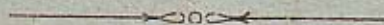


THE CEYLON
NATIONAL CONGRESS



PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
OF
H. W. AMARASURIYA, Esq., M.S.C.
DELIVERED AT THE
XVIIIth SESSIONS
OF THE
CEYLON NATIONAL CONGRESS
ON
SATURDAY, 19th DECEMBER, 1936.

THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
OF
Mr. HENRY W. AMARASURIYA
AT
THE EIGHTEENTH SESSION
OF THE
CEYLON NATIONAL CONGRESS
19TH DECEMBER, 1936.

Fellow Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to associate myself, to the fullest degree, with the warm and cordial welcome which has been extended to you by the Chairman of the Reception Committee.

Your presence, in such large numbers from various and distant parts of the Island, in spite of the considerable personal inconvenience, is a happy augury for the support which, I feel, will be given to the Congress in its arduous work during the coming year.

The Congress enters upon the 18th year of its existence. I consider it singularly fortunate that I should have been elected to preside over its deliberations a second time in succession. It would be ungracious on my part if I do not express my appreciation and gratitude, and also tender my sincere thanks for the great confidence you have in me, in having conferred upon me this signal honour in reelecting me your President for the ensuing year.

Personally, I would have been glad to lay down the burden of office, but I yielded to the persuasions of many of the ardent workers of the Congress, who induced me to continue in office, as the Congress is passing through a very critical period of its existence. This makes me feel that the responsibilities laid upon me this year are even greater than last year. I feel confident that, with your advice, sympathy, co-operation and good will, I shall be able to steer clear of dangerous rocks, angry seas and contrary winds, and bring the ship of Congress into safe harbour. I look forward to a year of crowded activities, and the launching of a programme of work which will secure to us the attainment of our political emancipation, and the creation of a great national consciousness. There are evidences of a lack of national fervour around us. This has retarded our progress considerably. It has resulted in a deplorable period of stagnation. We cannot afford to drift aimlessly in this culpable manner.

We must take stock anew of the present situation, mark out our deficiencies, and set about the necessary task of putting our own house in order.

This is an obligation which we cannot avoid, if the country is to be awakened from the condition of apathy to which it has fallen.

If we bestir ourselves in this manner, the country will be led towards a period of productive activities. The founders of the National Congress were men of vision. They foresaw the needs of the country, and placed, therefore, in the forefront of their creed these fundamental objects.

“The aim of the Ceylon National Congress is to secure for the people of Ceylon Responsible Government and the status of a self-governing member of the British Empire. This end is to be achieved by constitutional methods, by a reform of the existing system of

Government and administration, by a vigorous development of self-governing institutions, and by organising and fostering the intellectual, moral and economic resources of the country.”

These objects are comprehensive and they can be attained only by the energizing of public life in this country.

The founders of Congress believed, and it is an unquestionable sign of their penetrating wisdom, that the people should work actively for their own well being. They should prove themselves capable of working for the benefits which they hope to obtain. The Congress itself cannot obtain for this country all its rights; the people must be behind the Congress, working through this agency for their own salvation. The National Congress today, as always, respects this creed. Its work has been done under this inspiration. I can hopefully prophesy that so long as Congress continues to remain true to this creed, as it has done in the past, it will always retain its character as a living and energizing force, working unceasingly for the achievement of the aims of its creed, and it will thus remain a powerful and influential agency in the moulding of the country's future.

Every critic of the Congress should seriously and conscientiously ask himself whether or not Congress has been consistently loyal to this creed. Every unbiased mind will agree that the Congress has done so. We can honestly claim to be the only political organisation which has thrown open the door to individuals comprising every section of the people, irrespective of race, caste, creed or colour. May I, therefore, appeal to all right-thinking men to cease indulging in mutual recrimination, to sink all prejudices and differences, and join hands with us in the great struggle for the liberation of this country. By this division of interests, we have

left unexplored our full intellectual and economic resources, whilst others have benefited owing to the dissensions amongst ourselves. Let us learn to make sacrifices and to subordinate our personal ambitions for the loyalty to a cause which alone will enable us to march ahead unimpeded.

Fellow Delegates, I do not propose to take your minds back to our early political history. It is an indisputable fact that the inauguration of the Ceylon National Congress 18 years ago was a landmark in the political progress of this country. May I recall the fact that just twenty five years ago, there was only one elected Ceylonese representative in the Legislative Council. The franchise then was the monopoly of a few rich educated men. But today we are harvesting the results of the seeds sown in earlier years, as we now have 52 elected representatives, returned on the basis of universal franchise. The Ceylon National Congress played no insignificant part in bringing about these changes. Many reactionaries, particularly of the type of Mr. Page Croft, have vigorously denounced the grant of adult suffrage to the masses of this country. But the results of the last two general elections prove beyond any shadow of doubt, if proof were really necessary, that the Donoughmore Commissioners were the better judges, being fully justified in their generous estimate of the people of this country.

The acceptance of the Donoughmore Constitution, and its consequent introduction, have given opportunity to the representatives of the people to play a prominent part in the executive functions of Government in the initiation of policy and in the administration of departments. Our elected Ministers supported by their Committees have aptly demonstrated that the opportunity only was necessary for them to give proof of their capacity to administer the affairs of this country. In spite of handicaps and obstacles placed in their path, they have discharged their duties with great acceptance. The first State Council

and its successor have, on the whole, worked the constitution satisfactorily in spite of its inherent defects. As early as July, 1932, on the motions introduced by Mr. E. W. Perera, the then member for Horana and a past President of the Ceylon National Congress, a protracted and an exhaustive debate took place.

The Board of Ministers submitted a Memorandum to the Right Hon'ble The Secretary of State for the Colonies in accordance with the decisions arrived at as a result of this debate, and pointing out the difficulties encountered by them in the working of the present constitution. Among other matters they pressed for a reform of the constitution on the following main points :

- (a) Removal of the Officers of State and their substitution by elected Ministers and Executive Committees of the Council.
- (b) The strengthening of the position of the Board of Ministers by enabling them to initiate and carry out their financial policies.
- (c) Alteration in the method of the election of Ministers.
- (d) The reconstitution of the Public Services Commission.
- (e) The deletion of provision for obtaining the prior sanction of the Governor in the case of bills, motions, resolutions, or votes affecting officers in the public services.
- (f) The curtailment of the special powers of the Governor.

I do not consider it necessary to enter into a lengthy discussion as to the urgent need for a reform of the present constitution and to purge it of the defects in its working. Suffice it to say that the urgency is becoming more pronounced day by day, as it is not an uncommon feature to have serious differences between elected

Ministers and the three Officers of State, who form a sort of inner cabinet, and are only responsible to the Governor and not to the legislature. The three Officers of State were foisted temporarily, under the new scheme, as advisers to the elected Ministers and the Council generally. We feel their presence is no longer necessary, as our Ministers have gained the necessary experience to enable them to exercise their judgment independently. We, therefore, demand of the authorities their removal and substitution by elected Ministers and Executive Committees of the Council.

We would also urge that the Board of Ministers, under a reformed constitution, should enjoy the unrestricted power to control public finance and to initiate and carry out public policies unimpaired. The present position is far from satisfactory as the Ministers possess power without responsibility. They have no responsibility, because a bare majority of the Committee can initiate a policy even against the wishes of the Ministers. It is an entirely anomalous position that a Minister should be compelled to defend in open Council a policy which he has been forced to accept by his own Committee.

With regard to the method of electing Ministers, opinion is divided in the country; and we feel that, if our Board of Ministers is to function similar to the practice obtaining under a parliamentary system of Government, the present method of election calls for improvement.

I now pass on to the question of the Public Services Commission which, as constituted at present, is a purely official body empowered to make recommendations to the Governor in regard to the appointment, promotion, transfer, dismissal and disciplinary control of public officers. I claim, you will agree, that this is not a state of affairs which could be allowed to continue without an early remedy. We would strongly advocate the reconstitution of the Public Services Com-

mission by a body of independent men who can bring an unbiased mind to bear on matters referred to them for their disposal. If this were done, the present vicious practice of consulting Executive Committees in regard to appointments could with advantage be abolished.

Article 87 (1) of the Order in Council is an objectionable feature in our constitution as it demands the Governor's prior sanction for the introduction of bills, motions, resolutions, and votes affecting officers in the Public Service. This provision in the constitution has made the Public Services an unduly protected entity. The Personal Emoluments Bill is soaring year by year, and the Council is precluded from making any motion calculated to alter the conditions of service of any public officer in the employ of Government prior to the introduction of the Donoughmore Constitution. The need for the deletion of this provision was never felt more urgently than during the recent depression, owing to the inability to meet our commitments to pay the Public Services. We, therefore, consider the deletion of this provision an essential step in the future governmental system of this country.

Article 22 of the Order in Council which empowers the Governor the right to certify any measure on the ground of paramount importance, or necessary to give effect to the provisions of the Order in Council, has been very loosely applied by the Governor in matters which cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, come into the category of matters of paramount importance. The frequent abuse of this power has given a peculiar interpretation to the phrase "of paramount importance." The Donoughmore Commissioners were of opinion that the power of the Governor should be more supervisory than executive, if the constitution had any semblance of a democratic form of Government. We, therefore, demand that the constitution should be amended so as to curtail and restrict the special powers vested in the Governor.

I have only referred in passing to some of the grave defects in the Donoughmore Constitution. I am of opinion that the constitution renders itself capable of amendment because this was granted, in the words of the Commissioners themselves, as an experiment worthy of a trial. I submit a fair trial has been given to the constitution, and unless these inherent defects, which I have referred to, are removed, we shall see the sad spectacle of conflicts and certifications. I make bold to say that, with the best will in the world, no amount of co-operation on our part can surmount these difficulties unless the disease is eradicated from its roots.

I trust that the powers that be, will see our point of view in the proper perspective, and not be misguided by the shibboleths of the reactionary forces which have deliberately adopted an unsympathetic view of our difficulties, and have painted a dark picture to make the authorities believe that we are unfit for a further advance towards full Responsible Government.

I now propose to deal with the next resolution on the agenda. It deals with an important departure, the result of great deliberation and careful examination. The Executive Committee of the Ceylon National Congress had under its consideration the desirability of evolving and forming a party which was considered as necessary for its future well-being. This could only be effected by a suitable amendment of the Congress constitution; and, with this end in view, a resolution purporting to make the necessary amendment will be placed before you for your consideration and decision. It has become impossible for us to ignore the urgent need for Congress functioning as a party; and it is to satisfy this demand that we have determined upon this imperative course of action. A party can work coherently towards certain definite objects. It alone is capable of exerting an effective discipline. It brings

together persons of a like political complexion, and gives their efforts an accumulated energy which carries forward the cause they have set their minds upon. We have carefully considered this development and have, with mature deliberation, come to the conclusion that it is a binding obligation to form the Congress into an active and adequately functioning party. The political life of the country has in some measure relaxed. This, we find, is due to the disadvantage of there being no party which has hitherto taken upon itself the responsibilities of functioning in the sense of the great parties in England. There has been an approach to such system in the Congress; but there has been an insufficient comprehensiveness in its undertaking a definite course of action. This omission we are now prepared to make good, in as effective a manner as possible. We believe that Congress has alone a history, tradition and authority in this country which would enable it to be adequately representative of the political consciousness in Ceylon. The services of Congress to this country are evidenced in the political advancement which has been achieved since 1919, when it was inaugurated for the express purpose of obtaining Responsible Government for Ceylon. We feel that the country will be grateful for the services which have been rendered in the past; and that all communities and creeds will find again a rallying point on the Congress platform, so that greater advances will be made in the political aspirations of the Island. We hope to appeal to the country for this support; and we have reason to anticipate that it will be readily forthcoming. It is in the interests of all communities to throw in their lot with us, and strengthen our hands in the work which we are setting out to accomplish for the future. We can show all communities our credentials. We have done great and effective work in the past. We must also acknowledge that this work was made possible owing to the degree of generous co-operation which we then received; and for which we

have reason to be thankful, up to the measure of services thus rendered. There was in 1919 a generous realisation that the Congress had to be helped to secure the political rights of the people. No other organisation existed which could fulfil the same purpose, with the same amount of public opinion behind it. The communities of the Island then did their duty, but when some of the measures which were demanded were received, there was a loosening of the bonds which has proved disastrous to the country. Claims were advanced for the benefits which were obtained, but which were not justified by the circumstances; and there was then a deplorable division and secession, which has left an unfortunate legacy of trouble for us to deal with, at the present time. Such a contingency was not anticipated by the great founders of the Congress who believed that the communities would hold together through the most adverse and trying circumstances, until the country had obtained the grant of Responsible Government. But divided counsels prevailed; there were demands to which the Congress could not in reason accede; strife was formented in all ranks; and the unity which had been the cherished dream of the past was wrecked upon the adamantine prejudices which manifested themselves.

To this early and desired unity we must now return. There can be no quarrelling for the spoils of office. We have all suffered from the effects of this disunity. As men guided by wise maxims of policy in our public life, we realise that we should heal our divisions, and present a united front. Much has already been achieved, but much more still remains to be done. We should not allow ourselves to be the victims of a "divide and rule" policy. It has been the bane of India that the communities have been divided. This country has also paid the price for lack of unity, in its own measure. It is the tendency of all governments to profit from this state of affairs. We cannot blame those who exploit such a situation

when we refuse to adopt the remedy that lies in our own hands. We have no reason at the present time to divide our ranks. It is our duty to fulfil the anticipations which were the cherished objects of the founders of Congress; and I can do no better than quote to you the memorable words of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam in 1919, at the first sessions of the Congress, when he made a powerful appeal for unity and for corporate action under the aegis of Congress:—

"By the inauguration of this Congress," he said, "we proclaim once for all that we have done with our petty differences and dissensions and that whatever one's creed, race, or caste may be, if only in the memorable words of our Island's chronicle, the Mahawansa, "he makes himself one with the people," he is the true son of Lanka, a true Ceylonese, and entitled both to serve our dear Motherland to the best of his power; and to enjoy in the fullest measure the advantages and benefits she offers."

You will admit, Fellow Delegates, that we have no right to deviate from these true and inspiring ideals of common action; and make for ourselves new and false ideals which lead only to division, strife and a weakening of our ranks. The Congress obtained for this country a substantial measure of political reforms in 1920 and again in 1923. If, when there was only one elected representative in Council, all communities shared a desire to act together for the common good, it is reasonable to ask that there should be a greater unity now when, by our united action, successful advances in the political life of this country have been, obtained under the present constitution.

But this has, unfortunately, not been the course of events. It is in the nature of things that dissensions should arise. But it is not essential in the nature of things that they should continue for ever to mar our future development, by denying to us the services of thousands of our countrymen, who have their part to

play in moulding the destinies of this country. It is a grave pity that the pages of this country's modern history should be darkened by a chapter of dissension, strife and prejudice. Our posterity will think that we have lost the advantages of many stirring political campaigns by our own lack of vision and weak impulsiveness in sacrificing their interests to our quarrelling over hard won spoils. In the political life of a country, continuity of action is an essential element of ultimate success. Progress should be maintained all along the line. One generation should not fritter away even a part of its heritage of successes. They have to be won over again, and this is always a difficult, arduous and uncertain task. We have profited by the work of the generation before us; and we must consolidate their gains, add to them by our own endeavours, and hand over, unimpaired but increased, to our posterity all that is within our power to transmit to them in full measure, and even running over. This is a course which we must follow for the future. This task we must set about to accomplish without delay. There should be no more idle and damaging talk of maintaining a condition of secession. We must restore the ideals which stirred to action the generous-hearted founders of the Congress and which made its very existence possible.

Nor must we forget some of the fundamental considerations which were raised by the Donoughmore Commissioners. They discovered the absence in this country of parties which were essential to the working of the parliamentary system of government. What they found in this country was an entirely fortuitous and accidental combination between persons who had only, on particular questions, the same views. When their aims had been fulfilled they fell apart. This is an obvious disadvantage. These groups, which are accidentally formed, shift and change; having no bond of principle. They do not act upon formulated principles to which they owe allegiance. They might be

tempted on occasion, by self-interest, to abandon a line of policy which is beneficial to the country. They might, under a sudden pressure of events, lose their hold on their judgments; and find, when it is too late, that they have been the dupes of an intriguing group, which was able to temporarily advance some plausible grounds for their interested point of view. It will be seen that there are grave dangers in individuals working without a settled policy, such as a powerful party could lay down; and the validity and acceptance of which, by the country, can be tested at the polls. The interests of the country must always be considered as of paramount importance; and a party can test the opinion of the country much better than any group or individuals, under the hasty circumstances in which they combine for some immediate advantage to be secured by their acting together on one particular issue. In England, as well as other countries, there is a growing danger that the individual is losing his freedom of action in recording a free vote. The particular danger in England is the dominating position of the Cabinet. This happens even under a system which is built on party principles. We, in this country, have our own particular form of this problem, owing to the absence of the party system; and the danger of obliterating the individuality of the private member is therefore all the more grave and imminent; and can be combated only by adopting the party system, as we are intending to do in a definite programme. We must also not be blind to the possibility of narrow interests becoming the centre round which individuals group themselves. In England there are large policies, imperial and international in their aspect, which give to parties the opportunity of forming themselves along distinct lines of alignment. In internal affairs, too, there are separate interests, large and sufficiently distinct, to warrant the existence of different schools of political thought. But in Ceylon, this situation does not arise. We have no serious industrial problems; no foreign

policies of the kinds which exist elsewhere; and no internal issues which make for the legitimate cleavage of opinions, sufficiently wide to warrant the formation of many parties with different objectives. There is also no urgent need for the formation of parties, the programmes of which overlap ours.

We do not think it wise policy, therefore, to create a multiplicity of parties which would ultimately result in greater cleavages. But we do not deny to any body of persons the right to decide for themselves whether or not they should form organisations of their own, with objects identical with those of the Congress; or which could be adequately served by the creation of Congress itself into a party. We do not wish to interfere with the judgment of individuals; but we feel that due attention should be given to such considerations as we have set down, before action is taken to create new bodies which do not have the authority of the Congress derived from a long history, a definite achievement in the political sphere, and an influence which is capable of serving the interests of the country, however diverse, and the common good, whatever form this may assume, now or in the future. The Congress is therefore, you will admit, right in assuming that there is an urgent necessity of its formation into a properly disciplined party.

The main interests of the country can be served by Congress through its functioning as a party. If there are other parties with distinctive features and serving special ends, the Congress is prepared to extend the right hand of fellowship to such institutions which function for the public good. This is the end we all have in view. Ceylon is mainly an agricultural country, with limited problems; and, we feel, that a number of separate bodies will tend to emphasise our divisions out of proportion to their respective aims, and lead to some measure of internal disruption. In a small country, all sections of public opinion should hold together. The mere fact of separate bodies creates in

the public mind the impression of divergent objects, and undermines the foundation of unity which is so essential to public life. The Congress will, however, gladly give and accept such co-operation as is necessary in order to advance the common good of the country. Congress is neither a coterie nor a caucus to serve any special interests. It claims to be the best instrument of public opinion in the country. Any opposing point of view is a fallacy which has been fostered by the deliberate refusal to acknowledge its claims. The Congress has absolutely no sectional interests; and it can, therefore, solicit the co-operation of all communities. In the words of the Donoughmore Commissioners: "It is the balance of parties which gives stability and prevents too frequent changes of government; it is the party system which renders politics intelligible to the electorate; and it is the party system which reduces to a minimum the intrigues, bargainings and understandings which, in a house of petty groups, are apt to become an essential preliminary to every parliamentary system."

I would substantiate my argument by a quotation from Burke, the greatest political philosopher in British history, in his defence of the party system:—

"Party" says Burke, "is a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours, the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed. For my part, I find it impossible to conceive that any one believes in his own politics, or thinks them to be of any weight, who refuses to adopt the means of having them reduced to practice. It is the business of the speculative philosopher to mark the proper ends of government. It is the business of the politician, who is the philosopher in action, to point out proper means towards those ends, and to employ them with effect. Therefore, every honourable connexion will avow it is their first purpose to pursue every just method to put the men who hold their opinions into such a condition as may enable them to carry their

common plans into execution, with all the power and authority of the state. As this power is attached to certain situations, it is their duty to contend for these situations. Without a proscription of others, they are bound to give to their own party the preference in all things, and by no means, for private considerations, to accept any offers of power in which the whole body is not included; nor to suffer themselves to be led or to be controlled; or to be overbalanced in office or in council by those who contradict the very fundamental principles on which their party is formed, and even those upon which every fair connexion must stand. Such a generous contention for power, on such manly and honourable maxims, will easily be distinguished from the mean and interested struggle for place and emolument. The very style of such persons will serve to discriminate them from the numberless imposters who have deluded the ignorant with professions incompatible with human practice, and have afterwards incensed them by practices below the level of vulgar rectitude."

These are luminous principles and I recommend them to your earnest consideration. To join a party does not mean a form of political servitude. It only means that persons, with an interest in the country's well-being, agree upon some great leading general principles which they recognise as such before joining the party, and to which they are then bound to give their allegiance. It will be an incident of very rare occurrence if they disagree on one principle out of many; but they always have occasion for a common ground of action, and support each other upon the general principles on which all are agreed. The Congress I would point out, in its leading principles, provides such common ground of action; and I would, therefore, appeal to persons of all communities, who have an interest in promoting the common good of

the country to join us in doing this disinterested service instead of allowing the body politic to be distracted by the dissonance of contending and contentious aims, which hinder the realisation of an essential advancement in every sphere of public activity. The emergence of Congress as a functioning and effective party, with the co-operation of all communities will, I have every reason to believe, mark a new and auspicious era of prosperity for this country.

The next resolution deals with the question of Imperial Preference. After mature consideration, and a close examination of its repercussions, we have come to the conclusion that the Ottawa Agreement, which resulted in the introduction of a scheme of Imperial Preference, has in its practical application, as far as Ceylon is concerned, acted detrimentally to our economic interests. We have not had a fair deal on the admitted principle of reciprocity, which is the fundamental principle which commends such a scheme to our acceptance. Other countries, participating in this scheme, have benefited at the expense of the poor of this country. The burden that we are labouring under has been further aggravated by the imposition of quotas on Japanese textiles, by an Order-in-Council. This is a further demonstration of our impotence to resist any measure imposed by the Imperial Government without due regard to the state of this country. This is truly an act of high-handedness on the part of the Imperial Government, and a serious violation of the rights of our Legislature. The poor of this country, already hard hit by the depression and the malaria epidemic, are forced to undergo the further burden of paying more for articles of daily wear. We are, therefore, of opinion that our further participation in the scheme of preference is detrimental to the best interests of this country. We also demand, as a measure of bare justice to the poor of this country, that the quotas imposed against our wishes should be withdrawn, thus relieving the poor of an intolerable burden.

The next resolution is an equally important one for the future development of the country. The three main industries, tea, rubber and coconut have reached a saturation point; the former two owing to the operation of restriction schemes; and the development of the latter has in recent years been greatly retarded owing to the uneconomic prices coconut produce was able to command in the world's markets. I do not wish to over-emphasise how important it is to conserve our present markets. At the same time every possible attempt should be made to capture other markets, and find suitable outlets for our produce.

It is regrettable to note that up to the present time no proper facilities have been afforded by Government for the fostering of our nascent local industries. The grave economic situation, combined with the prevalence of wide-spread unemployment have caused the skilled worker to down his tools; and due to want of capital, and serious competition from outside, he is unable to establish himself in some industrial pursuit. We are strongly of opinion that a properly conceived scheme of industrial development should be undertaken, under the aegis of Government. The Industries Department, which has been recently established, should make itself more useful by giving instructions and practical help; and also by the dissemination of literature on industries that are best adaptable to the needs of the country.

The development of cottage industries should also find a proper place in this scheme, as a large number of cottage workers is engaged in the production of well-turned out articles which could find a ready market, if properly advertised and organised. The success of industrial development in this country is largely dependent on the successful completion of the Hydro-Electric Scheme. It is a matter for regret that a scheme, which was conceived about fifteen years ago, has not still seen the light of day. Experts have prophesied

that it has great potentialities, and we trust that, once for all, a start will be made and the scheme completed within a reasonable period.

The next resolution appertains to the immigrant labourer, who has elected to exercise his vote in the election of members to the State Council. We are of opinion that, if they intend to make Ceylon their permanent home, to which we have no objection, they should be made subject to the ordinary laws of the land, and not be allowed to enjoy special privileges, which they would otherwise have been entitled to as temporary settlers.

There is need for wise statesmanship in this country, as the main problems which have confronted us for years have not yet been satisfactorily solved. Important as are problems of constitutional reform, we do not consider them purely as ends in themselves but only as means towards promoting the welfare of the people.

Good Government is tested by the amount of happiness, security and peace it can confer on the people. We are not unaware of the value of political advancement; but this must go hand in hand with economic advancement. The people cannot live on the thin fare of political doctrines. They must have the means of subsistence. If we do not work with this object in view, we shall be creating a domestic problem which will assume dangerous proportions in the near future; and we will be convicted of being impracticable dreamers in respect of the actual well-being of the people, which we have failed to realise. Ceylon is still essentially an agricultural country. Its peasants have claims upon us, as they are the backbone of the country; and, without their prosperity, any schemes of development which we undertake will have no vital relation to the country's well-being. In ancient times the peasant was prosperous. Today, he is subject to many ills; mainly due to the systematic neglect

of his condition. The peasant, owing to his work being unproductive, is being rooted out of his ancestral holdings and is becoming a casual labourer. This is a state of affairs which is surely a grave reproach to our statesmanship; and it is our duty to see that the peasant finds his living on his own land, and that his labours are made productive.

Recently, there has been too much exclusive concentration on the experiments in the dry zone. These schemes are expensive and without immediate results, in proportion to the enormous costs they entail. More attention might now be paid to the system of cultivation necessary in the wet zones of the Island. In the dry zone, a population has to be induced to stay upon the land; in the wet zone, there is an already existing population which only requires some measure of encouragement to undertake cultivation. Both dry zone and wet zone cultivation should be vigorously carried out, and with equal attention.

We hope that action will be taken to give a real measure of support to the peasantry in both the dry and the wet zones, so that more persons will take to productive cultivation. We have, in this country, only about 850,000 acres under paddy cultivation; and considering our total population, it can easily be recognised that we are bound to remain in a uncertain and humiliating position of dependence upon outside sources for our essential food products. A food production drive on an extensive scale, throughout the whole Island, is obviously imperative in the circumstances. This should be carried out under the direction and advice of the Government. We appreciate the efforts of the present energetic Minister of Agriculture in this direction; and we feel confident that the entire country will give him the necessary backing and support to make our island self-supporting in the matter of its food supply. It is absolutely necessary that the

Agricultural Department should carry out further research, with a view to finding out suitable economic products for the greater development of agricultural industries.

We are of opinion that the present system of land development, by the grant of land to our peasants, is not in itself capable of satisfactory productive results, as the peasants labour under the difficulty of want of adequate capital for the development of such land. We would commend to Government the need of evolving a more generous scheme of financial assistance which would enable the peasantry to make paddy cultivation, and allied products, an economic proposition. There are vast possibilities of developing fruit-growing on a commercial basis which would ultimately lead to the establishment of a canning industry.

The producer's efforts have to be supplemented by exploring suitable outlets for his produce. We are in agreement that this could best be done to enable the peasant to have an adequate return by the further development of the co-operative movement for the purpose of production, distribution and sale.

Next to agriculture, we consider the preservation of health of importance to the regeneration of a nation. Malaria is still our greatest menace. We hope that before long this country will show some signs of improvement through the anti-malaria campaign, as the stamina of the people has been undermined by the serious incidence of this disease. Money should not also be stinted to stamp out other diseases like hookworm and phthisis, which are fast undermining the vitality of the nation. A proper health survey of the Island is, in our opinion, imperative to evolve well-considered health measures, and combat the ravages of diseases. The appalling rate of infant mortality, which is one of the highest in the world, is a serious blot on the efficiency of our medical machinery. A more liberal policy should be pursued in the establishment

of a greater number of dispensaries, hospitals, clinics, child welfare centres; and the employment of more medical men, to carry out a vigorous health drive, will accordingly be necessary. The majority of the people of the country still have great faith in the Ayurvedic system of medicine, and they often have recourse to this method of treatment. We would wish to add this system should be given greater encouragement; and also that all possible steps be taken to spread its usefulness. Under existing conditions, all children attending school are examined by the Officers of the Medical Department. No provision has however been made for the treatment of these children for their ailments. We would commend that early steps be taken to give the necessary treatment after such examination. The housing problem also needs attention. Other countries have advanced considerably in this direction. European countries have thus provided thousands of persons with clean and sanitary modern homes. We need more building societies in Ceylon. But the Government and self-governing local bodies should have their own schemes for the housing of their own labourers. Something should also be done, but very gradually, to improve the housing conditions in the village areas all over the country. The sanitary conditions of housing in the large towns leave room for considerable improvements.

It is the birthright of every child to have a proper elementary education. Although vast strides have been made in working towards the achievement of this end, it is regrettable to record that there are still nearly a hundred thousand children for whom no educational facilities have been provided. This is a serious reproach to the good government of this country. In certain quarters there is an outcry that too much money is being spent on education. If facts are carefully examined, one will see the futility and the fallacy of such an assumption. Our aim should be to make the entire nation literate. This could not be achieved in a

few years, but judicious expenditure of money spread over a reasonable number of years, upon well-conceived schemes of education, will bring about the desired result. Educational experts are definitely of opinion that the medium of instruction should be in the mother-tongue. We, therefore, consider that in Ceylon, which possesses a mixed population, mainly of Sinhalese and Tamils, English should form a second language in the curriculum of our schools, and instruction should be imparted in the mother-tongue. English being the official language, we should aim at giving a free primary education to every child. Particularly in the case of some of the poor who possess intellectual qualities, further opportunity should be afforded to pursue a course of higher education by the method of scholarships. It is very desirable that a Sinhalese child should be taught Tamil as a third language, and a Tamil Sinhalese as a third language. This would apply with equal force even to a Muslim child. I am of opinion that an educational system, directed on these lines, will greatly mitigate the existence of communal differences, as there would be a better mutual understanding of the culture, customs and manners of the three principal races living in this country.

It has become the common practice for the educationalists of today to vehemently denounce the present system of education; but strange to say, very little helpful criticism has emanated from such sources. We must appreciate the fact that the present system of education had its beginning about a century ago, and, with the passage of time, the system has, up to now, adapted itself to the needs of the community. We would point out that the system requires drastic changes if it is to adapt itself to the changed conditions which require a greater vocational bias. The inordinate delay in the establishment of a University has given a setback to secondary education. Our secondary schools today have to cater to the requirements of the outside universities, resulting in the control of the whole system of

secondary education by foreign standards. The University is indispensable to the proper development of our cultural needs. Its early establishment is of the utmost importance to the future development of our educational life. Another aspect of education is the need to find a solution to remove illiteracy among the adults. This is as important as educating the children in a system of national reawakening; and we trust early action will be taken to adequately tackle this problem too. Ceylon is rich in its archaeological remains, and it is the duty of the State to conserve and preserve these monuments as a national heritage. The present vandalism that is being practised should definitely be stopped, and measures be taken to preserve intact this valuable national asset.

It is gratifying to note that the principle of feeding of school children by providing a midday meal at school has been endorsed by the State Council; but we consider the money provision totally inadequate to feed all children in attendance at schools. We appreciate the difficulty in evolving a scheme which will be found satisfactory and acceptable to the majority. We trust the Executive Committee of Education will address themselves to the task; and will adopt a scheme that will work to the benefit of as large a number of children as possible. We hope in future years it would be possible to vote sufficient money for the feeding of all children.

The development of local government occupies an important place in a national scheme of development. The progress so far made cannot be considered commensurate with our needs. A substitute for archaic institutions like Sanitary Boards is long overdue, and a more democratic and advanced method of local administration should be devised to replace the Sanitary Board. The Village Committees which are scattered throughout the Island are unable to function efficiently and discharge their obligations, owing to lack of funds; and also restrictions placed upon them in regard to the

administration of whatever funds are at their disposal. We require an impetus towards the rapid development of local government institutions, as it is a well recognised fact that local self-government is an essential preliminary to responsible government.

The inordinate delay in formulating proposals on the Headman Commission Report has given cause for suspicion in the country. The Report of the Commission was published over a year ago and the country has been eagerly awaiting the introduction of a reform of the headmen system. Those responsible for the placing of proposals before the country should feel that they have been seriously lacking in their sense of duty. We would point out that the matter is of sufficient public importance to warrant early action.

The country was made to believe that a scheme of Rural Reconstruction would be launched at an early date, under the auspices of Government; but up to now, no practical steps have been taken for the inauguration of such a scheme. The scheme is an essential need to raise the standard of village life, which is at present at a very low ebb; as the villager is desperate, and has no immediate hopes for the future. This is a very disquieting state of affairs, and delay will only result in a serious national deterioration. This is a problem that should be grappled with statesmanlike promptitude.

It is regrettable to note that Government is gradually drifting away from the avowed policy of temperance. This policy was the result of an organised public opinion which started about twenty five years ago, and made its influence felt throughout the length and breadth of the Island. In certain quarters there is a belief that a stimulus should be given to the coconut industry by the encouragement of the production of liquor, not only for local consumption but also for export. This, I submit, is a fallacy and time alone will demonstrate the soundness of my point of view. The

Congress views with great concern any attempts to increase the quantity of liquor produced for consumption in this Island, and requests the Government to introduce a quota system for the gradual restriction of the import of foreign liquor and in the production of locally manufactured liquor.

We record with satisfaction that our demand for the appointment of a Commission to investigate into the restriction of immigration has become an accomplished fact. The Congress submitted a Memorandum and supported it by further oral evidence. As the matter is sub judice I do not wish to express any further views at this stage and I feel that the inquiry is in able hands. I trust that satisfactory conclusions will be arrived at which will find a solution to a vexed problem in this country.

The conditions of labour in this country are far from satisfactory, as compared with conditions in other countries. The Congress is of opinion that these conditions greatly determine the standard of living and general happiness of the labouring classes. Their upliftment is an essential ingredient in the furtherance of a programme of national reconstruction, and a proper inquiry should be instituted in determining what constitutes a reasonable living wage. The fixation of hours of work is also considered desirable and we would recommend this for the consideration of Government.

Ceylonese have been lacking in enterprise in trade and commerce, the life-blood of a nation. No nation can claim to have progressed without having played a significant part in the development of trade and commerce of a country. There is a mistaken notion that Ceylonese are not by nature inclined to take to these spheres of activity. Here again it is not due to disinclination on the part of Ceylonese but owing to the lack of capital and credit facilities. The Banking Commission recommended that a State Aided Bank be established but for reasons yet unknown to the

public the Bank has not seen the light of day; and the far-reaching benefits which would have been conferred by such an institution have been denied those engaged in agricultural, industrial and commercial pursuits.

I now proceed to deal with the proposed Loan Policy of Government. The national debt of this country compares very favourably with other countries of a similar status. No country can hope to progress without an investment of money on projects that will lay the foundations for future returns; but at the same time, such funds should be applied on well-conceived schemes by the application of a process of elimination of such schemes as are of a doubtful value. Our current revenue is insufficient to meet the current expenditure which has to be met for the carrying out of national services. The interest and Sinking Fund have to be met out of current revenue. Unless due caution is exercised, these payments might become a drain upon our national finances. We trust that our financial experts have not lost sight of this contingency arising.

The Congress has persistently demanded that a revision of the incidence of taxation is necessary. The poor of this country have been called upon to bear more than their fair share of this burden. Import duties on articles of food and other necessaries of life require revision. We make a strong demand that adequate relief should be granted.

The Congress is of opinion that the process of Ceylonisation of the services has been slow. Where Ceylonese young men of intellectual attainments and proved capacity are available, we demand that preference should be given to them, as against non-Ceylonese. Our young men have no other country to look up to for employment. It is, therefore, the duty of the Government to absorb them into the services of this country when suitable posts are available.

A proper network of roads is essential for the development of the country. It is the duty of Government to recognise the needs of those engaged in both agricultural and industrial pursuits, by providing adequate transport facilities. Particularly inter-district communications should be encouraged; and an efficient telephone service plays no small part in linking up the remote parts of the Island and bringing them within easy reach of businessmen.

The increase of crime is appalling, for there were no less than 295 murders committed in 1935, as against 255 the previous year. This is a serious indictment of a dangerous tendency in this country. It is mainly the serious economic situation which has led to a manifestation of these criminal tendencies; although other factors, such as illiteracy and an impulsive nature, have also contributed to this result. We feel that the co-operation of religious agencies with Government in an attempt to suppress crime is needed. Every right-minded person should make it a duty to extend his co-operation in a movement calculated to suppress crime.

There has been a renaissance of national art, music and drama, and also creative literature in many parts of the East, notably in India; and all this has been the outcome of a great national movement. The traditions of Ceylon are in no way inferior to those of India, and an impetus to revive art and music should manifest itself in this country, too, under favourable circumstances. The National Congress hopes that in the coming year, it would render possible a similar movement throughout the Island. We hope that national customs, too, will find their due place in such a scheme.

Fellow Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope I have not taken too much of your time in dealing with the vital problems of this country. I also hope that in

these considerations you will have a stimulus to serious reflection on your personal obligations to contribute to their solutions.

I am encouraged in the hope of general co-operation this year. The Governor's words at the Caledonian dinner are an indication of what we all desire should be the attitude of all communities. His Excellency said: "I think that the country has shown that it could take its part and share in the administration of its affairs. We might congratulate ourselves on the way in which the political education of the country has been advanced." His Excellency went on to further state that it was the duty of Europeans in this country to take greater interest and help in the political development of this country. These are significant words, and we appreciate these sentiments expressed by His Excellency. Knowing as we do the sympathy he has for the aspirations of this country, we feel confident that His Excellency will translate these words into action. There is a silver lining in every dark cloud, and it is a solace to us that the Official Head of the administration of this country should have uttered these words, which are an unsolicited testimonial of the capacity of Ceylonese to manage their own affairs.

I hope that all communities will take their cue from His Excellency's words, and give us tangible proof that they are anxious to fulfil that part which His Excellency thinks is due by them to this country, which they have adopted as their permanent home. Each community has its own particular contribution to make to the welfare of this country. We need all the support we can get. We have set out to serve no selfish or narrow ends. It is because of this fact that we are confident that we can win your generous support. We have great objects for which to work. There is something noble and inspiring in service. The records of every country prove that its advance had been the work, not of isolated groups of individuals, but of

men who lead, and the masses who respond to the call of the country. We must by now have done with the internecine disputes of the past for ever. They are a dark shadow which must be dissipated. We owe it to ourselves to forget the past. The future is crowded with possibilities of achievement. We have laid our hands to the plough and cannot look back. There is so much to do that we cannot afford to have a single idle hand which might be utilized for the benefit of the suffering masses. Every community has its own stake in the prosperity of the country. They will not deny this obvious truth. No emotion in the human heart can be more generous and disinterested than the dedication of one's best endeavours to the welfare of a country. We have faced good and ill times together. Can we not stand, shoulder to shoulder, for the future; and remould this country's destiny nearer to the heart's desire?

We see no reason why other political parties, as long as their creed is the attainment of Responsible Government, should be unwilling to co-operate with us in obtaining the common objects we all have in view. The future of the country lies in the hands of its youth. It is they who will have to carry the torch from the failing hands of this generation; and they must now bestir themselves and respond and rally round the banner of Congress. In England, Germany and other places, the youth of those countries are yearning to do all they can for their country. They are moved by a spirit of manly patriotism. They have reached to the stature of heroes. It is not possible to pass on the responsibility of service from one's self to others. Each individual has his part to play; and whether he does it ill or well, he has added to or taken from the collective conscience of the community, of which he forms a part. I appeal to the youth of Ceylon, therefore, to do all they can to make this country all the better for their having done their duty generously and well. The youth

of this country have a great heritage from the past. They must enrich it by their own actions, and pass it on to the next generation.

Congress represents the most progressive ideals of political life in this country. We have done our duty in the past, and we shall do so in the future. We make no empty protestations. We present a clear record for all to read. We have established the right to ask for the goodwill, co-operation and assistance of all in realising the political aspirations of this country. Suspicion begets cause for suspicion, until all possibility of amity is finally destroyed. But confidence also begets confidence; and happy is that country in which this quality prevails amongst all communities. No one can deny that the Congress has stood the most trying tests, and that through all vicissitudes of public life, the ideals which were set out in its creed, originally, have been maintained unimpaired. This is a pledge of our sincerity that the aims which the founders laid down as fundamental conditions for the co-operation of all communities, before any strife or rumour of strife had appeared, have been maintained, firmly and indissolubly, throughout our long history. This policy we will maintain until the goal of Responsible Government is reached. We have a programme and a definite policy; and I shall adhere to the principles of Congress in every particular, thus following the great precedent set by my predecessors in office. In view of all that I have said, you will agree with me that Congress during the past, has worked wholeheartedly, and will continue to do so, for the benefit of this country which has an indefeasible claim upon our willing services, our unswerving loyalties, and our undivided devotion in the maintenance and extension of its common good.

When I lay down the reins of office at the end of the coming year, I hope that Congress will have grown into a powerful body, commensurate with its claims upon your service and the widespread needs of the

country; and that I shall cherish, as one of the tenderest and most inspiring memories of my life, the part I have played in restoring Congress to the place which is its due.

For serving this common good of the country, by building the Congress upon firm foundations, I can do no better than quote to you the memorable words of Ruskin :

“Let us think that we build for ever. Let it not be for present delight, nor for present use alone; let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for; and let us think, as we lay stone on stone, that a time is to come, when these stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them; and that men will say, as they look upon the labour and wrought substance of them : ‘See, this our fathers did for us!’ ”

Fellow Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you again most sincerely from the bottom of my heart for the patient hearing which you have accorded to me on this occasion.



PRINTERS:

"CEYLON DAILY NEWS" PRESS,
COLOMBO.
