribute to D. S. Senanayake over my initials. In the course of that article, prepared as recorded above some weeks before his sudden death, I wrote:

“Mr. Senanayake is dead and Ceylon, the land of different communities, different religions and different castes, has lost someone whom they all trusted as a just man.

“In this hour of a nation’s sorrow, memories come crowding in—memories of a just man whom everybody trusted.

“The Wednesday mornings when he related his off-the-record stories of men and affairs, dressed as he liked to *be* in his sarong and banian, a Prime Minister minus even his carpet slippers, thinking aloud, mentioning aspirations, not for himself but for the country, chuckling over the foibles of the cutthroats and pretenders who do not know what the world is saying of them.

“They were the morning chats also when one was amazed by the knowledge he possessed, not the learning gathered in universities but wisdom concerning human nature—how to analyse moves and counter moves—agriculture and animal lore.

“He belonged to a much older generation and yet just as much as he never let you feel in private conversation that he was the Head of the Government, he did not try to impose his views as grandfathers do on mature men who always appear to them as callow youth.

“Those Wednesday morning chats are over; the reverberating ‘Hallo! Hallo!’ — not the Oxford way—the sight of mighty eating, discussing the week’s

events, laughter that shook the air. All that is ended: only Thursday morning remains.”

I knew that there was conflict festering within the government party while D. S. Senanayake's body lay in state at Temple Trees. In numbers there were more behind the demand that Dudley Senanayake should succeed his father in office. On the other hand I was personally aware that several government party men had given assurances to Sir John that they would support his claims.

As my newspaper functions at the time made it necessary for me to have regular consultations with anybody who took over as Prime Minister, I requested Esmond Wickremesinghe to permit me to stay away even from Lake House in order to avoid getting mixed up with the moves and counter moves of the two camps backing Sir John and Dudley Senanayake respectively. This request was readily granted. But that did not prevent me from learning that the Lake House Group of newspapers was conducting a clever campaign to throw the weight of propaganda behind Dudley Senanayake. The Lake House Press churned out emotional news and commentaries, creating the impression that Dudley Senanayake was too shy and unwilling to step into his father's shoes. Editorials demanded that Dudley Senanayake should place the interests of the country above his modesty. This was first-rate propaganda to appeal to the emotions of the populace already moved by the news of the death of a great leader. Dudley Senanayake's stock naturally rose and the propaganda machine continued to whirl incessantly, on Sunday, the day after the death, and Monday and Tuesday.

I continued to be in my self-imposed isolation till Tuesday when I telephoned Temple Trees, got D. S. Senanayake's valet, Carolis, on the line and asked him to inform Dudley Senanayake that I wished to speak to

him. When Dudley Senanayake came on the line I offered him my sympathies. We continued our conversation for a few minutes. He said he had read my newspaper tribute to his father who he thought was very fond of me. Then when I asked him "How are things getting on?", he gave me a reply which I have always remembered "Things are alright. Only your Ratmalana friend is objecting."

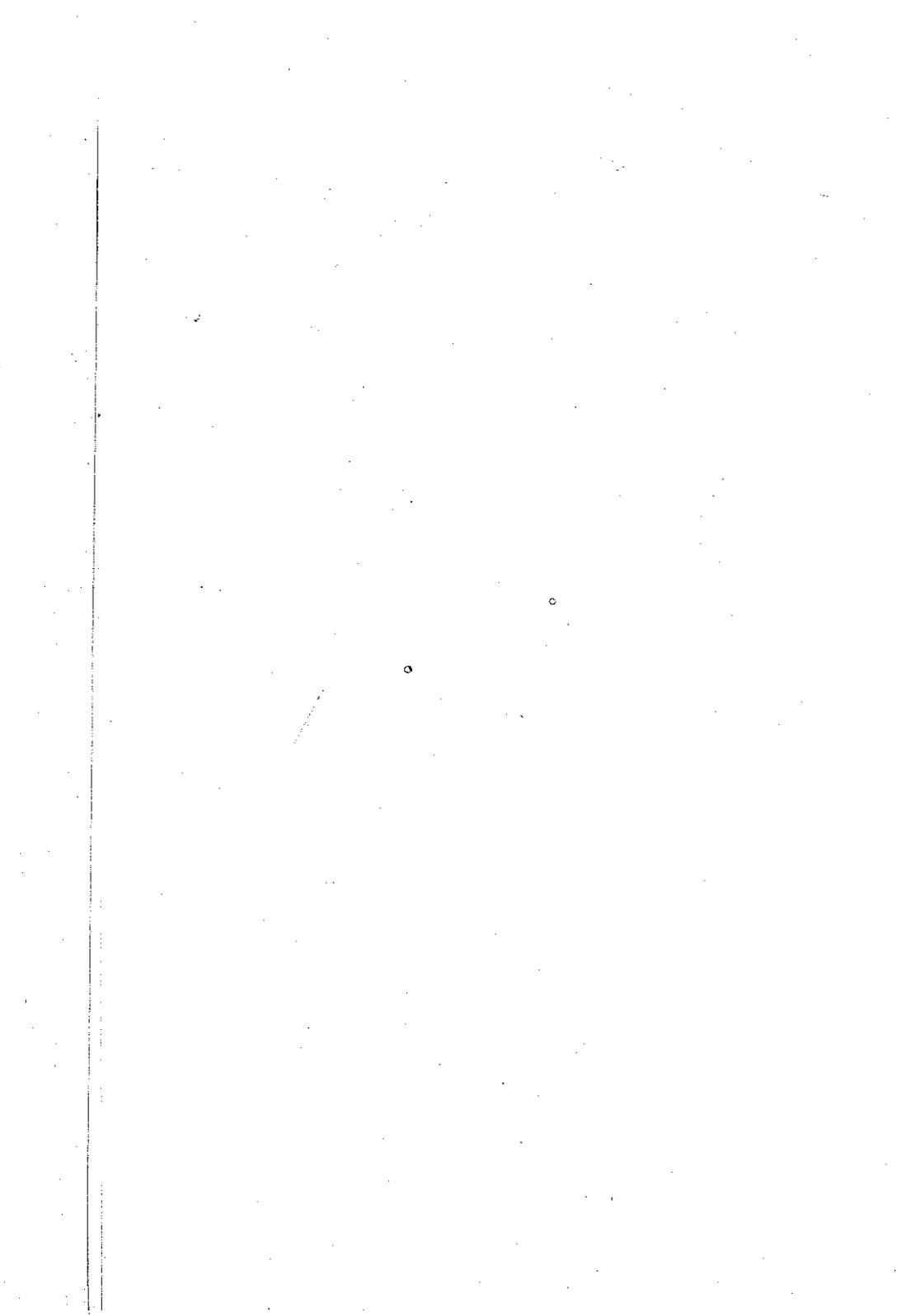
"My Ratmalana friend" was, of course, Sir John. Dudley Senanayake very pardonably thought that I was also an active participant in the campaign of the Lake House group of newspapers.

Next day, Wednesday, March 26, 1952, at dawn Esmond Wickremesinghe telephoned me and in a very agitated voice said that I had to leave home and go on a special mission. He explained that Sir Allan Rose, the acting Governor-General, had telephoned him and informed him that Sir Allan Rose proposed to contact Lord Soulbury, the Governor-General, who was hurrying back from England by the B.O.A.C. plane and to advise Lord Soulbury to divert the plane from Ratmalana aerodrome to Katunayake aerodrome because Sir Allan had had reports from the Intelligence branch of the Police that Sir John was massing his plumbago miners from the Kahatagaha Mines to march to Ratmalana aerodrome to stage a demonstration on the Governor-General's arrival. Esmond Wickremesinghe had suggested to Sir Allan that such an eleventh-hour change in the venue of arrival of the Governor-General which had already been published in the newspapers, would in the state of tension prevailing create a public scare. He had gone further and assured Sir Allan that he would send somebody to convince Sir John of the folly of his reported intentions. That somebody was me.

Esmond Wickremesinghe just brushed aside my fears and hesitation to go on this very awkward mission. My fears were based on the fact that the Lake House



DUDLEY SENANAYAKE,
Prime Minister of Ceylon, March 1952 - October 1953 and March 1960 - July 1960.



newspapers had already taken sides in this contest for the premiership. My hesitation came out of the knowledge that Sir John can be a tough customer when enraged. Nevertheless I agreed to go and said I would make my own plans to carry out this peculiar mission. Wickremesinghe asked me to inform Sir John that he could not have any hope whatsoever in that contest and that several groups of parliamentarians had already submitted petitions to the acting Governor-General against Sir John.

Although I had given a promise, I moved warily. I sent for a Lake House journalist friend, Bobby Weerakoon, who is now dead, and despatched him posthaste with a letter to Sir John at his home in Kandewela Estate, Ratmalana.

Here is the copy of the letter (you will note that I have addressed him as Colonel which I have always done in my correspondence with him since I sent him an abusive letter criticising him for accepting a knighthood):

26-3-1952.

My dear Colonel,

I am writing this because I feel that as much as the Old Man, your Guru, trusted my good faith you trust my good faith towards you.

Before you make any definite move please check up from Sir Allan Rose whether the European bloc, the Tamil bloc and the Burgher bloc have not written in officially intimating that they will pull out if you are called upon to form a Government.

If you have been given pledges it is best that you test whether they are from persons who wish to mislead you. I know that you are a soldier—so discipline is the need today. But for God's sake don't be misled.

With best regards,

Yours very sincerely,

J.L.

267120

Bobby Weerakoon soon came back with the message that Sir John wished to see me immediately. I had cleared the first hurdle, but I did not wish to go alone and without a witness on a delicate mission like that. After a quick decision I took with me Felix de Silva, the senior partner of a well-known firm of solicitors, who was himself a friend of Sir John's. When we reached Sir John's home we found him smartly dressed, obviously prepared to go to Queen's House on being called to be appointed Prime Minister. He had been misled to that extent by the false assurances of several M.P.s of the government party.

As we went in we saw S. A. Pakeman, an appointed M.P., and Henry Amarasuriya, former Cabinet Minister, leaving the house. There were quite a number of visitors inside the drawing-room. When I sat down with Felix de Silva to talk privately to Sir John, the latter's official Secretary, P. Nadesan, and Private Secretary, Anandatissa de Alwis, both equally well-dressed like their chief, came forward and sat around the same table.

I repeated to Sir John what I had already written in my urgent letter to him. I told him also of the report, false as it proved to be, that he was collecting toughs to stage a demonstration on the arrival of the Governor-General's airplane at the aerodrome which was near Sir John's home. The bitterest pill I had to administer was the assurance I gave that he had no hope whatsoever of general support from government party M.P.s.

I can remember Anandatissa de Alwis interrupting to advise his chief "Sir, whatever J. L. says we must try". My reply was somewhat harsh and uncomplimentary to my good friend, Anandatissa de Alwis.

Sir John was more realistic. The stark facts that I placed before him had sunk in and he said, "Alright, I will withdraw but go and tell Dudley that when he is Prime Minister he should recommend my appointment

as Governor-General". That was a fantastic suggestion to make just then but when he proposed it I realised that he had believed what I had come to tell him and that the threatened conflict was ended. So hurriedly I said that Felix de Silva and I would certainly convey the message and we came away.

I was both glad and sorry, glad that an internecine tug-o'-war had ended, sorry that I had been the har-binger of information of how his friends had lied to Sir John.

On our way back Felix de Silva took Sir John's message to Dudley Senanayake at Temple Trees. Naturally the latter had pointed out that he could not give any such assurance.

When I returned home, near lunch time, I received a frightening shock. D. B. Dhanapala, then Editor of the Sinhalese newspaper, *Lankādīpa*, telephoned me to discuss the news which he said had been flashed in the early edition of the *Ceylon Observer* of the day, which I had not yet seen. He told me that there was a front page news story publishing the fact that the government party M.P.s were against any move to appoint Sir John Prime Minister. He read out a couple of headlines—“*Sir John Unacceptable to Several Groups*”, “*Nineteen reject Sir John*”.

I felt as if I had been pole-axed. I had gone in the morning to persuade Sir John privately not to create trouble. And here was Lake House in the meantime unloading on the public the reports that Sir John was unacceptable and had been rejected by parliamentarians. Obviously if I had known that the day's *Ceylon Observer* was coming out with that news I would never have consented to go on that peace mission to Sir John. It reminded me of that historic event in the last World War in which while a Japanese envoy named

Kursu was talking peace with the Americans in the United States Japanese fighter planes bombed Pearl Harbour.

Next day was Thursday, March 27, 1952, and just as I had kept my Wednesday mornings with D. S. Senanayake, on Thursday mornings I call on Sir John as a matter of routine. How was I to face a friend who had been dive-bombed by the newspaper group to which I belonged even while I was working on him to withdraw from a head-on clash with Dudley Senanayake and had succeeded in my confidential assignment?

I telephoned Esmond Wickremesinghe about my predicament. I had no solace in that quarter because he merely explained that when he telephoned me at dawn he had in the hurry forgotten to inform me that the *Ceylon Observer* was running that news adverse to Sir John.

I made up my mind as my own conscience was clear. I would keep my Thursday morning appointment with Sir John as usual.

Between noon on Wednesday and Thursday morning events had moved fast. Dudley Senanayake had been appointed Prime Minister by Lord Soulbury and had chosen his Cabinet leaving the portfolio of Transport and Works unawarded in the hope of offering it to Sir John. That was the news when I went in to the Kandewala home of Sir John on Thursday morning at about 6.30 a.m., memories of Kursu and Pearl Harbour ticking in my brain. There were two visitors there already, a doctor and his wife, and Sir John had not yet come down the stairs.

I have described the scene that followed in an article I contributed anonymously to a book edited by P. Nadesan and entitled "This Man Kotelawala", published in 1956. This is what I wrote.

“One remembers an occasion when for him the whole world had been shattered the day before, when friends had forsaken him, enemies had humiliated him, and in his eyes the sun had not risen that Thursday morning. For once in a long and happy association I saw him come down the stairs unshaven and with almost blood-shot eyes. Two other good friends of his were there, a man and his wife. For nearly five long minutes Sir John shouted his defiance at those who had made him bite the dust, and the picture of his reeling figure brought to my mind a famous newspaper photograph of a swaying bull elephant, the leader of a herd, shot to death even as he charged. The tension was so heavy that the lady visitor sobbed. Fortunately I intervened to say “What is this? You are supposed to be the strong man of our country and you are behaving like an angry school girl!”

“Sir John laughed and ceased his denunciations....”

We sat down to breakfast as on every Thursday morning. In his bitterness he was insisting that he would be leaving the country for all time but I did not wish to argue with him in the presence of the other visitors. In the evening of the same day, I sent, again in Bobby Weerakoon's custody, this letter:

27-3-1952.

My dear Colonel,

There were some facts I wished to place before you this morning but couldn't owing to the company present. I know you will not misunderstand me.

There is not doubt that you have been betrayed by friends who did not have the courage to make you aware of either public opinion of the hour or of their own views. They intrigued behind your back without telling you the truth.

The truth was that overwhelming public opinion was in favour of Dudley. If you were made aware of that you would have been the first man to induce him to bow to public opinion. But provoked by the discovery of intrigue and egged on by false promises and the plaudits of those who have hitched their waggons to your star, you crashed headlong into disillusionment.

Those who really like you and know your worth for the Cause for which the Old Man stood, expect that you will be bold, not in the face of defeat, but in the discovery that you have been let down.

Now is the time not for escape but for a searching of conscience. In realisation of the cause of sorrow you will conquer your disappointment. Please go back even if it be only to spread the gospel of being true and frank to friends—a sterling quality in both my Old Friend and you.

Yours very sincerely,
J.L.

Sir John did change his mind about leaving the country. He accepted the portfolio of Transport and Works in the Dudley Senanayake Cabinet.

The same evening when I wrote the above letter to Sir John I sent a note of congratulations to the new Prime Minister, Dudley Senanayake. In my letter, of which I have no copy, I remember expressing the hope that he would follow the convention maintained by his father and keep Wednesday mornings free to have a weekly chat with me. I have among my papers his reply sent the same evening:

The Temple Trees,
Colombo 3.
27-3-1952.

My dear J.L.,

Thank you very much for your message and letter. Yes, I am glad the old team is back again and I thank you for the part you and Lake House played in achieving this. Of course we must meet on Wednesdays.

Yours Sincerely,
Dudley.

CHAPTER 3

I KEPT my Wednesday mornings with Dudley Senanayake, the new Prime Minister. From that first Wednesday I had the impression that the burden of office weighed heavily on Dudley Senanayake and that here was a young man whom circumstances had thrust into a position in life when he was hardly prepared for it. Dudley Senanayake, the Prime Minister for the second time in March 1960 was quite different to Dudley Senanayake the Prime Minister in 1952. In 1960 he was a leader of mature experience, a man who had tasted both triumph and disaster and knew how to "treat these imposters just the same". In 1952 his best qualification was that he was his father's son and he had been swept into office on the waves of emotion set in motion by the press of Ceylon.

During several of those Wednesday morning breakfast chats, Dudley Senanayake was repeatedly telling me that he did not relish being Prime Minister. My reply was, as repeatedly, in the form of a question "Then who can take your place?" To that his answer was always "Why? J.R.", meaning J. R. Jayawardene, the most astute and able politician of the younger set of the Rightwing in the D. S. Senanayake period I have had dealings with. Not only was he a debator worth listening to but a first-rate tactician whose abilities were acknowledged both by political friends and foes.

Dudley Senanayake as Prime Minister lent heavily on J. R. Jayawardene who was Minister of Finance in his Cabinet. Sir John Kotelawala, the Minister of Transport and Works, still a bitter man, sulked even in the Cabinet room while Cabinet meetings went on. R. G. Senanayake, who is the son of F. R. Senanayake, Dudley Senanayake's uncle, was also a member of the Dudley Senanayake Cabinet. Far from being co-

operative to Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake, R. G. Senanayake was constantly embarrassing his cousin by his relentless political antagonism towards J. R. Jayawardene. Dudley Senanayake's cabinet meetings soon became a nightmare to him. There was Sir John keeping a tight lip and even reported to be seated with averted face. And there was R. G. Senanayake raising difficulties by the very fact that unlike Sir John he kept talking.

Then in September 1952 the simmering trouble with Sir John threatened to boil and flow over, submerging the Cabinet. In August a weekly newsheet entitled "*Trine*" had published in serial form the contents of a document labelled "*Prime Minister's Stakes 1952*" which related the story of intrigue within the government party soon after the death of D. S. Senanayake. The author of "*Prime Minister's Stakes 1952*", was reputed to be Sir John Kotelawala. Obviously the author of such attacks on government personalities could not be allowed to remain in the Cabinet. The document had been in private circulation before the publication in "*Trine*". In fact I had with me the only copy autographed by the author, but more about that "inside story", later.

After the publication in "*Trine*", a columnist raised the issue in a newspaper (not of the Lake House group). At the time this publicity had naturally set tongues wagging in political circles, Sir John Kotelawala was away on an official visit to the U.S.A. Dudley Senanayake, the Prime Minister, had a duty to perform. He had first to make certain that Kotelawala was the author and if so he had to be relieved from Cabinet office.

Those were days of heavy political tension and I am glad that I kept a special record of events. My notes are dated September 3, 1952, September 10, 1952, and September 13, 1952.

September 3, and September 10 were Wednesdays and I have diarised events after keeping my early morning breakfast assignments with Dudley Senanayake at Temple Trees, the official residence of the Prime Minister. It is from those notes that I now draw the facts in continuation of my narration.

Although the Prime Minister's first duty was to question the accused, Sir John, whether he was the author of *Premier Stakes*, the Prime Minister was pressurized by others to send a cable to Sir John through the Ceylon High Commissioner in Washington giving him no option but to submit his resignation from the Cabinet. The Prime Minister's chief advisers on this issue were the Governor-General, Lord Soulbury, and L.M.D. de Silva, at the time Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Lake House group of newspapers. The "inside story" of the events which preceded the despatch of that cable of dismissal is very illuminating. In the absence abroad of Esmond Wickremesinghe, Managing Director of the editorial section of Lake House, it was my function to supervise editorial policy. I had asked all editors to keep off commenting or "taking a line" on the political trouble brewing between Dudley Senanayake and Kotelawala. The reason for my decision was my conviction, the result of my close contact with D. S. Senanayake and his men, that the proverb that blood is thicker than water would be found to be true in regard to the final outcome of their personal quarrels. So I wanted the Lake House Press to avoid the risk of backing either Dudley Senanayake, the Prime Minister, or Sir John Kotelawala, the accused.

The matter was, however, taken out of my hands by the Chairman of the Board of Lake House and I was directed on Tuesday, September 2, 1952, to have an editorial comment on Thursday, September 4, 1952, demanding that the Prime Minister should take action against the person responsible for "*Prime Minister's*

Stakes". I fought a rearguard action the day I was given this direction by the Chairman because I had had more experience in the ways of the ruling set of the time. I canvassed the aid of G. B. S. Gomes, Managing Director of the commercial section of Lake House, to keep this group of newspapers out of the battle between Prime Minister and Minister. Gomes, who as a quickwitted businessman realised that Lake House was not going to receive any benefit by taking sides in this matter, himself tried to keep the newspapers out of the conflict but failed. At the time I did not tell Gomes or anybody else the further information in my possession, which I have recorded in the notes I prepared that September of 1952.

The British Government had made inquiries whether Ceylon would wish to have a representative on the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, the salary of such representative being borne by the Ceylon Government. During my Wednesday morning conversations with the Prime Minister, Dudley Senanayake, I had gathered that Lord Soulbury, the Governor-General, was sponsoring the candidature of L. M. D. de Silva, q.c., Chairman of Lake House, for the Privy Council post. De Silva had been at one time a judge of the Supreme Court. To qualify for the Privy Council post it was recommended that he should be re-appointed to the Supreme Court even for a brief period. Dudley Senanayake was very sensitive about championing the cause of individuals for preferment and from his conversations I learned that he had been resisting the sponsorship of L. M. D. de Silva's claims. But the most reluctant politician can be finally pressurized to give up his opposition, and at the Cabinet meeting of Thursday, August 28, 1952, the proposal to appoint a representative of Ceylon to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council was approved, it being mentioned that L. M. D. de Silva was willing to accept the appointment provided

his remuneration would be that of a judge of the Ceylon Supreme Court and that he would continue to draw in addition the pension that he was already entitled to. L. M. D. de Silva must naturally have been a happy man to know that high office in the Privy Council was coming his way.

This background news was in my possession when I met the Prime Minister the next Wednesday, September 3, 1952. I had in my previous conversations with him urged him not to take direct action against Sir John but to wait till the latter returned from abroad and then question him and ask for an explanation. On Wednesday, September 3, 1952, when I informed Dudley Senanayake that despite my objections Lake House would be writing editorials demanding action against Kotelawala, he said that he knew that already. He also mentioned the fact that on Sunday, August 31, 1952, Lord Soulbury had advised him to take action against Sir John. Lord Soulbury, by the way, had also been harshly criticised in "*Prime Minister's Stakes*".

The *Ceylon Daily News* of September 4, 1952, carried a strongly-worded editorial captioned "Prime Minister's Responsibility". Here are extracts:

"It is now a matter of common knowledge that a document which contains distortions and halftruths regarding recent happenings within the Government is in circulation. There is further a widespread belief that a particular Minister is either the author or the inspirer of this document and no denial has been made by the Minister concerned. Disparaging comments on Government personalities have also appeared in journals known to be published by this particular Minister. There has thus arisen a thoroughly anomalous situation which in the interest of good Government demands immediate clarification. Although some of the matters

raised in the document in question are personal to the Prime Minister and the Minister who is alleged to be the author, the fundamental issue involved in its publication and circulation is one which goes beyond any personal differences and affects the public interest. There can be no doubt that it is neither constitutionally proper nor politically expedient that a Minister or any hired hacks writing in journals reported to be owned by a Minister, should be allowed to disparage the Head of the Government or to indulge in vituperation against his Cabinet colleagues. No party or Cabinet system government can be sustained on such a basis, and it would be thoroughly detrimental to the principles on which democratic government in this country is founded if a precedent were created which would undermine its very foundation."

"This unhappy situation places a grave responsibility on the shoulders of the Prime Minister. It is not inappropriate to recall at this stage that he is generally known to have accepted office against his natural inclinations and to have yielded to the wishes of the people out of a sense of duty. We trust that the same sense of duty will urge the Prime Minister to do whatever is necessary to clear the present anomalous situation in the interest of orderly government, to set at rest uneasiness in the public mind and to silence the current of private gossip and whispering which swells from day to day."

That was the call to action trumpeted in the *Ceylon Daily News* on Thursday, September 4, 1952. The very next day, Friday, September 5, 1952, a cable in cipher was despatched to Sir John Kotelawala, care of the Ceylon Embassy in Washington, stating that the publication of "*Prime Minister's Stakes*" made it necessary for Sir John to resign. The Prime Minister gave me this information on Sunday, September 7, 1952, and he

also added that only two others besides himself were aware of that information. My newspaper sense was naturally excited and I followed this scent to discover that the two others were Sir Oliver Goonetilleke and L. M. D. de Silva. In fact these two had been present at the Prime Minister's Office and had discussed the phraseology to be used in the dismissal order sent by cable. Long after the event one of them told me that the other had even brought with him a hand-written draft for the discussion!

While the official "sacking" order went out in that manner, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, who from the very start of this Cabinet crisis, was keen on bringing about a settlement, confidentially advised Sir John's mother, Mrs. Alice Kotelawala, to despatch a personal cable to her son requesting him to return home immediately. Sir Oliver's long experience in patching up other people's quarrels made him realise that if Dudley Senanayake and Sir John could be made to face each other the conflict could be ironed out.

On Monday September 8, 1952, I had a telephone call from Felix de Silva, the Senior partner of the solicitors' firm of De Silva and Mendis, who said to me that a mutual friend wanted to see me in the afternoon at 2 p.m. at De Silva's home in Turret Road. I asked him who it would be and he gave the telephone over saying "Here he is". I heard a familiar voice with an attractive stammer say: "J. . J. . L. I am meeting you at 2 but after that I haven't met you at 2!" This mysterious air was in keeping with the public tension of the day. But reading my notes, dated September 10, 1952, I see that I personally have been somewhat frivolous in my reply when I said "I haven't met you in my life!" My telephone caller was, of course, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke.

I met Sir Oliver at Felix de Silva's home that afternoon. His request to me was that I should meet Sir John at the Ratmalana aerodrome on Tuesday, September 9, or Wednesday, September 10, and convey to him the confidential message that he should immediately meet the Prime Minister and express regret to the latter and that thereby a face-saving compromise would be made possible. I said that I could not take the message but would have it conveyed which I did through a Lake House friend, K. Shiradhananda, an experienced political reporter, who was well known to the political personalities of the day.

On Wednesday morning, September 10, 1952, I had my usual weekly chat with Dudley Senanayake and I have recorded in the notes I kept my impression that a settlement of the Kotelawala affair could be expected. During the afternoon of that day I received a telephone call from a friend giving me the information that just at that particular minute there were three others in the Prime Minister's office at the Senate building. The three others were Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, L. M. D. de Silva and Kanthiah Vaithianathan, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs. That was another mysterious meeting.

Sir John arrived by the 3.30 p.m. airplane at Ratmalana. A few U.N.P. Youth Leaguers staged a minor demonstration. But he got into his mother's car and after calling at his Kandewala home for a very few minutes where my friend, Shirandhananda, whispered the message on my behalf, Sir John was driven to his mother's home at Horton Place. From there he visited Dudley Senanayake, the Prime Minister, in the latter's Senate building office where there had been a tearful reconciliation under the benign influence of Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, the ace among peace-makers. The same night Sir John in his capacity of Minister of Transport and Works issued an official communique which should

have produced the laugh of the century. The fact that Sir John accepted its contents was funny. The fact that Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake accepted it as an adequate settlement of an issue which had threatened to blow up his Cabinet was funnier. But the funniest feature in the whole episode was how deftly Sir Oliver had mesmerized both contestants. This is what the communique contained:

“I returned to the Island today in order to discuss with the Prime Minister the situation arising from the publication in a newspaper of the document called the *“Prime Minister’s Stakes, 1952.”*”

“I explained to the Prime Minister that I had nothing to do with the publication. I also denied the truth of the statements in this document which are attributed to me. The Prime Minister has accepted my explanation.”

There was more evidence given that night of the truth of the proverb that blood is thicker than water. Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake and Sir John dined together at the house of Sir John’s mother and there had been a post-mortem of the whole episode, Sir John exhibiting his indignation against those who had encouraged the Prime Minister to “take action”.

The last scene in this very illuminating personal drama took place in my home the next day, Thursday, September 17, 1952. Owing to a misunderstanding over a telephoned message which I had given Sir John’s servant on Wednesday night I did not keep my usual Thursday morning engagement at his home. Late on Thursday evening I was talking with a few visitors who had called at home, the subject of the conversation being the startling events of the day before, when suddenly Sir John walked in. The visitors who had been very critical of Sir John’s unexpected retreat from battle recorded in his official communique were

naturally embarrassed by his sudden appearance. I broke the ice by saying to Sir John (according to my notes dated September 13, 1952). "All these people are condemning you. Now kindly answer their questions."

They did not ask questions but, the celebrated raconteur that he was, he told them fascinating stories about the affair that had ended the previous day.

I drew him into a room for a private conversation where in salty army language he condemned those who had taken a hand in inducing the Prime Minister to despatch the dismissal order. I have recorded in my notes that I then reminded Sir John "You should either leave Ceylon or if you are going to be here you should help your kinsman", and also his peppery reply "Of course I'll help him but you tell him not to be misled by that b....Soufury!"

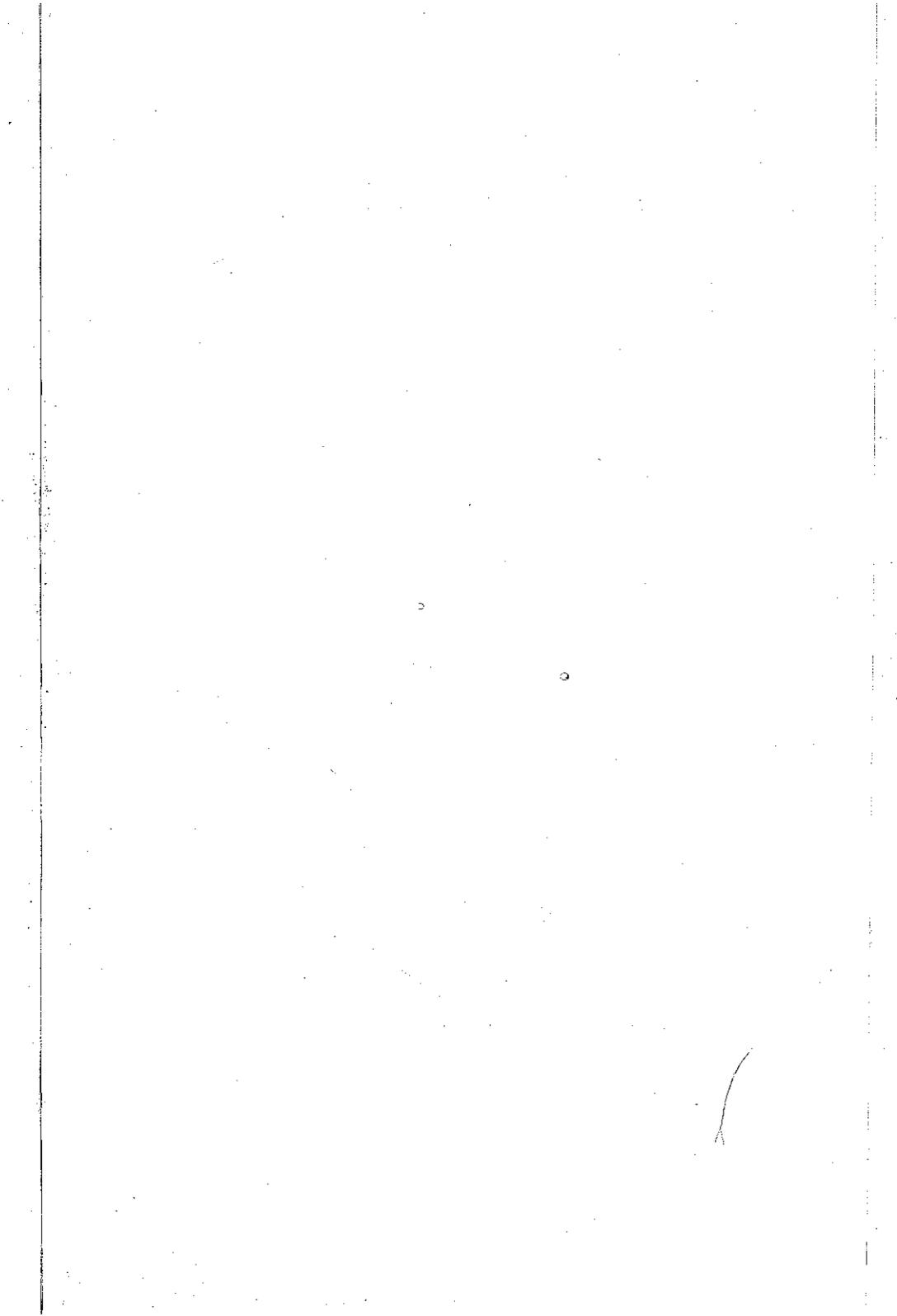
Then I did something which caught him unawares. From a drawer in my room I took out the only signed copy of "*Prime Minister's Stakes*", bearing the author's message "To Egg Hopper" (his code designation of me in memory of Thursday morning egg-hoppers we had eaten together for years) "for his reflections when an old man — J. L. Kotelawala". I tore that hand-written sentence and gave the piece of paper over to him. While parting with the only irrefutable evidence of the authorship of a document which had caused so much public excitement, I said "I don't want to have this responsibility!" He put into his pocket this evidence which if exposed would have meant his political death. The throaty chuckle that escaped him, the only response my action produced, was more eloquent than thanks. Later I discovered that from my home Sir John had visited Sir Oliver at the latter's home at that time in Castle Street, Colombo, and shown his old friend the scrap of paper he got from me and then tore it into shreds. What he said to Sir Oliver I never learned.

My notes from which I have drawn the above material end with a paragraph which I now reproduce without comment but with the thought that the spirit must have moved me when I wrote it:

“I have written these notes really for the information of Esmond Wickremesinghe, (Managing Director, editorial section of Lake House). I trust that having read them he will gain more knowledge in the art of exercising the power that Lake House is, only in the interest of our country, never for self or to please friends. Whether in family matters or in State matters those who by taking sides promote enmities among friends and relatives run grave risks. That to my mind is the moral of ‘*L'affaire Kotelawala*’. And in this particular affair peace between two friends and relatives meant peace and stability in our country, for which Lake House must strive unless Lake House wishes to be destroyed.”

There is an “inside story” also to the conflict between Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake and his cousin, R. G. Senanayake, who was Minister of Commerce and Trade. The questions and the criticism which R. G. Senanayake indulged in at Cabinet meetings continued to grow in volume and threatened to imperil Cabinet solidarity. Unlike in other countries leakages to newspapers of news of discussions at Cabinet meetings is a matter of routine in our country. Foreigners living in this country must be amazed at reports in our newspapers which begin “The Cabinet decided yesterday. . .” News of conflicts and quarrels within the Cabinet Room can have a devastating effect on the Government of the day and I remember Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake making good use of this known newspaper practice to persuade R. G. Senanayake to go on leave abroad.

At the time R. G. Senanayake’s critical questions at Cabinet meetings were causing the Prime Minister





SIR JOHN KOTELAWALA, C.H., K.C.M.G.,
Prime Minister of Ceylon, October 1953 - April 1956.

serious embarrassment, and what worried him most was the possibility of the news of dissension within the Cabinet appearing in the newspapers.

It was not an unknown practice for Prime Ministers to make a polite request of newspapers to refrain from publishing news of discussions at Cabinet meetings. Such a request I remember Dudley Senanayake making of me while giving me the further information that he would settle the problem by persuading his stubborn cousin to go away from the scene. Within a few days the news of R. G. Senanayake leaving for England for health reasons appeared in the Press. Prime Minister Senanayake had played his cards with finesse.

The same technique he adopted when he persuaded a Parliamentary Secretary of his Government to hand in his resignation. There had been a somewhat scandalous report of a complaint made by a working girl of the government radio establishment about a parliamentary secretary's unwelcome attentions. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry in charge of the government radio service had been instructed to hold an official inquiry. I had mentioned to Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake that the news had reached Lake House and that the newspapers were on the scent. One day I had a telephone call from Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake from his Temple Trees residence. He asked me whether I could come there immediately. In reply to a question from me, he said that the Parliamentary Secretary in question was with him and he wanted the Parliamentary Secretary to find out from me what the newspapers had already gathered about the scandal. I naturally jibbed at involving myself too closely in that affair and explained to Dudley Senanayake that it would be inadvisable for me to come to Temple Trees. His next action reminded me of the cleverness of his father in handling men. He continued to question me on what I as a newspaperman had heard of the scandal

—all this while the Parliamentary Secretary was near him at his end of the telephone. The Parliamentary Secretary sent in his resignation.

There is another story connected to the above incident. A few weeks later Dudley Senanayake had called on me at home of an evening and we were discussing politics. All discussions of an evening between friends become more enjoyable with whisky and soda to mellow your views. I called for a trolley of drinks because I knew by past experience that Dudley Senanayake, as a normal healthy young man, did have a drink of an evening. To my surprise he said that he had given up taking whisky and soda. When I asked for the reason he explained that when the official report of the inquiry held into the complaint against the Parliamentary Secretary reached him at Temple Trees late in the evening one day, he had had a couple of drinks himself. The report revealed that the Parliamentary Secretary's un-premeditated escapade had been the sequel to consuming more than what was good for him. So Dudley Senanayake had decided then and there to give up strong drink like whisky.

I could not help wondering at the child-like simplicity of this man. Indeed while he was in office during that short spell, March 26, 1952 to October 12, 1953, he showed himself to be too sensitive a person to rule over both good people as well as knaves, which a Prime Minister is called upon to do.

The pomp of the office of Prime Minister had no attractions for him either. He was truly embarrassed when appearing at big State functions. I remember his own story of what had occurred at a banquet held in London where he had gone for a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. The day before the banquet there had been a rehearsal of the men leading in the ladies, one couple behind the other in formation.

Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake's partner had been a Duchess. Despite the previous day's rehearsal Dudley Senanayake leading his Duchess had, in his excitement, overshot their respective chairs at the table when the Duchess whispered in his ear and said "Mr. Senanayake, I'm afraid we have overshot our places", and back they had to turn, upsetting the march of those behind them.

After the banquet, coming down the stairs, Ceylon's Prime Minister, shy and embarrassed in that distinguished crowd, had missed his footing and lumbered down a couple of steps at a time, knocking heavily against another Commonwealth Prime Minister!

Such stories Dudley Senanayake, the Prime Minister, used to relate with good humour against himself. They were the confessions of a sensitive soul. It was this sensitiveness which in the end induced him to vacate office.

In August 1953, Marxist politicians whipped up their followers to create public disorder as a protest against the decision of the Government to increase the price of rice which was distributed through State-managed co-operatives. Politically the Government's decision was an unwise move but the state of the Government's coffers had compelled this course of action. The Marxist politicians called the public demonstrations which they sponsored a "*hartal*" but that was a misnomer because violence was substituted for the peaceful protest which was the basic feature of the Gandhian idea of the *hartal*.

The civil disturbances and the attacks on government property by roving mobs were so widespread that it was considered necessary to declare a State of Emergency when the military and naval services are called in to aid the police and guns can be brought into action to restore public order. It was the Prime Minister's function to advise the Governor-General to proclaim a State of

Emergency. The over-sensitive Dudley Senanayake of 1953 was, I learned from reliable sources of information, so hesitant about signing the documents advising the proclamation of an Emergency that the Attorney-General, Hema H. Basnayake, who in his capacity as legal adviser to the government was present when the documents were to be signed, had to dip the pen in ink and almost force it into the hands of the reluctant Prime Minister. Obviously Dudley Senanayake's hesitation was born out of his knowledge that a State of Emergency meant guns in action and, therefore, possible loss of human lives. But the anti-social forces which threaten public tranquillity cannot be brought under control by Heads of Governments whose hearts are governed by the spirit of "*Ahimsa*" alone. Probably Basnayake, the Attorney-General of the day, who is known to be a most devout Buddhist himself and also a strict vegetarian because of the religion which he practices, realised the truth I state in the preceding paragraph, and he must have felt that advice to declare a State of Emergency at the moment was as much a duty of the Attorney-General as it was the duty of Hema H. Basnayake to be true to the Buddhist principle of "*Ahimsa*". This is again an "inside story" of the fact that Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake of 1952 to 1953 was unprepared to shoulder the secular responsibilities as Head of the Government. He was both prepared and well equipped in 1960 when he became Prime Minister for the second time.

The State of Emergency, declared on the advice of reluctant Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake was short-lived, from August 8, 1953 to August 20, 1953. A few persons did lose their lives as a result of the Government's efforts to quell disturbances by the use of the armed services. Marxist politicians then started to make use of those shootings to berate Dudley Senanayake and his Government in Parliament.

The too sensitive Prime Minister was obviously over-worried by the blame attached to him personally by his Marxist opponents as a pure political tactic. Another factor that was worrying him greatly was the proposed visit of Queen Elizabeth of England and Ceylon to this Dominion. It was known in political circles that Lord Soulbury, the Governor-General, was keen on the Queen's visit. The Prime Minister on the contrary was diffident about it after the "*hartal*" experience. He feared Marxist demonstrations against the Queen while she was in this country. He tried hard to influence Lord Soulbury to beg of the Queen to postpone her visit. But one day he was informed at Queen's House that the proposed visit to Ceylon which was one item in the Queen's programme overseas had already been arranged. That information was quite a shock to Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake as I then gathered from reliable sources of information.

My Wednesday morning breakfast engagements with the Prime Minister had been getting more and more irregular, not because I for my part did not want them. But I followed the crowded events of Dudley Senanayake's last phase at the end of September and the beginning of October, 1953, from other vantage points of observation.

Under this heavy mental stress he developed an old stomach ailment which had troubled him even in his student days when nervous tension preceded examinations. Although the public also realised from the newspaper reports that the Prime Minister was not fit enough to carry on the heavy burden of office he hesitated a little too long to make a decision. He decided on resignation on October 12, 1953, and the widest public sympathy was extended to him in his hour of disappointment, for who is the man who would not be disappointed at being compelled by ill-health to give up the responsibilities of leading a country? The people's

imagination was also captured by the action of a man who had given up a throne, whatever the reason, because few persons renounce position and power. The day after Dudley Senanayake's resignation, his former Permanent Secretary, Sir Kanthiah Vaithianathan, writing anonymously in the *Ceylon Daily News*, had these opening paragraphs in an article in praise of his Chief:*

“How many know what qualities he possessed of head and heart, rare in the world and rarer than one in a million? A smaller man might have been tempted to cling to office. Mr. Dudley Senanayake, as a Prime Minister and as a man, was not made of common stuff. Here was a man who felt no elation at sitting at the head of the Cabinet table, living in a large mansion or riding in a Rolls-Royce. On the contrary he preferred a much less exalted grade of everything which was thrust on him and which others thought were the right things for him to do in his position.”

During the last few weeks of Dudley Senanayake's regime it was evident that on his inevitable resignation, Sir John Kotelawala would be appointed Prime Minister and that such a recommendation would be made by the out-going Prime Minister as a matter of course. Realising this as a political commentator, I was keen on bringing Sir John and J. R. Jayawardene closer to each other as friends because one knew that Jayawardene's abilities and loyal co-operation would be an essential requirement for the success of Sir John's government. J. R. Jayawardene's closeness to Dudley Senanayake during the latter's term of office was not a fact that Sir John had relished although Jayawardene was merely performing his duty by his Chief, loyally and with the efficiency for which Jayawardene is now celebrated even among

* Sir Kanthiah has given permission to disclose his name.

his political opponents. Jayawardene on his part had no reason to be delighted with Sir John's caustic comments about him in "*Prime Minister's Stakes*".

Against this background it was not an easy task to bring these two closer in friendship but I was determined to see it done. Of course, each of them was wise enough to realise the mutual benefits that would flow from my effort and both readily agreed to spend an evening together. The venue of the meeting was the home of Esmond Wickremesinghe. It was a good experience to watch two strong personalities of different temperaments talk it out between themselves while I myself did a little ironing of the differences. I remember Sir John roaring at times while J. R. Jayawardene smiled benignly, puffing at an unaccustomed cigarette and holding it awkwardly as if it was a Jaffna cigar. The discussion was fruitful in that it exposed the nefarious activities of some persons who had been trying to sponsor a contest between Sir John and Jayawardene in the event of Dudley Senanayake's resignation. After plenty of examination and cross-examination the meeting ended happily and at my suggestion they shook hands to symbolise peace and mutual confidence.

CHAPTER 4

SIR JOHN KOTELAWALA was called upon to form a new government on October 12, 1953, the day that Dudley Senanayake resigned. I produced a pen-picture of the new Prime Minister in the *Ceylon Daily News* of October 13, 1953. Maintaining the anonymity in which tradition D. R. Wijewardene had trained his old newspapermen I used the initials E. H. (the private Egg-Hopper code between Kotelawala and myself) in place of my own initials. The headlines over the article stated "An Intimate Pen-Portrait of the New Prime Minister. Courage, a ruthless tongue, and a lively sense of humour."

Here are a few illuminating extracts:

"So the Old Man's lieutenant is in the saddle now. He could do no better than follow in the footsteps of his Chief who governed a country justly and with courage. Within recent times there has been in the democratic camp, among those who do not believe in Revolution, a definite swing in favour of Kotelawala. Even those who looked upon him at one time as a 'dangerous man' now instinctively mention his name as the most suitable to steer the ship of State.

"Therefore he starts off on his new role with a great deal of public goodwill on his side. But let him be careful of two things — that ruthless tongue of his which is both his weakness and his strength, and the gathering around him of assorted characters. To his real friends who upbraid him about his tongue he is known to have retorted that he is not willing to cut that or any other part of his anatomy. That may be one of these Kotelawala 'bon mots'. But as Prime Minister of a country a man has to undergo some penance at least. It will be penance also to

keep at a distance those vultures who hover round men in the seats of political power. True 'nobody great or small can be ruined except by his own hand'. But in a small country like Ceylon you cannot blame the people if they pass judgement on their elected representatives by the company the latter keep."

In retrospect, surveying the period October 12, 1953, to April 12, 1956, I would submit that my pen-portrait was both intimate and fair. With the frightening memories of the violent "*hartal*" — a contradiction of terms — still fresh in the minds of the law-abiding sections of the people, Sir John "steered the ship of State" courageously and well and lawless elements which had reared their heads crept back into their anthills. On the other hand, like a medieval Pope who on his elevation to his high office is reported to have said "Now that we have the papacy let us enjoy it", Sir John not only provided public evidence of enjoyment but let the people see that he would *not* 'keep at a distance those vultures who hover round men in the seats of political power'. Very early in his regime he showed how to handle Communist trouble-makers with a strong arm. He assured the Governor General, Lord Soulbury, that he could guarantee that nothing untoward would happen during the Queen's visit to Ceylon and he personally supervised police precautions. There was the story which Sir John himself related in his best raconteur style that when Dr. N. M. Perera, the Sama Samajist (Trotskyist) leader called on him to find out whether orders had been given to the Police to take into custody anybody who demonstrated against the Queen his reply had been "Oh! no! orders have been given to take demonstrators to hospital first!" Indeed his reputation for ability to maintain law and order increased heavily during the successful tours of the Queen all over the country.

It was during that period too that he told me a story which explained how uninhibited he was even in the presence of the most august personalities. One Thursday morning while the Queen had won the hearts of the Ceylonese crowds I asked Sir John about the form of address one used in conversation with Her Majesty and whether he followed the rules given in the books on the subject — “Your Majesty” a couple of times and then “Maam”.

“Well,” he said, “I use ‘Your Majesty’ a couple of times. But sometimes I say ‘I say, Mum.’” Even the Queen must like Prime Ministers who are uninhibited like that, and it came to be known that this Queen got on famously with this Prime Minister of hers.

This attitude of his was neither one of disrespect nor a pose. It was just that he was never overpowered by other personalities nor was he conscious of his own personality. In January, 1954, when he had led a team of Ministers and officials to India to start discussions with the Prime Minister of India on the unsolved Indo-Ceylon problem of persons of Indian ancestry living in Ceylon he staggered the team of Indian officials by suddenly terminating the polite exchanges between Pundit Nehru and himself by coming to business and saying “I say, Nehru what about this Indo-Ceylon problem?” Nehru it was said looked delighted by this rare informality of his colleague from Ceylon but one can forgive the very correct Indian civil servants being dumbfounded by this informal form of address towards their world-famous chief.

Nehru and Kotelawala got along very well together. One Indo-Ceylon agreement was signed in January 1954 and another in October of that year when Sir John included in that second team from Ceylon both S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and Dudley Senanayake.

At the Bandung Afro-Asian conference Sir John's name hit the headlines of the world press when he clashed with the celebrated Communist personality, Chou En'lai. No aura of power and personality in others ever seemed to bother Prime Minister Kotelawala.

I can recall his attitude towards Lord Soulbury, the Governor-General, as distinguished and learned a Governor-General the Commonwealth has known. Prime Minister Kotelawala had made up his mind to replace Lord Soulbury with the first Ceylonese Governor-General. During one of my Thursday morning chats with him he mentioned to me "confidentially" that he had Sir Tikiri Banda Panabokke in mind as the successor to Lord Soulbury. Apparently he had made discreet inquiries from Panabokke. I mentioned this piece of information, again confidentially, to Esmond Wickremesinghe who I knew did not breathe a word about it himself to anybody. You can imagine my consternation when the *Ceylon Observer* suddenly broke the news of the possibility that Panabokke might be appointed Governor-General in succession to Soulbury.

Late that evening Sir John suddenly visited my home shouting his imprecations on the score that I had not kept my secret. I assured him that I had and urged that he should tell me the name of anybody else with whom he had shared that secret. With some reluctance he admitted that he had mentioned his intentions to C. C. Desai, High Commissioner for India in Ceylon, who I knew was his intimate friend. I asked him whether anything had happened as a result of the publication. The worst in fact had happened. Lord Soulbury on seeing the day's "*Ceylon Observer*" had telephoned Sir John at Temple Trees and had him drawn out of a conference room and questioned him about the news which Sir John himself had not seen up to then. When

asked whether there was any truth in the news report Sir John had readily answered "Of course not, Sir. These are the usual newspaper lies!"

It was a quick way out of an awkward situation. If I am well informed about those matters, as I think I am, Sir John was naturally never forgiven by Sir Tikiri Banda Panabokke.

On my side although Sir John had accepted my assurance, I held an investigation into the publication in the *Ceylon Observer*, at least to salve my conscience. Newspaper editors are very cagey about divulging their sources even to those higher up in the hierarchy of their organisation, specially if the editors know that the news is accurate. So with many years of experience behind me I taxed Tarzie Vittachi, then Editor of the *Ceylon Observer* and a brilliant newspaperman to boot, with publishing wrong and thoroughly mischievous news. Vittachi in his defence gave me an amazing bit of information. C. C. Desai, a good friend of his too, had excited his news-sense by telling him in a telephone conversation that Desai had a wonderful "scoop" to give Vittachi. And the Panabokke story had been the "scoop".

I have often wondered whether Desai, who was known to take too active an interest in the internal politics of the country where he was an envoy (this was later made the excuse to demand his transfer out of Ceylon), did not relish seeing installed as Governor-General a representative of the Kandyans who were the most affected by the presence of the Indians in the Kandyan provinces. If that was Desai's view it was an adroit move he had made to plant the Panabokke story in the Press because it was inevitable that publicity at that stage would spike Sir John's proposal.

Prime Minister Kotelawala was involved in another exciting newspaper imbroglio and I found myself in the

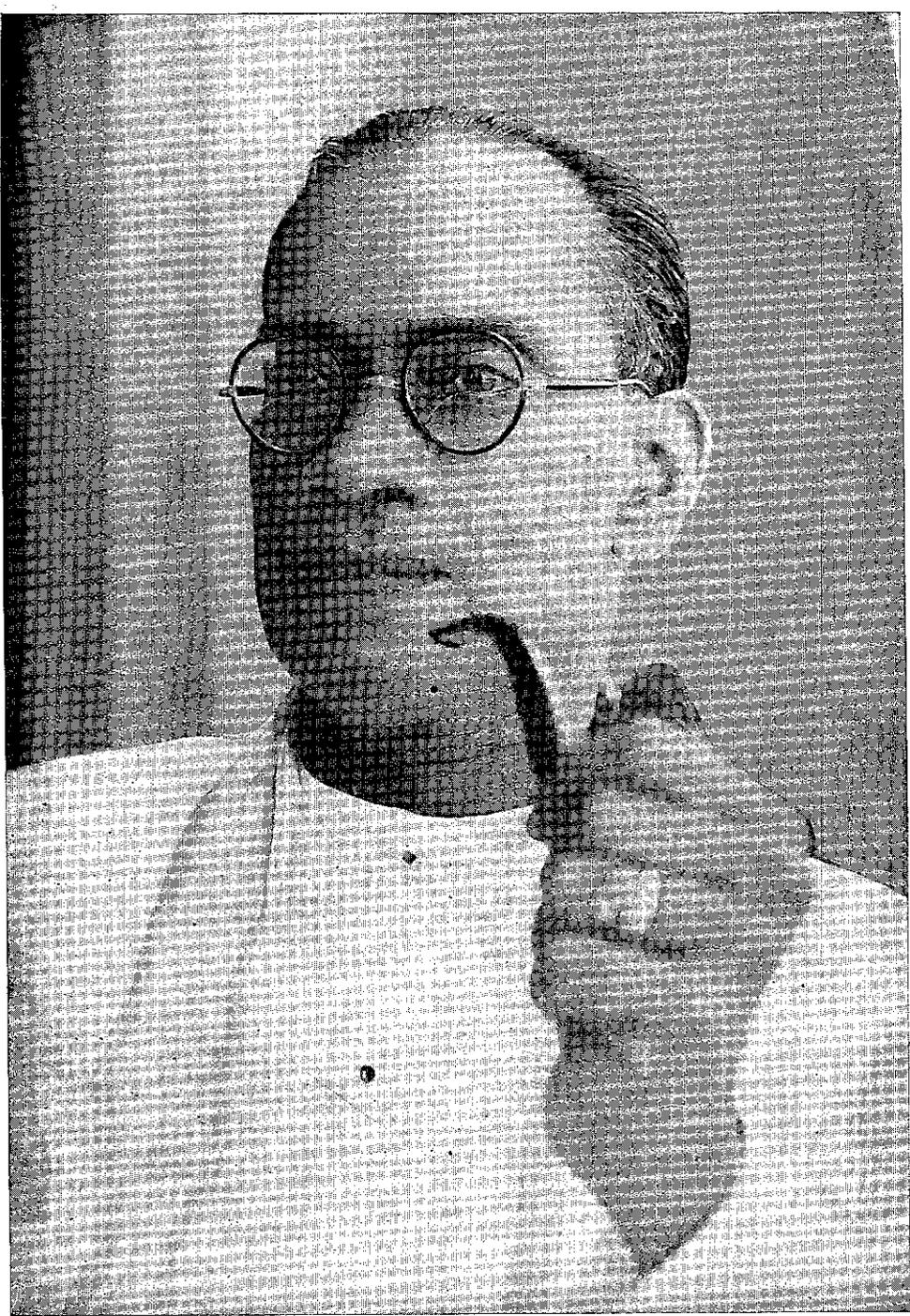
thick of it. One day he telephoned me the information that too many of our public officials were ready to accept or were actively canvassing for American scholarships to go on free trips to the U.S. He mentioned the specific case of a member of the judiciary who had been selected for such a scholarship and suggested that some comment in the newspapers would be of value in creating public opinion against what he himself described as "ping-bath-karaya" (scrounging around for free meals) habits. I wrote a discreet paragraph in the next Political Correspondent's column of September 17, 1955, which column was produced by me at the time.

A few days later there arrived a demand for an apology, not addressed as customarily to the Company but to the then Chairman of the Board of Directors, J. A. Martensz. The Managing Director of the editorial section, Esmond Wickremesinghe, was abroad at the time and organising the defence of what appeared would be a libel action against Lake House became my duty. I informed Prime Minister Kotelawala of the threatening storm. He gave me courage by emphasizing that we should "fight to the last" and that he would stand by me. Unfortunately he left Ceylon on an official visit to the Australian Government soon after, on October 25, 1955. But before he left Ceylon he gave me a wonderful "secret weapon" to use if necessary. That was a copy of a letter sent by the then Governor-General, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, to the Minister of Justice, E. B. Wickremanayake, informing the Minister that he was returning a written application for the office of Attorney-General by a member of the judiciary "as it is not the practice for him to entertain written applications for this office" — an open snub to the applicant. I kept the "secret weapon" in safe custody.

In Esmond Wickremesinghe's absence I had to arrange a consultation with the lawyers who appear for Lake House in such matters. N. E. Weerasooriya, Queen's

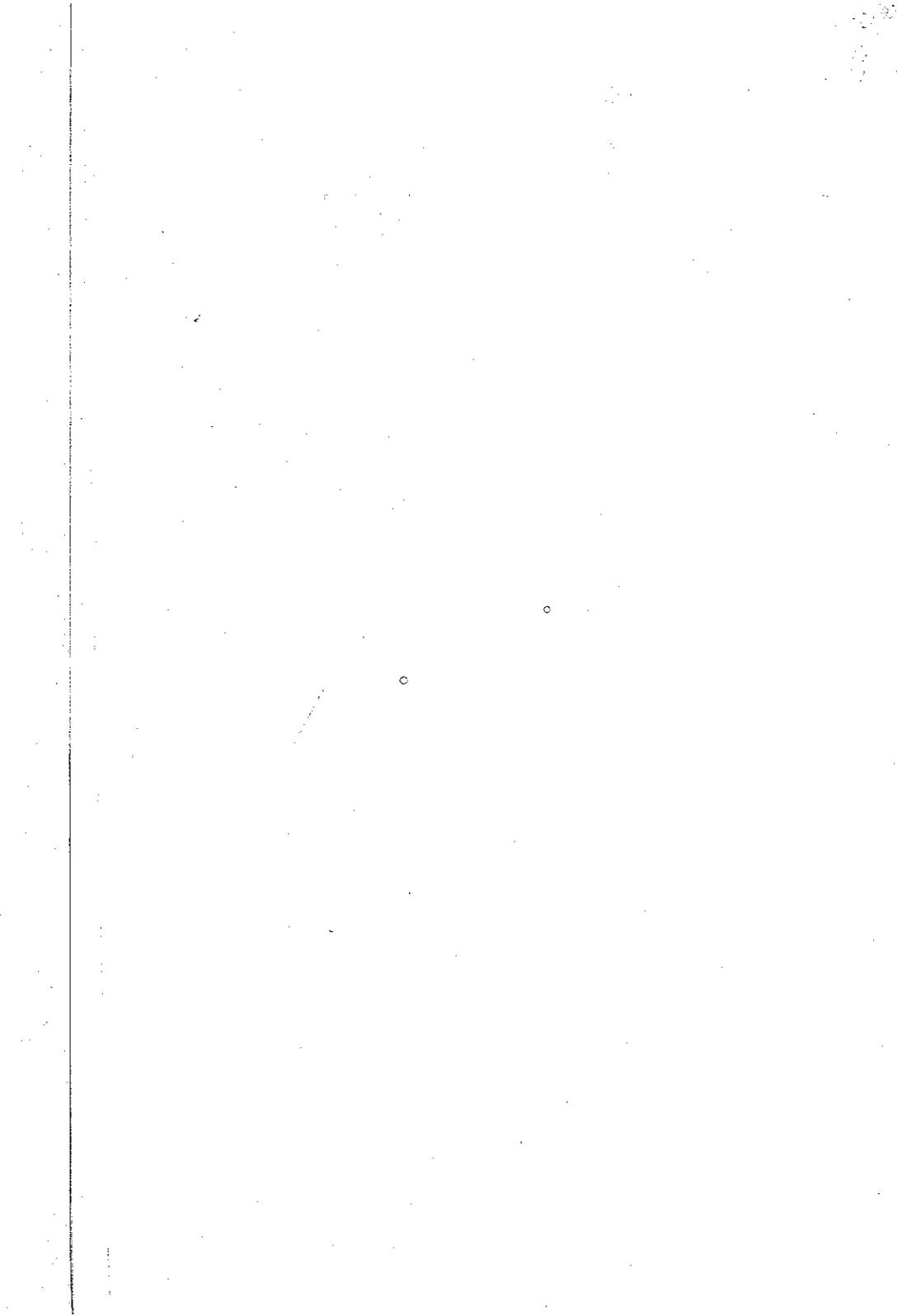
Counsel, and G.H. Samarawickreme, Advocate, who were retained in the first place to give Lake House an opinion whether the paragraph complained of was libellous or not. I was somewhat surprised to find both J. A. Martensz, the Chairman of the Board of Directors, and his brother, David Martensz, who was also on the Board and was at the same time the head of a firm of solicitors, present at our consultation. I said all I had to say about the accuracy of the information I had had with me before writing the paragraph. I also made it clear that any information available in government offices and necessary for our defence could be got by me. N. E. Weerasooriya, one of the most astute brains of the Ceylon Bar, at first showed himself very confident about the success of our defence if the matter was taken to court by the complainant. But I could not blame Weerasooriya for executing a strategic retreat when he, just as much as junior counsel and myself, felt that the Martensz brothers viewed the paragraph as offensive and libellous.

The matter dragged on till the beginning of November, 1955, myself expressing the view that the newspaper, in this case the "*Ceylon Daily News*", should fight it out in court and the Chairman, J. A. Martensz, trying to persuade me to publish an apology to "the member of the judiciary". I was by then becoming more and more exasperated because being a D. R. Wijewardene-trained newspaperman I was very much averse to newspapermen being pressurized to surrender when their case was sound. I was, however, greatly handicapped by the absence of Esmond Wickremesinghe, the Managing Director. On Monday October 31, 1955, I was at last brought to bay. I was summoned to the Chairman's flat but before I went in there I appealed to two others on the directorate, G.B.S. Gomes, a Managing Director, and Lal C. Gooneratne, a Director, to help me to uphold the tradition that the Press must oppose intimi-



S. W. R. D. BANDARANAIKE

former Leader of the Opposition in the House of Representatives who won at the General Election of 1956 to become Prime Minister of Ceylon, April 1956 - September 1959.



dation. Both of them were also present at the Chairman's flat. When I got there G. B. S. Gomes, the senior of the two, tried hard to support my opposition to surrender. But David Martensz, the Chairman's brother, who was present took a view contrary to mine. Under pressure I had to capitulate because mine was a fight for a principle against the powers controlling Lake House at the time, although both J. A. Martensz and his brother, David Martensz, were the "outsiders" in the directorate presiding over the destinies of a national asset that D. R. Wijewardene had left behind.

The decision was to publish an apology to the member of the judiciary in the issue of the *Ceylon Daily News* of Saturday, November 5, 1955. In despair I searched for aid from Esmond Wickremesinghe who was then in Canberra, Australia, where he had flown from England. I had already written several air-mail letters to him explaining the whole situation and my own predicament. Prime Minister Kotelawala was also still in Australia and I knew that they were bound to meet each other. Using my code name for Kotelawala, namely, "Thursday", the day of the week on which traditionally we met for breakfast chats, and using the term "Holland" to signify the Martensz brothers, I despatched on Tuesday, November 1, 1955, a personal cable, somewhat lyrically worded, I confess now:

"Wickremesinghe,
c/o Ceylon High Commission,
Canberra, Australia.

"Reference letters regret report to my managing director citadel fell to holland stop last stand george¹ lal² self failed stop tell thursday am in sackcloth "remembering fight instructions."

I-11-55.

1. G. B. S. Gomes

2. Lal C. Gooneratne

In a cable from Canberra, dated November 3, 1955, Esmond Wickremesinghe sent me this cable:

“Have cabled aubrey (J. A. Martensz) asking no apology be given....Esmond”.

Then on November 5, 1955, the day on which the apology was published, I received the following cable from Prime Minister Kotelawala from Sidney where he had heard the news:

“Have cabled aubrey martensz the following please withhold any action regarding affair till I return as I know something about it.”

On the same day, November 5, 1955, I received this distressing cable from Esmond Wickremesinghe, who was yet in Canberra:

“It breaks my heart as well as thursdays on tragedy stop he cabled holland asking no action be taken pending his return.”

These messages of comfort and sympathy had come too late to save a newspaperman who was fighting for the freedom of the Press within the organisation to which he belonged. But I see from my old papers that I have despatched to him at Canberra on November 8, 1955, a final cable containing my sentiments to Esmond Wickremesinghe, the Managing Director, who had tried hard to come to the rescue of Lake House:

“Lights of lake house were going out till yours et thursdays all cables reached and delivered though after capitulation.”

On the same day, November 8, 1955 I unloaded the “secret weapon” left with me by the Prime Minister. It was front page news, headlined “Governor-General

Returns Application for office of A.G." There was plenty of excitement in the Law Courts at Hulstsdorp that morning because it was startling news to read that a member of the judiciary had applied through the Minister of Justice for the post of Attorney-General and that the Governor-General had curtly returned the application, pointing out that the appointment was one that is made under the provisions of the Ceylon (Constitution and Independence) Orders in Council 1946 and 1947 on the advice of the Prime Minister "who would no doubt tender such advice after due consideration of all those who are eligible for that office."

The spirit of D. R. Wijewardene, the founder of the Lake House Press, must have been appeased by the fact that his organisation had fought back in defeat.

The Governor-General in a telephone conversation told me of an interesting sequel to the publication of that startling news. The Minister of Justice, he said, had telephoned him to inquire how that confidential information could have leaked to the Press. The Governor-General in reply had said that he wished to ask the same question of his Minister of Justice. I wonder whether E. B. Wickremanayake, the Minister of Justice, ever guessed that Prime Minister Kotelawala had stood by a friend and gifted him with a "secret weapon" secured from the files of Queen's House.

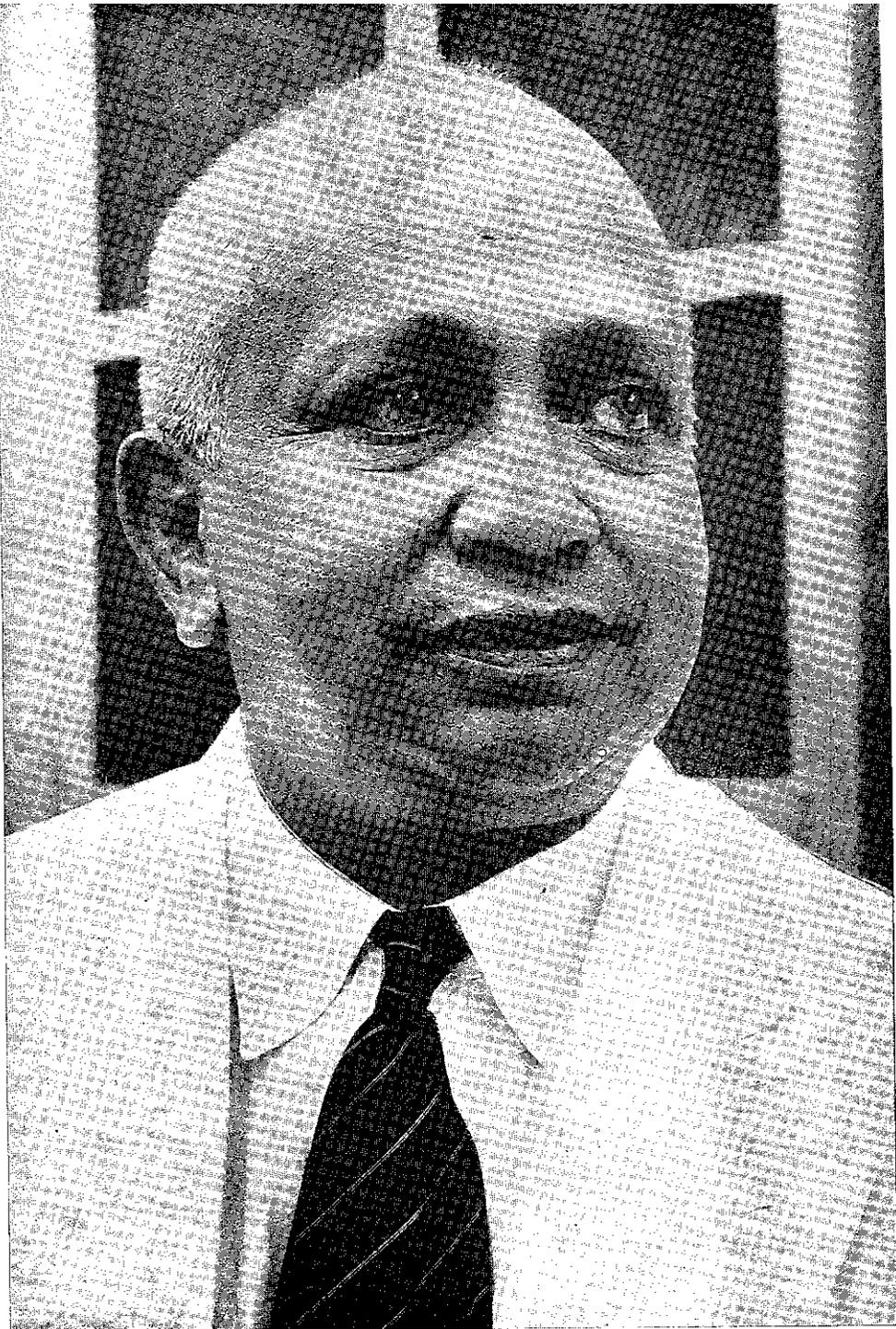
Sir Oliver Goonetilleke on his part could deny nothing to Prime Minister Kotelawala because Sir Oliver's elevation to the post of Governor-General was due entirely to Sir John. I remember the Thursday morning in the beautiful gardens of Sir John's home at Kandewala when he first mentioned his intention to recommend that Sir Oliver Goonetilleke should take over from Lord Soulbury. Sir John asked me to keep the information confidential, to relay it only to Esmond Wickremesinghe and to ask him for newspaper

backing to prepare the public for such an event. To me the proposal sounded a fantastic one as at that time Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, despite his past services to his country, was not *persona grata* with the government parliamentary group. He was also a most unpopular figure in the eyes of the majority of the populace. I told Sir John so.

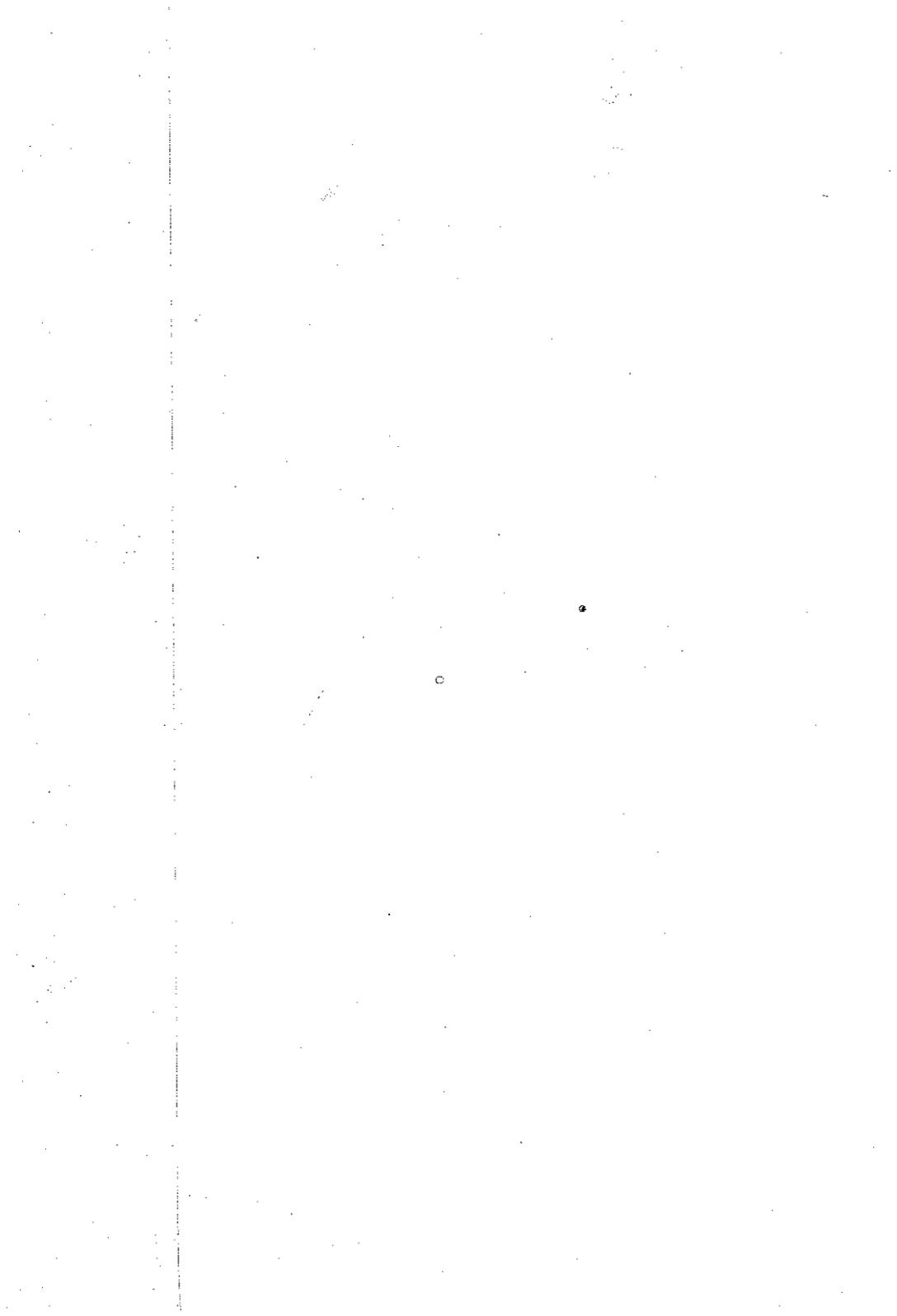
I can recall my saying quite bluntly "You will be committing suicide". This appeared to enrage him and we were walking past his stables when he raised his voice in defence of Sir Oliver Goonetilleke. He recalled the valuable services that Sir Oliver had rendered to Ceylon. He had tried, he pointed out, to enable Sir Oliver who was a Cabinet Minister in the Senate to appear in the House of Representatives during debates when necessary but the Government parliamentary group had rejected an amendment to the Constitution to make such a procedure legal. A Ceylonese had to take over as Governor-General and there was no better man in the context of the time than Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, said Sir John with a great deal of vehemence. I remember my reply "Well, you are running the government, we can only help. I will certainly tell Esmond and and we will start making O.E.G. into a virtuous man!"

For the next Saturday and the two Saturdays following the Political Correspondent's column of the Lake House Press reminded its large readership of the great services rendered by Sir Oliver Goonetilleke to his country. By the time the news of the forthcoming appointment of the first Ceylonese Governor-General broke at least the politically conscious sections of the people were not surprised.

It was amusing to note how during his first few months at Queen's House Sir Oliver himself was very wary of appearing at public ceremonials because as an old campaigner he himself would have realised



SIR OLIVER GOONETILLEKE, K.C.M.G.,
Governor General of Ceylon 1954.



that both the government parliamentary party and large sections of the public did not look upon him as a popular idol. He also knew how vulgarly Ceylon crowds exhibit their disfavour by hooting and jeering. So he always took the precaution of commanding his Prime Minister, Sir John, to be on the site at any public ceremony which Sir Oliver had to attend and Sir John had to be there at least ten minutes earlier than the time of arrival of the Governor-General. To the Governor-General the presence of Sir John was some kind of insulation against catcalls from crowds.

As far as our country was concerned Sir John's decision to send Sir Oliver to Queen's House proved extremely beneficial. He gave of his wealth of experience in statecraft not only to Sir John, his sponsor, but to successive Prime Ministers. The part Sir Oliver played in 1958 when his firm direction of Emergency Rule from Queen's House saved this country from a holocaust of murder, looting and rape, thereby saving the regime of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, was in itself justification that Sir Oliver's appointment as Governor-General was a wise move. From that point of view I had been wrong when I protested that day in the Kandewala gardens after hearing of Sir John's intentions to recommend Sir Oliver to take over from Lord Soulbury. But I have often recalled the instinctive warning which escaped from my mouth that Thursday morning "You will be committing suicide". For these were prophetic words as far as Prime Minister Kotelawala was concerned, and I now record the inside story of how that prophecy came true.

At Esmond Wickremesinghe's request I had asked Sir John to call at Wickremesinghe's home one night late in the year 1955 to allow us to learn something of Ceylon's foreign policy of the time. Having got to know of this engagement Governor-General Sir Oliver Goonetilleke himself suddenly appeared on the scene. Esmond

Wickremesinghe at that time had already proved himself to be an able adviser on foreign affairs, a subject which he was constantly following in foreign newspapers and journals. In fact Ceylon's election in 1955 as a member of the United Nations Organisation was in large measure due to the services he had rendered the Kotelawala Government during his visit to the U.S. earlier in 1955 as Envoy Extraordinary of the Prime Minister of Ceylon of the day. On that visit he had been of invaluable help to the Permanent Representative, R. S. S. Gunewardene, in lobbying support for the election of Ceylon as a member of the United Nations Organisation.

It was with this background of knowledge of international affairs that Esmond Wickremesinghe on this particular night in his home gave the three of us — Sir John, Sir Oliver and myself — a learned dissertation on Far Eastern Affairs which, I am quite certain, sounded like Greek or Elu Pali to Prime Minister Kotelawala. It did to me.

I remember Esmond Wickremesinghe mentioning Dien Bien Phu, the location in Indo-China which had been in the news and which persons like myself somewhat ignorant of foreign affairs could recall because of the peculiarity of the name. When Wickremesinghe ceased speaking it was Sir Oliver who wished to take up the threads of this learned discussion: Sir John was beyond his depth and was silent. But he broke his silence and rocked with laughter when foreign affairs expert, Sir Oliver, commenting on Esmond Wickremesinghe's assessment talked of Panmunjom in Korea and not of Dien Bien Phu!

However, we left foreign affairs aside and suddenly got on to local politics. It was then that Sir Oliver drew from the air, as it were, an idea and, playing with it as a magician plays with billiards balls, expressed the

view that Prime Minister Kotelawala would do well to have a snap general election. The Kotelawala Government had another two years' life in store. It had been formed in October 1953, and according to constitutional requirements would end in 1958. But here was Sir Oliver producing arguments for an early general election. Two of his arguments I can recall. *The Buddha Jayanti* was being celebrated — the anniversary of the introduction of Buddhism into Ceylon 2,500 years ago. Sir Oliver pointed out that in their appeal to the electorate Sir John and his followers could say, "Send us in and we will organise the Buddha Jayanti celebrations as it should be done." His other argument was that Dudley Senanayake, the former United National Party stalwart, was known to be organising a Prohibition Crusade which could be embarrassing to the government of the day, and so let Sir John go to the polls before the prohibition issue became a menace.

Sir John himself did not comment on Sir Oliver's advice but I remember raising the question why he should seek a general election when he had nearly two years more to be in office during which time so much could be done. When the discussion broke up late at night I was given a ride home in Sir John's car and on the way I asked him what Sir Oliver's idea was in advising an unduly early general election. In reply he pooh-poohed Sir Oliver's advice and in his characteristic language said "That.....is frightened about his place at Queen's House."

Accepting that as the Prime Minister's final decision I informed Esmond Wickremesinghe the next day that Sir Oliver's idea of an early general election need not be taken seriously. But three weeks did not pass by, and during those weeks the Prime Minister, in keeping with a convention started by Lord Soulbury and D. S. Senanayake, met the Governor-General at lunch at Queen's House every Wednesday, when Sir John

himself was convinced that a general election before the due time would be to the benefit of his government. His able advisers like J. R. Jayawardene were definitely opposed to such an early election. But the Prime Minister who has the last word in these matters had his way. The general election was announced and later held. The Kotelawala government was swept out of power by the verdict of the people. That is why sometimes of an evening when I recall the events of the past which I have personally seen or heard of I wonder what made me say to Sir John "You will be committing suicide" when he first informed me of his intention to recommend the appointment of Sir Oliver as Governor-General. This, of course, is no accusation of bad faith against Sir Oliver Goonetilleke. His advice to have an early election must have been given in all good faith, in the interests as he thought then of his friend and patron, Sir John Kotelawala. After all Sir Oliver's waggon was then hitched to the Kotelawala star and if that constellation fell there was the risk of his own destruction. I am definitely of the opinion that there was no bad faith: it was a costly error of judgment by the most experienced judge of public opinion in his age.

Despite the legend of the "Strong Man" that has grown round Sir John Kotelawala he was like wax in the hands of those whose loyalty he trusted. Both the Prime Ministers who had preceded him and he himself had been accepted as leaders of a country who believed in the hypothesis that Ceylon belonged to all the communities living here — Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher — and to the followers of the different religions practised here — Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and the Islamic faith. In a land of different communities and different religions D. S. Senanayake, Dudley Senanayake and Kotelawala had, therefore, been acknowledged as just men by the minorities.

In all my own political commentaries in the Press I had myself portrayed these three as just to all communities and to the various creeds, although the three of them belonged to the majority community and professed the faith of the majority of the people.

A new trend made its impact in the last quarter of 1955. It was known that S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, Leader of the Opposition in the House of Representatives, was campaigning to make Sinhalese the official language of the country and thereby win the support of the majority community at the next general election for the Sri Lanka Freedom Party which he had formed when he left the United National Party. The United National Party of which Sir John was the President had no such discriminatory language policy.

On Sunday, October 23, 1955, I came home late in the night to discover that Sir John had telephoned me. He was due to leave for Australia on October 25. I got him on the telephone and wished to know why he had called. He rattled off information which stunned me for the moment. His party, he said, would support a motion to be introduced at their annual sessions in Kelaniya in December to the effect that Sinhalese should be made the official language of the country. D. C. W. Kannangara, M.P. for Panadure, would be the mover and Anandatissa de Alwis the seconder. By passing such a resolution the United National Party, he explained, would spike the guns of the S.L.F.P. opposition.

This was an amazing change of policy, and I reminded Sir John that his two predecessors in office, D. S. Senanayake and Dudley Senanayake, and he himself had been "built up" on the propaganda that they had never discriminated between communities and creeds. He brushed aside my reminders and emphasized that

his party could not hope to win the next general election unless they forestalled Bandaranaike's 'Sinhala only' appeal.

I asked him what made him change his views. He said he had had two visitors for dinner who had made it clear to him that the U.N.P. had to change its language policy if they desired to win at the next general election. I pressed for their names and he said they were J. R. Jayawardene and Sir Ukwatte Jayasundara.

The following day's *Ceylon Observer* and the *Ceylon Daily News* of the next day, Tuesday, October 25, 1955, carried the news. Prime Minister Kotelawala left on his Australian visit on Tuesday afternoon.

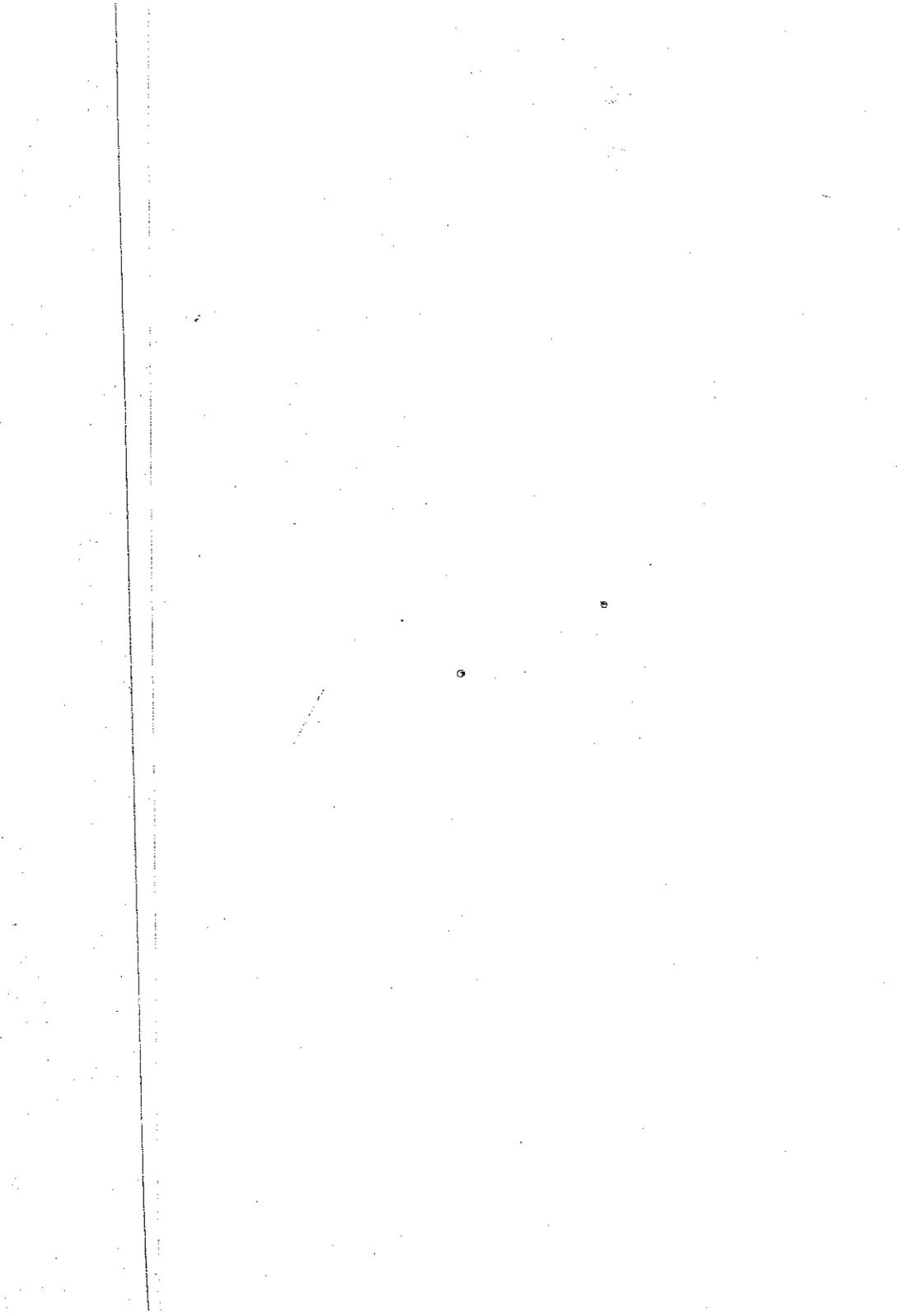
During this month Esmond Wickremesinghe himself was abroad as I have recorded earlier in this book. Lake House had in the past supported the D. S. Senanayake policy-line of no discrimination on grounds of language or religion. In view of that traditional Lake House policy and in the absence of the Managing Director who supervised editorial policy, I asked the Editors of Lake House papers to withhold comment on the governing party's change of language policy until the return of Esmond Wickremesinghe from abroad, but directed that all news of public meetings on the language question should be published.

By the end of November 1955, both Prime Minister Kotelawala and Esmond Wickremesinghe were back in the country. The latter asked me to arrange a meeting with Sir John so that Lake House could get the "inside story" of the government's intentions concerning the language policy. That was a historic meeting.

In view of the tensions in the country over the language question I felt that there should be secrecy at such a meeting. Sir John expressed a desire to have J. R. Jayawardene also at the discussion. The four of us,



J. R. JAYAWARDENE, M.P.,
a United National Party stalwart.



Sir John, J. R. Jayawardene, Esmond Wickremesinghe and, I travelled down late one evening after sunset to a tiny little island on the Lunawa lagoon where as tiny a summer house built in the style of a ship was the venue selected by me for our discussion. I opened the discussion, addressing Sir John and explaining that the two of us from the Lake House Press would like to know how he was going to handle the changed language policy of his party. Then, at the very outset, Sir John made an amazing statement which I shall always remember. It exposed what he really felt in his heart while the head was being attuned to political considerations only.

“I say, J. L.”, he said, pointing at me, “I don’t like this Sinhala only business.”

“That’s a funny thing to say,” I said, “why, it was you who told me before you went to Australia that your language policy must be changed.”

“I’ll tell you why I don’t like it”, he continued. “Now we give into this Sinhala only demand. Then it will be a Buddhism only demand, and we will have to give in. Next it will be a Goigama only demand and we shall have to give in and we will lose b.....s like you”, he said, addressing me, the only member of the Karawa caste present, the three others being of the Goigama caste.

The language was of the racy, barrackroom kind he was always accustomed to use as a military man. But I thought to myself that here was a man speaking bluntly to a friend the truth in his heart although as a politician he was being pressurized to follow a different course of action.

The news of the United National Party’s proposed change in the language policy and the propaganda this party indulged in before the general election in April

1956 did not help. Sir John and his party suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (Party) led by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike who had been the first to raise the "Sinhala only" battle-cry for the purpose of a general election. He was swept into office as Prime Minister on a wave of emotion roused among the Sinhalese masses. But the tragic events of 1958 when communal riots broke out in the country and the fair name of Ceylon tarnished abroad was, to any impartial observer, ample justification of the principle that in a country of people of different communities and different creeds the rulers must be just to everybody alike. Harmony among the different communities and among the followers of different religions had been the pride of Ceylon in the whole of Asia during the regimes of D. S. Senanayake, Dudley Senanayake and Kotelawala. What a pity that Kotelawala, who had that night on an island in the Lunawa lagoon uttered ruthless logic to me, should have gone down in defeat at the 1956 general election carrying with him a slur — that he had let the Tamils down for a political end! Unexpected defeat at a general election can be any national leader's destiny, but even in defeat history could have accorded a special niche to a leader in a multi-communal country who refused to compromise on the principle that the language of the majority cannot be forced down the throats of a minority and, therefore, was vanquished at the polls.

To Sir John specially these events in retrospect must be a bitter memory for he was not only one of those Sinhalese leaders whom all communities of Ceylon trusted but he had also sponsored so many Tamils to important posts in the public administration of his government. From that point of view it was a great credit to Sir John's trustworthiness that in 1958, at the peak of the communal riots in Ceylon, when he was abroad in his Kent farm, the talk went from mouth to

mouth and was even re-echoed at a Cabinet meeting of the S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike government that communal riots would never have occurred had Sir John been handling the reins of the government.

CHAPTER 5

THE "inside story" of the regimes of the first three Prime Ministers of Ceylon would not be complete without a reference to the common link that bound those three regimes. Sir Oliver Goonetilleke was that link. As Minister of Home Affairs in the D. S. Senanayake government, Minister of Agriculture and Food in the Dudley Senanayake government and Minister of Finance and Governor-General during the Kotelawala regime, Sir Oliver was always both the handyman and adviser of the Head of the Government. To D. S. Senanayake he was of great assistance even before independence was granted to Ceylon. I can remember Senanayake telling me that he depended on Sir Oliver for the more tricky part of the negotiations which had to be conducted with British officials at Whitehall when Senanayake was negotiating with the U.K. government for the final instalment of political freedom for Ceylon. On such assignments Sir Oliver played a first-class hand of poker.

On the eve of the declaration of the Soulbury Reforms Sir Oliver himself told me the story of how at Whitehall he was once pressing the claims of Ceylon for due recognition of her share in the war effort when millions of rubber trees had been slaughter-tapped to help build the rubber supply for the Allies. Of course, what Ceylon's outstanding negotiator had omitted to mention was the fact that a whole class of new-rich had arisen in this country by making heavy profits on slaughter-tapped rubber! Continuing with his story Sir Oliver related how he impressed the tough men of Whitehall by declaring that as far as loyalty to the British Crown was concerned, were Britain to be involved in another war there would be a race between Australia and Ceylon to come to Britain's aid and Ceylon would be there first! Protestations of such loyalty can thaw even the icebergs of Whitehall.

While D. S. Senanayake held office as Prime Minister, his eyes and ears was Sir Oliver. It was Sir Oliver who got to know the trends of political movements, laid the first information before his Chief and also advised him on the steps to be taken. For his part there was no doubt that the rôle he then played increased his own influence. That particular time of the year when the Prime Minister of the day had to make recommendations for the inclusion of names in the Honours List, Imperial Honours in June and Local Honours in January, was a busy time for Sir Oliver. Most aspirants first went to him to pray that their claims be advocated. Probably he promised success to all: the few whose names did get included in lists, whether it was because of Sir Oliver's mediation or not, were indebted to him for life, the others berated him behind his back.

This rôle of advocate in respect of the Honours List Sir Oliver tried to fill during Dudley Senanayake's short régime too. But Dudley Senanayake, somewhat resentful of what he considered to be the interference of a busy-body, once pulled Sir Oliver's leg, as Dudley Senanayake himself related to a few of us. When Sir Oliver discreetly enquired about a particular list of recommendations for Honours, Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake showed him a draft-proposal list which was not to be a final list at all. The final list had many amendments. Sir Oliver would have made many enemies that year if he gave the inaccurate "good news" to aspirant for Honours. But he was not the man to worry about criticism from those disappointed.

Dudley Senanayake, the Prime Minister, I can recall, had not much respect for Sir Oliver's ability to give correct advice. That became apparent to me during my Wednesday morning conversations in the early part of his régime. But when troubles come there is no better adviser than Sir Oliver for others to turn to. So it was with Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake. During his

difficult last phase in office in 1953 it was Sir Oliver who was often by his side at Temple Trees. The father's adviser had become the son's adviser too.

Sir John perhaps was closer as a colleague to Sir Oliver. Using the privilege of an intimate friend, Sir John had even before he assumed duties as Prime Minister turned his ruthless tongue on Sir Oliver on occasions. There was one such occasion at the end of the day on which Dudley Senanayake had been appointed Prime Minister (Wednesday, March 26, 1952) when Sir Oliver who had also been suspected by Sir John of having conspired against him over the appointment of a new Prime Minister, walked into Sir John's home late in the night.

"Don't step into this home, I'll shoot you", roared the enraged Sir John.

"Get the gun; shoot me not once but ten times if I have done wrong", answered Sir Oliver suavely. And Sir John roared with laughter. (This story Sir John related to me once more this last Thursday morning, October 20, 1960).

When Sir Oliver moved into Queen's House as Governor-General in July 1954, a princely reward to him from his friend, Sir John, the latter, as I have related earlier, followed a convention set up by Lord Soulbury and D. S. Senanayake of keeping a lunch engagement at Queen's House every Wednesday. Those lunch conversations would obviously have been of great value to Prime Minister Kotelawala. Perhaps the only occasion when Sir Oliver made an error of judgment, a fatal one indeed, was his assessment of a political situation which induced him to advise Kotelawala to hold a general election well before the due time, and that led to disaster.

But it was after the Kotelawala regime that Sir Oliver blossomed into full flower as an able adviser, a reverse in the roles of Governor-General and Prime

Minister found in constitutional books. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, experienced politician that he was, stemmed the tide of opposition from his government parliamentary party against the continuation of Sir Oliver as Governor-General. Bandaranaike must have had his reasons. Soon he discovered how right those reasons were, because, though a United National Party follower in the past, Sir Oliver as Governor-General always acted very correctly. As Bandaranaike's headaches grew and industrial strikes started to occur in waves, it was to Sir Oliver that he turned for advice and it was loyal advice that he received. U. N. P. men were quite indignant, but it must be admitted that Sir Oliver was functioning as the constitutional Governor-General, looking after the interests of his government of the day. Then in 1958, during the communal riots which rocked the country for a few days and spread an aftermath of racial bitterness, the Governor-General personally governed the land with sagacity and firmness, bringing conditions back to normal after the Emergency Rule.

Despite all the valuable services that Sir Oliver rendered during the S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike regime, it was also during this period that he was the target of much public criticism on account of his personal affairs relating to the activities of a relative. In the eyes of informed sections of the public Sir Oliver had no defence for his own actions save the human frailty which many fathers disclose by showing weakness when firmness is called for in dealing with wayward children. But every time there was the news of a father's trials and tribulations in Queen's House, one could not help recalling D. S. Senanayake's judgment on this matter "According to our religion that is what you call '*Sansara*'"—the wheel of sorrow which turns without end.

All over Ceylon there would be so many persons, rich and poor, to whom Sir Oliver Goonetilleke would have been of some service during his career as a public man

and before that when he was a government official. At the same time there would be many who have gone to him for help, who deserved to be thrown down the stairs but were promised help which was never to be given. Naturally they have hard things to say about Sir Oliver.

In the art of conducting difficult negotiations he had no peer. His pleading when it looked difficult for the side he represents could be a tearful prayer which the toughest audience could not resist. On the contrary he could produce the most fearful gale of righteous indignation, mixing it with threats, to break down any opposition. These tactics of which he was master naturally made those who ruled the country to turn to him in a crisis, big or small. There is no doubt that his razor-edged brain functioned so efficiently partly owing to his excellent physical fitness to maintain which he took great pains.

In 1958 when the entire burden of managing the State of Emergency declared in view of communal riots fell on the shoulders of Sir Oliver Goonetilleke as Governor-General, he displayed an amazing fund of energy by being on duty right round the clock at Queen's House. Only a man of perfect physical fitness could have gone through that strain. And in 1958 Sir Oliver was 66 years old.

Neither the regimes of our first three Prime Ministers nor the regimes which followed would have been so colourful but for the activities of Sir Oliver Goonetilleke. In fact if the news of his activities did not reach well-informed sections of the public, they began to wonder what Sir Oliver was up to, and not infrequently fanciful stories were set afloat concerning his mysterious doings. It was, of course, a fact that Sir Oliver was unable to practise the art of doing nothing.

During his regime in Queen's House he was most unhappy when there were long spells of inactivity. Then he got on to his many telephones in the establish-

ment, gathering from friends in the Government services and the newspaper world all information on current affairs. So even if the rulers of the day did not keep him informed he was yet the best informed Governor-General in the Commonwealth.

One other personality stands out in relief when I look back on those three regimes which form the subject matter of this "inside story". That is J. R. Jayawardene. He was in my experience the most methodical politician of the Rightwing group. On any matter which he had to handle, whether it was the preparation of a Budget speech as Minister of Finance or sponsoring the Colombo Plan with which his name will always be associated, he was certain in his own mind what his objective was, and then with almost military precision he set about making plans to get at the objective. I know some colleagues of his, on his side of the fence in politics, who were afraid of his obvious cleverness. That I felt was the fear in the mind of the fool and the braggart for the man who sets about a task with a great deal of method and expresses his thoughts with clarity, as J. R. Jayawardene always does.

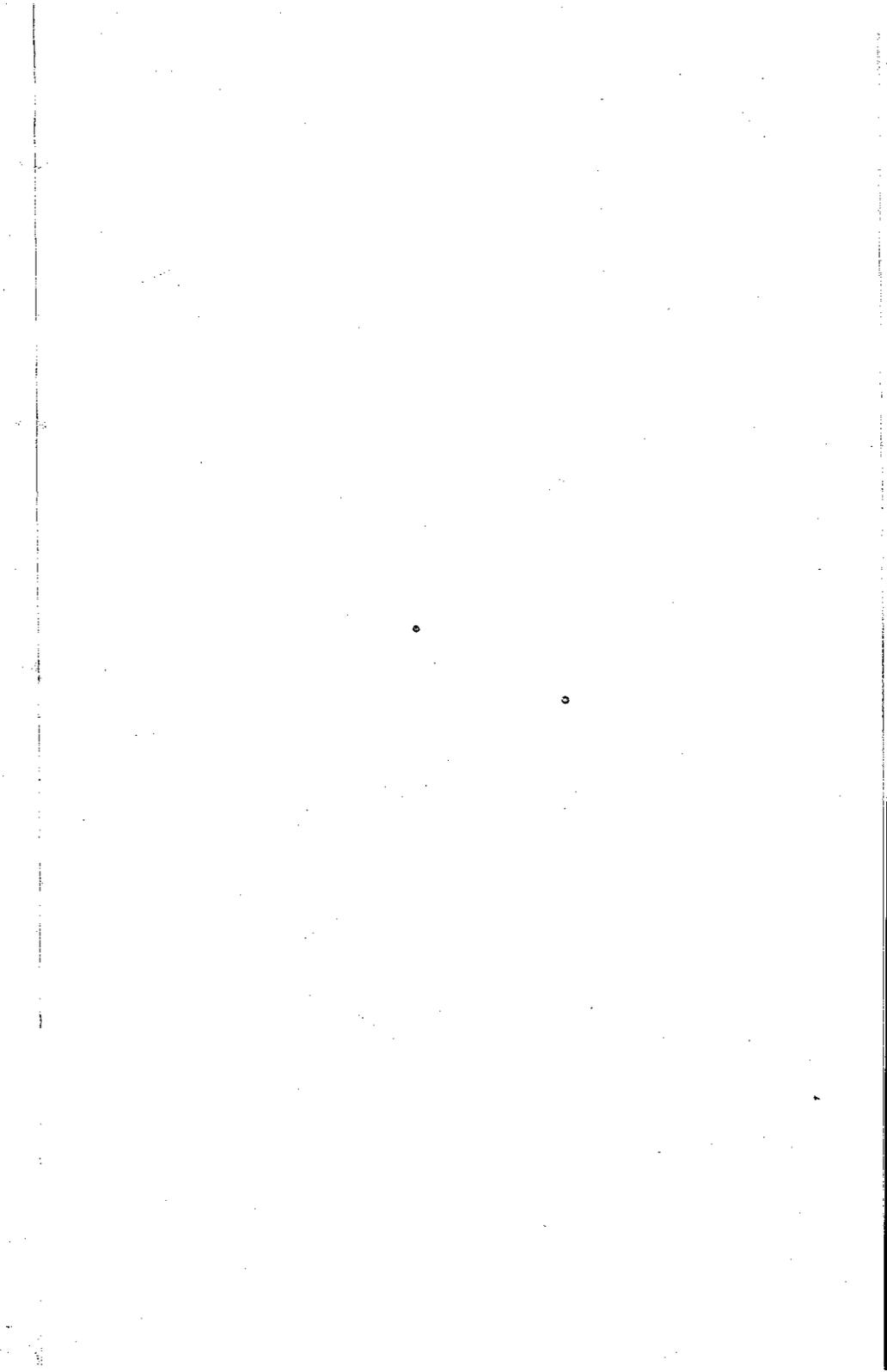
Even among the public J. R. Jayawardene has not been an idol as some others of the period referred to in this book have been. People have admired Jayawardene's abilities both as an orator and an organiser, above all as a courageous politician who, after the overthrow of the United National Party in the 1956 general election, taught both his party men and their opponents how to fight back in defeat. And yet the public have never been emotionally drawn towards J. R. Jayawardene. The reason to my mind lies in the cold, logical public speeches he delivers, quite in contrast to the tub-thumping of others, and also in the iceberg-like temperament of his. I remember Sir John Kotelawala, who during his own premiership had the highest admiration for Jayawardene's abilities, saying that he had once given

Jayawardene a prescription to thaw himself — to smoke a cigarette, have a drink and occasionally perform biological functions! Many who admire J. R. Jayawardene's brains have, I am sure, the impression that Jayawardene is more of a machine and less of a human who might well take Sir John's prescription.

Jayawardene who was a cricketer of some reputation during his school career at Royal College, Colombo, practices what is called "team-spirit" to perfection in public life. As a member of a team he is thoroughly loyal to the captain of the team. If one captain is replaced by another Jayawardene as a member of the team is as loyal to the new captain as he was to the former captain. This exceedingly rare team spirit of Jayawardene was appreciated neither by Dudley Senanayake nor by Sir John Kotelawala. The former could not appreciate Jayawardene when Jayawardene was loyal to the captain of the team, Kotelawala; the latter could not appreciate Jayawardene when Jayawardene was loyal to the captain of the team, Dudley Senanayake. In my view, however, great credit is due to J. R. Jayawardene for setting up the convention that a principle is of more importance than a person in working a parliamentary system.

Determination and courage must bring their rewards in public life, and the young man whom D. S. Senanayake selected to be the Minister of Finance in independent Ceylon's first Cabinet must have a great future before him. So far he has functioned with distinction as No. 2 in four Cabinets in which he served. Who knows whether one day J. R. Jayawardene will not blossom out as No. 1?

Any "inside story" of the political history of our country from 1932 to 1956 would not be complete without reference to politicians of Marxist parties. In fact the common object of the three regimes of D. S.





Dr. N. M. PERERA,
Leader of the Sama Samajist (Trotskyist) Party.

Senanayake, Dudley Senanayake and Kotelawala was to prevent the politicians of the Leftwing forming a government because they were Marxists and, therefore, against Democracy.

Perhaps no newspaperman in Ceylon has written so many columns of criticism against Marxism and local Marxists than myself. Fortunately for one's self-respect the policy of the Lake House Press was anti-Marxist and what I wrote by conviction was in keeping with the policy of the Press organisation to which I belonged. So I did not suffer any qualms of conscience which must have beset newspaper writers who were red-hot Marxists in their younger days and later wrote against Marxism.

Although I may have been a relentless propagandist against the spread of Marxism in Ceylon I must in all sincerity salute the consistency of Marxist leaders like N. M. Perera and Pieter Keuneman and even Philip Gunawardena who flitted from one Leftwing camp to another Leftwing camp but always in search of his Marxist ideal. These three and Bernard Soysa, another front-rank Marxist with whom it was always a pleasure to discuss politics in the old days, could never be accused by anti-Marxists of being traitors to the cause of Marxism, although among themselves they have been accustomed to charge one another of traitorous conduct whenever they had differences over ideological niceties. It was during my early years as the Lobby correspondent of the *Ceylon Daily News* that I first studied the politics of N. M. Perera and Philip Gunawardena, then working as a team of two in the former State Council, the Central Legislature of the pre-Independence era. They were a picturesque pair whom I remember labelling in my Lobby column in the Press "the Samasamajist Twins". I had also associated with N. M. Perera as a student in the former University College of Colombo, the precursor to the fully fledged University of Ceylon. Even

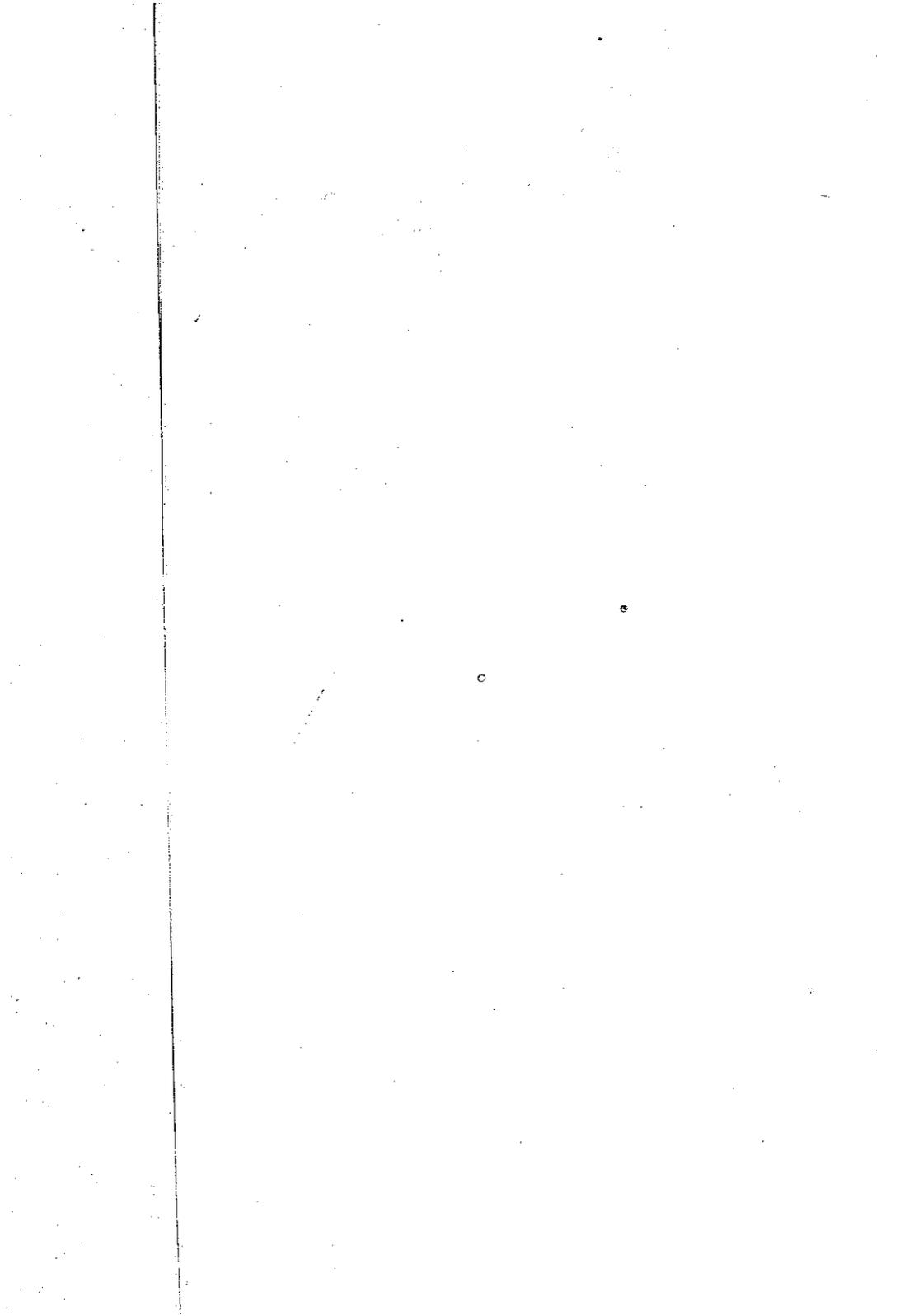
as a young undergraduate N. M. Perera was frightfully argumentative. I came across Pieter Keuneman, newly returned from a successful debating career in the Cambridge Union, when he joined the Lake House Press as a leader-writer. In fact at the request of the late D. R. Wijewardene I took Keuneman round to the State Council lobbies to get him interested in the study of politics and politicians, which was my special function then. Apparently D. R. Wijewardene with his experience saw in Pieter Keuneman a star newspaperman of the future. I always hold it to the credit of Pieter Keuneman that when he realised that the policy of the Lake House Press was contrary to his own political ideology, he resigned from Lake House. He was one of those rare newspapermen who was not willing to prostitute his talent for an income. So he went away to become a famous Communist leader.

I have placed on record a tribute I paid these three personalities of the extreme Left. In a special supplement of the *Ceylon Daily News* of February 10, 1948, in an article concerning political personalities of the day this is what I wrote of these three:

“The rumble of Marxist thunder was first heard in our legislature when those whom I labelled the Samasamajist twins appeared in the State Council as representatives of Avissawella and Ruanwella. They, especially Mr. Philip Gunawardena, introduced a new technique in debate. Mr. Gunawardena was always the most striking personality. Starting almost caressingly in the softest of tones, suddenly he changed into a raging tempest, often short of breath to get out the last few words in a sentence — so devastating was the intensity of his emotion. He had other unconscious mannerisms. If he stood in one place his forearms worked like hammers, swinging up and down. More frequently, even within the restricted space between seats in the Chamber, he moved to and fro



PHILIP GUNAWARDENA,
Leader of the Viplavakari (Revolutionary) Sama Samaja Party.



while thundering his denunciations. And yet, soon after, in the Lobbies if you met him he was as soft-spoken as a coy woman!"

"Dr. N. M. Perera lacked the blinding fire of his colleague. But that stubborn nature which drove him to persist in arguing at tutorials with a former lecturer in Economics at the old University College spurred him to out-argue everybody else in the State Council."

"Mr. Keuneman is a revolutionary by profession but his speech-making is stamped with the polish of the Cambridge Union Society of which he was once President. As a rule he desists from indulging in personal taunts but this does not detract from his fiery eloquence which often wins him applause from friend and foe alike in the House."

A brief history of the Left movement which threw up these three personalities must find a place in this book. In the 20's A. E. Goonesingha organised a labour movement in Colombo City, but it was in the 30's that a group of young men, who had returned from the West after their university education, joined hands to sow successfully the seeds of Marxism in Ceylon. They formed themselves into a political party labelled the Lanka Sama Samaja Party of which the outstanding personalities were Dr. S. A. Wickremesinghe, Philip Gunawardena, N. M. Perera, Colvin R. de Silva, Leslie Goonewardena, M. G. Mendis and a Buddhist monk named Udakandewala Sri Saranankara. In 1936 this Party participated in the elections for the second State Council and N. M. Perera and Philip Gunawardena were elected as members for the Ruwanwella and Avissawella constituencies respectively. I shall always remember the lone fight that these two put up against almost all the others in that State Council. As memorable was the good humour with which they accepted my critical commentary in the Press on the

Marxist ideas which they expounded in the debates. At that time even Philip Gunawardena was a tolerant politician, quite different to the roaring lion who was Philip Gunawardena after 1956.

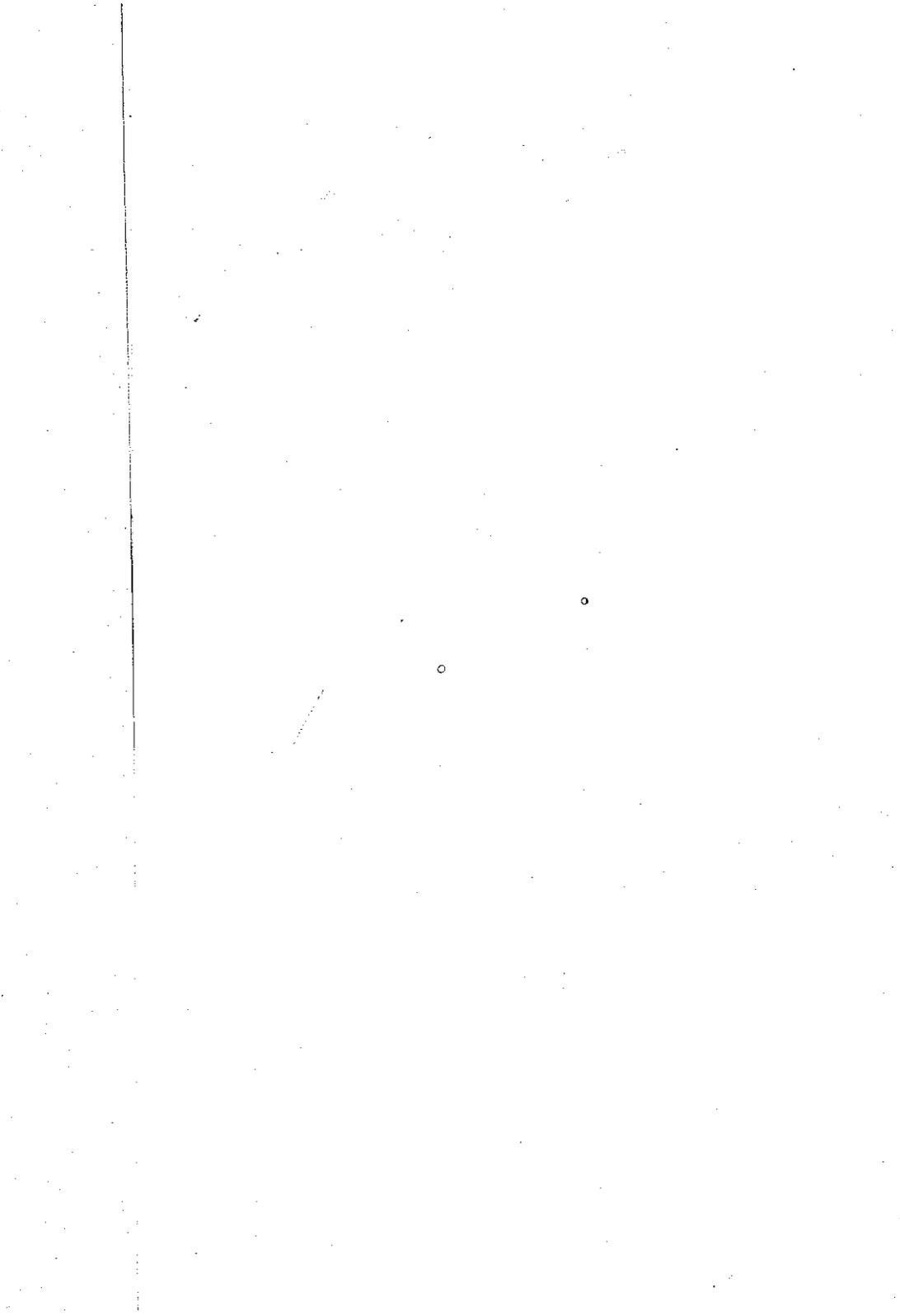
By the end of that decade, about 1940, there was a split in the party due to ideological differences between those who claimed to be disciples of Trotsky and those who were described as followers of Lenin's theories on Marxism. Dr. S. A. Wickremesinghe and his group (Leninists) then formed another party labelled the United Socialist Party.

In 1940 leaders of the original Lanka Sama Samaja Party, which opposed the Ceylon Government's policy to aid the war effort of the Commonwealth against Hitler Germany in World War II, were taken into preventive custody because of their opposition to the government and the Party was banned. In 1942 the government of the day took similar action to ban the United Socialist Party. When the bans were lifted the organisers of the United Socialist Party formed a new party, the Ceylon Communist Party. Pieter Keuneman was by then a known Communist.

The main object of both the original Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party was to organise the trade union movement in Ceylon, each party sponsoring unions in rivalry to unions led by the other party. This rivalry was bred on industrial strikes which in turn promoted the rivalry. In 1947 the two parties joined together in organising a general strike which alarmed the government of the day and definitely frightened the middle-classes and the peasants who were not in the trade union movement. In fact D. S. Senanayake when he went to the polls for the first parliamentary elections under the Soulbury Constitution in 1947 made good use of the antipathy of the middle-classes and the



PIETER KEUNEMAN,
General Secretary of the Ceylon Communist Party.



majority of peasants towards Marxist parties who sponsored strikes and, therefore, as the argument went, chaos.

The original Lanka Sama Samaja Party was further split when a splinter-group broke away and labelled themselves a section of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India, and latter dropped the title "of India" and called themselves the Bolshevik Leninist Party. That split was also due to the hair-splitting arguments revolving round ideological differences. The leader of that splinter group was Colvin R. de Silva but Doric de Souza was known to be the most argumentative on ideological distinctions. Later, however, this Bolshevik Leninist Party returned to the mother-fold, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. This proved the signal for Philip Gunawardena to leave the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and form a party of his own, which he described as the Viplavakari (Revolutionary) Sama Samaja Party. He christened the original Lanka Sama Samaja Party, which was still led by his former colleague, N. M. Perera, the Navalanka (new Ceylon) Sama Samaja Party. This was obviously meant to make the public believe that his splinter group was the original and N. M. Perera's group a spurious model. After this breakway Philip Gunawardena moved closer to the Ceylon Communist Party with whom he signed in 1951 an Agreement to work for a "Free and Prosperous Lanka."

For the 1956 elections all three Leftwing Parties, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party of N. M. Perera, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party of Philip Gunawardena and the Ceylon Communist Party, entered into electoral pacts with S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in the election campaign to overthrow the United National Party.

From the brief sketch above it would be noted why these Leftwing parties, all wedded to Marxism, could not succeed in forming a Marxist Government in Ceylon

during those years when D. S. Senanayake, Dudley Senanayake, and Sir John Kotelawala functioned as Heads of the Government. They failed because there was no unity among them. In the absence of such unity it was easy for those governments to make use of one Leftwing party against the other whenever trade union action threatened internal peace and order. In retrospect it appears an almost incredible fact that learned men like N. M. Perera, Philip Gunawardena and Pieter Keuneman failed to realise that as long as they continued their ideological differences a Marxist government, in which all three pinned their faith, could not be established. From the point of view of the need to attain their object, theirs has been a barren struggle. But it must be said to the credit of these Marxist parties that their organisational activities and their political propaganda did help to make the have-nots in our country more articulate.

Marxism as a political philosophy is theoretically anti-religious, and it was no doubt difficult to spread this philosophy in a country where religion, whatever it be, has a hold over the people. But despite the hurdle of religion Marxism gathered so many followers entirely owing to the influence of leaders like N. M. Perera, Philip Gunawardena and Pieter Keuneman, whose reputation for incorruptability was acknowledged even by their opponents of the Rightwing.

The process of awakening the workers and the peasants, whose revolution these Marxist leaders were supposed to organise, could not avoid violence and the creation of class-hatred. Many industrial strikes which the Marxists actively sponsored resulted in violence while the slogans which their cheer-leaders were trained to shout at public demonstrations had class-hatred as their theme. So those who sowed the seeds of Marxism in Ceylon cannot blame their critics, who included myself, charging them with having nurtured a spirit of

lawlessness in our country. It might be claimed in their defence that in a stage of transition the rank and file of the trade union movement have to learn discipline and that till then some of them are bound to indulge in lawlessness. But the history of the violent hartal in Dudley Senanayake's regime and the lawlessness which prevailed in the earlier general strike of 1947 would indicate that they were not isolated acts of lawlessness but organised attempts to introduce chaos out of which Marxist dictatorships are born.

CHAPTER 6

APRIL 1956 was in fact the end of an era. My narration of the "inside story" of the D. S. Senanayake to Kotelawala period of our political history must provide some idea on how the country was ruled up to April 1956. But for the short spell of lawlessness in 1953 which followed the "*hartal*" law and order prevailed in the land and people of different communities and different creeds lived together in amity. Ceylon's stock abroad was very high. In fact during the period 1948 to 1956 Ceylon was a model in Asia as far as internal peace and stability of government were concerned. This high reputation abroad was enhanced in the democratic countries of the world owing to news created by Prime Minister Kotelawala at the Asian Prime Ministers' Conference which he organised in Ceylon and at the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung. But obviously there was something wanting in the social structure at home in Ceylon which induced the majority of people to wait expectantly for a change of government.

Language and the attire of the people played a bigger part than many observers think in the change-over from one era to another. During the era that ended opportunities in life were open only to the English-educated and yet they were a minority among the mass of those educated, really half-educated, in the national languages. One grave omission on the part of the rulers of the period that ended in April 1956 was that they did not take English to the masses so that the door of opportunity would be open to them too. Instead those rulers started the movement to give recognition and an exalted place to the national languages. This had naturally to be a long-term process of change and in the meantime the English-educated continued to enjoy the plums of office and to have better opportunities for employment, so creating inevitable jealousies in the minds of those

who were becoming more articulate by receiving a better education in the national languages. Those conditions created a further problem which was made more complex by the selfish ambitions of politicians. Which of the two national languages was to be the official language? That question led ultimately to a bloodbath.

On the contrary, had the rulers of that era which ended in 1956, opened the doors of knowledge contained in books in the English language to everybody alike while giving a due place to both national languages, Sinhalese among the Sinhalese and Tamil among the Tamils, the political slogan "Sinhalese only" might never have been coined, for then there would not have been a reason for it. The ordinary citizen, Appuhamy or Singho, would have had no grievance if their children too were given the knowledge available at that time only through the medium of English. Their sons and daughters would have then had the same opportunities as D. S. Senanayake's children and above all the country could have been spared the divisive cry of language which has caused such irreparable bitterness.

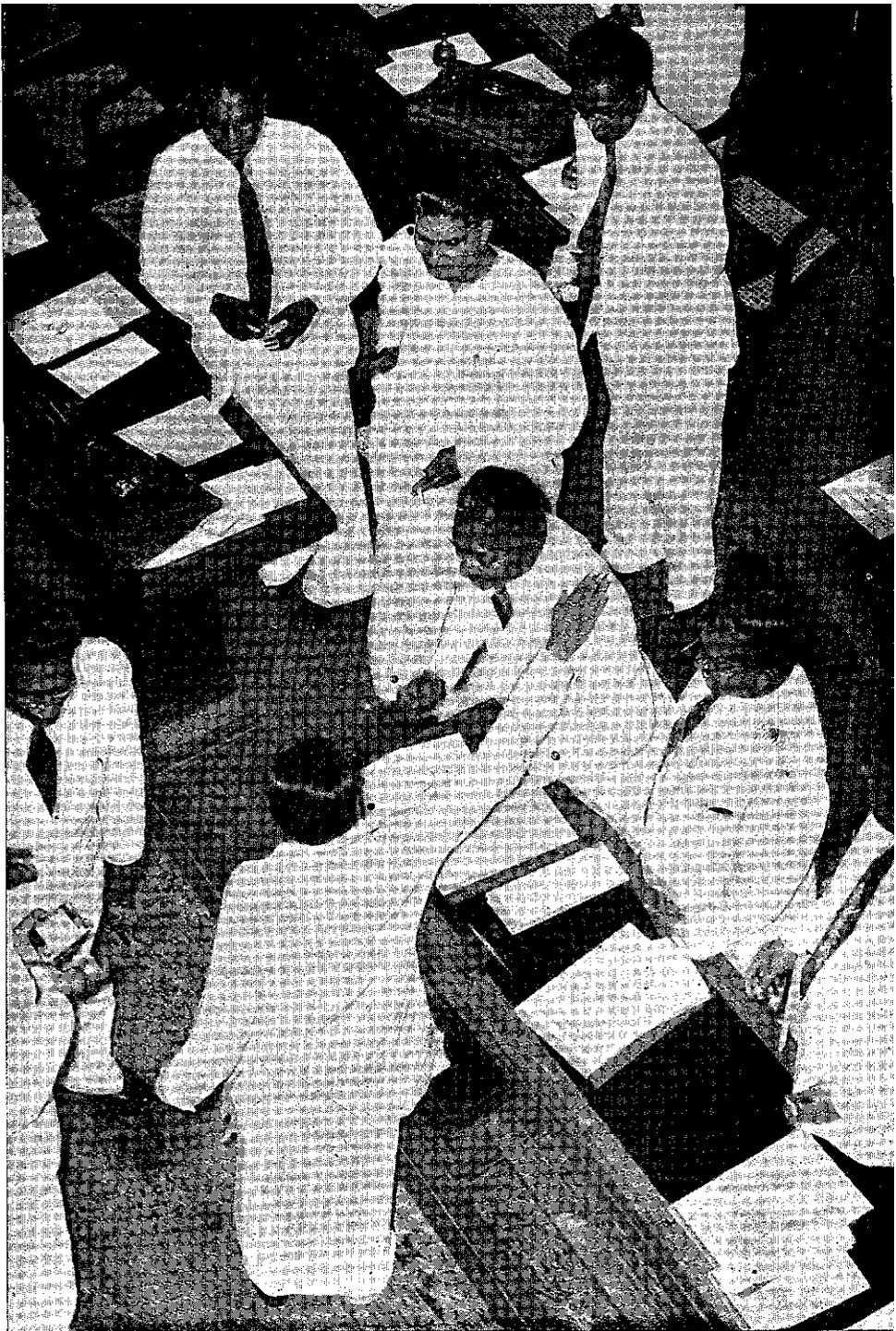
Differences in attire too had created latent antagonisms during the era that ended in April 1956. The English-speaking classes from whom the rulers of the country had been drawn wore the Western coat and trousers while the huge mass of people who did not converse in English wore Oriental costumes. Wherever a man had to go to get his personal business done — a post office, a railway station, a police station or any government office — he got quicker attention if he spoke English and wore the coat and trousers. The rulers of that era did not realise the sullen antagonism in the minds of the more articulate sections of those who did not wear western attire, or if they did realise it they took no action about it.

That was the state of the social structure of the country at the beginning of 1956 during which year

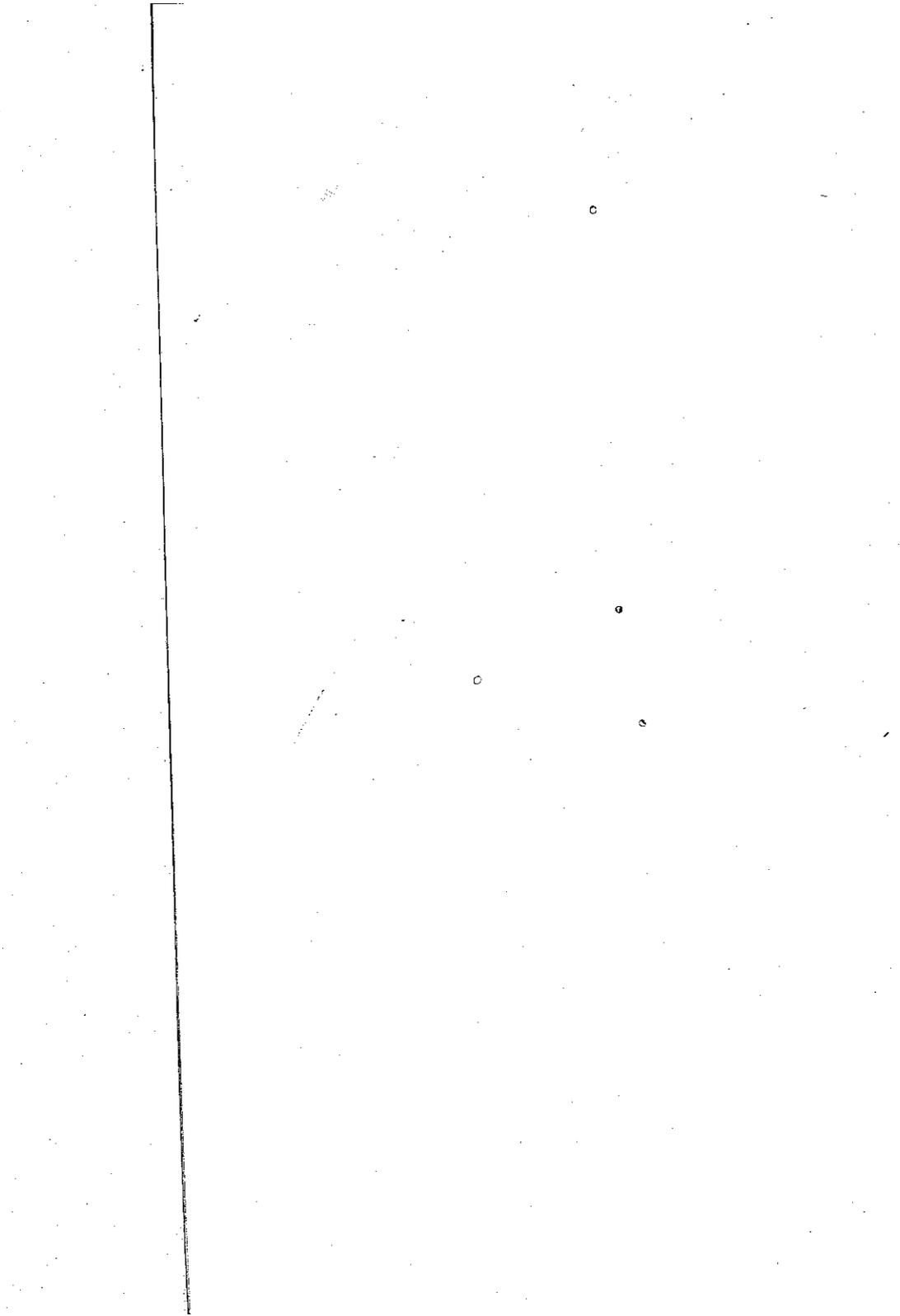
the end of an era was destined to occur. As far as Prime Minister Kotelawala's stock was concerned it was at its peak both abroad and among most law-abiding sections of the people at home. But this did not erase from the minds of the majority of people the great difference between the world of Sir John and the world of the average voter of 1956. The world of Sir John was a world of glittering social parties and of banquets and ball-room dancing, a world where a set of inane husbands watched while their painted wives scrimmaged publicly for the Strong Man's favours and caresses. The world of the average voter of 1956 was devoid of such revelry by night and was filled with doubts and fears concerning the availability of their meals when the sun rose the next day. Naturally the average voter's mind was full of human envy.

In February, 1956, there occurred a notable event which applied the spark to the keg of gunpowder on which the World of Sir John rested. The Buddhist Commission released its report to the public and moves were made to force the Prime Minister of the day to give firm assurances that his government would accept certain recommendations of that Commission. The chief object of the Buddhist Commission was to provide a prominent place to the Buddhist religion on the simple theory that other religions practised in Ceylon claimed only a microscopic minority for a following. This theory the Commission buttressed with historical data on the unmoral measures taken by foreign rulers of Ceylon in the past — The Portuguese, the Dutch and the British — against the spread and even the very existence of the Buddhist religion.

When Sir John, the Prime Minister, refused to be stampeded into accepting the Commission's recommendations a set of Buddhist monks banded themselves into an organisation labelled the Eksath Bhikku Peramuna and its members crusaded all over the country, mostly



A historic picture of Prime Minister S. W. R. D. BANDARANAIKE who has walked across the floor of the House of Representatives to greet Sir John Kotelawa his beaten rival, at the first sessions of the new Parliament in 1956.



in village areas, against Sir John and his government. In our country any person wearing the venerated yellow robes of the disciples of the Buddha wields over the Buddhist masses of the villages the same type of unquestioned authority that the Pope has over his Roman Catholic flock. It was this traditional influence which that organised group of yellow-robed monks used with success in 1956 to turn the Buddhist masses in the villages against Sir John and his government. There was no doubt that they uttered defamatory statements and half-truths in their campaign which was entirely political in its aims and meant solely to influence the verdict of voters in the 1956 March-April general election. But those defamatory statements and half-truths were blindly accepted because those who heard them were already envious of the world of Sir John, which I have described earlier.

On another side S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Representatives, was also in the field as the Leader of the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, an electoral coalition of three parties, himself campaigning against, not so much Sir John, but the world of Sir John. By birth and training Bandaranaike was more of an aristocrat than Sir John. Reared in a lordly country mansion and educated in the more ancient University of Oxford, he was the son of a Knight who had been as distinguished a *pukka sahib* as any British proconsul in the nineteenth century. But S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike when he took the field against Sir John appeared among the masses as one who had renounced the world of his father, Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranaike, which was the world of Sir John also. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike might have worn a pair of pyjamas and a dressing-gown and eaten kippers for breakfast, as one did at Oxford, at his Rosmead Place home, but the masses saw his ascetic-looking figure attired in the costume of their own world and

heard him mesmerising them with his silver-tongued oratory.

While yellow-robed monks (the most outstanding personality among whom is now languishing in jail as one of those concerned in the murder of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike) were crusading against Sir John's Government on one side and Bandaranaike and his Mahajana Eksath Peramuna were attacking on the other side, Sir John himself was greatly handicapped in his defence by the defection of Dudley Senanayake. The latter's influence, especially over the peasant electorates, was undoubted and could have been utilised to good effect on the side of Sir John's defence against the powerful attacking forces. (Dudley Senanayake's defection in 1956 was in contrast to Kotelawala's own action in the 1960 March general election, when he threw his own influence heavily on the side of Dudley Senanayake who emerged as Prime Minister for a second term in March 1960).

So with his defence organisation crippled and the attacking forces making full use of the latent antagonisms in the minds of the non-English-speaking masses attired in Oriental costumes, Prime Minister Kotelawala's government was swept out of power that April 1956. An era ended.

There are two incidents which are worthy of record, incidents which occurred after the appointment of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike as Prime Minister and which prove, to the credit of Bandaranaike, that chivalry had not died with the end of an era. I heard of one incident from the Police Officer who was the bodyguard of Prime Minister Kotelawala as well as of Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike early in the latter's regime.

Before Prime Minister Kotelawala's regime came to an end he had invited Lord Louis Mountbatten who had had his headquarters in Kandy during the latter

stages of the last world war, to visit Ceylon on his journey to the East in 1956. Sir John was out of office before the date of arrival of Lord Mountbatten but Sir John's successor, Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, gave a party at Temple Trees to the distinguished visitor. Sir John, of course, had been invited to the party himself and I remember his thinking aloud in my presence as to whether he should go to the party or keep away because the function was too soon after his fall from the heights to the depths, and none could have blamed his sensitiveness to appear at an official ceremony at that particular time. It was easy for me to urge him to go to a party for I was not the person bearing a painful wound yet unhealed. The sequel I heard from the Police Officer who had travelled as bodyguard in attendance on Prime Minister Bandaranaike and Mrs. Bandaranaike from their home at Rosmead Place, Colombo, to Temple Trees in time for the party to Lord Mountbatten. In conversation with her husband Mrs. Bandaranaike had said that she did not think that Sir John would come to the party. Bandaranaike's reply was that Mrs. Bandaranaike did not know Sir John as he knew Sir John who, he had said, was a "Sportsman" and would certainly attend the function. Addressing the Police Officer who was in the front seat of the car Bandaranaike had instructed him that as soon as Sir John came in the Prime Minister was to be informed of the fact. On Sir John's arrival the Police Officer had hurried to Bandaranaike who with his wife and Lord Mountbatten were greeting the guests in the beautiful gardens in the backyard quadrangle of Temple Trees. Leaving his wife and Lord Mountbatten, Bandaranaike had walked up the steps leading from the garden to the house, greeted Sir John and led him by the arm to Lord Mountbatten — special attention to the man whom he had called a "Sportsman".

Then again at the first meeting of the new Parliament elected at the April 1956 general election, Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike walked across the floor of the House of Representatives and greeted Sir John who was seated on the Opposition benches. The Press picture of that historic meeting in Parliament between victor and vanquished must remain a memorable record of the behaviour of well-bred, honourable men at the end of a fight unto death in the political arena.

POSTSCRIPT

I refrain from recording the "inside story" of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's regime because I am not specially qualified to do so. As I have stated earlier, I asked that I be released from writing the Political Correspondent's column in the Lake House group of newspapers after Bandaranaike was appointed Prime Minister. No political commentator can be well or adequately informed under our system of government unless he picks the "inside" information from, among other sources, the Prime Minister of the land who in the interests of efficient government must naturally be the best informed. After my close association as a newspaperman with the three previous Prime Ministers whose political theories were not those of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, I was hardly the newspaper commentator to whom Bandaranaike could be expected to extend his confidence. And what comments I had written in the Lake House Press on his own political theories could not permit me with self-respect to seek his confidence. Therefore, as I state, I have no "inside" information of how he played his hand as Prime Minister.

Even though I may be suspect as too close a newspaper associate behind the scenes of the three regimes which preceded his, I would submit that one's experience from 1932 to 1956 in following the political history of the country entitles me both to essay an assessment of events after 1956 as seen from my desk and to offer a forecast.

S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike as an astute and experienced politician made full use of the latent antagonisms against the previous regimes. For a politician it was good generalship and it secured for him the Prime Minister's throne. And whoever is Prime Minister under our system of government he is more influential than what the books state—the sun round whom the planets revolve. He is really king. It might have come to pass that if

Bandaranaike, the democrat and believer in parliamentary government, did not make use of those latent antagonisms of the mass of voters and as a result ascended the Prime Minister's throne, some other personality would have used those same forces, not for the purpose of parliamentary government, but for creating a dictatorship.

However, once he was installed as Prime Minister, the huge mass of the under-privileged thought that their day had dawned and that theirs was a day when anything could be had for the asking. To ride to political power on the wave of human emotions, in 1956 mostly envy and anger, was one thing. But as Head of the Government, bound by the rules of his upbringing and educational training to be just and fair to all alike, Bandaranaike soon found that he could not function according to the dictates of the emotions of the mass. When he tried to ensure that discipline was observed, the first duty of a Head of Government, the same forces that he made use of and had swept him into political power resented his action and he was relentlessly harrassed. If he had been given time, the man who organised the various forces which overthrew a particular type of regime might have been able to break in those forces to obey the demands of discipline. Wild horses or wild buffaloes can be stampeded to rush in a herd and destroy another's field, and the artist who arranged such an awesome spectacle can still hope to tame the forces of destruction, and create a useful herd out of them. Would Bandaranaike have thought so? If he did, given a long period in office, he was clever enough to have tamed the forces he had unleashed to upset an old regime. But destiny took a hand and he died at the hands of a dastardly assassin.

We have had two short regimes following that of Bandaranaike and now there has come into being a third under the Prime Ministership of his widow,

pledged to continue the policies he believed in. But policies without a strong living personality to operate them would be like trying to act Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark or like staging Dutugemunu with none to play the role of that warrior King of an ancient Sinhalese era. From all reports, Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike appears to be a lady of outstanding courage and with a great deal of common sense. But the functions of a Prime Minister unfortunately demand at least a considerable number of years of experience in politics. In my opinion Dudley Senanayake who is an experienced politician today failed to fill the bill in 1952-53 because he was not ready for the high office of Prime Minister at that time. How more acute are the trials that await Mrs. Bandaranaike? As I see it, the new era in Ceylon that started in 1956 with its brief hiatus during the period March to June 1960, is an era without a dynamic leader in power who can hold divisive forces together. The absence of such a personality, together with the fact that the State's finances are startling low, would indicate that chaos is in store for our country. And out of chaos arises a dictatorship, of either the Right or the Left. That is the lesson of history.