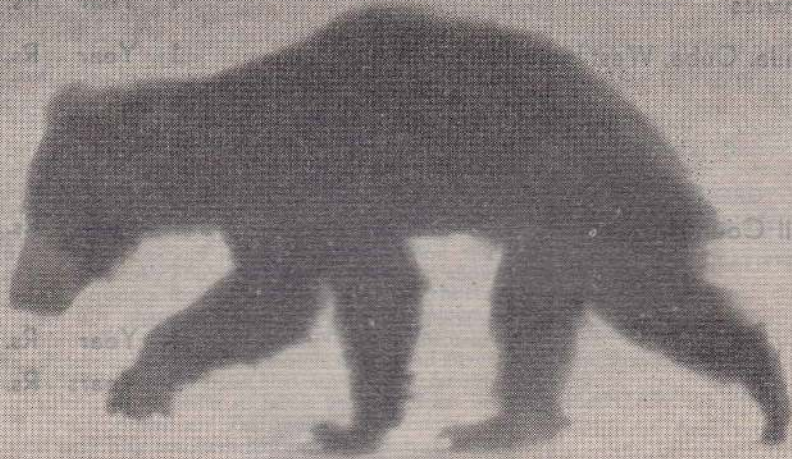


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Letter From The Editor

A BEAR, a good, true and genuine CEYLON BEAR, adorns our Cover this week. In the era of the (much-to-be-lamented) Republican Constitution, remaining United Front "enthusiasts" and fast diminishing SLFP "stalwarts" (political bankruptcy has driven them to buffoonery—to replace historical statues of colonial governors with those of feudal-cum-tribal lightweights—to assert their anti-imperialist fervour), will call it *thuppahi* revisionist betrayal not to call the animal on our Cover a SRI LANKA BEAR, and characterise it as free, independent, sovereign and socialist. But, to all others, this animal is and always will be the CEYLON BEAR. It cannot be anything else. Hangovers from the McCarthyian-Dullesian-Kotelawelan cold war era will wishfully suggest that it is really a RUSSIAN BEAR in the garb of its Ceylon counterpart: that this RUSSIAN BEAR was secretly smuggled into the emerald isle to push red revolution down everybody's throats. This kind of wishful-delusion cannot explain the changes that have already overtaken this country from the first quarter of this century—and not merely from 1956 or 1972, as some pundits believe. Nor can the bogey of a RUSSIAN BEAR be used prevent the catalytic and cataclysmic revolutionary changes that will soon transform this island. But, what of our CEYLON BEAR, today? He is a long-forgotten and much-neglected animal. He is killed (and has been), without protest, for his skin, for the oil from his fat (good, they say, for rheumatism) and also because he is a nuisance and a danger (attacks humans without provocation, say humans). Even the conservativist and the protectionist have not raised the customary hue and cry on behalf of the humble CEYLON BEAR. That is why we have turned the spotlight on him (or her) this week. Our cameraman caught him (let's stick to *him*) strolling across a sandy patch. What is more, the picture has captured a certain look on the face of the BEAR (if the reproduction is not clear enough to discern it, readers will have to take our word for it) that makes him a typical CEYLON BEAR. He has a doleful and mournful look, of the half-starved, of the unhappy, the dissatisfied, the frustrated, the disgruntled and the discontented. But, who in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) today is otherwise? Look at the faces of the thousands who walk away from our co-ops and our shops everyday, nearly empty-handed, and it will not be difficult to detect in them the same angry touch of resentment vibrant in the front right foot he (our friend, the BEAR) is putting forward—he has reason to be angry because he has just discovered that the honey comb he had kept as his secret (cache) for dinner on a "rainy" day had been pinched by marauding humans. (In our co-operatives there are many human predatory rats who gobble up what should go to others). So far as the BEAR is concerned he has not much to worry; there are bees to manufacture honey for him and plenty of berries to nibble. Outside the jungle matters have become really bad. There is less and less food for more and more people. But, what is not yet sufficiently known is that there are not enough people to work on the land to produce food. There is a growing shortage of manpower in agriculture. But, there is uncontrollable unemployment running into millions clamouring for white collar and soft government jobs. This is the tragedy of the educational and socio-economic policies all governments have followed since 1947. There is little that anyone can do about this immediately, but part of this white collar surfeit is being (and has been for some time) siphoned to Eurodollar and Petrodollar rich countries as wage slaves. It is true that they may not have had any other future except wage-slavery in Ceylon, but all those who have sought refuge in richer lands abroad know what it means "to belong", what it means to be in the land of one's birth. But let us not be carried away by emotional sentiments of "belonging". Let us stick to the realities and approach the problem in the currently fashionable attitude—pragmatically. It is true that there is a demand for "cheap" manpower from Ceylon in certain Eurodollar and Petrodollar countries, but the point of saturation and no-return will come soon. The main question really is whether our economic problems can be solved by getting ourselves drawn into the new SLAVE SYSTEM that has been imposed upon the world by rich countries to get richer. The old colonial SLAVE SYSTEM consisted in the straightforward purchase of Negro slaves or the camouflaged indenture of conquered and pauperised Indians and Asians. The new SLAVE SYSTEM, based on "freedom" of contract and "human rights", and made attractive by electronic baubles, thrives because of poverty in countries like Ceylon. Will the new SLAVE SYSTEM solve the problems of the world, or will it bring a new kind of REVOLUTION to dethrone contemporary inequality and injustice? Will these *wage-slaves* do unto the oligarchical Empires of today what the *serf-slaves* did unto the holy Roman Empire of old? It is something to think about.

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EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK**Before Nomination Day**

Colombo, May 31,

An uneasy calm, with a near-funeral touch, has descended on the city of Colombo. There is no excitement about the forthcoming general election. Not many seem to be bothered as to who is nominated to which seat. The UNP has published its complete list—it has fielded candidates in 156 seats (some of them multi-member), and apart from a handful of seats in the Jaffna area, the UNP is contesting in Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim areas. It is making a sustained effort to demonstrate that it is a national party.

The SLFP has made it known that it wants to contest even more seats than the UNP, in Sinhala Tamil and Muslim areas. And although, the SLFP has announced its candidates for the majority of the seats it hopes to contest, there are still glaring gaps and omissions. In all these cases, the SLFP Nomination Board seems to be at sixes and sevens as to fix on candidates. What is inexplicable is that in some instances there have been so many quick changes in respect of the same seat that the situation is getting curiously and curiously, as Alice said in Wonderland.

There have been, for instances, three "choices" for Colombo Central, and the latest rumour is that the SLFP nomination will go to a fourth. A similar game of chess has been going on about seats like Gampaha, Badulla, Minuwangoda, Kandy and a number of others—with the result that the SLFP Nomination Board has lost the credibility that should attach to this hierarchic body of the ruling Party. In some cases there are whispers that the SLFP would not nominate anybody but support Independents—really Dudley Peramuna boys in the guise of Independents. Even at this late point of time, it is not clear how many seats the SLFP will contest and how many Independents it will back. The Prime Minister had insisted (and very wisely) that nominations should not be considered for any members of her family—

except Anura: that as he had entered the field some time ago and was the leader of the SLFP Youth Leagues he was entitled to nomination. This guillotined the ambitions of Kumar, Sunethra, and probably Chandrika to seek seats in the new NSA.

The Socialist United Front—once again it has become the United Left Front—has not announced its complete list, but sitting members belonging to the different parties have paid in the deposits to enable them to file Nomination Papers on June 6. The LSSP wants to field as many as 70 candidates, and it is not clear how many the CP and the PDP will enter. It has not been possible yet to detect any spontaneous or popular enthusiasm for the Left United Front turned Socialist United Front and now finally the United Left Front—memories of the abortive United Left Front of 1963 come to mind when the LSSP left the two other partners (the CP and the MEP) without notice to join Mrs. Bandaranaike in the shortlived coalition of June 1964. Unless the new ULF is able to stage a miraculous rejuvenation, in the next four or five weeks, it is not likely that it will make a major impact on the elections.

THE SLVB—the Sri Lanka Vimukthi Balavegaya—led by Mr. Prins Gunesefera has decided not to put forward any candidates to contest the 1977 General Elections. Mr. Gunesefera himself, who is the sitting MP for Habaraduwa, has decided to contest, and the only other SLVB MP, Col. Udugama, (who had been returned on the SLFP ticket for Matale), has also kept out of the election (and it is believed that he will back the UNP candidate on a local basis in Matale). But what is interesting and revealing is the statement issued by Mr. Prins Gunesefera:

Mr. Prins Gunesefera, former MP for Habaraduwa and General Secretary of the Sri Lanka Vimukthi Balavegaya, has decided not to contest a seat in the coming general elections. The Balavegaya would not be fielding any candidates for the general election, Mr. Gunesefera announced in a statement issued yesterday. The statement, explaining the SLVB's view of the political situation in the country and the reasons why it has decided not to contest any seats, is as

follows—From the start the SLVB strived to create an honest leftist alliance, dedicated to full socialism. With this in view, conferences were held with diverse leftist political parties and organisations. Unfortunately for the country's leftist movement, the Balavegaya has been unable to form a leftist alliance for the elections this year. What exist today are a large number of leftist organisations scattered throughout the country. It is our belief that if we are to confront the common enemy of capitalist and reactionary elements, all organisations given to the ideal of full socialism should be brought together. The seven-year rule of the so-called socialist United Front, a period of injustice, sin and suppression, has brought the people to the cross roads. The people deplored the leftist partners of the mis-rule. It is in this context that a new front led by an undefeated and honest leftist leadership was felt essential and for the creation of which we worked hard. The orthodox leftist leaders obstructed it and some of their own members who believed on those lines were expelled. These old leaders, who were the partners of the 7-year misrule, are trying desperately to form a party front that supports their line of thinking and excludes the honest leaders. They are only trying to cover up their past sins. They will not succeed in forming a force which attracts the public support. The SLVB, decided unanimously not to nominate any candidates for this chaotic, general election of 1977, due to its failure to form a genuine united leftist front. The correctness of the decision of the Balavegaya will be seen if the anti-democratic and unfair aspects of the general election is viewed clearly. The recognised leadership of a section of the people—the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna which represents the youth—has been confined to prison although the emergency had been lifted. This party was suppressed under emergency powers, which were in force for 71 months. All leaders of all recognised political parties of the country have the right to contest the elections. But the leaders of the JVP have been denied it. The elections to be held with the youth leaders behind bars would be a great hoax on democracy. The Pakistan election held

Rail Stoppage

recently was a similar hoax. Whatever government that comes to power through a general election held contrary to the democratic ideals, cannot be called a duly elected government. Therefore the SLVB rejects the false exercise. We must face a big struggle in order to achieve the socialist ideals and objectives of the people. It is futile to expect that any Government which comes to power by this elections, would do anything for the common good of the people. We believe that people will come forward for the historic occasion, in a few years, of forming the next Government, when conditions in the country will aggravate. We are dedicated to the formation of a full socialist alliance, to take the lead fearlessly and victoriously on that occasion. The SLVB, under pressing conditions, has taken the first steps in this direction. The SLVB has pledged to come forward and make sacrifices in organising the people and to give them a political training to finish the great duty successfully."

There is no doubt that the youth and the uncommitted will see a great deal of acceptable logic in Prins Gunasekera's rhetoric. The JVP youth have no use for the leaders of the old established Left, the LSSP and CPSL, who are regarded as partners in SLFP-UF misrule which has brought the country to the present pass. The JVP is likely to field a few candidates to make its presence felt. Its new journal—in Sinhala with a name that translated reads *Vanguard*—sets out to carve a new course in leftism and socialism. Chou En-lai was condemned in its first issue for underwriting the United Front's (and Mrs. Bandaranaike's) suppression of the 1971 insurgency with an interest-free loan of Rs. 150 million as a "counter-revolutionary". (It will be recalled that Chou had pulled the Maoist chestnuts out of the fire of Ceylon insurgency with this loan and also with an unsolicited and unnecessary condemnation of the insurgents as "counter-revolutionaries". The JVP has now repaid the compliment in the same coin). The JVP is critical of Russia as it is of China, but it is not clear what the JVP wants or what it thinks is the correct way. This is understandable because the JVP is still in search of the Golden Fleece (or is it the

Holy Grail!) The old established Parties have become ossified in the belief that they know all that there is to be known and that they have all the answers for every problem confronting the people and the country.

The TULF, with its allies the CWC and the MUF, will contest about 27 seats—they may contest a few more to keep the separatist flag flying in places like Puttalam (getting a mandate it is called). But after *Chelvanayakam* the TULF has sprung a few leaks which have already begun to create difficulties. In every place where the sitting MP has been changed, or a new candidate nominated for the new seats, there has been "trouble". In some of the old seats, there is trouble. Already, one can detect difficulties for the TULF in Trincomalee, Vaddukottai, Uduppiddy and a number of other places. But in the overall pattern the euphoria around the TULF that stems from emotional upsurges caused by racial discrimination will carry it through to victory in the general election. But it will be interesting to see whether the opponents of the TULF will be able to weaken its armour during the election campaign.

The UNP is the first major party to issue its manifesto (the JVP had issued one earlier). It also started its election campaign on May 25 at Kandy. There was a great deal of mumbo jumbo about candidates going in for religious services in different places of worship—Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian. The SLFP will hold its election rally on June 3rd, also in Kandy, and it has promised to release its manifesto on that date. The ULF has issued its election manifesto—a 12-point statement (about which the less said the better). The TULF will naturally issue a manifesto, but like the FP the main thrust of the TULF manifesto will be confined to the need to establish a separate state (earlier it was a federal state) to end the discrimination practised against the Tamils. The TULF has not worked out how a separate state should be run, (or whether it can be run at all as a viable unit), how its economy should be organised and how its citizens should be taught and fed. Like the FP, the TULF has neither an economic programme nor a work plan. Most of the TULF enthusiasts still live in the vague be-

lief that once a separate state (or a federal state or even an autonomous region) is established where the Tamil language will rule supreme, everything will be hunky-dory and that a Dravidian millennium would envelop the new state. One does not know when the TULF will get over this fairy-tale existence and come down to the brass tacks of an ordinary government based on economic policies of grassroots validity.

In the meantime, the GO-SLOW in the Railways, starting at the Ratmalana Railway Workshop, had begun to spread to other sections of the Railways. Thereupon, the CGR management had retorted with a partial lockout—to save the locomotives that were not being serviced or maintained. The result was that from the evening of Friday May 27, total paralysis had gripped the Railways and there was a virtual standstill for a couple of days. As from May 30, a few trains have been run to "save the face" of the Government. It is known that the Go-Slow could not have caused the stoppage so soon. It was expected that the Go-Slow would lead to a stoppage in about two weeks time, but the CGR's decision to effect a partial lockout was probably intended to bring matters to a head.

The rail stoppage has come at a time when large crowds were expected to trek to Anuradhapura and Mihintale. This Posen tamasha, it was thought by some SLFP stalwarts, would provide a good opportunity for politicking just before the elections, but the Rail strike has spoilt the fun. The Posen Full Moon holiday coming in mid-week (June 1) would have normally thrown all governmental activity out of gear for some time—the Posen celebrations go on from May 31 to June 5—but, the rail stoppage and the consequent inability to move petrol to Anuradhapura and Mihintale has thrown a damper on holiday-makers who find religious pilgrimages an excellent cover for taking French leave from work.

Many strange things are taking place in Colombo—not the least being the attempt to post two "sitting" ex-MPs as Ambassadors. It is strange that a Caretaker Government—it is Caretaker with a big "C"—should attempt to send two of its senior MPs (one a Minis-

ter and the other the Deputy Speaker) as Ambassadors. This was probably the only way that the seats they held could have been made available to other aspirants, but

this way out of the difficulty does not reflect well on the Government. It is not certain whether the countries concerned will be willing to agree to their accredi-

tation before the election results are known, but the announcements of these appointments were leaked out even before replies had been received.

SRI LANKA CHRONICLE

May 20 — May 25

A DIARY OF EVENTS IN SRI LANKA AND THE WORLD
COMPILED FROM DAILY NEWSPAPERS
PUBLISHED IN COLOMBO.

CDN—Ceylon Daily News; CDM—Ceylon Daily Mirror; CO—Ceylon Observer; ST—Sunday Times; DM—Dinamina; LD—Lankadipa; VK—Virakesari; ATH—Aththa; SM—Silumina; SLD—Sri Lankadipa; JD—Janadina; DP—Dinapathi; SU—Sun; DW—Dawasa; CM—Chinthamani; WK—Weekend; RR—Rivirasa;

FRIDAY, MAY 20: CTB buses that were damaged on May Day, number around 549; this one of the main reasons for the deterioration of bus services. The government has decided to grant an amnesty to prisoners to mark Republic Day. The nomination board of the SLFP yesterday decided to nominate Mr. Felix Dias Bandaranaike to contest Dompe at the forthcoming general elections—CDN. With the general elections fixed for July 21, the SLFP and the UNP have already picked their respective candidates for most of the seats. Sri Lanka's rubber production shot up by a million pounds last year. The technical officers of the SLBC will stage a 24 hour strike from midnight today—CDM. Employees of the Petroleum Corporation belonging to eight major trade unions will work-to-rule from today, in protest against the government's failure to grant 15 demands put forward by them. There will be about 100,000 postal voters at the General Elections. The Presidential proclamation dissolving the NSA has named 30 centres where nominations will be received for the general elections in July—SU. Processions and demonstrations have been banned from Nomination Day upto the general elections. A new wing of the CP has been born under the leadership of some of the oldest members of the CP of Sri Lanka; it is called the Navalanka CP (Marxist-Leninist) and is under the leadership of old veterans like K. A. Wimalapala, Ariyawansa Gunasekera, R. V. de S. Wijeyanayake and D. U. Jayasekera—LD. In the weeks preceding the dissolution of the NSA, in many departments, Corporations and Boards, the files and other documents of many workers and officers have been lost; this has happened in the case of those who have been recruited without the proper qualifications or those who have been found guilty of certain offences—ATH. Canada and the International Development Association, an Affiliate of the World Bank are jointly providing 14 million dollars on concessional terms to help finance a water supply project in Sri Lanka—CO.

SATURDAY, MAY 21: The government has intervened on behalf of the policy holders of the Ceylon Insurance Company Ltd. who complained that they have not received payment on policies which had matured. A trial test for around 30,000 HNCE students, pioneers of the new educational reforms will be held

in July; the date will be announced shortly. Police have recovered the five powerful transceivers which were reported lost by the Fisheries Corporation four weeks ago. Islandwide religious ceremonies will be held tomorrow to usher in Republic Day. The government has ordered an immediate rehabilitation program for 50-odd persons—including children—badly affected as a result of the recent disturbances at Delta Estates in Gampola—CDN. The Sri Lanka Consumers and User's Federation has written to the Chairman, National Prices Commission about the unrealistic pricing of consumer items. The Sri Lanka Air Force on Wednesday gave a new lease of life to an obsolete and abandoned Air Ceylon Dakota DC-3 aircraft believed to be over 33 years old saving the company about Rs. 30,000 in valuable foreign exchange. The Commissioner of Elections will recruit about 55,000 public servants for election duties. The Telecommunications personnel have temporarily suspended their 'work to rule'. The Central Organisation of the SLFP in Kandy has decided to disband itself in protest against nominations. This month too, consumers will receive increased rations of certain foodstuffs imported by the CWE—SU. The CP of the North is going to field candidates at the general elections against the TULF; this is because of a difference of opinion, it is understood—CDM. There are efforts being made by one faction of the SLFP to try and bring together the ULF—VK. The much-disputed appointment of teachers, will be stopped by the PM it is reliably understood; this is because there has been much opposition to the hasty recruitment of teachers not only by members of the opposition, but also by members of the government—DW. The Sri Lanka Bauddha Peramuna has asked the government to change the translation of the name in Tamil to Sri Lanka from *Ilankai*, because when the whole world, according to them refers to the country as Sri Lanka, only a minority in the country itself refers to it by a different name—DW.

SUNDAY, MAY 22: The fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Sri Lanka, which falls today will be marked by religious observances, the pagentry that is normally associated with the armed services parade and a cultural show at the Colombo Town Hall at night—SO. A Republic Day Amnesty was granted to 150 in the death row; their death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. The District Political authority system lapses as a consequence of dissolution and MP's going out of office. The Criminal Justice Commission Act will be revoked in the event of a UNP government being installed according to party leader, Mr. J. R. Jayewardene—ST. All political Parties fielding candidates for the general elections and independent candidates will be required to conform to a series of stringent measures to be introduced by the police to prevent violence from the time of nominations till the polls are over. Over seven hundred planters belonging to estates vested in the State will be in Colombo on Wednesday to meet the IGP and appraise him of the personal dangers facing them in their work places. The PM has called to a halt all appointments

in state corporations and other institutions till the general elections are over. Several candidates who are scheduled to contest at the forthcoming elections have bought ponies as they cannot afford the high price of petrol—VK.

MONDAY, MAY 23: The PM in her address to the nation on the fifth anniversary of the Republic said that the Republican status had enriched the country, that sovereignty resided in the people and that their lost rights have been restored. 7,000 new acres allotted to farmers under the Mahaweli scheme will be brought under cultivation this Yala in the newly developed areas lying between Kalawewa and Rajangana settlement schemes. The PM has decided that except for Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, no member of her family shall contest any seat at the forthcoming general elections. The neglect of orthopaedic patients at the General Hospital, Colombo, still continues; these patients remain in most surgical wards without any attention. Crowds braved the rain to witness the March-past of the services at the Republic Day celebrations at Galle Face Green yesterday to mark the fifth anniversary of the Republic of Sri Lanka—CDM. Panic buying has depleted stocks of petrol and kerosene in the city and many provincial towns, according to the Chairman of the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation. A bowel disease bacillary dysentery—is raging in Badulla and surrounding areas. Mr. Kumar Ponnambalam, son of the leader of the TC, Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam, announced yesterday that he would be contesting Jaffna as the TC candidate at the next general elections. UNP branches at Galle are opposing the application by Dr. W. Dahanayake, former MP, for UNP nomination to contest the Galle seat at the general elections. SLFP candidates who have lost at the polls on three consecutive occasions will not be re-nominated to contest the general elections—SU.

TUESDAY, MAY 24: The Bank of Ceylon will soon establish a separate department to assist gem exporters; they will be provided with a free-of charge documentation service and credit facilities to the value of gems certified by the Gem Corporation. Petrol and kerosene supplies will return to normal today, said the Chairman of the Petroleum Corporation. The Education Ministry yesterday categorically said that no decision had been made by the government to cancel the teaching appointments. University teachers may get another salary increase if a recommendation made to this effect by the Minister of Education is approved by the government this week; this will be in addition to the pay hike approved by the government early this month for University teachers—CDN. The PM and some of her other Ministers have withdrawn the lists submitted by them for the recent appointment of teachers as several members of the SLFP have vehemently protested to the PM against the manner in which the selections were made for the teaching appointments. A severe shortage of kerosene and petrol sent housewives and motorists on a panicky hunt during the weekend in many parts of the country. Sri Lanka has sought assistance from the Asian Development Bank for the modernisation, expansion and rehabilitation of the railway. The Joint Front of Trade Unions in the Ceylon Electricity Board have threatened to launch 'direct trade union action' if their demands are not met within a fortnight from today. The CWE has issued pharmacists and other registered dealers stocks of milk foods—CDM. An alliance of trade

unions in the plantation sector yesterday appealed to the government to rise above petty politics and act in the best interests of the national economy in the alienation of lands. The CP has ruled out the possibility of a no-contest pact or an alliance with the SLFP for the general elections. The unloading of fertiliser from ships in the Port of Colombo—stalled since March due to a go-slow in the Ceylon Fertiliser Corporation—has begun again. The work-to-rule by employees of the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation has been suspended till Thursday May 26—SU. The price of fish has been soaring in recent weeks, and the 'Observer feels it is due to the monsoon rains. Petrol and kerosene supplies will return to normal today, according to the Chairman of the Petroleum Corporation—CO. Because there is an acute shortage of matches it is proposed to start 11 factories under the DDC projects; two, one in Galagedara and the other in Kolonnawa are already under way—DM.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 25: Voters exercising their votes through the post will have to do so within ten days of nomination day, the Elections Commissioner said yesterday. The Government Printer last week briefed his senior staff about the work connected with the forthcoming general election. The UNP will launch its election campaign at Bogambara, Kandy today; the public rally will be preceded by religious observances and the working committee meeting. The TULF election campaign will be launched on May 28—CDN. A nephew of the late Mr. Dudley Senanayake is to be the SLFP nominee for the Dedigama seat at the forthcoming general election; he is Mr. Ranjith Senayake, brother of Mr. Rukman Senanayake, former MP for Dedigama. Employees of the Land Reform Co-operatives of the Yatiyantota electorate are on strike because they allege victimisation and the harassment of non LSSP staff and workers and the compulsory deductions of their pay packets for LSSP political work. The Janata Vimukthi Peramuna will contest four seats at the forthcoming general elections. University teachers have threatened to give up their deanships and professorships unless the Ministers at their meeting today approve the salary scale recommended by the Advisory Board of Governors—CDM. The IGP yesterday gave an assurance that Police operations in estate areas would be intensified. One more minister of the SLFP will be out of the general election; this will be Mr. M. P. de Z. Siriwardene. The SLBC has now placed a ban on the coverage of all political events. The AMS and the GMOA have expressed concern over the delay in implementing agreements they have reached with the Ministry of Health—SU. Since there is an acute shortage of soap, the government has decided to import palm oil and also to increase the import of tallow—LD. The customs and the CID after confiscating posters of the former MP for Yatiyantota and the leader of the LSSP which came from UK, have released them—DW.

FOR THE RECORD

Explosion In The Plantations

by Tribune Chronicler

As mentioned in the *Tribune* last week, it is only recently that the troubles in the plantation areas received a little attention. It is not necessary to recount in detail all that has taken place, but in the course of our commentary for the record we will refer to a number of incidents which must shock the conscience of all right thinking people.

It will be recalled that all the major plantation trade unions had launched a strike in the Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya electorate as from 29th April and the unions had threatened that the strikes would be escalated on an Island-wide basis on the 12th of May. This strike was led mainly by the Ceylon Workers Congress and the Ceylon Estate Staffs Union. It was after the strike started on April 29 that the Commissioner of Labour was prompted to intervene in order to effect some kind of settlement. On May 11, a settlement was reached. An official note about the agreement reads as follows: "At a conference held on 11th May, 1977 at the Department of Labour presided over by the Commissioner of Labour, at which the Chairman, Land Reform Commission, Chairman, State Plantation Corporation and the Additional Secretary, Ministry of Plantation Industry were present together with representatives of the C.W.C., C.E.S.U., National Union of Workers, Ceylon Plantation Workers Union, New Red Flag Plantation Workers Union, Lanka Estate Workers Union, United Plantation Workers Union, D.W.C., Progressive Estates Staffs Union, Sri Lanka Plantation and Estate Industrial Worker Congress, Illanka, Thozhilalar Kazhakam and Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union, the following agreement was reached:

"1. The principle that there should be no adverse change in the terms and conditions of employment of workers and staff on all plantations affected by the vesting of such plantations in the L.R.C. or any other State Management Agency is agreed upon. Where such adverse changes have

taken effect steps will be taken to give redress. Details of this will be worked out by a committee composed of representatives of the Labour Department, the L.R.C., Janawasama, State Plantations Corporation, Usawasama and other State agencies that may become necessary.

"2. The scheme for a price wage supplement for tea workers already proposed by the Ministry of Labour will be made effective with retrospective effect from the 1st of the month on which the proposal was made. The scheme will apply to all estates 50 acres and above in extent. This will be calculated on the basis of high, medium and low grown averages taken separately.

"3. In the alienation of estate land the following principles will be observed. (a) there will be no de-housing of workers resident on the estate; (b) there will be no reduction in the amount of work offered to the workers; (c) There will be no discrimination between Sinhalese village residents and Sri Lanka citizens working on estates in the selection for the allocation of such land."

"This principle will be extended to the Sri Lanka resident workers on Balapokuna and Choisy estates where land has been alienated. Sri Lanka resident workers on these estates will be found allotments elsewhere in the district if no allotments are possible on the estates.

"(d) Two Standing Committees consisting of representatives of the Department of Labour, the L.R.C., Janawasama, State Plantation Corporation, Usawasama and any other State agency that may be necessary will go into: (i) all outstanding matters pertaining to estate staff, and (ii) all outstanding matters pertaining to manual workers respectively.

"These committees will start functioning before the end of this month. On the basis of this agreement, the aforementioned Unions have decided to call off their present strike on the plantations with effect from the 13th May, 1977."

To the credit of the Unions, it must be said that they honoured the agreement and called off the strike, in spite of a most provocative incident that took place on

Devon Estate, Talawakelle on the morning of 11th May. The *Congress News* the fortnightly newspaper published by the Ceylon Workers' Congress, reported this and other incidents in the following terms:

"Trigger happy policemen are on the rampage again, their latest victim being a eighteen year old youth, SIVANOO LECTHUMANAN who was fatally injured of when a party policemen fired at the workers on Devon estate, Talawakelle on May 11. Meanwhile, thugs have taken over the Gampola area. On the 11th of this month three lorry loads of hooligans, led allegedly by a Project Manager of a government owned estate went into Sanquhar estate, Gampola and created pandemonium, attacking innocent workers and robbing them of their all too meagre possession.

"What is worse, the culprits have been allowed to go scot-free by the guardians of law and order, while their colleagues have downed an innocent youth, on the threshold of life with their bullets. Over fifty thousand workers—men, women and children who filed past the body of the martyred youth, Letchumanan at the Patana office of the Ceylon Workers Congress and an equal number who participated in the funeral procession and his last rights, bore ample testimony to the resentment caused among the public by the police action."

"In this connection the President of the C.W.C., Mr. S. Thondaman has sent the following letter to the Prime Minister, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike:

"In a series of communications addressed to you during the course of the last three years, I have brought to your notice the climate of frustration that was developing in the plantation areas on account of certain Ministers and the bureaucrats carrying out their directions. It is indeed most unfortunate that despite my very best efforts to meet you personally and place the case of the plantation workers before you, it did not materialise despite promises held out in this direction.

"As late as March 7th this year, I brought to your attention the development of an explosive situation with communal overtones in the Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya, Kotmale and Gampola electo-

rates arising out of discriminatory governmental measures put in operation by parties who appear bent on creating two warring sections between the peasants and the estate workers. Matters reached such an unfortunate pitch that the plantation workers had no alternative other than to undertake yet another strike in the Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya electorate and extend it to the rest of the country.

"I am aware of the role played by your goodself in defusing the strike situation that further endangered the economic situation of the country and it was your realistic approach that led to the settlement that was arrived at on 11th May 1977 before the Commissioner of Labour Mr. Lakshman de Mel. Though the agreement of 11th May 1977 did not match our expectations we accepted it in tune with the consistent position we have taken that the C.W.C. would always act with a sense of responsibility and in the larger interests of community.

"In this context it is extremely distressing that conditions should have been created for a worker to lose his life at the hands of the Police at Devon Estate and the workers of Sanquhar Estate be subjected to organised looting and bodily harm at the instance of the project Manager of Orwell Estate, Gampola—both these incidents taking place on 11th May 1977—the very day on which the Government authorities were negotiating a formula to bring the situation to normalcy on the plantations.

"I visited Sanquhar Estate on 15th May 1977 and was able to see for myself the devastation left behind and speak to the victims of the dastardly attack. From statements made by witnesses following persons (and others whose names and identity will be available to you in the statements recorded by the police from injured persons and victims of damage to their line rooms and other personal property) were members of an unlawful assembly who, with others armed with deadly weapons committed acts of rioting, mischief, criminal trespass, assault and looting as common object;

I. Nandana Bandara Project Manager, Orwell Estate, Gam-

pola; 2. Ratnayake—Private Secretary to M.P. Gampola; 3. The Grama Sevaka of Atabage; 4. Piyasena Liyanamahatmaya; 5. Sampson; 6. Piyasena of Vetellapitiya; 7. Sugathadasa of Verellapitiya; 8. Mahatun of Verellapitiya; 9. Dissanayake K.P. of Sanquhar Estate who is himself an aspirant for an allotment of land.

"Whilst persons 1 to 5 had come to the scene in a jeep the others had come in lorries, three of which have been identified as being, Kalugalla Estate lorry, Atabage Peter's lorry, and a Co-operative Society lorry. Altogether six lorries had brought the members of the unlawful assembly to the spot.

"In spite of information furnished to the police they had arrived on the scene only on the following morning. It is inexplicable that not a single person who constituted this unlawful assembly had been taken into custody. I understand the police merely administered a warning to the leaders of the unlawful assembly, namely the project manager of Orwell Estate.

"State officers of some sort or other have been responsible for letting loose a reign of terror, making use of vehicles belonging to the State institutions, to loot, damage living quarters, personal property and maim helpless residents. Government must accept full responsibility for the criminal conduct of the persons who are employees of state institutions.

"I trust that the Government will dissociate itself from criminal activities of this nature by:

"1. Interdicting forthwith the persons responsible for the incidents on Sanquhar Estate.

"2. Appointing a Commission of Inquiry to probe the incidents on Sanquhar Estate and the Police shooting of a young worker on Devon Estate.

"3. Giving adequate protection to resident workers and their families and personal property at Sanquhar Estate for them to pursue their normal work.

"Your early response to my representations will be greatly appreciated."

There was no report of any action being taken by the authorities, until the senior management planters decided to take action (vide *Tribune*, May 28).

Apart from minor references, neither the *Lake House* nor the *Times* papers published any reports about these happenings. The *Sun* too, in the earlier stages, had only fragmentary reports.

It is argued by apologists that it is better to "play down" these incidents lest it lead to communal tension. They do not seem to realize that such an ostrich-like attitude of hiding in the sand is futility at its worst. The Virakesari published reasonably good reports but they reach only the Tamil public whereas it is necessary to alert the whole nation to the very dangerous situation that was developing in the plantations.

Whilst the UNP papers were generally quiet and silent the LSSP's weekly journal *Socialist Nation* sought to make the maximum use of these incidents to expound its Marxist outlook. In its issue of May 13, it published a front page story with the heading **DIABOLICAL PLOT! SLFP BANKRUPTS FAN COMMUNAL FIRES IN MASKELIYA.** For the record we quote this comment in full.

"Now that Mr. Felix Dias' grand strategy for boosting the morale and electoral prospects of the SLFP has ended in the dampest squib this side of 1956 and he himself has gone, together with his wife and brother-in-law, the SLFP has thought up something far more disastrous than anything Felix Dias could have devised. The decision to parcel out seven thousand acres of the choicest tea lands in the Nuwara Eliya electorate to villagers was undoubtedly motivated by a material desire to ensure victory for Crown Prince Anura Bandaranaike, whose only connection with the electorate is that he spends the April season at his mother's house at Nuwara Eliya. But, putting these petty devices of petty people with petty ambitions aside, the decision and the strike of plantation workers which it has provoked give rise to considerations which are of the highest social and political importance. It is both imperative and urgent to arrive at a correct evaluation of their import.

"There is no issue which throws up so sharply the petitbourgeois and opportunistic character of the

SLFP than that of the plantations. While it mouths brave words about socialism when the word is likely to win votes, its conception of socialism is of the crudest and most debased kind. Had it been otherwise the SLFP would not fail to recognize the distinction between land reform and nationalisation of the plantations. While land reform is essentially a process which seeks to provide the landless peasant cultivator with an adequate landholding taken from absentee land lords and feudal chieftains, nationalisation is a process whereby the state extends its ownership and control of the means of production. In this instance, the latter happens to be a sector of the economy which is most highly capitalised and at a far higher level of economic organisation than peasant agriculture, whether individual or collective, could possibly connote.

"It is typical of SLFP political impoverishment that it confuses these two economic categories. The SLFP's political maturity has not advanced very much higher than the mud of the paddy field. Since the capitalist UNP and the socialist Left understand issues of this nature all too clearly, the middle-headed party of the "middle-path" can only perceive some collusion between the two.

"The SLFP bemoans the Kandyan peasant, robbed of his 'birth-right' by British imperialists and foreign labour. No observant person, we venture to think, would fail to recognize the plight of the Kandyan peasantry, hemmed in by the giant tea plantations towering above their tiny plots both geographically and economically. But the purely emotional approach, whether genuine, chauvinistic, or opportunistic, provides no answer to the problem. This problem, posed in these terms, was stated quite some years ago by the late Albert Godamunne and he happened to be one of Sri Lanka's most reactionary politicians. Only those who live in a world of fantasy and emotional frustration would imagine that historical wrongs could be remedied by reversing historical processes. Dr. Vimalananda Tennakoon would contest this view, but then he wants a restoration of the Kandyan Kingdom! He is at least consistent.

"The SLFP, despite the homage it feels bound to pay to the Sirima-

Shashtri Pact, would like to wish the plantation worker into limbo or treat him as if he did not exist at the human level. Fundamentally, this party's mental make-up is anti-working class and xenophobic. It is galling to them that the plantation worker is rooted in his work place and organised to defend his rights as a productive worker. The decision to fragment these 7,000 acres demonstrated that the SLFP is quite prepared to destroy national wealth to win one electoral seat.

"Fortunately, economic facts are stubborn and more powerful than a coterie of political bankrupts approaching 20th century problems with mental equipment fashioned in the early 19th. They will destroy themselves in this desperate adventure.

"However, let us not blind ourselves to the dangers that beset us. Losers may create havoc, and often do, before they bow to the political guillotine. There is little doubt that the present situation in the hill country contains the seeds of bloody holocaust. The signs are distinctive and at least one Minister has made an ominous reference to the powers of the President to postpone elections in the event of civil commotion. What, in fact, the Government's decision would achieve, if implemented, is to put the plantation workers and the rural folk of the hill country at each other's throats. The plantation workers will not give up their traditional livelihood and face starvation without a life and death struggle. They will undoubtedly, if pushed to an extremity, seize the plantations themselves rather than give them up. The SLFP Government, which is, in any event, an usurper Government with no moral right to rule, is playing with fire and dynamite at the tail end of its corrupt career.

"The problem of the landless and hard-pressed hill country peasantry cannot be solved along these lines and no one who calls himself a socialist with any serious intent will think of destroying our largest national asset and a section of our productive working class in a futile exercise to do so. This problem can be solved and it eventually will be solved, we have little doubt, when the peasantry and workers of the hill country

and indeed of the whole country join together to usher in their Government and socialism."

In its issue of May 20, the *Socialist Nation* in the last page column entitled *Notes and Comments* stated: "Gangs of thugs, moving about in lorries, have gone into action against estate workers in the hill country. This week organised gangsters in lorry loads entered Sanquhar Estate in Pussellawa and looted and assaulted workers on that plantation. On Delta Estate, in the same area a number of line rooms were set on fire and inestimable damage caused to the property of poor workers. Law and order seem to have broken down in the plantation districts. These incidents bear out our comments last week to the very hilt. Indeed there are definite indications that these were so isolated incidents. The election campaign of Anura Bandaranaike in Maskeliya is increasingly tending towards racial incitement. He is fighting to get votes away from Gamini Ariyaratne, former M.P., for Maskeliya and a trade union leader, but the only political weapon with which he could carry on the fight in a civilised manner is the fact that he is the son of two Prime Ministers of this country....."

The only other English newspaper which has been consistently reporting and commenting on the explosive situation in the plantations is the weekly *THE INDEPENDENT*. In its issue of May 20, in a front page box with the title **THUGS ON THE RAMPAGE ON ESTATE**, it stated: "Thugs have gone berserk in the upcountry areas and are setting fire to the living quarters of labourers, looting their belongings, assaulting them and harassing them. But according to Mr. S. Thondaman, President of the C.W.C., the Police are taking no action against them. He has sent an official letter of protest to the Prime Minister, listing these complaints and urging her to take immediate action lest the situation worsens. Mr. Thondaman told *The Independent* that ever since a labourer was shot by the Police on Devon Estate, Talawakelle on the 11th instant, gangs of thugs using Government transport like CWE lorries are scouring the estate areas and assaulting the people at will. Most of these thugs he said, were headed by L.R.C.

Planters Demonstrate

officials and Government employees who were provoking them to go on the rampage. 'What distresses me', said Mr. Thondaman, 'is that the Police are watching this situation unconcerned and doing nothing to prevent what may eventually develop to be a holocaust. I have also informed the Indian High Commission to take immediate action.'

As we have already mentioned, the *Sun*, is the only daily paper of a big publishing group that has recently started to give even a little coverage to the dangerous situation that has enveloped the plantations. It is the only daily paper which gave publicity to the demonstration staged by the members of the Ceylon Planters Society in Colombo on May 24 (vide *Tribune* May 28). It is the only paper which thereafter referred to the fact that the Government has decided to suspend land alienation contemplated in the Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya electorate for the time being. It is also the only paper that published reports that the Police had begun to take some action against a few of the culprits who had organised the looting on Sanquhar and Delta Estates.

The *Weekend*, the Sunday paper of the *Sun* had a big spread on page 4 of its issue of May 29 about the planters demonstration. Veteran commentator, Gamini Navaratne, wrote a scintillating piece entitled **POLITICIANS PLAY PANTHU ON THE PLANTATIONS**. A few extracts from this article will indicate that Navaratne has done a good job of work in explaining the significance and meaning of the planters' demonstration. He said, "The *Periya Dorais* and *Sinna Dorais* were in town on Tuesday. The men who in the company-owned days enjoyed pay and perks that were the envy of others were not on a spree. They were here to fight for their rights—and their lives. More, they were here to fight for YOU and ME. For a situation has developed on the tea plantations after the nationalisation that can, if mishandled, spell economic ruin for Sri Lanka. Like the blight that dethroned King Coffee in the late 19th century. The name of the new disease is **POLITICS**. And it is being spread rapidly by some politicians who are playing pandu on the plantations. For it is now quite clear that behind the several recent

acts of violence, arson and looting on the estates there has been politics—communal politics. The real intent of Tuesday's demonstration by the superintendents and assistant superintendents—now called managers and assistant managers was to alert the people to this grave danger."

Gamini Navaratne pointed out that the planters, by their action, had rendered "a national service". He went on to say, "The demonstration itself was unique. These management grades had never had occasion since the tea bush was introduced to Sri Lanka over a century ago, to stage a protest march. The name of the demonstrators' organisation, the Ceylon Planters' Society, itself must have sounded unfamiliar to most people, because previously there had been little publicity about its activities, although it has been in existence since the 1930s. Whatever problems they had in those days were sorted out quietly with the company owners because the men who are expected to maintain discipline on the estates could not afford to display any lack of responsibility. This is not to say that what they did on Tuesday amounted to irresponsible conduct. I personally think they could not have performed a more nobler role. I say this after visiting Galle Face Green and talking to nearly a hundred of the demonstrators—to get their side of the story. And their story, shorn of all exaggeration, makes shocking reading.."

The article merits careful reading by all who had not paid any attention to current developments in the plantations. The *Sun* had also made the demonstration of the planters and its initial success its front page leads on Tuesday, May 24 and Wednesday, May 25.

And, on Saturday, May 28, the *Sun* was the only paper to announce **ALIENATION OF LAND SUSPENDED: "PROCEDURAL PROBLEMS" SAY OFFICIAL SOURCES**. The report, (byline P. Balasuriya) stated:

Government is to suspend its controversial plan to alienate land in the Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya electorate. Authoritative sources said yesterday that the plan would not be implemented till after the general elections, in view of what they called "procedural problems". These problems were spotlighted

at conferences held recently at the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, and the Ministry of Defence and Foreign Affairs to discuss matters relating to alienation. One of the main problems pointed out was the displacement of workers. Originally, 6,000 acres were earmarked for alienation from estates in the Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya areas. Later it was proposed that only 3,000 acres be alienated. The move to alienate land in this electorate was strongly resisted by the trade unions in plantation sector and there have been violent repercussions in many estates. The Ceylon Planters' Society recently told the Inspector General of Police that "uncertainty and fear" prevailed among the plantation workers. A deputation from the society also met the Minister of Plantation Industry and warned that an explosive situation was developing in the estate areas.

Whatever the official excuse to "save face", there is no doubt that the Government was compelled to stage a retreat.

The indignation, frustration and disappointment that stemmed from this retreat from land alienation in Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya was betrayed in a speech at Yatinuwara, on May 27, by Minister Hector Kobbekaduwa. The *Sun*, May 28, reported it under the headline: **THONDAMAN WILL BE DEPORTED SAYS HECTOR**.

"Thondaman has been dancing a little too much of late. He was very silent when this Government crushed his estate kingdom. But now he was openly backing the UNP in order to get his lands back, hoping that the UNP will come to power. If he does not stop his activities I am afraid stern action will have to be taken by this Government to acquire the limited 52 acres left for him and to deport him from this country," said Mr. Hector Kobbekaduwa, Minister of Agriculture and Lands, at a party meeting of the SLFP Central Organisation and party branches of the Yatinuwara Kandupalatha area held at Ketakumbura, in the Yatinuwara electorate, where he is seeking re-election at the forthcoming general election.

Mr. Kobbekaduwa also said that UNP would never come to power as long as the common masses of this country backed the Government.

The common masses were eagerly waiting to reject the UNP and re-elect the SLFP to reign this country for another term. People knew what the UNP was and who its leader was.

Mr. Kobbekaduwa added that SLFP would win about 100 seats easily and there was no doubt about this Government coming to power again.

This speech cannot be dismissed as the stupid and insane outpourings of a conceited egomaniac. It is the speech of a senior SLFP Minister, and also one the ULF parties look up to as a "hero", nay a possible Prime Minister they could support.

Up to the time of writing, this speech has not been repudiated or denied. It has not been disowned by the Government. (Certain official sources only say that the Sun should not have published it, i.e. it should have been blacked out).

This speech is only further proof in support of Tribune's longtime contention that the implementation of Land Reform teemed with illegalities, that intimidation, threats, blackmail, misuse of power and official bullying had become part of the style of government.

Even if the SLFP wins a 100 seats, as Minister Kobbekaduwa seems to think it will, it will be suicidal for the SLFP to have him as a responsible Minister if the Republican Constitution and Parliamentary Democracy are to continue.

Even the "bad" kings of Kandy could not have "deported" Thondaman—for one thing no country can be compelled to take "deportees". (His head of course, could have been given the works in a mortar!) And if Kobbekaduwa can "deport" Thondaman, can he not deport the Chelvanayakams, Mahmuds, Kumarasuriyars, Jayawardena's, Pereras, Nanayakkaras—or even the Ratwattes, Gopallawas or Ellawalas?

POSTSCRIPT

The Daily Mirror, on Monday May 30, spread a 5-column banner headline on its front page: HECTOR REASSURES LANDLESS: LAND DISTRIBUTION IN N' ELIYA-MASKELIYA TO CONTINUE.

The report read:

"Land alienation in the N'ElIya and Maskeliya areas will continue." This was said by the Minister of Agriculture and Lands, Mr. Hec-

tor Kobbekaduwa, at a mass rally in the Yatinuwara electorate. Mr. Kobbekaduwa characterised as 'absolutely false' a news item in the **Dawasa** Group of newspapers that land alienation in the N'ElIya and Maskeliya areas had been suspended. "I wish to categorically state that what had been started at N'ElIya will be extended to other parts of the island. I wish to assure the landless that land will be made available to them on a co-operative basis". The Minister said that the second stage of land reforms was initiated by him with Mr. Anura Bandaranaike in Nuwara Eliya on the grounds that socialism did not mean merely the transfer of ownership from private sector institutions to State institutions but the ultimate transfer of land to the people. Units of about 100 acres each, which will enable personalised attention, are to be set aside for alienation. They will have quarter-acre residential blocks making up hamlets with amenities such as electricity, water, community centres and shrine rooms. The balance land would be cultivated as one unit. Co-operatives would be formed under strict articles of association for their management.

"It is felt that tea production in the N'ElIya-Maskeliya district can be more than trebled by this method with replanting the better clones and more regular use of fertilisers. This will release two-thirds of the cultivated area for further settlement. Kenya follows a less sophisticated method similar to this scheme but has achieved much higher productivity than Sri Lanka.

"Up to now, there had been over 18,000 applicants for land in the N'ElIya-Maskeliya district. More land is being surveyed and more Land Kachcheries will be held to cope with the large number of applicants. There has been considerable resistance to this method of land distribution not only by political elements but even by the Ceylon Workers' Congress led by Mr. Thondaman. Nevertheless, Mr. Kobbekaduwa said that he was determined to push ahead with this second stage of land reforms as he did the first."

The Sun, on Monday 30, had a small front page item entitled: HECTOR WANTS TO GO

AHEAD WITH ALIENATION. The report stated:

"The Minister of Agriculture and Lands, Mr. Hector Kobbekaduwa is determined to go ahead with the proposed alienation of land in the Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya electorate. He said so at a public meeting held last week at Yatinuwara. At present, plans for alienation remain suspended in view of procedural difficulties, according to official sources. No instructions to go ahead with the alienation have yet been given, these sources added.

The Daily Mirror headlines and Hector Kobbekaduwa's heroic attempt to keep the flag flying (remember the boy who stood on the burning deck...!) are no doubt election pep talk. But, such irresponsible statements will only add fuel to a fire that has already started to blaze in the plantations.

And what about Hector K's threat to deport Thondaman after taking over the 52 acres that Land Reform had graciously allowed Thondaman to retain out of many hundreds of acres of tea lands Thondaman had once owned?

AN OPEN LETTER

To All Journalists

I was surprised that Tribune has not "reacted" to an article published in the Sunday Times of May 22, 1977, entitled "THE STORY OF EMERGENCY: THE PEOPLE MUST KNOW", by C. Raghavan. This particular article was published in the Tribune of May 14. Readers know that Tribune has, over the years regularly reprinted articles from the Indian weekly Mainstream, and that the Times Group has never before done so. I have checked up and found out that the Times does not get a copy of the Mainstream. It is therefore obvious that the printing of this article in the Sunday Times of May 22 was a reproduction of the article which appeared in the Tribune of May 14. The least the Sunday Times should have done is to acknowledge that it had taken the article off the Tribune. Journalistic ethics prescribe such acknowledgements. It is not enough to refer to the original source.

Foreign Correspondents' Association

What makes this act of piracy even more intriguing is the lengthy introductory note published at the top of the article. The note does not indicate its authorship; whether it is by the Editor or an Assistant Editor, or a Sub-Editor or a hack. The purpose and motive for this note is certainly not to explain to the readers the background of Mr. C. Raghavan (though it seems to be the excuse) but to enable some person or persons un-named to stick a MacCarthyian cold war knife into a foreign journalist working in Colombo. The fact that innuendoes in the paragraph quoted below are directed at a particular foreign correspondent (and who has no local forum for self-defence) makes this attack all the more despicable.

The paragraph referred to in this introductory note in the *Sunday Times* reads as follows:

"Like PTI, *Samachar* has many correspondents abroad. Some like Mr. Unnikrishnan, served in Colombo for many years. Most of them are top-class correspondents competing keenly with the big agencies. In some places however, the PTI or *Samachar* must be a third-rater whose main job is to gather information for the Indian Embassy on local politics and personalities. The Nayar Commission, it is reported, is studying these aspects to see whether the professional functioning of *Samachar* is hampered by the way some correspondents are used by the embassy as a secret arm to meddle in local affairs, especially journalistic affairs, and to influence local newspapers and newspapermen in a manner that brings discredit both to the agency and to India. Mr. Raghavan was "removed" from his post for standing up to his dictatorial bosses and their scant regard for professionalism. Some time ago, Mr. Raghavan sent a prompt letter of apology to the editor of a Colombo daily when the Colombo PTI correspondent had introduced personal criticism of the editor into a news despatch—one of the chief voices of the Western monopolies attacked by the non-aligned press."

Although no names have been mentioned, and although a painfully laboured attempt has been made to prepare, in advance, for why-but-the-cap-on-yourself defence, it is clear at whom the libellous innuendoes are directed. It is much

more than mere libel. It is a mischievous attempt to sow discord between two friendly neighbouring countries. The allegation is that the PTI/*Samachar* correspondent in Colombo is part of an Indian CIA operating in Colombo. This kind of cold-war character assassination, characteristic of the McCarthyism of the 1950s and 1960s, had died a natural death years ago, and it is surprising that it should be revived in 1977 in Colombo.

This uncalled for and unprovoked attack on the *Samachar* correspondent in Colombo using a cold war tar brush calls for action, in the first instance, by the professional bodies of journalism (or what is even left of them today). The most appropriate of such bodies in this case is the *Sri Lanka Foreign Correspondents Association* and if this Association does not take up this matter as a gross and indecent violation of journalistic ethics the Association has no justification for its existence. If the Association does take up the matter, and I hope it will, I will be willing to place whatever information I have to throw light on some of the most sordid aspects of this attack. For instance, I am personally aware that Mr. Raghavan did not "apologise" to the editor of a Colombo daily when he sent in a "complaint" many many years ago. It is preposterous that an ancient grievance (1973!) should be resurrected as an excuse to use a poison pen tar brush. People in glass houses should know how to behave.

This indecent instance of character assassination is also a matter, which, in my view, must be taken before the Press Council. If the parties who can take the matter before the Press Council, viz: the *Sri Lanka Foreign Correspondents Association* (on behalf of the correspondent), or the *Foreign Correspondent* attacked in the *Sunday Times* note, I will be willing to testify before the Press Council.

For the moment, I am withholding my name from publication but should my assistance be required, either by the *Sri Lanka Foreign Correspondents Association* or the Press Council, I have authorised the Editor of *Tribune* to divulge my name. I have expressly told him that my name is not to be divulged to the Office bearers of the *Sri Lanka Foreign Corres-*

pondents Association unless some worthwhile, purposeful and meaningful action is taken by the Association to provide redress to the foreign correspondent so grievously libelled and also to ensure that such violations of accepted journalistic norms are not violated with impunity.

If a new era is to dawn in journalism in Ceylon, there must be an end to this kind of tar-brush smear campaigns to assassinate the character of defenceless persons, especially journalists. There has recently been an unfortunate epidemic of such tar-brush libellous character assassinations in the organ of a leading political party but this is no reason for the *Sunday Times* to follow suit. The papers which indulge in such smear campaigns will find them counter-productive. Those in charge of newspapers and also those who write such dirty pieces should be careful about boomerangs and counter-attacks. They will come from the most unexpected quarters at the most unlikely times.

In any case, I hope the *Sri Lanka Foreign Correspondents Association* will not sleep over this matter.

A JOURNALIST.

Colombo.
29.5.77

* * *

A PRAYER

Lord Buddha And Plantation Workers

by Pio Campa S.J.

In the middle of May, a week after Vesak, and a short time before Poson, up-country Plantation Workers have been inhumanly assaulted. If those who have planned and executed such inhumanity and cruelty against such peaceful men and women, responsible for Rs. 200 million MONTHLY PROFIT (in contrast with the Rs. 20 million MONTHLY DEFICIT of the C.T.B.) are Buddhist Sinhalese, one cannot but bow one's head in shame and confusion to ask Lord Buddha's and his follower's forgiveness.

"Maitri, kindness, selfless joy and fortitude" are the four foundation stones for the building of a

new society and a new family of man where everyone will be respected, loved and served. Such assault against the Plantation Workers took place ten days before the Republic Day so betraying the ideal and aspiration of the Sri Lanka people to have the wheel of the Dhamma supreme in this country.

Planters and Trade Union leaders have appealed to the Police for protection against such acts of hatred and inner war. Police have promised it. That will never be sufficient UNLESS a united effort be made to spread the implementation of the sublime teachings of Lord Buddha: Love and compassion towards everyone, especially the least ones, and those most in need.

If those responsible for such blind acts of violence and destruction are Buddhist Sinhalese, this is the time to make everyone realize the historical truth that there is much blood-relationship and connection between Lord Buddha and the Plantation Workers: They are sons of the same Mother India; both have come from India here on a mission of welfare for and development of the country and its people.

Lord Buddha (as Lord Jesus few centuries after Him) said: "What you do to or against the least of my brethren you will do to or against Me."

Therefore everything done against the Sri Lanka Plantation Workers is a betrayal of Lord Buddha's precepts and of his way of Life.

Sinhalese Buddhists should come forward and protest against such anti-Sinhalese and anti-Buddhist action. It is THEY who have to build a bridge of mutual understanding between the majority and minority community. "MAY ALL BEINGS BE WELL."

Estate People's Service
Oxfam - Sarvodaya
Kahawatte.
May 20, 1977.

T O D A Y

The Plantations Are Burning

by R. R. Sivalingam

The plantations in the hill country are aflame. The working people in the plantations are enraged. A situation, that has never before been faced in the plantation areas, has been created. These are explosive tensions threatening the smooth functioning and peaceful human relations in the area. The situation has arisen purely as a result of consequences arising out of Land Reform.

The two most significant events that have taken place in this country concerning the plantation workers are the 1964 and 1975 agreements between the Governments of India and Sri Lanka. The position of the plantation workers had remained indeterminate up to 1964. The plantation people who were accepted as citizens of Sri Lanka by the Laws of our country prior to 1947, lost that position in 1949 and were en masse rendered stateless by the Citizenship Laws of 1948 and 1949. This injustice continued to rankle up to 1964, when the Sirima-Shastri Pact was signed.

Even that pact was not conclusive in respect of 150,000 peasants of Indian origin. The agreement of 1975 between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India and our Prime Minister reached conclusion regarding the status and rights of the plantation people. 600,000 persons are to be repatriated to India and 375,000 persons are to become citizens of Sri Lanka. Implementation of this agreement gives also to two processes, namely: repatriation and citizenisation.

The latter process necessarily leads to consequential action and policies to be adopted by the Government of Sri Lanka. So far, apart from the creation of a Multimember Constituency in the Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya Electorate, to enable the plantation workers to return a representative of their choice to the National State Assembly, no other concrete policy or scheme has been announced regarding the integration of these persons wh

have lived and worked in the country for nearly 150 years. The current disturbances in the plantation areas arise directly as a consequence of a lack of policy and failure to envisage a scheme of integration of the new citizens the Government of Sri Lanka has accepted, through International Agreements.

The second most important event is the passing of the Land Reform Laws of 1973 and 1975. From the fact that these laws have been enacted, beyond the General Election Manifesto of 1970 of the United Front, is in itself a clear indication that this was done without adequate planning and preparation but was ushered into being through popular pressure. As far as I could see there is no clear land policy after the vesting of lands with the Land Reform Commission. One million acres of land has been vested in State Agencies and sporadic land alienation to landless peasants has taken place. One fails to see a clear policy of either a well-thought out scheme of land use pattern on land alienation. There is the vague promise of correcting the injustice done to the Kandyan peasantry and distribution of land to the landless peasants. It does not appear to be adequately appreciated that all plantation lands are not suitable for peasant alienation.

If the policy of land alienation is one of giving land to the landless then the claim of the plantation worker cannot easily be overlooked. They are the most landless community in this country. There does not appear to be any willingness to give land to the plantation people or even an awareness to settle them in an organised manner, distinct from the present colonial provision of barracks-like line room accommodation. On the other hand there seems to be an official attitude of complete indifference as to what happens to plantation workers who are displaced as a result of the breaking up of plantation lands through the process of land alienation.

Thousands of workers have been driven out of their homes and denied employment opportunities and even the basic right of drawing their rations as a result of this attitude of indifference and forced eviction of plantation workers has

Resistance

gone on for some time. So we find in our country today government-created beggars and modern gypsies who are the erstwhile plantation workers. Officially, of course, neither this problem nor these persons are recognized.

The Government appears to think the only solution to this problem is the acceleration of the rate of repatriation. Though there is an administrative machinery to ensure this process there is neither policy nor machinery to take the conclusive action of land settlement and rehabilitation of plantation workers who have been citizenised.

Youth Settlements such as Janawasas and Agricultural Co-operatives are not meant for plantation workers or youths. Co-operative Development bodies would not make plantation workers members of those Co-op. bodies. On the other hand Youth Settlements and Agricultural Co-ops. have been created in the heart of plantations causing racial differences between plantation people and the new settlers.

In the nationalized estates great discrimination has been shown in the recruitment and employment of personnel and even workers. Speeches made by important persons have the unfortunate effect of humiliating and insulting the plantation workers. The discrimination against the plantation workers either because they are Tamil or because they are largely voteless has reached such glaring proportions that not even a casual visitor to these areas can fail to observe this.

The benefits accruing from Land Reform have flowed to one section of the people and the disadvantages and the difficulties have fallen squarely on another section of the people, namely: the plantation workers. In estate areas land alienation has been so done as to create a belt of new settlers encircling a large plantation. The plantation workers are thus deprived of access to main roads except through these settlements and this policy of encirclement also heightens communal tensions. The plantation people are voiceless except through their trade unions. Therefore, any problem concerning them re education, repatriation, social amenities on land alienation is sought to be treated as a trade union problem.

Government's approach is said to have changed from an "Indian" approach to a trade union approach and it seems strange that there is a failure to look upon this problem as a vital national problem and to adopt a national approach.

The failures and discrimination cited above are threatening the plantation workers with insecurity and deprivation of their only means of livelihood. This cumulative effect of distributing favours to some and difficulties to others have had an electric effect of uniting plantation workers and converting ordinary passive workers into a group of militant workers.

There has come into being organised resistance to land alienation without adequate guaranteeing of employment or alternative land for settlement. This is a spontaneous reaction of the plantation workers and not inspired by any particular trade union or a leader. The plantation workers are not allowing government officials to survey plantation land for alienation. This resistance is met by Police assault and communal assault on the workers. The shooting of a young worker on Devon Estate allegedly for resisting land survey, and arson, looting and

assault on Sanguhar Estate and the large scale arson on Delta Estate have the effect of fanning communal passions leading to a confrontationalist situation.

In the plantation areas today the mood is the mood of violence. Workers are ready to die for their basic rights. They have lost their faith even in police protection because the question is openly asked "is it possible for organised gangs armed with hand bombs to travel in lorries in broad day light to set fire to the living lines of nearly thousand workers without some form of connivance at high levels?"

Strangely enough the police are not in a position in some instances to apprehend all the culprits. Among those who have been arrested are prominent personalities belonging to a certain political party. Is there a social war brewing in the plantations? Are there certain foolish power-hungry persons ready to provoke a social war for their narrow ends?

In this process of thoughtless fragmentation of high yielding plantation lands, greed for making more money because green leaf is fetching a very high price today is the main motivating factor and not peasant settlement.

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY — SUNDAY, JUNE 5TH, 1977

A public Meeting will be held on Sunday the 5th of June, 1977 at 5 p.m. at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute Auditorium—100 Independence Square, Colombo 7 on the occasion of World Environment Day. The Meeting will be under the distinguished patronage of Mr. M. J. Priestly, Resident Representative United Nations Organisation in Sri Lanka. Mr. S. Ambalavanar, President of the Sri Lanka Environment Society will preside.

The Meeting will be addressed by representatives of various conservation and oriented groups in Sinhala, Tamil, and English. Representatives of the Wild Life and Nature Protection Society, the Natural History Society, the Soil Conservation Society, Tree Protection Society (Ruk Rekaganno) the United Nations Association and other organisations have been invited to address the gathering.

The Meeting will be followed by a Film Show—Local and International films on Conservation, Environment and Wild Life Protection will be screened.

The Meeting and the film show will be open to the public. The organisers hope that there will be a wide participation by the general public especially the youth, particularly as "Appreciation of the Environment" is now taught in many schools in the Colombo District.

Sri Lanka Environment Society
17, Alfred Place,
Colpetty, Colombo 3.
Sri Lanka.
Telephone: 31106/29985

The plantations, as a national asset, is being destroyed and a communal holocaust is being brewed. Those who indulge in this reckless spirit of avarice, communal hatred and a craze for political

power are causing untold damage to the nation. They are the enemies of the people. It is time to detect them, apprehend them and save the nation from this suicidal path of power-hungry politicians.

WHAT THE COUNTRY NEEDS TODAY—A SOLUTION TO THE COST OF LIVING

Problems Of The Consumer

by R. Kahawita

When it comes to finding one's food and clothing all are consumer's, but today there is a privileged class of consumer and an under-privileged class. I am interested in the latter class who number something around 12 million people or 2,500,000 family units. What hardships these millions of families undergo to procure their rationed and Government imported goods nobody seemed to have paid any attention so far. Patiently these people seem to endure their hardships till they get an opportunity to exercise their right under the Constitution. For this reason, much more than any other reason, their right to choose a Government must be protected by all political parties.

Today the consumer suffers the most in any dispute with the Government and its many employees. They have multiplied overnight because the United Front's desire to provide employment to save its face. As ex-Minister Subesinghe said—"this kind of employment created by the U.F. Government is unproductive". So we have scarcities, shortages and a well established blackmarket.

In addition, whenever there is a strike by any of the Government sponsored Trade Unions the consumers' problems multiply overnight. The latest is the Railway strike which we experienced some time back, and shortly after that our Prime Minister had explained that as a result of this strike price of coconuts had shot up to two rupees a nut. The strike has been settled and forgotten but the price of nuts is still escalating and to escape from the mess our politicians created in the coconut growing industry they still keep on harking back to the Strike.

Practically everything the consumer needs is state-controlled and state distributed by an army of selected party supporters. Where the private sector is taken into the orbit of the Government to distribute the consumer items, such private sector distributors are also party supporters. Today the consumer faces a number of these state favoured distributors, large and small, all over the country. Any complaints against this class will not produce any relief

to the consumer. These favoured distributors are the "cartels" under the patronage, of the ruling Party.

Those employees of the Government and their friends and relations, the selected private sector and their friends and relations form the today's privileged class. They experience no shortages, no difficulties and hardships to get what they want. Recently there was a news item of how Thulhiriya textiles were distributed, within this elite. The employers were said to be entitled to almost 65 yards per employee at a time while the ordinary consumer could get barely one yard per person per annum.

All the Ministers and Members of the present Government are aware of what is happening and their inaction to put matters right may be, due to the "member's letter" institution of the United Front.

Just a few days ago the Minister of Food, Co-operatives and Small Industries had made reference to "Textile—and Errant Co-ops" and newspapers dwelt on the consumer

hardships in obtaining their textiles (*Sunday Observer* of 6th March), but in a way, the Ministry did not believe what the newspapers said was true. The Ministry believes that its system is so perfect that what the newspapers brought to light was fiction. When the whole trade is managed by a politicalised bureaucracy nothing is said to be wrong and in that set up the consumer is of no consequence. It is "the ideology" that matters. That is what the present Government says.

In the midst of this ideological warfare it is heartening to know that the Deputy Leader of Opposition, Mr. R. Premadasa, and his party have understood the problems of the consumer and have made a clear cut policy statement of the Party at a meeting at Grandpass last month as reported in the *Sun* of the 8th March. The Party's Policy is to place the country's economic prosperity upon a competitive system where the public sector and private sector will compete to serve the consumer and the consumer will be the judge and not the bureaucracy. This is the democratic socialism the country needs today to save her from the abysmal depths to which the U.F. Government has led the country in the party's road to "socialism".

If the UNP, when it comes into power, can lighten the burden of the consumer within the shortest possible time, it would have saved the consumer from the utter destitution he is experiencing today.

What are the problems of the consumer today?

All the basic needs of the consumer are rationed and controlled. They are issued to him weekly on tokens or cards through the so-called "Co-operative Societies" at the village level and in urban areas. As the Government control grows, such controlling agencies are multiplied like the Multipurpose Co-operative Societies, Co-operative Wholesale Societies, Marketing Federations, Co-operative Unions etc. They are nothing short of Government shops where the consumer is treated as something the cat brought in. The consumer is subjected to insults, indignities and rudeness, as if the consumer is asking for alms. It is a wonder that the consumers do not get together and manhandle the men behind the counters.

The employees of these Government controlled distribution points are the masters and rulers at the village level. The people in their dire need to get their basic needs endure the treatment with the patience of a Job. They know if they protest, the treatment they get would be worse.

More often than not, the whole family gets into the queue to get their rice, currys, stuffs, maldive fish, sugar, dried fish if available, garlic and flour, then to the textile queue occasionally. Apart from their domestic difficulties, transport etc. they lose also several days of working time waiting in the queue; and whether they are self-employed or wage-earners, their earnings drop, production drops and poverty increases. This is one of the major problems of the consumer.

A few days back we went to see the Friday Fair in Wellawaya—it should be an important hamlet as it is a transport and distribution point to Hambantota, Moneragala, Tissamaharama and Kataragama and a halting point for Tourist traffic. What did we find here?—all the local produce brought for sale at the fair would not fill a one half ton lorry: the people who came to the fair from the surrounding villages, without exception, were dressed in rags, half starved—looked so miserable that I, as a Sinhala, could not believe that there is such poverty in our Sinhala villages. It is a shameful tragedy for which the full blame must be taken by the present Government. If the Government failed to alleviate the misery of these people in seven years, they cannot do it in a lifetime.

To bring sunshine and a smile to the faces of these millions of suffering people, the cost of their basic needs must be brought to the level of their earning capacity and to the national wage levels of the ordinary worker. They do not understand international trade, they do not understand FEEDCs, they do not understand inflation, they do not understand Balance of Payments etc. They understand only one thing and only that; that is, the present Government has cheated them.....

There is inflation, because production is almost at a standstill, money supply has

been increased progressively to meet the demands of the Government employees who are united to force a Government to grant their demands. The employment created by the U.F. Government has no relation to production and such employment is given with no consideration whether such employees can be gainfully employed, or whether the national income can pay them. What matters is the M.P.'s or P.A.'s letter. This is the dilemma of the present Government—to provide employment when there is no money to pay them. So the spiral of the cost of living goes up and up, and the consumer is finding it harder to make ends meet and also to procure his basic needs. At the village level the bureaucrats have not understood the consumer problems.

How has the prices of basic needs of the people sky-rocketed, when the Government is the sole importer and distributor? The erstwhile *laissez faire* import and distribution of the basic items by the private sector were nationalized to break up the blackmarket, creation of artificial scarcities, manipulation of invoices etc. These malpractices have not stopped, even though the Government is the sole importer. On the contrary, all the malpractices are thriving at several levels today and prices are beyond the average wage earner. In addition, adulteration, drop in quality, short measures and weights are the rule in Government controlled shops and distribution agencies, which were started with the excuse to prevent the malpractices of the private trader. With Government control and management of Import and distribution a Government should be able to peg down the prices of basic needs of the consumer at least.

The needs of the average man may be classified into various groups according to the consumer needs and importance to the cost of living of the people. For example class A of these items of wages expenditure on food and clothing have two components—imported items and locally produced items. Dealing with imported items that go to daily wage expenditure—What are they? Cereals, flour, condiments, sugar, processed fish,

pulses, and a few others. All these items are imported and distributed by Government. The cost of these items to the consumer can be controlled by ordering the distributor that these should be sold to the consumer at C.I.F. value plus 20% to cover all transport, handling, and distribution charges up to the marketing bag of the consumer. The Government Agencies that handle the import, stocking, distribution of these items will have to cover their expenditure within the 20% including the profits. This is an exercise for the management of these agencies to do and work out a price structure within this percentage and if they cannot do it, they just go out of business and hand them back to those who can do it within the controlled prices.

In the case of locally produced items, there are two aspects, one is to guarantee the price to the producer as an inducement for him to stay on the production line, other is to protect the consumer. The Government will have to fix the price of selected items of produce to the producer, taking into consideration the cost of producing and the prices of these items to the consumer's marketing bag. The difference between the two prices will be a subsidy to the producers and consumers. For example, a pound of dry chillies cost the farmer Rs. 5/- at the farm, allow him a reasonable margin to cover his profits and bad seasons etc. say this be 3/-. So the farmer's price is 8/- add to this cost of transport, handling and distribution 25%, then the cost to the consumer will be 10/-. In order to keep the price within his wages expenditure, the Government sells to the consumer at Rs. 8/- per lb, then the subsidy will be two rupees per lb. Many an item can be covered in this manner to protect the producer and consumer.

This exercise can be spread to cover all items of imports and local production that go to provide food, clothing and shelter of the so-called "common man". The main object is to protect the consumer by pegging down the cost of living which today is the root cause of industrial disputes and demands—a wage in keeping with the realistic cost of living within the society we have created. These demands are basic and have nothing to do with output, res-

possibilities, hours of work etc. The demands are related to the cost of living today and it is for the Government to peg it down.

(If this problem is to be solved it is most important, to reduce the cost of living within the earning capacity of the common people and to enable them to procure those items without waiting days on end in the queue).

This is, by no means, an easy task for a Government to do, more so today because the Government has got involved deeply in production, import-export, distribution and transport, wholesaling and retailing, price stabilising and supporting prices, employment and wages control so on and so forth. The Government has got deep into the complexities of management and management expertise at all levels with the result, all efforts necessary to meet the consumer demands have failed.

Consequently, blackmarketing, shortages, break-down in distribution, queues, together with frustration, annoyance to the consumer and harassed employees behind the serving counters at the distribution points have surfaced in a degree never experienced before. It has also created a bureaucracy immune to public criticisms and their complaints. This breed of public employees has contributed to discredit the Government more than anything else. Every one wants his daily needs and in the process of procuring it every one is annoyed and begin to think what a bloody stupid Government they have created for themselves.

The people—the average consumer—wants a change of Government for no other reason than this. As we said earlier, he is not interested in high Politics, what compliments are paid to our Ministers in international affairs, medals and prizes. What they want is their simple frugal fare, their rice and curry, basic clothing and a little shelter. This is what a Government has to secure for them even if a Government is going to continue with this kind of type control of consumer goods, because the Government has encroached into the traditional channels through which the simple Village folk got their daily necessities. Having encroached on the freedom of choice of the people to choose from where and from

whom, and at what price their daily needs are to be purchased, the people have a right to demand for protection against the Establishment. One way of satisfying this demand is to remove all controls and throw open the business of distribution to what it was before a Government was bitten by the Co-operative Bug. This is the most Progressive step a Government can take. *What matters is not the ideology but the content of happiness and well-being of the consumer. A Government is run for his benefit and not vice versa. Such a progressive step is not possible because we simply do not have the money to provide the basic needs of the people. The destruction of our economy by the united efforts of a United Front Government is complete.*

The other way of satisfying their demands, in the present context of Public Sector management and distribution of the basic needs of the people is to set up a separate Portfolio on the rank of a cabinet Minister to protect and safeguard the interests of the consumer, which we propose to call *Minister for Pricing and Consumer Protection*. This is an institution, so to say, to protect man against men—a Minister to protect the consumer from the Government of which he is a member.

The main functions of this Ministry will be to keep a tab on all price trends on consumer goods in relation to wage expenditure and protect the consumer against price escalation by the Government controlled institutions as well as the private sector. At the moment, under Ministerial threats the Private trader is scaling down on a variety of consumer items—most of which are off the counter for months. But this big stick has not been raised against many of the Public sector production lines. This is the best argument for the establishment of a separate Ministry for Pricing and Consumer Protection. This will provide the consumer with a responsible Minister to look after his interests and to whom the consumer can represent, petition, and appeal to in his day to day problems. Very little can be done at the beginning, granted, but it will be the most effective tool a Government will have to peg down cost of living and “a psychological emancipation” of the consumer from the present bureaucratic stranglehold on his

freedom of choice of what to eat and where to get it. We earnestly recommend this suggestion as a means to fulfill the assurance: “We shall bring down the cost of living by reducing the artificially increased prices of imported and local goods in day to day use and by increasing local production and shall ensure that the consumer shall not be exploited.” as given in a declaration of New Policy and Programme of the United National Party enunciated in 1975. The UNP may well have an opportunity to fulfil this undertaking, soon.

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REPORTAGE

“Village” In The City

—Rawatta, Madawatta or

What-Have-You—

by Severus

Some people like to hide their heads in sand, ostrichwise. Others pass the buck and palm off their responsibility to others, as in the case of the repatriates, or as in the case of the removal of slum-dwellers of Sri Lanka's capital city last August, buttressed by hopes, buttered by promises.

A visit to this abandoned ‘village’, a day after a rainy evening is a sad experience; flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, our own Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim people are there to suffer in sheer hopelessness. Tondo area in Manila, they say, was emptied of its 250,000 people in one night and the fabulous Zoto organisation put up a courageous fight for their rights. And behold, more than Tondo, here: it is our own country, a land bubbling with democracy and socialism and human rights around every street corner.

The long, long trail to Mattakuliya begins at the Hettiwatta turn with its Tobacco company (at the top of the trachea). At that very spot a grinning poster tells you: “Ape nagaraya prisiduwen tabaganimu”, let's keep our city clean. Imagine well-nigh 10,000 people in this new ‘village’ in the city saying that they'd want their part of the city kept clean! Who'll help them?

End Of The Road?

Brought there at gun-point before August last year, they hail from Kompannavidiya, Prince of Wales Avenue/upper and lower, Madampitiya road, Narahenpita, McCallum Road, —i.e. from areas of motor-shopping centres, newspaper concerns, aerated water sectors, traffic department headquarters, timber depots, cemetery and garbage dump areas—to this one-time coconut estate where heavy grazing has loosened the soil and made it into a first-rate marshy bog, where water oozes in and ruins the 'floors', keeping the older men and young people awake at night. Three out of six homes had a new-born baby hanging away in a hammock, away from the oozing water. The average number of children in the families was 5 on this 13-acre block of land, the sloping terrain of which brought water to over half the homes in the lower area. Some women were knee-deep in water (the water had remained in, since Saturday night, and today was Wednesday) and only one out of a hundred homes had no mud and oozing water on the 'floor'.

Formerly called *Rawatta*, this land was named *Sugathadasawatta* and boasted the address of the last king of Kandy—"Sri Wickrema Mawatha", and most of the people felt they had been *hounded* out of their customary slum, or is it pounded (to keep to the image of Sri Wickrema history). *Rawatta*—or *Madawatta* as it is now,—boasts of a twelve-foot wide road in the middle of the camp, a road that is shy half-way and becomes a reluctant 8 feet and then peters out into nowhere. The 5 mercury lamps (mercury, no less!) are 60 feet apart, one from the other. By daylight or mercury-light, it is clear that these people have been abandoned there, the playthings of politicians, pawns in petty games of party-men. Perhaps the people of Mattakkuliya, in general of course, do not want them but God is on their side, for He is always on the side of the down-and-out, of the lowly, of the oppressed and harassed of society. What a crying shame that we who boast we have no *apartheid*, we who make glowing speeches against Israel and for Palestine, cannot see that we are experts at producing "slums" overnight by making a composite slum like a "village", far away from nowhere. A young

man there told me that there are occasional robberies; that there is some little prostitution through sheer inability to earn and live.

From what I saw, I could say that Colombo is sitting on a powder-keg.

Crime, illnesses, hatred, violence may be born of such unjust situations. Most criminal activity and resultant imprisonment are a function of poverty status: and poverty status is a political decision. Governments can decide to end poverty and reduce economic inequality. "The USA has a homicide rate 25 times higher than Sweden, and Sweden's low crime rate was achieved only after they virtually eliminated poverty..." (*Towards a New Society*, Gowan-Lakey, p 155). If the monks of this country see this inhuman situation they will be up in arms, for Lord Buddha made such of the ordinary man, the hungry and the oppressed by his tendency to equalize and socialize; the Muslims, the right-thinking ones especially, who live by the holy Qur'an would be sad to see the Muslim women and children suffering due to the bungling of local government and due to foul ineptitude. One Muslim woman with a baby in a hammock 4 inches from the ground, and with nowhere to lay her head in her wet floorless one-roomed house 10x8 (I measured it) said: "*Eka manikak eti me mulu gama ma hadanda, namuth agamak neti vage inne*"—one single gem would have put aright this whole 'village' but they live as if they have no religion. She turned away and brushed off a tear. Will the world press take up the story of the aftermath of an International conference on Non-alignment which brought disgrace and homelessness to 10,000 people? I wonder.

Colombo has become an inhuman city, with its "belt of misery" and whitened sepulchres, clean, neat, head-empty. No need to collect waste from wastepaper baskets, but from the higher echelons of city functionaries. Nemesis may overtake them through the utter desperation of these humans, our brothers.

To say that 7 toilets would suffice for ten-thousand people is to say that planners had bad will and greed in their eyes, perhaps gratifying themselves, saying that they had done well. The toilets, on a bucket system, overflow into a

drain: Goya perfumes for some areas of Colombo; stench for other areas. The excess is drawn off and dumped in an open 'lake' making Colombo North, ill-health area Number One in the capital city. Tourists do well to keep away if they want to get back home in good health! About 60 people, old and young have died there since August 1976, a matter of nine months, with an average of seven deaths a month: one of old age, many of dysentery and of cholera, some of TB. Who seems interested? A young man F., said: "It is far better had we been left in our old places to die in peace rather than bring us to this tragic place to die". Saying this he took me to a dingy, lightless place to see an "old" woman (old at 40) waiting for death because she had contracted an asthmatic illness on the cold floor. Where are there any helpers to the small team of christians and others working for them? Organization is power and no man can shake people's power. Soweto in S. Africa, taught that lesson to people last June (1976). No self-respecting Muslim will abandon the Qur'an and its urgent demand to help the widow and the orphan. No Saivite Hindu can bear to forget the thrust to total liberation (moksha, vimukti) that his religion bears as key message. Or are we going to fail our religions?

A pall of gloom has descended on the nervous and taut people who have not slept for days on end owing to incessant monsoonal rains, boon to farmers of the WP, perhaps, but bane of the existence of this abandoned sector of human society in affluent Colombo, where the demographic density of Dematagoda was 240 per acre and of Colombo 7, only 19 per acre according to figures of the late 'fifties and early 'sixties.

Gloom and discontent come from a denial of co-operative facilities for them: they have to get their rations—at least those who have their rationbooks and have not yet pawned them for coconuts etc. to a big mudalali who runs the price-ring and who practices dog eating dog in that area. How can these unemployed men trek to their original place for rations? They have no money for bus-fare: are not well-fed for a long walk and back, for they are many of them, sick with one illness or another due to the

inclement weather. They have no dispensary for they don't belong to the area-dispensary, they have been told. They have no school to go to, but officials there are, who have told them to walk to the schools to which they first went: area-rule for them, but they are not officials (who have daughters and sons in any school they like to have them in). The force of man loving his fellowman, and of the Common Man's glory goes on apace. Murder will out. This is genocide with a vengeance. The crisis of the poor and defenceless cannot be stifled.

Some of the people of Mattakuliya do not want these people to spoil their fun. These people in the "village" in the city are called alternatively scalliwags, thugs, scoundrels, ruffians, ne'er-dowells, criminals, idiots and no one has made a serious study of the causes of migration into the city and of the increase of the belt of misery around the city and towns. I heard two priests (not the official one) saying: "After all, it is for such as these that liberation is to be a reality. It is to save the down-and-out of all kinds that religions have their basic message." How true. "Social work is good, but not enough. These people want justice. They are people."

A learned doctor from Negombo once said: "Injustice is the mother of ill-health". We find this true when we see the appalling conditions under rain, of the "village" in the city, where humans have been dumped as garbage, and because of this situation we may soon see the "rich going away empty". Power, privilege, pomp may pay the penalty of a bad conscience and sleepless nights, because the ubiquitous water cozes from the ground, defies mat and bedding of any sort. This keeps the angry youngsters vigilant, nervous and awake. They want justice.

If a man in the upper reaches of the Colombo income-brackets would ever want a thing, it is proffered to him on a platter. No irrelevance would face him. This can turn him cynically paternalistic, condescending. Recently, our city "slum" in question received four basket-loads of buns! Asking for bread and getting stones. Wanting floor-space that's decently dry but getting enough for a half-meal to continue life so that they may prolong the agony of keeping

awake: I thought of the foolish ones at the top who make people keep awake at the bottom:

*"Digha jagarato ratti,
digham santassa yojanam
Digho balanam samsaro
saddhammam avijanatam"*

*"Long is the night to the wakeful,
long the league to the weary,
Long is the chain of existence
to the foolish who know
not the Truth" (Dhp. v/60)*

If the social order is directed towards the good of the person, then surely, we must accept in practice that all men are equal in nobility, dignity and nature, without any distinction of race, sex, religion. Hasn't everyone the same fundamental rights and duties undictated to by bank balances or privilege or influence? Are the

rights of human persons of Sugathadasawatta inviolable, inalienable, universal? Then something serious must be done. Religion cannot open half an eyelid and back the wrong horse. Do these men, women and little ones not have a right to existence, to bodily integrity and well-being, to everything necessary to maintain a decent standard of living, such as food, clothing, shelter, means of subsistence, and any other services indispensable to social security. More than all, isn't one's most basic right, the right to have all his rights safeguarded by law—the right to impartial protection, inspired by true norms of justice, and at the same time, effective?

What answer now, to this human group, flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone?

INDIA

The Cowardice Of Indira Gandhi-2

By Daniel Snieder

TRIBUNE only recently received a copy of the April 22 issue of the NEW SOLIDARITY, the organ of the US Labor Party which carried an article by Daniel Snieder, datelined New Delhi, April 12 about the defeat of the Congress and Indira Gandhi in the last Lok Sabha elections. The NEW SOLIDARITY is tri-weekly, published in New York by the U.S. Labor Party, which seeks to explain, interpret and comment upon national and international events from a new Marxist approach adumbrated, developed and popularised by the leader of the U.S. Labour Party, Lyndon La Rouché, a candidate in the last US Presidential election and his colleagues. Snieder was in India in March and early April (he left after the Nonaligned Co-ordinating Committee meeting). His incisive article, entitled **THE COWARDICE OF INDIRA GANDHI**, pregnant with revealing insight on current development in India will appear in the TRIBUNE in two instalments.

The Extra-Constitutional Authority (ECA) functioned on two fronts. On economic policy, the ECA had pushed the 20-point program into the background and began to promote the "5-point program" of Sanjay Gandhi within approximately six months after the declaration of the Emergency.

The main feature of the 5-point program was the forced sterilization program which in the northern states of India—where the Congress Party suffered its most sweeping defeat in the election—became the disgusting symbol of the Emergency to the Indian rural masses. However, this was only the most evident part of a more general program of austerity against wor-

ker and peasant consumption, encouragement of exports at the expense of domestic development, and other steps which amounted to the defacto implementation of the IMF-World Bank policy for India! This capitulation to the IMF showed itself as well in India's increasing role within the ranks of the developing countries and the Non-Aligned Movement as a spokesman for "moderation" in the struggle against imperialism and for the new world economic order. All this, however, unfolded slowly and was not fully known to those outside the inner circle.

The second front of the ECA was the systematic destruction of constitutional rule and the structures

Removed From Reality

of political life that could have counteracted the growing influence of this dirty clique. The Congress Party itself gradually ceased to function or to have access to Mrs. Gandhi. The machinery of government was brandished by the ECA as their personal tool for the promotion of their individual wealth and power.

As the ECA gradually took over, Mrs. Gandhi became more and more a shadow of her former self and isolated herself in the Prime Minister's residence, where she received only carefully sifted information about what was happening in the country and internationally. Her insistence on defending the activities of her idiot son revealed her loss of any sense of reality. Her mental state was that of someone acting in a psychologically controlled environment—a crude but effective brain-washing operation. The advisors who wrote the 20-point program, including cabinet ministers, never saw her alone or were forced to go to Sanjay and the clique for policy decisions.

Behind this control structure stood the Birlas and their Wall Street backers. While the details of this are just being dug out—the Indian left weekly *Mainstream* recently published an explosive expose entitled "From Maruti to Mafia" dealing with this—it is already clear that the political setup of Mrs. Gandhi involved some form of blackmail by the Birlas. The Birlas, who during the last three years rose from being No. three or four to become the top business house in India, derive their wealth from their origins as comprador capitalists for British imperialism. Now they hold large interests in textiles, jute, sugar and control many of India's major bourgeois newspapers. It was the Birlas who came to fund Sanjay's entry into the world of big business when he attempted to start a company manufacturing a small car, the Maruti, for the Indian market. Despite an investment of more than

£300 million, Sanjay's company has yet to produce anything.

The Birlas hold over the Gandhi family is an important key, although not the controlling factor, in Indira's downfall. During the 1970-71 period of the Congress political offensive, a massive attack on the Birla family was launched which threatened to destroy their political influence in the Congress and the entire country. In 1973 a scandal broke about the Maruti Company's dubious winning of a contract over the head of more experienced companies desiring to enter the auto production field. From that point on, the Birlas and others became involved in the Maruti and it is likely that this involvement established the first crucial link in a chain of control which led to the ECA.

In 1974 an official commission investigating Birla corruption was forced to shut down and, by the early part of the Emergency, all such investigatory activity was completely suppressed. During the Emergency, the Birlas' power grew and they placed their agents—and the agents of the IMF—in positions of power around the Prime Minister and in key ministries. Birla control over the press increased and Birla papers became spokesmen for the family's advocacy of an IMF-style "Brazilian miracle" for India. News about international and domestic realities left the Birla press. During this period the Birla family leaders took numerous trips to New York City and Western Europe, no doubt to report their successes to their overlords.

The control over Mrs. Gandhi's access to reality—*itself*, it must be said, a product of her own and others' cowardice—reached its culmination in the decision to hold elections. By the time that decision had been made, the situation had deteriorated to the point that the Communist Party of India had been forced into an open break with the Gandhi government on the crucial issue of lifting the Emergency and had thereby become the target of ECA-directed attacks. The pro-socialist core of the Congress had also been under attack, with people like Mrs. Sathpathy, still a loyal supporter of Mrs. Gandhi, forced out of office under tremendous pressure from an ECA-directed campaign which included

the use of the government-controlled radio and other media to attack her. When Sathpathy confronted Gandhi on his campaign, the Prime Minister could only weakly reply that she had heard that Sathpathy was "losing control" of her state.

Sources here say that the decision to hold elections was the result of a recommendation made to Mrs. Gandhi by the Police Intelligence Bureau—no doubt infiltrated by U.S. intelligence agencies—which told her that a snap election call would not give the disparate opposition time to pull itself together into a credible force, and victory could be assured. These same sources report that the Carter Administration also urged that elections be held, assuring the Gandhi government that with such a step improved relations between the two countries could rapidly increase.

It is revealing that such a crucial political decision as that to hold national elections (which, legally, could have been held later) was made completely without consultation with Congress leaders in New Delhi or in the states. The decision was presented to the cabinet and the party as an almost casual fait accompli. Up until the end, due to their isolation from the mood of the country, the clique in the Prime Minister's house believed that victory would be theirs.

The key to the loss of the Congress was not, as some Western observers have been quick to say, due to the popularity of the ragtag collage of fascists, regional interests and old political hacks now known as the ruling Janata party (the "Peoples Party"). Rather, the Janata successfully capitalized upon the powerful and conscious rejection by the Indian rural and working masses of the ECA clique (not the Emergency per se).

Even this maneuvering would have been insufficient to insure a Janata victory had it not been for the popularity of a group of Congress leaders who finally, after months of suffering under the abuse of the ECA, split from the party to form the Congress for Democracy (CFD). These CFD leaders are the more legitimate inheritors of power, since they were the defenders of the 20-point program and of the Nehru, ideal of progress and modernization—they were the

one group who, after the CPI, made a belated show of political courage.

The truth of the election results, the Janata's opportunism, is revealed in the exceptions to their victory. Besides the Congress victories in the south of India (where the Congress bosses kept the ECA at a distance), the most important Congress win was in the state of Kerala where a united front of the Congress and the CPI, in power as a coalition state government under a Communist Chief Minister, swept both parliamentary and state-level elections. Kerala was perhaps the one state—due to the CPI strength—where the 20-point program was actually taken seriously and implemented to some degree. Communist Chief Minister Achuta Menon was one of the few leaders to have the courage to tell the ECA to "keep out!" Kerala was the only state in India where Sanjay Gandhi never set foot.

We have merely sketched the painful reality that developed in India. The cowardice of Indira Gandhi is not hers alone but is shared by all the Indian political leaders who identified with progress, but guttlessly refused to make the fight at a point when the decay could have been decisively halted. The fruits of cowardice are visible in the regime which now holds power—a regime which can be expected to take forward the IMF program for India with a vengeance and whose actions will bring India to the brink of economic disaster and instability within a short period of time.

But, despite the dangers that the future holds—a danger that would have been no less if the rule of the ECA had continued—there is also opportunity. The opportunity exists for those political leaders, whether in the CFD, the CPI, or in the demoralized ranks of the Congress Party, who are willing to face the lessons of this past period and conduct a new struggle to restore freedom and the march of progress. Such a battle cannot be conducted and cannot be won unless that leadership is prepared to act with courage upon an understanding of the strategic realities of the international situation, and is willing to communicate that understanding to the

Indian masses in the form of a program for economic progress against the enforced backwardness that is the policy of Wall Street and the World Bank.

In the immediate period ahead, as the present regime struggles to consolidate its still-tenuous hold on power—and begins to factionalize into a hard-core fascist wing, and a section containing those who have some connection to India's national interests—there will be a precious space of time to prepare that battle. The cowards and the practitioners of self-interest politics have no place in that struggle; only those with the courage to understand and act upon reality will survive.

Concluded

INDIA

• Janata • Congress • Assembly Elections

New Delhi, May 7,

The emergence of the Janata Party as a single political entity with Chandra Shekhar as its President, marks a turning point in Indian politics. This is reinforced by Jagjivan Ram's dramatic May Day announcement of the merger of the Congress for Democracy into the Janata Party. This development is regarded by the protagonists of the so-called two-party system as a vindication of their thesis that in Indian conditions, the time has come when the American or the British model of two major parties should dominate the political scene, thereby ensuring some sort of a check-and-balance.

Apart from the fact that such an Anglo-Saxon political precedent need not be suitable for our specific Indian conditions, since it is born out of the historical circumstances prevailing at a particular stage of development of those countries, we have to take into account the fact that the working of the two-party system, particularly in the American context—what with all the disclosures of the CIA-FBI, the Watergate, the Lockheeds, the Ku Klux Klan and the Birch Society—does not neces-

sarily provide an inspiring working model for any country.

What the inexorable compulsions of the Indian situation demand is the evolution of a political set-up which can and must mobilise the nation for a relentless struggle for the elimination of poverty together with the full and active participation of the masses in the democratic process suited to our native genius.

If Indira Gandhi's political career suffered a shattering debacle at the hands of the electorate in March, it has been mainly because of two reasons: her inability to live up to the promise of "garibi hatao" and her total disregard for the democratic process, as the monster of Emergency demonstrated. The two-party or the multi-party functioning is only a matter of form; what really matters is the content of our political commitment and the firm adherence of the political leadership to that commitment.

This is the point on which the Janata Party will be judged from now on. It has come to power in a manner which was totally unexpected for its leadership: the massive anger against the Emergency regime which was gathering in the northern States—almost imperceptible not only to Indira Gandhi and her caucus but to practically all political parties—came like a dam-burst at the Lok Sabha poll, and the only credential demanded of the victorious candidates was whether they were opposed to the Congress, since in the eyes of the masses, Emergency was the handiwork of the Congress raj.

Once the nightmare of Emergency is over the old credential alone will not do. The discerning public will certainly give the Morarji Government a breathing space; it will mark time for the debris of the Emergency misdeeds to be cleared, whether by way of restoration of normal democratic functioning or punishment of the guilty men and women of the mafia.

But the return to the democratic process will not by itself help the Janata Party to have a stable tenure in office. In the ultimate analysis,

Congress Unchanged ?

the new Government's stability will depend on its efforts to honour the commitment to strive for a just and equitable order in which poverty will be eliminated: unemployment banished and economic disparities reduced.

While the traditional hundred days have to be granted to Morarji Desai and his Government before any judgement, however tentative, can be passed on it, its insistence on forcing State Assembly elections on as many as nine States by executive diktat has, to say the least, not enhanced its commitment to genuine democratic functioning. While on the political plane, the Congress in these States had lost its credibility to govern after its total debacle in the Lok Sabha poll, the Janata Government's resort to constitutional squeeze could not possibly have helped to strengthen healthy precedent in democratic functioning. The open strain generated over the difference with the Acting President could have been avoided by a less precipitate approach to the issue.

The Congress camp was certainly not united on the question of challenging the legal validity of the Centre's powers on the subject, as could be seen in the West Bengal Ministry's refusal to be associated in the reference to the Supreme Court. There was a touch of poetic justice in the entire episode since the unwanted Forty-second Amendment which had been forced through Parliament by the Indira Government under cover of Emergency, took away the last vestige of Presidential prerogative, and its first fall-out could be felt to their detriment by the Congress Ministries themselves.

Although the coming State Assembly elections need not bring about an exact replica of the Lok Sabha election—since the issues facing the electorate are different—there is little chance for the Congress to recover a substantial part of the lost ground because of its inability to put its own house in order even after the March poll debacle. The stubborn defence by Indira Gandhi of the mafia that played havoc during Emergency is the main cause of the prevailing disorder inside the Congress. Corresponding lack of firmness on the part of those opposed to the mafia will extract heavy toll from the Congress in the coming poll. As the political parties will be absorbed in State-wise election in the

coming two months, the economic situation shows no sign of improvement. By the time the election fever will be over, the imperatives on the economic front will force new tensions on the politics of the country.

And it is precisely on this score that Chandra Shekhar as the new Chairman of the Janata Party will face the greatest challenge of his political career. If there is any lesson that he can learn from Indira Gandhi's fate, it is that her persistent refusal to build the Congress into a functioning political organisation was to a large measure responsible for her fiasco.

Compared to the Congress, the Janata Party cannot claim to be a better equipped organisation. In many ways it resembles the pre-1969 Congress with the only difference that the Congress did not have any RSS-based Jana Sangh element within its composition. While some section of the Janata regard the presence of the well-knit RSS as an asset and try to assure that it has been undergoing transformation, there is no gain-saying the fact that many inside the Janata Party itself and a large number outside its fold are not able to reconcile its ideology with that of secularism and democracy. *The bias for Big Business and the rich farmer in the Janata Party is no less than in the Congress.*

With such a party at his disposal, Chandra Shekhar has before him a perspective of encounters and confrontations. For him, the Presidency of the Janata Party promises to be a crown of thorns, with all the best wishes that he deserves for his politics of commitment towards building a new social order.

—Nikil Chakravarty

New Delhi, May 14,

Politics in India today is marked by a strange demonstration of bankruptcy. Whether one turns to the Janata or to the Congress or to the Left, there's the same spectacle of infantile squabbles bereft of any sense of perspective. In the bargain, the basic realities of Indian life—the question of grappling with poverty and unemployment among the millions, the widening disparity between the Have and the Have-not—are neglected and as a result, the inherent strength of this great nation is dissi-

pated or undermined. Although it is too early to make an assessment about the Morarji Government performance record, the style of functioning of the Janata leadership reminds one of the ramshackle political entity that the Congress had reduced itself into just ten years ago—with this difference that there is not even a Syndicate today to ensure organisational viability.

It is no secret that one of the reasons why the Janata leadership was in a hurry to force State Assembly elections in nine States is that it expected that a mini-general election might help to galvanise the Party. But the reality as has unfolded so far shows that the differences inside the Janata Party have been intensified to the point of open in-fighting. All the dirt could not be swept under the carpet but the carpet itself is getting worn out. The last few days have sharply brought out the lack of cohesiveness among the leaders of the Janata Party coupled with Charan Singh trying to play the boss. The manner in which he attempted to blackmail the Janata Party, with-holding the accepted electoral symbol until his terms about seat distribution was settled, is a measure of Charan Singh's anxiety to dominate the Janata Party through organisational trickery. He has bullied the Janata leadership into conceding that he himself would be the election campaign "observer" for UP, although it is a tested convention in Indian politics that a leader does not become an observer in his own home State. In fact, Charan Singh is reported to have asked for the right to choose Janata candidates not only in UP but in Haryana as well. The poll symbol episode is only a symptom of the growing *malaise* inside the Janata camp. Charan Singh's allergy to both Chandra Shekhar and the Jana Sangh is well known; nor can he suffer C. B. Gupta and Bahuguna, with the result that in the key state of UP the Janata on the eve of the election (which it has on its own called) presents the spectacle of a house divided against itself.

And it is not only over UP that Janata President Chandra Shekhar is having headaches. In Orissa, Biju Patnaki does not want to share his political zemindary with anybody else, with the result that Nanadini Satpathy and the CFD cadres are left wondering if it is

worth continuing within the Janata. It is not an easy job for Chandra Shekhar to discipline Patnaik. In West Bengal, P.C. Sen's advocacy is making it difficult for the CPM-led Left Front to have any electoral understanding with the Janata Party. The number of seats that Sen, in his self-delusion about his party's capacity to win the election battle has so far offered to the CPM and its allies is no more than what they can win on their own, without any agreement with others. Chandra Shekhar's SOS and Madhu Limaye's mission to West Bengal seem so far to be making little impact upon P. C. Sen. The mess over Raj Narain's mishandling of the inquiry into the allegation about the damage to JP's kidney began at the Cabinet level with his insistence on a judicial probe with the saner elements among his Cabinet colleagues voting for a medical probe. The manner in which the respected Dr. Koshy has been forced to abandon the investigation shows the level of irresponsibility at the Ministerial level.

Much more serious is Charan Singh's mysterious delay in arranging for the start of the three Commissions to probe into the Emergency excesses, the Maruti scandal and Bansi Lal's misconduct. Even the terms of reference have not yet been announced, nor has a substitute for Justice Khanna (who on grounds of propriety has declined to head one of the Commissions) been so far selected. All this is adding to misgivings in the public mind as to what Charan Singh is up to, and these misgivings have not been allayed by the reported *sub rosa* visit to the Home Minister by one of the Mafia characters, Yashpal Kapur.

There is nothing on record to show that Charan Singh in his political career has been slow at taking decisions; that makes it all the more inexplicable why there is such inordinate delay in going ahead with the investigations into the Mafia misdeeds, the platform on which—and on which alone—the Janata Party could romp home to victory at the poll. In normal course one would have expected the Mafia to have been put behind bars as under-trials by now. Instead, one finds them merrily arranging for the destruction and disposal of incriminating papers; while rumours as a result have been going the rounds that Bansi Lal had

managed to have a secret meeting with Charan Singh. It is time that the Morarji Government takes prompt steps to clear itself of these suspicions.

The middle-class relief over the scrapping of the Compulsory Deposit Scheme is no doubt a plus point for the new Government but populist measures available to it are few, since it cannot escape the compulsions of the inflationary pressure. The wage-earner is bound to campaign in the present climate of civil liberties, for the restoration of the additional Dearness Allowance and the minimum bonus of 8.33 per cent—which quite a few in Morarji's Cabinet would support. *Very disturbing is the situation in the countryside where the dispossessed sections of the rural community have been facing serious offensive from the rural rich who turning Janata supporter has gone on a rampage. Not to speak of the bonded labourer forced back to debt-slavery even where he was emancipated the Agricultural labourer is forced into submission without any prospect of getting his statutory wage-enforced.*

The Janata leadership has to realise that even in terms of vote-catching, the rural poor with the growing army of agricultural labourers thrown in constitute the biggest segment of the electorate; and it needs to be noted by them that with all the excesses of Emergency, the bulk of the Congress vote from the countryside came from agricultural labour even in the last election. Unless and until the Janata leadership—overpowering the resistance of the rural vested interests represented by men like Charan Singh and Prakash Singh Badal—provide a fair deal for the rural poor, there is little chance of its Government becoming viable. In fact, this question should concern the Janata leadership while working out its strategy for the coming poll battle—and it should certainly be the major worry for its progressive allies—like the CPM which can ill-afford to ignore in the long run the urges of the impoverished rural masses.

If the picture in the Janata camp is far from reassuring, what the Congress presents today is shocking indeed. With a score of over 150 in the Lok Sabha despite the heavy toll extracted by the Emergency misdeeds, the

Congress even in the midst of the greatest crisis in its long political career, could have played an important role in the national politics.

For that, the Congress needed to purge itself of those whose misdeeds particularly under Emergency, led to its ignominious poll debacle and the loss of executive power which it would command uninterrupted since Independence. Instead of such a purge however, it was Indira Gandhi with her protective patronage for her Mafia, that has been able to get the better of the Congress organisation, as the recent AICC session demonstrated. Not to speak of honest self-criticism, there is not even formal acknowledgement of the guilt, and her stage-managed shedding of tears at the session looked like a school teacher consoling her pupils who could not get through the exam. Catharsis has been reduced to a farce.

It is but natural that the disgust at this state of affairs should create revulsion among some of her staunchest supporters. If Barooah has had to pay the price for his Indira-is-India sycophancy, his murmur of dissent has led to his exit; while Siddhartha Shankar Ray, one of the authors of Emergency, has had to stand up to the shameless move on her part to persist in dictating the Congress politics even after the exposure of her mafia raj. Many no doubt have been leaving the sinking ship; many more have not moved out because the counter-attraction offered by the Janata Party has been eroded by its own internal weakness that have begun to surface.

The retention of the AICC majority by Indira Gandhi even after her identification with the Sanjay Mafia, has surprised many, but careful observers would not fail to note that the average AICC member knows that she and her mafia control all the funds and has a large amount to spare—their Emergency accumulation can be counted by millions—and that is what matters most when many of them have to contest the elections in a few weeks time. Siddhartha Shankar Ray may have a just cause on his side, but the finances for the electoral

Importance Of Money

war are at Indira Gandhi's command.

The honest Congressman, in such a sordid situation, is left without any choice but to fight an uneven battle. His old-style functioning in which the funds could be drawn from the party coffers, can no longer do. He has to fight with whatever record he has of service to the masses, of dedication to the ideals that had once inspired him in the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru. Radical shibboleths will no longer help but hard work among the working people. Before him has come the challenge of Indira Gandhi and her caucus who want to cash in on the name of the Congress with all that it still stands for in the minds of a large section of the Indian people. For him the Congress flag may have been tainted by the misdeeds of the Indira Raj, but he still hopes to wash it clean by getting rid of whatever she and her mafia stand for today; if he walks out of the Congress, it is Indira Gandhi who will exploit the name of the Congress among the masses still committed to it. This is the mental make up of the honest Congressman of today who with all his baffling dilemma still prefers to remain in the organisation.

Such elements inside the Congress could be won over—even with their retention of loyalty to the legend that was the Congress—had the Left in India today emerged as a political entity endowed with wisdom. The Socialists are engaged in what they regard as the experiment of the Janata. The division among the Communists persist. If the CPI has lost heavily its credibility because of its unconscionable attachment to the Emergency policies of the Congress and its consequent refusal to join hands with those in the Left who would not tolerate the Emergency raj, the CPM leadership today, in the eyes of many of its friends, seems to be in danger of making the same mistake; hitching its wagon to the Janata star and insisting on electoral alliance with it. To regard the Janata Party as more acceptable than the anti-Indira section of the Congress, may be dictated by the prospects of election gains, but can certainly not be termed as good Marxism.

Had the two Communist Parties been able to come to terms the very development would have made a

qualitative difference in the situation, and they together would have been able to rally the forward-looking elements inside both the Janata and the Congress, and also could have won over the Naxalite extremists who are today in the midst of severe introspection after a long spell of infantile adventurism. Will statesmanship come over the Left and push them on to the path of unit, at least towards united action?

Surely, the people of India deserve a far better leadership than what the different political parties can provide them today.

—Nikil Chakravarty

LETTERS

• Train Travel

Sir,

We were about ten students who had gone for a short rest to the hill-country after a hard programme of study in the HNCE class and were returning on 8th May to Colombo on the up-train Udara Menike. The train was chock-full. One of us counted over 144 persons standing all along from N'Eliya to Colombo. We do not speak for ourselves alone, but for the large number of would-be voters, men, women and children, babes-in-arms, muslim ladies, a sick woman, working men, the rank and file of our people, and the backbone of our Country. We did not mind it very much if they gave us seats or not. They were very gracious and offered us seats, but we took turns and managed some how.

It is true our transport system has many deficiencies but could we not discuss together and try to remedy them all? If some wise transport officer would care to travel on the last day of a period of holidays given by Government, he would note down how many compartments get filled and from what station or stations and then could recommend that, "from such a station onwards, say, from, Nanu Oya, or from Bandarawela beyond or from Badulla itself, so many new bogeys (it may be, only one more) may be needed". In this way, all will know and see and surely understand that the Government is trying to do something to remedy the situation. We may be

school-girls, but we want to say that our educational programme makes us interested in the country, and our christianity (RC) studies make us interested in the human welfare also, of all men. This is why we write to the paper, in the hope that our words will be accepted and taken in good part, because we write to the paper without any bad will, but only to let ourselves be heard on behalf of so many good people who suffer on trains and buses, paying the same amount for a seat and unjustly getting no seat. We think it is unfair.

Couldn't something be done, about this?

Valerie Meider, Maryse Baldsing
Astrid Fernandopulle, Shiromi
Rodrigo, Portia Fernando, Arlene
Casie Chetty, Sandra Miranda

HNCE Class,
Good Shepherd Convent,
Kotahena,
Colombo 13.
12.5.77

• Canned Fish

Sir,

The object of the conference between the Acting Minister of Food and Co-operatives (C.D.N. 10/5/77) was to ensure efficient distribution of consumer goods. The C.W.E. outlet at the Bambalapitiya flats has 50/60 cases of Canned Fish stacked up since mid-April and no sales are permitted without authority from Headquarters. If these cartoons are meant for distribution to Co-ops, this outlet is flanked by two in the same building. On inquiry from the polite staff the stock reply is "We are awaiting transport to take the cartoons away."

If it is to be sent to another Urban or rural Co-op, it is time action was taken, either to distribute or effect a sale at this very store, instead of hoarding, and quietly allowing it to fall into unauthorised hands. Fresh fish is sold at premium prices in pre-monsoon weather, and no customer needs canned fish when the times are rusty and bloated. I wrote to the Editor, Ceylon Daily News, on 10th May, 1977 but my letter has not been published.

Douglas John

27A, Melbourne Avenue,
Colombo 4.
21.5.77

Confidentially

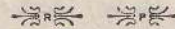
• Land Reform—2

IS IT NOT A FACT that the Department of Agriculture has been (from 1972) so overwhelmingly engrossed in the work of Land Reform that several essential sectors of its work have suffered? That those who know what the Department of Agriculture is expected to do and what it has done in the past to assist farmers and agriculturists (and also maintain the state farms and institutions) now admit (privately till now, but they will speak out soon) that "everything" is in a state of virtual collapse? That for sometime now many sections of the Agricultural Department had slowly slipped into a state of near-paralysis and that now everything has come to a standstill? That whatever passes for activity and work is no more than a maya-like mirage? That the work that now keeps the wheels running is generated by free-wheeling on the past activities and record of the Department? That the Extension and Research sections of the Department have been the worst sufferers in the avalanche set in motion by Land Reform that has atrophied all work? That the best research officers have either left the country or have been shunted into administrative posts where they sleep over files most of the time? That the few research officers who do any work at all have become frustrated because their work is not recognised? That their work cannot be even published because the journal of the Department, known as the *Tropical Agriculturist*, has not been published for two years (or more)? That the excuse for the delay, or the failure to publish, this prestigious journal, very essential for the growth and development of agriculture, is that the Government Printer has been chock-a-block with work in the periods the Government Press was not on strike? That whispers filter through that some interesting and excellent research has been done in Maha Illapalama, or Gannoruwa, or Tinnevely or some other station—but these findings on fungicides,

on legumes and other plants have not seen the light of day so far as the farming world is concerned? That, one by one, the best research officers are moving heaven and earth to quit the country in order to get opportunities to continue their research in other countries? That it is not the material benefits alone that compel these people to seek employment elsewhere (though this is a contributory factor) but the frustration that stems from the inability to do research and the failure to have the satisfaction that their work was being recognised and appreciated?

That more than even the Research Stations, the *Extension Service* of the Department of Agriculture has taken a severe beating? That there is no Extension Service worth speaking about today? That in the process of allegedly "democratising" the work of the Agricultural Department, the new APCs (Agriculture Productivity Centres) have been entrusted with the most important work that had earlier been done by the Extension Service—viz. supplying of seed material, fertilisers, agro-chemicals etc., etc.? That, with the APCs taking over, bureaucratic procedures have been trebled and quadrupled (with the consequent delays) and the costs to the farming community of basic essentials have gone up tremendously—the increased cost it is said is to cover the salaries, allowances and other payments for the staff of the APCs? That in addition to all this, the bigwigs of the APCs want their Lockheed-like cuts? That this is now mainly got by arranging for supplies direct from the suppliers—more often than not from the local agents of multinationals? That these APC bosses do not favour the products of the Petroleum Corporation? That those who ask for them are told that they are "out of stock"? That the prices charged for agrochemicals and fertilisers in many APCs are much higher than the prices in the open market? That farmers are compelled to buy at these prices because they get these essentials as part of the loans advanced to them for agricultural production? That with this officially legitimized exploitation, is it any wonder that most farmers default on their loans? That a recent newspaper report had stated that the People's

Bank was faced with unpaid agricultural loans amounting to Rs. 266 millions? That this is not surprising? That in spite of the paper stipulations about the manner the loans had to be given and the stringent requirements that have to be fulfilled, Political Authorities and MPs were able to secure agricultural loans to all and sundry (people who either helped them in the last elections or who were expected to help them in the coming elections)? That most of such money was not used for agricultural production? That it would be impossible to recover any of this money? That genuine farmers, who obtained these loans, are compelled to default because of the high costs of production and the low prices (compared to the costs) for their products? That a myth has been fostered that farmers were swimming in wealth because of the "high prices"? That what really happens is that the farmer spends what gets for his produce with gay abandon without paying his debts (governmental) because he has first to meet his consumerist needs and when even the barest minimum has been bought there is no money to pay the debts? That the APCs have become a new tier of exploitative bureaucracy? That it is a political bureaucracy of ignorant and corrupt elements who have clambered on to the bandwagon of MPs and Political Authorities who were vested with Executive, Administrative and even quasi-judicial powers from which there is no appeal? That APCs are only part and parcel of the monstrous Frankenstein that has begun to devastate this land under the cover of MPs chits and letters? That Bryan de Kretser's campaign against the MPs letters and chits, if it succeeds—as succeed it must—will also sweep over the APCs as constituted under the United Front (and latterly under the SLFP) from the face of Sri Lanka?



NEXT WEEK

- RAIL "STRIKE"
 - ELECTION TUSSLE
 - LOCAL AUTHORITIES
 - LAND REFORM SCANDALS
-

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