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A Memoir of Happenings and Personalities

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We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead.

- W.B. Yeats: *Easter 1916*

This book is dedicated to the memory of all those -- famous or obscure, remembered or forgotten -- who, in the LSSP of colonial times, worked, endured, and died or survived in the hope of making their dream the reality it never became.

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Preface

In the years of the Second World War the Lanka Sama Samaja Party moved from semi-illegality, with the detention of four of its leaders, to complete underground existence after the party was proscribed when those leaders escaped in April 1942. These were also the years when the party was transformed from the open, radical mass party it had been before the war to a committedly Trotskyist party with a cadre-based organisation. During the same years the LSSP also attempted to influence the course of Indian revolutionary politics through the formation that it initiated of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India,

For many years now several people have urged me to write down my personal recollections of my participation in the LSSP of that period, One friend and colleague even offered to sit down with a tape-recorder so as to relieve me of the effort of writing: I agreed, but somehow the idea was never realised. It's possible that the same thing would have happened with other vague promises I made in response to similar requests, but for an experience of mine in reading the recently published, long awaited and generally excellent book of Professor Y. Ranjith Amarasinghe, *Revolutionary Idealism and Parliamentary Politics: A Study of Trotskyism in Sri Lanka* (Social Scientists' Association, Colombo, 1999). During that reading I was startled on realising that, by the accident of an excessive and undesired longevity, I happened to be the last survivor of certain events who can speak of them with direct, first-hand knowledge. It was the shock of that recognition that made me feel I had a duty to the historical record to preserve my memories before they were overtaken by the inevitable oblivion of human mortality.

This book is not, however, in competition with Professor

Amarasinghe's. His is an analytical, historical work; mine is the personal memoir of a participant and observer, and whatever political reflections and judgments it contains are subordinate to that character of the narrative. Prof. Amarasinghe's study covers the history of the LSSP from its foundation in 1935 to its entry into coalition politics in 1964. I have set down only my recollections of the wartime years. As a good Marxist historian, Prof. Amarasinghe anchors his interpretation of events and developments in the motive forces of classes, ideologies and political institutions. One of my concerns, on the other hand, has been to bring to life, in some degree, the personalities who figured in the drama I am re-enacting. Several of them were exceptional people - in intellect, dedication and courage unmatched by the leadership of any other political party of this country then or at any other time; but they were also human beings, subject to the imperfections inherent in being human. I have set out in Chapter 4 my reasons for believing that in the special conditions of underground existence these personal elements played a greater role in influencing the course of inner party life than they would have done in other circumstances.

The first chapter, which I have titled 'Prelude', is intended to indicate the family circumstances and other formative influences which led me, as an adolescent growing up in a lower middle class family in the Ceylon of the late 1930s, to be drawn towards the LSSP. (I have throughout used the old colonial name 'Ceylon' in referring to the island before 1972, in keeping with the period I am writing about.) The second chapter begins with my induction into the party, and describes the activity in which I became involved as well as some of the people I came to work with and know in those years. The third chapter interrupts the chronological narrative to indicate the nature of the party's organisation, class composition and its political objectives of that time, in which were contained, as I see it, the seeds of some of its future problems. A brief account of the Leninist theory of party organisation and of

the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution seemed necessary in order to explain the party's mode of operation and its aims. I have tried to explain these theories in the same chapter for the benefit of those readers to whom they are unfamiliar. Chapter Four returns to the narrative sequence, concentrating on what I have called 'the fateful year', 1942, with only a page on the period between then and the end of the war and the LSSP's return to legality. In that chapter there are two questions of fact on which I felt compelled to disagree, on the basis of first-hand knowledge, with Prof. Amarasinghe's study, but I do so not in a spirit of polemic or controversy but simply in order to record what I know to be the truth. In the fifth chapter I go beyond the form of the memoir and consider what were the effects on the party and on national politics of the choices the LSSP made in that period, and whether it had any other options. This chapter (as well as some incidental comments made elsewhere) involves a critical re-examination of the LSSP of that period. It may be said by some readers that these criticisms are made on the basis of hindsight. That would be perfectly true. But I make them all the more readily because they imply a self-criticism too: I shared in the party's limitations of vision and in its errors of judgment.

I believe I have one advantage in writing this story. I bring to it a combination of personal involvement in the events as they happened and a detachment from them now. I am no longer a Trotskyist, nor do I count myself a Marxist of any persuasion today, though I have derived from these traditions of political thought and activity influences that have gone into the formation of my outlook and understanding of the world. (Some readers, of course, may consider my non-Marxist position today a disqualification for writing this book.) Part of the period I chronicle was one in which the LSSP was caught up in a bitter internal factional struggle, though no knowledge of this reached the outer world until much later because the party was then functioning underground. In that struggle I was

with one faction, but since I was never one of the leadership and have not been a participant in the life of the party for over fifty years, I have no personal record to defend and no loyalties to uphold. I believe I can regard the issues and the personalities involved in the battles of the past with as much impartiality as is possible for any observer.

I have a good memory for events and things spoken, and although in re-enacting conversations across a large gap in time, I cannot claim that I have recalled the exact words, I believe that in reconstructing them I have been faithful enough to the substance of what was said. There are only a few facts that I have consciously suppressed, and these relate not to myself but to other people. In doing so I have been actuated by a kind of piety to the dead (regardless of factional differences), by a sympathy for individuals subjected to the violent stresses of extraordinary circumstances, and by a desire to spare pain to some persons still living - considerations that are for me stronger than fidelity to history. I have also referred to three figures in the story not by names but by initials because of what I had to say about them, although I know one of them to be dead, and the other two also are probably no longer living. Political struggle often arouses violent passions of bitterness and hatred, even among those (or sometimes, especially those) who are supposedly fighting for the same cause; but time, age and death must be allowed to calm them.

These men, and those who opposed them
And those whom they opposed
Accept the constitution of silence

1

Prelude

That afternoon I was sitting in the third-class compartment of a south-bound train from Maradana. I wasn't quite seventeen, and I was travelling home from school. There was an open book on my lap: it was John Strachey's *The Theory and Practice of Socialism*, and it was bound in the red-coloured boards of the Left Book Club publications of Victor Gollancz. I had been wholly absorbed in my reading for some time when I looked up to find a man in the seat opposite staring at me intently.

'Are you a brother of C.D.S. Siriwardena?' he asked.

'Yes,' I said. I suppose it was the family face that gave me away.

'I see you're reading John Strachey.'

'Yes. He's very good, isn't he?'

The man in the opposite seat smiled, with a shade of irony in his smile. 'You know, Strachey is one of those people who try to make socialism palatable to middle class people.'

I thought this was blasphemy, but he spoke with authority and was older than myself, so that I hadn't the courage to argue. Nor would there have been time anyway, because the train was drawing into one of the suburban stations, and he got up. But before he could dismount, I asked him, 'May I know your name?'

'Bernard Soysa.'

And that chance encounter was probably the beginning of my involvement with the LSSP.

*

I didn't actually get to know Bernard any better till much later, but what I conjecture now is that he passed the word to Hector

Abhayvardhana that there was a schoolboy ripe for conversion. I lived in Ratmalana, and Hector used to be one of the active members of a literary society that conducted lectures and debates in Mount Lavinia. He drew me into its activities; later he took me home and lent me books, and my socialist education gradually progressed beyond Strachey.

The Theory and Practice of Socialism hadn't been the first book of Strachey I read. Some months earlier I had been walking down Baillie Street in the Fort, when I spotted, suspended by a clip above the counter of a tea room, a small pamphlet with the title *Why YOU should be a Socialist*, and the still to me unknown name of John Strachey. I bought it for forty cents, read it, and said to myself, 'Now I am a socialist.' Strachey may have been what Bernard said of him (he ended as a post-war Minister in a Labour government); but he was a good propagandist. In any case, as I have often experienced at various times of my life, the influence a book has on you may have little to do with its intrinsic merits: it's just a matter of what you are ripe for at that particular time.

The Theory and Practice of Socialism I bought in an office down that same street. Justin Siriwardena (a future High Commissioner) ran an office there which probably acted as an agency for the Left Book Club. Incidentally, I wonder how I got the forty cents I paid for the pamphlet, or the two or three rupees for the book. My father was a government clerk, then retired: my family lived frugally, and didn't run to pocket money for the children. I must have raised the money in the way I did when I infrequently bought a Dorothy Sayers or an Agatha Christie at the bookstall at Maradana station - by selling some old schoolbooks to one of the secondhand bookshops that were so plentiful in that part of the city.

But if I try to track down what impelled me in the direction of socialism in my adolescence, it was not only my reading of Strachey or - around the same time - of Wells and Shaw that I have to reckon with but also a number of more indeterminate formative influences. Often a person's intellectual

commitments aren't exclusively the product of rational reflection; there are other motivations that one may not be conscious of but aren't any the less powerful for that. I couldn't in my teens have identified what in my family life or school environment had impelled me on the course of life towards which I was moving; it's only in looking back now that I can go some way towards discerning those shaping forces..

By the time I was twelve Father retired prematurely, owing to the state of his health, from the position of chief clerk he held in the CTO (his diabetes has been one of his principal legacies to me). He was largely self-taught, but he had a small collection of books, which ranged from English translations of Buddhist texts to rationalist literature by nineteenth-century British and American writers to cheap Indian reprints of the novels of G.W.M. Reynolds to the essays of Macaulay (so important a force in the colonial cultures of both India and Ceylon) to an adulatory biography of Napoleon by an American with republican (small r) convictions by the name of Abbott. There was no contradiction for him between the first two items: like many Ceylonese Buddhists who grew up in his time, he thought of Buddhism as different from other religions in being a rational philosophy, and he had no truck with ritual or superstition. I connect his admiration for Napoleon with the fact that like his hero, he was short; but it was also part of his political anti-Britishness: Napoleon was the man risen from the ranks who nearly beat the British as he had toppled so many crowned heads of Europe. Even in Macaulay his favourite essay was that on Warren Hastings, who was (unsuccessfully) impeached by Burke for his atrocities in India, and I can still remember the sonorous sentence with which Macaulay introduced Burke's peroration, 'Then, raising his voice till the arches of Irish oak resounded, the orator concluded...'.

These books I had free run of, and I was even induced to read some of them aloud to him (hence my recollection of the sentence about Burke), but Reynolds was carefully withheld

from me. Probably hardly anybody but me in this country today has even heard of G.W.M. Reynolds, but he was, as I discovered in later life, an interesting figure. He was a Chartist who wrote popular novels with titles like *Mysteries of the Court of London:* they exposed the vices and iniquities of the monarchy and the aristocracy while mixing social radicalism with a kind of soft-porn: that's why they were taboo to me.

Father had also a treasured scrapbook of newspaper clippings, and among these I remember a long report from the front page of the *Morning Leader* of Ponnambalam Ramanathan's speech in the Legislative Council against the atrocities committed by British troops during the martial law of 1915. It must have made some effect on me before I was in my teens, and I remember the preamble to the news story (possibly written by Armand de Souza himself). It described the dramatic moment in the Council when, as the clock in the chamber struck twelve midnight, the Governor in the chair turned to Ramanathan and asked, 'What was the cause of the riots?' and the latter rose to make his indictment.

My mother had been born into a peasant family and had grown up in a village till she married, and she never spoke or read English. Consequently, I spoke English to Father and Sinhala to her. It was also part of the lower middle class culture of my family that we, the children, called Father and Mother neither *Daddy* and *Mummy* nor *Thaththa* and *Amma* but *Pappa* and *Mamma* (Portuguese, I believe, in origin)- a revealing marker of our intermediate social position. In theory, this contact with different cultures should have been enriching, but it was distorted by the class values of a colonial era. I have recalled in a poem ('Colonial Cameo') the shame I felt at the age of six when Mother, calling at school, spoke to the teacher in Sinhala and a gang of boys mocked her parting salutation in the same language.

One of the quarrels I have today with the classical Marxism that I espoused so ardently in my youth is that its

concept of class is altogether too narrowly economistic, based on relations to the means of production. A much more complex formulation is needed to encapsulate the different social hierarchies, economic and cultural, and the degrees to which they coincide or diverge in a particular society or time. Of course, it will be said that what Marx and his followers were concerned with was isolating relations of production and their determining social effects, but when you interpret the totality of social phenomena on that basis, there is a great deal you leave out that limits your understanding of the real world. Incidentally, I wonder how much Marx, when he spoke of the economic base and the political and intellectual superstructure, was influenced, in his choice of an architectural metaphor, by the geography of 19th century bourgeois and petty bourgeois households: an army of servants lived 'below stairs', sustaining by their labour the social and intellectual activities of their masters and mistresses in the upper levels of the house.

In a colonial society like the one into which I was born, command of the ruling language was an important ingredient of status which didn't always coincide with one's economic position. In my own case, I grew up in a borderland between classes (not defined in purely economic terms) and linguistic cultures. Let me try to bring out the ambivalences inherent in such a position, not through theory (which Lenin, quoting Goethe, admitted to be 'grey', though he didn't always follow that pronouncement, unfortunately) but through sensations and impressions derived from 'the evergreen tree of life'.

I was very small, probably around five, when Father took me to the Fort for some reason I have forgotten, then to his office at the CTO, then sent me home by train with a saronged linesman, who naturally bought third class tickets for himself and me with the money Father had given him. I had never been in a third class compartment before: it was part of the small superiorities to those below them to which lower middle class families like ours were attached that we travelled second class. Children, like dogs, develop their sense of class

differences very early from the behaviour of their elders in the one case and their masters in the other. All the way home in the train I felt a deep sense of resentment as well as shame (and how powerful shame is as an emotional shaping force in forming that sense of class!), which I, of course, had to bottle up inside me. But as soon as I got home it burst out into sobs, as I cried to Mother (in Sinhala), with the linesman still waiting outside in the garden: 'He brought me by third class!' Both Mother and the linesman were greatly amused. But by the time I was eleven that tiny badge of class position had vanished: Father had retired and was living on a pension, and our family income was greatly diminished. At one time I had gone to school with my sister in a buggy cart, and later walked, but when we moved to a house further out in Ratmalana, I had to take a train, and I travelled then daily to school in a third class compartment without feeling that it involved any degradation.

But other early experiences were significant in exemplifying the force of language as an instrument of power. I was sent to school later than most children of similar families. Thinking about this now, I conjecture that economy may have been a material consideration. But Father taught me at home, so that I could read with great facility before I was sent to school. In consequence, in my first year (it was a girls' school then), I became something of a marvel. One day, during the lunch break, some girls in the class above mine, having heard of my prowess at reading, tested it by asking me to read at sight from one of their own readers. I took it in my stride; then they ran and fetched readers in succession from higher and higher classes, till I ended by reading from one of the Senior texts of the top class in the school. How much of it I understood I don't know, but I had no difficulty in articulating the words. The girls went away and told their teacher about this prodigy, so that after lunch I was called into the neighbouring class, given a book by the teacher and asked to read aloud. When I finished my performance, the teacher said:

'My goodness, I wish my girls could read like that!' That early experience was a foretaste of what was to happen throughout my schooldays: in economic terms and social status my position was inferior to that of many of my schoolfellows, but my ability to wield the English language - that potent instrument of power in a colonial society - often compensated for those disadvantages.

In spite of his Buddhism and his inchoate anti-imperialism my father believed, like so many others, in the superior efficiency of missionary education, so before I was nine I was sent to St. Thomas'. This must have entailed great sacrifices at first, but two years later I was awarded a scholarship, and thereafter, throughout my school education, as later at the university, I was educated on scholarships. (Free education came in only two years after I had graduated.) But at fourteen, I read Tagore's *Gitanjali,* which captivated my awakening adolescent romanticism. The conversion was as complete as that by Strachey was to be a couple of years later; and, with a perhaps mistaken idea of honesty, I announced to my father one day, at the entrance to a temple, that I wasn't going to take pansil because I believed in God. It was an enormous shock to him: any kind of belief in God was for him inseparable from the irrational absurdities that his favourite Ingersoll and other rationalists had exposed. He became convinced, though wrongly, that the school had converted me to Christianity: Tagore was something quite outside his comprehension. Months of misery, for me and the family, followed, and then I was taken out of St. Thomas' and put into Ananda.

It was a wrench for me, but in the end I was grateful, and I still am. St. Thomas' had been a predominantly upper middle class school, and its atmosphere was strongly pro-British. (In writing my novel *Among My Souvenirs* I used two actual experiences of my schooldays there: the Warden summoning an assembly to announce the death of George V and mourn him as 'a great and good king', and a boy in my class being reported to him for wearing a surya mala on

Remembrance Day.) How much did my sense of the class difference between me and many of my schoolfellows contribute to my socialist conversion? I don't know, but there must have been some element of this that worked on me unconsciously. My clothes were made for me by my mother, in order to save money on tailoring. This didn't matter as far as the standard school uniform of white shirts and blue shorts was concerned, and I was mercifully too little aware about niceties such as the proper cut and fit to worry about them. But once on prize-day, when I was to receive the form prize, I was on my way to school in a new outfit, also made for me by my mother. On the way I met a classmate, who looked at me in astonishment and said, 'Aren't you going to get a prize?' I said, 'Yes.' He looked again at my clothes, and was too polite to say anything more, but I read from his expression what he had meant - that they were entirely unsuitable for that ceremonial occasion.

Ananda was different. The boys were mainly urban lower middle class or rural bourgeois. Probably some of the latter had money to spare, but no smart sophistication: their idea of a good time would still have been a feed at the Sandagiri at Punchi Borella junction, washed down with a bottle of Vimto. Politically, the atmosphere of the school was strongly nationalist, but Ceylonese nationalist and not exclusively Sinhala. The composition of both staff and students was multi-ethnic (though it was a sign of how little such differences counted that the term had yet to be invented), and there were no visible manifestations of racial or religious prejudice. I am happy to have been there, in the golden age of Ananda under P. de S. Kularatne, the ablest and most enlightened of school heads, who abolished corporal punishment during my time and made a transition to co-education. (When I taught later at Ananda after graduation, the classes I took were substantially mixed, sex-wise; later heads of the school wound up the experiment, in deference, I suppose, to the middle class prejudice against co-education, although a great number of

state schools were, and are, mixed.) And in Kularatne's time there was a political tradition linked to the school: Philip and Robert Gunawardena, N.M. Perera, Bernard Soysa, had all been there.

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By the time of my last year in school Father was bedridden (he was to die of a stroke during the year). He told me there would be no money to send me to the university, and advised me to prepare for the General Clerical Service examination which would open the door to a government clerk's career like his own. I wasn't seriously troubled by this prospect: I had won several prizes in school, and was reading literature and criticism for the competitive Entrance Scholarship exam to the university. In the Colombo Public Library I was discovering the poetry of Auden, Spender, Day Lewis, which I read with alternating excitement and bafflement, caught up as much by their left-wing political beliefs (at that time) as by their poetic novelty. With the exhibitionism of adolescence I flourished at a school debate the name of Stephen Spender that probably nobody else in the hall knew, and quoted with much bravura his line, 'Death to the killers, bringing light to life.' At the exam I outran the rest of the field, and was awarded a scholarship of forty rupees a month. That was riches, in those days. Father died two months after I entered the university, and I remember, from accompanying Mother several times to collect her widows' pension, that she got exactly Rs. 74.99 a month - on which she was to feed and clothe a family of five for many years. With forty rupees I had enough to pay my fees, travel to the university, get my clothes, and even buy a few books (Penguins were only forty cents) and see an occasional film. For the first time in my life, I had pocket money to dispose of as I wished.

By the time I entered the university my Marxist education under Hector's tutelage had proceeded far enough for him to

conduct me on my very first day to be introduced to Esmond Wickramasinghe, rather as a raw young recruit might be presented to the commanding officer. Esmond, son of a senior civil servant, and future editorial boss of Lake House (and my own), was then the leading Samasamajist among university students. I joined a LSSP study class, and I remember that Philip Gunawardena dropped in there late one evening when the class was almost over. This was the first time I had seen him, and the last until my meeting with him in more dramatic circumstances in April 1942. He was - and this was to be a recurring impression at various times of my contact with him - quiet and soft-spoken in conversation with an individual or a small group, so that it almost seemed that a miraculous transformation occurred when he mounted a public platform. At the time of the study class it was the eve of the LSSP executive committee's resolution at the end of 1939 condemning the Third International, which precipitated the first split in the party. One of the students asked him about it. Philip didn't seem very anxious at that time to discuss the issue with novices. I remember, however, that he said, 'Probably the Third International will go the way of all flesh.'

It was not only us fledgling Marxists in the university who were unclear about the issue of Trotskyism vs. Stalinism but many members of the party as well. Even my ideological mentor of that time, Hector, had only a few months earlier hotly defended in conversation the Hitler-Stalin pact, and among the books he had lent me was the verbatim report of the Bukharin trial - a trial by confession which in my innocence I found rather too much to swallow. I am convinced that it was mainly Philip, who had then an enormous intellectual ascendancy over the party, as the most deeply read Marxist and most experienced political activist (I will return to this subject later), who pushed the party into that clean break with Stalinism. He was right, of course, for otherwise the party would have found itself in the ridiculous position of supporting the British war effort in 1942. Whether he or the party should

have gone all the way with Trotskyism is another question I shall leave for later.

The split in the party had, a few months later, an amusing sequel in my own experience. P. Kandiah, who was on the university staff then (he was later to be a Communist Party M.P.), one day invited a small group of left-minded students to tea in his rooms. During the evening Pieter Keuneman, who had only recently returned from Cambridge, and A.B. Perera (later Ananda College Principal, and still later, Ambassador) dropped in, as if by accident. Given the interests of the group there, the conversation naturally turned to politics, to the LSSP split and the differences betwseen Trotskyism and Stalinism - an issue of which none of us students knew very much. At some point in the discussion, I said, out of the vagueness of my knowledge, 'But didn't Lenin before he died want Stalin removed from the post of Party Secretary?' (Marxist arguments then and later were often conducted by reference to scriptural authority, as theologians used to fling Bible texts at each other.)

'No, no,' interjected Pieter, 'that isn't what happened.'

He then proceeded to give his own version of the event - that Lenin had at the last party congress in his life complained of Stalin's rudeness (he made this sound as if it was merely a matter of drawing-room manners), that the party discussed the matter, and ultimately Lenin withdrew the charge and the congress passed a vote of confidence in Stalin.

'If you want to check it,' he concluded, 'you can look it up in Lenin's *Selected Works*, Volume 10 - I think [he paused for a moment as if searching his memory], I think, page 352.'

That remarkable display of erudition naturally ended that part of the discussion. It wasn't till some time later that I discovered that :Lenin's complaint of rudeness (which was a prophetic political criticism) was made not at any party congress but in his last and suppressed letter to the party, and that it was nowhere in Lenin's *Selected Works* at that time: it

was ultimately published for the first time in Moscow only after Khrushchev's de-Stalinising speech of 1956.

If I may engage in a quick flash-forward to that time, P. Kandiah, whom I liked very much when I got to know him more closely, had just returned from a trip to Moscow in 1958. He rang me, and said, "Regi, I have with me some documents I brought back from Moscow; they are old documents, but published for the first time. You might find them interesting, I'll send them along.'

He did so, and looking through them, I found the text of Lenin's last letter to the party ('the Suppressed Testament', as it had come to be called), which Pieter had distorted that evening in Kandiah's room. It was new to Kandiah, but it had been familiar to me from Trotskyist literature for many years.

I liked Kandiah, who was charming and unassuming and whose manifest sincerity won my respect, but I never grew to like Pieter. He was clever, he was an excellent parliamentary debater who used to impress me when I heard him later from the press gallery of parliament, but he would eke out his natural cleverness with little tactical devices like that in the conversation in Kandiah's room long ago.

Soon after he returned from England, Pieter joined Lake House, and was a star performer on the *Sunday Observer* for some time. One Sunday the Observer ran a symposium on 'The Worst Book in the World'. Pieter had two choices: Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* and Palgrave's *Golden Treasury.* Of the latter he said, 'It tries to put poetry on a pedestal, and succeeds only in putting it on the shelf.' That witty remark came straight (though unacknowledged) from W.H. Auden and John Garrett's introduction to their anthology, *The Poet's Tongue.*

When I was still a student, a university society celebrated the anniversary of Lenin's death by inviting Pieter to deliver a lecture on him. Pieter began: *'Lenin is dead!* The words were like great rocks falling into the sea.' That came straight (though

again unacknowledged) from Trotsky, whom he despised and hated so much.

Pieter even paid me the compliment once of borrowing a phrase from me. When I was parliamentary lobby correspondent for the *Daily News* in the second half of the 'fifties. I began a column one day with the words, 'The Minister of Agriculture and Food [Philip Gunawardena] usually sits so quietly on the government front bench that you might mistake him for an extinct volcano. But the fires are only slumbering...' When Pieter died, a journalist collected some of his brilliant parliamentary remarks, and I discovered that some years after me he had called Philip 'an extinct volcano'.

Since I have been cutting back and forth in time so much in this part of the chapter, I may as well record my later experience with the third protagonist of the conversation in Kandiah's room, A.B. Perera. He was then a Communist sympathiser. The only thing I can remember him saying that evening was: 'Sidney and Beatrice Webb titled their book on the Soviet Union *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?*, but in the second edition they took out the question mark.' But soon after I took my university degree I applied for a teaching job at my old school, Ananda, of which A.B. Perera was the newly appointed principal. When he interviewed me, he remarked:

'They tell me you're a Samasamajist.'

'Yes.' I said.

'Well, if I am to appoint you, I want you to promise you won't use your position to influence the boys politically.'

'That I can promise.'

'That's alright then. But you should reconsider your political position. I think the future of the world lies with National Socialism.'

He went on to elaborate this idea. It was mid-1943, and A.B. Perera was apparently carried away by the military successes of the Axis powers. I don't know whether he saw himself as dictator of Ceylon in a Fascist-dominated world,

but he soon precipitated a crisis in the Buddhist Theosophical Society, which controlled Buddhist schools, and a violent internal struggle ensued. There was a gang of 'storm-troopers' who were loyal to A.B.P. who terrorised the opposing faction. They never got as far as setting fire to the Reichstag, but when the faction they supported lost out in the end, the cadjan-roofed buildings, in which Ananda College was temporarily housed under wartime conditions, mysteriously caught fire and were burnt to the ground.

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In my first year at the university I was still on the fringes of the LSSP, attending study classes, collecting money for the protests about the killing of Govindan at Mooloya estate, and reading Marxist - and now, Trotskyist - literature. One of the people I got to know through my association with the LSSP group in the university, and whom I was to know better as a party comrade later, was the colourful figure of Dickie Attyaglle. Dickie was a great wit, and some of his remarks deserve to be recalled. Of an undergraduette who was prim and proper, as well as stout and dumpy, Dickie once remarked to me, 'She reminds me of the whitewashed statue of Queen Victoria in Gordon Gardens.' When Trotsky was murdered in Mexico by a Stalinist assassin, Dickie told Shan (N. Sanmugathasan), the most active Stalinist at the university, 'You fellows used the hammer to kill Trotsky? The sickle is reserved for the Georgian peasant.' (Perhaps behind this remark was the Trotskyist expectation of a political revolution in which Stalin would be dethroned by the proletariat; but he was to outlive Trotsky by thirteen years to die peacefully in his bed, and the anti-Stalinist political revolution would be carried out later under very different auspices from what the Trotskyists expected.)

Dickie's wit wasn't confined to his conversation. He once wrote a brilliant parody in the university students' magazine

of Sir Solomon Bandaranaike's *Remembered Yesterdays,* which ended with Sir Solomon in the 'Blue Room' at Horagolla, drinking with 'Sonny' a toast to the King on the outbreak of war. Earlier, when Madrid fell at the end of the Spanish Civil War, Fr. Peter A. Pillai was reported to have celebrated the event with the students of the university's Catholic hostel with a feast of Barcelona nuts and Tarragona wine. Dickie's skit on this subject, also in the university magazine, described how 'the students of Wertenberg, and Mephistopheles without his Faustus' gathered, and after consuming the nuts and wine,

They gave thanks to thee, O Franco,
Remembering thee, O Zion.

And their sins were all forgiven;
All good soldiers go to heaven.

When later, I briefly succeeded Dickie as teacher of English at Royal College, I found a whole generation of Royalists in the upper forms who had absorbed Dickie's modes of speech and even his gestures. Dickie had carried his propensity for ironic wit into his career as teacher. One of his pupils was Felix Dias (as he was then known; the revival of his Bandaranaike surname came only with his entry into political life). Felix apparently had a habit of bowing ceremonially to the master at the end of a lesson before he left the class. This formality used to irritate Dickie, until one day he remarked, 'Dias, you think you bow like a gentleman, but actually you bow like a butler.'

The big event of 1939, as far as the LSSP student group was concerned, was the protest against the donation of Rs. 100 to war funds by the Amalgamation Club - the officially recognised representative body for all student activities. I have elsewhere described the ban on the protest meeting by Professor Pakeman, the acting head of the university, the conduct of the meeting in spite of the ban, and the ensuing

confrontation between the professor and his pupil, Esmond Wickramasinghe. After describing that last incident, I added: 'That was Esmond's finest hour.' Mervyn de Silva, referring to this in a newspaper column, questioned it by referring to the Golden Pen that Esmond won as editorial Managing Director of Lake House for his defence of press freedom in 1965. I can't agree. There were some squalid aspects to that defence, but in 1939, young, and with his idealism still unspoilt, Esmond had nothing to gain personally by his defiance of authority.

The Mooloya estate strike and the killing of the worker Govindan by the police became a major political issue, which, like the earlier Bracegirdle affair, gave the LSSP great national prominence. Mooloya was an issue that exemplified the preponderance class politics then had over ethnic politics. At the university a student who had up to then shown no interest in the LSSP and was to show none later, but was contesting a Union Society office in the approaching student elections, turned up for a debate in a red shirt and made a fiery speech, ending with the prophecy that 'the blood of Comrade Govindan' would nourish the struggle against imperialism. No demagogue or careerist in the South today would try to make political capital of the killing of a Tamil estate worker. Nor would any Southern-based political party mount a national agitation, as the LSSP did, for the prosecution for murder of a Sinhala sergeant who had shot a Tamil worker. For that matter, the national conscience would hardly be agitated today by the question whether the killing of one man was justified or not; we have grown inured to the violent deaths of thousands.

But after the arrest of the four detenus - Philip Gunawardena, Colvin R. de Silva, N.M. Perera and Edmund Samarakkody- in mid-1940 and the issue of a warrant on Leslie Goomewardene, who evaded arrest, there was a perceptible lull in party activity as far as it could be perceived from the angle of student life. The party had gone underground and there were few signs of open life. That was still the situation

early in 1941 when Lorensz Perera came unexpectedly to meet me at the university one day. His is a name that very few people will know today, but since he was one of the most remarkable people I have ever known, I will break the chronological thread of narrative to describe him.

2

Life in the Party

Lorensz had entered the university at the same time as me; he was a medical student who had, by all accounts, a brilliant academic career ahead of him. But he joined an LSSP study class: I remember him at the first one I attended, and I recall that he was arguing then that Marxism was wholly compatible with Buddhism. At that stage he didn't know Marxist theory deeply, nor do I think that intellectual conviction was at any time the main motive force of his political action. Che Guevara said in one of his writings (I am quoting from memory) that the revolutionary must be actuated by great love if he is not to fall into an arid scholasticism. That great love of humanity and a strong urge to fight against suffering were what drove Lorensz. The rest of us in that study class either dropped out in course of time or pursued a double life, between our academic interests and political involvement of some kind. But Lorensz was the kind of person for whom such a compromise would have been impossible. He became wholly committed and was drawn into full-time political activity. I don't know whether he ever formally left the university, he just drifted away because he now had no time for it. He had entered upon the life of the professional revolutionary:

To hunger, work illegally,
And be anonymous.

He continued to follow that vocation till 1942 when he was arrested in circumstances that I shall describe later. During the period when he was underground, I used to visit him sometimes in his hideout where he lived at the level of near-starvation, but he would often press me to stay and share his miserable meal that he had cooked himself. I felt for him an admiration of a degree of intensity that I have rarely known

for anybody else, certainly not for anybody else in the party, although he was externally a simple, seemingly ordinary and unobtrusive personality, without Philip's magnetism, Colvin's flamboyance or Doric"s razor-sharp intellect. After his arrest in the latter half of 1942, he remained in detention till the end of the war, and in jail he contracted tuberculosis; probably the privations of his previous life had made him less resistant to the disease.

After he came out, Lorenz went back to working for the party, but this time combined it with resuming his medical studies. Meanwhile he fell in love with a young girl who lived in a house two doors away from the party office at 9, 33rd Lane, Bagatelle Road, and after they were married, he coped tirelessly and uncomplainingly with running a family while studying and keeping his disease in check. Some time later he moved away from the party, and indeed I can't imagine him surviving the compromises and detours of the LSSP's post-independence years. But I don't think Lorensz ever lost his moral commitment to combat human suffering; he only carried it into another vocation, into his relations with the poor patients he treated. He died relatively young.

There is one story about Lorensz that sums up for me the man he was. At that time he was still a medical student, and Basil Mendis had come to see him. Basil, whom I also knew well at that time, had moved from Marxism and party activity to religion: he had gone back to the bosom of Mother Church and was to end as a Catholic priest. In the period I am talking about he was a self-appointed proselytiser, expounding to friends and acquaintances his philosophical proofs of the existence of God. He did the same thing that day with Lorensz, who listened, didn't argue, said nothing, until the time came when he had to leave for his work in the General Hospital wards. Basil accompanied him there, still continuing his exposition, and was about to turn back at the hospital gate when Lorensz said, 'No, come in.' He took Basil to one of the wards and showed him some patients who were dying in the

agony of terminal cancer. Then he said simply, 'That's why I can't believe in God.' Perhaps Basil would have had an intellectual answer to that too, but the force of Lorensz"s undemonstrative honesty left him for the moment silent.

Lorensz's name has probably never figured substantially in any party history, and it is already largely forgotten. But I have known several other people who recognised that he was an exceptional human being. More than anybody else, he represented for me that moral consciousness that draws people to a socialist movement, but which is tragically often lost in the dust and heat of the political struggle and the pursuit of power. He was a pure personality, of all those I knew in the party the one who most fully lived his socialism, the nearest I have ever known to a secular saint.

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I hadn't seen Lorenz for about a year when he turned up that day at the university early in 1941. I noticed that his clothes were crumpled and not ideally clean, and he was unshaven. He asked me:

'Would you be willing to do some work for the party?'

I agreed, without asking what the work would be. He said he wanted to speak to some others and would be back. After some time he returned with two other students: we had all been members of the study class. Lorensz fixed a meeting with us: we were to wait for him the following evening outside a factory in Maradana, then he would talk to us about what we were to do.

I turned up at the appointed place on time. There was nobody else there. Time passed, and nobody came. I waited in a niche in the factory wall, faithfully, like Casabianca on the burning deck. It must have been nearly half an hour later that Lorensz turned up on a pushbike. He asked: 'The others haven't come?'

I said, 'No.' Wheeling his pushbike, he took me to the office of the Industrial and General Workers' Union: keeping its trade unions going was almost the only form of open activity the party retained. There was only a single party worker there when we entered. After we had sat on one of the plain wooden benches, Lorensz told me, 'The first job you have to do is to draw the hmmer and sickle.'

Under the defence regulations the Government had made display of the hammer and sickle emblem in any form illegal. Following this, a rash of hammers and sickles appeared, painted or tarred on walls, on public signboards, on bridges and culverts, in many parts of the country. It was the party's manifestation of defiance to the regulation and a demonstration to the people that repression hadn't killed it.

Lorensz explained that I would have to go out at night with a pot of paint and a brush and draw a hammer and sickle in a place I would be told of. 'That's all for a beginning.' He smiled. 'Don't be worried that you might then get an order for 100 hammers and sickles. You do that once, and that's over. We'll go on from there.'

I sensed that, having passed the first test for enthusiasm and reliability by turning up at the meeting-place, I was being given a second. I waited for some days thereafter for an instruction about the place where I was to exercise my artistry, but none came. Then I met Hector, who asked me: 'Did Lorenz ask you to paint a hammer and sickle?' I said, 'Yes.' He laughed; he seemed to find the idea very funny. He must have told Lorensz that was unnecessary, because soon I received another message, specifying a place and time where I would be picked up in a car and told what to do.

This led to a great surprise for me, for the man who picked me up the next evening was Doric de Souza. Doric had been one of my lecturers in the university's English Department for around a year and a half. I knew that he was reputed to be left-wing in his thinking, but I had never thought he was politically active. There was in fact an occasion when at a

meeting of the English Literary Society Doric disagreed with a paper given by Professor Ludowyk, and ended by saying, 'I think Karl Marx was right when he said that all culture was the culture of the ruling class.' Describing that confrontation to Hector, I asked, 'But why does he remain an armchair Marxist?' Hector had smiled but said nothing. I didn't know then that Doric had purposely been kept under cover by the party for just such a situation as it was now living through.

Since Doric was to be a storm-centre of the turbulent events in the party in the following year, 1942, I need at this point to give some impressions of his personality as I then experienced it. These impressions were, to begin with, derived from my contact with him as a university teacher. My first sense of him was of the clarity and force of his intellect. I can't say that I thought of him as the best lecturer in the department: in that respect I would without hesitation have opted for Lyn Ludowyk. But Doric and Ludowyk were poles apart in the quality of their minds. An unsympathetic or uncomprehending listener might have found Ludowyk fuzzy, with his tendency to hint at ideas rather than to hammer them out explicitly; often it seemed that it was a gesture of his hands or a shrug rather than words that conveyed the full nuances of his meaning. But when he discussed poetry it was with an inward sensitivity that was unmatched by anybody else who taught me. Doric's strength, on the other hand, came out best when he was teaching something that required lucid exposition and analytical rigour; his lectures on linguistics or on the ruling ideas of the literature of a period left you with a clearly grasped and ably marshalled body of concepts.

In the years that were to follow the first encounter in my new relationship with him, I was to discover that Doric brought to political ideas and political organisation the same lucidity of intellect and the same driving force that I had come to associate with him in the lecture room. His capacity to expound ideas simply and forcefully wasn't confined to theoretical discourse; he was just as good as a pamphleteer (in English,

of course). I once found him at home reading Swift's *Drapier Letters* in preparation for writing an agitational leaflet; and indeed his writing had something in common with the brevity, clarity and power of his model.

When I got to know Doric better, as a party member and fellow-worker in the underground, I liked his freedom from intellectual taboos and his readiness to extend his critical faculties even to the revered figures of the Marxist pantheon. In the early days after the Russian Revolution, some younger German Communists had advocated 'free love'. Lenin was profoundly shocked, and told Clara Zetkin, the German woman Communist, 'Does a man like to drink water from a glass from which another man has drunk?' Quoting this, Doric remarked to me once: 'What a prude Lenin was! Surely the answer is that you wash the glass and drink from it.' Neither Doric nor I knew then what is well known now - that Lenin had a long-standing extra-marital affair with Inessa Armand, so that in his remark to Zetkin, there was not only prudery but also a double standard.

The other thing I put down to Doric's credit is that he always remained consistently secular in his outlook. Other LSSP leaders of his generation later compromised with traditional institutionalised religion, either because they found it politically expedient, or because, as they grew older, they felt a personal need for it. Philip even allied himself politically in one period with the militant Buddhism of L.H. Mettananda. But Doric never found any use again for the Catholicism he had given up in his youth, and there were no religious rites at his funeral.

Doric could, in private, make irreverent remarks on some of the senior leaders of the LSSP, but ironically - in view of what followed - hardly ever about Philip. At that time he regarded Philip as unique among the party leadership, and accorded him a respect that amounted almost to hero-worship. Of course, that attitude didn't differ from the deference with which Philip was regarded at that time in the party - a fact

that other people, accustomed to the later ascendancy of N.M. and Colvin, will find it hard to credit today. I am convinced that for Doric, Philip was then a kind of father-figure, and that when Philip turned against him in 1942 - an episode I shall come to - it was a painful shock.

Doric's role was vital in the underground organisation. Because he wasn't identified openly with the party, he could rent 'safe houses' (the term wasn't current in the LSSP at that time) when necessary, set up and maintain the functioning of a secret press and transport illegal literature with less chance of detection. He used his personal relationships with some of his 'bourgeois' friends to draw on their help sometimes for particular purposes. His resourcefulness and ingenuity were an asset in running a clandestine organisation.

I know, however, of one occasion when his ingenuity overreached itself - at least; in relation to the intelligence of the person he was dealing with. In the year of which I am writing in this chapter he went on a trip to India to meet some Indian Trotskyists (this was at the time of the early preparations for setting up the later Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India). While in Bombay, he was interrogated by the Indian police about what he was doing there (I don't think it likely that they had information about him but they must have been vigilant about one or the other of the people he met). After the police let him go, Doric wanted to inform the party back at home of what had happened. But foreign letters were routinely censored in wartime. Doric then thought up a brilliant idea. There was a detective story writer then by the name of Dennis Wheatley who produced his books in an unusual form. Each book was got up like a file containing the dossier of a murder - letters, photographs, police reports and the like, and a sealed envelope at the back of the book giving the detective's solution of the mystery. Doric bought one of these books, typed a letter giving in somewhat disguised form the news about his interrogation bound it into the book, and posted it to a Crown Counsel who was a party sympathiser, counting on him to alert the party.

When Doric returned some weeks later, he was surprised to find that the party was unaware of his interrogation. He rushed off to meet the man to whom he had posted the book, to learn - to his astonishment - that the other had received the book, read it, enjoyed the story and never discovered that there was any alien communication in it!

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On that first evening with him in 1941. Doric took me to the house of one of the 'bourgeois' sympathisers I have mentioned, introduced me, and told me that by next evening the copies of a new issue of the illegal party paper would arrive there. I was to pick them up, hail a rickshaw (then a common form of middle class transport) and take them to a point where there would be a worker waiting for me. I did so after dark the next day. The papers were wrapped as a parcel in brown paper; I don't know exactly how many copies there were, but I don't think there could have been more than a thousand, each a single sheet of what would today be called tabloid size, printed on both sides in Sinhala. This was the underground *Samasamajaya*. The worker saw me approaching (the rickshaw must have been the signal), came up, took the parcel, and disappeared without a word into the night. I was to meet him again in different circumstances: his name was Neelakandan, and he was a Malayalee worker in the Wellawatte Spinning and Weaving Mills, which was a stronghold of the party, after it had led a long-continuing strike there in its early days.

That job accomplished, I made rapid progress in the underground. I was christened with a 'cover name'. Such names were used in written party documents in order to preserve secrecy, but also, in order to habituate members to their use, even in conversation and group discussions. Mine was 'Hamid'. Soon after my transportation of the papers, Doric took to me see Leslie in his hideout. When the four detenus

were arrested in mid-1940, Leslie remained underground, with a warrant for his arrest; he participated in a small party delegates' conference which took place early in 1941, and then moved to India. Doric took me to meet him because I was to act as courier between him and the party.

The second time I went there, unaccompanied, taking a letter, I made a ridiculous blunder because of my inexperience. Having been brought up in a proper middle class code of behaviour - one doesn't walk into anybody else's house without knocking - I knocked at the front door. There was silence. After some time, I knocked again, and more loudly. Silence again, and so also on a third knocking. After some time Leslie peeped through a window and asked me to come in. Vivie was there too, having come for a short stay; there was a domestic help in the house (a trusted family dependant), who would normally have answered the door, but he had gone marketing. Leslie and Vivie had been petrified by the knocking (was it a police spy?) and had first remained mum, but when the knocking persisted, the suspense became too great and Leslie had taken the risk of looking out. 'Don't knock,' he told me, 'just walk straight in.'

Leslie I never got to know well, as I was to know Doric and would later know Colvin, among the leadership. My visits to Leslie were brief and short-lived, because he soon left for India. But Vivie with her charm and ebullience was, of course, a figure who made an instantaneous impression.

My next advancement was to be taken to the clandestine press. The printing machine was a small one, operated by hand and foot by a worker who was a trusted party member; he will figure later in an important episode in this story; I shall call him G. He lived and worked there; there was another man who came when required to handset type. The printing machine made a clanking noise when it was in use. In order to prevent this noise reaching any of the neighbouring houses, there was a portable gramophone with a set of records, and these would be played when printing was going on. Among

them I found the hauntingly lovely 'May sweet oblivion lull thee...' of Monteverdi., in the old *Columbia History of Music* series. The compositor loved it: he called it *saumya* (gentle, soothing), and it was always his first choice when the printing machine was in operation, so he must have had natural good taste.

My work in relation to the press was twofold. When copy for the paper was ready, I took it there for setting; and when printing of an issue was completed, I transported it or arranged for its transport. I became familiar with the heavy feel of a suitcase filled with papers. Then Doric persuaded Ernest de Chickera, one of the young lecturers in the English department, to assist. Ernest wasn't a Marxist, but like certain English-educated liberal intellectuals of the time, he had some sympathy for the LSSP. He drove a car; we would go together to the press, load the suitcase with the papers into the vehicle, and drop it at the destination from where the papers would be distributed.

As a result of this joint clandestine activity I formed a friendship with Ernest whom I had known until then only in the classroom. He wore a brooding, Byronic expression (and Byron was one of his literary interests); this wasn't a pose, because when I got to know him better, I learnt that he had indeed had a great sorrow in his life. He had been in love with a student at the university, and she with him; but she suddenly fell ill and died. It so happened that Ernest had been out of town for a few days at that time, and the first he knew about the fatality was when he returned to Colombo to find her already dead and buried. The disaster had been a wound from which he hadn't really recovered when I knew him. I remain grateful to Ernest for two things: one was that after our paper-transporting expeditions, he would take me to the Twentieth-Century Club, and there he taught me to drink beer. The other was that he introduced me to the Letters and Journals of Byron (I already knew and admired his best poetry), which became one of the permanent delights of my life.

However, the location of the press had to be moved at various times according to the changing circumstances of wartime security, and ultimately it had to be sited outside Colombo. Then I could only take a longish journey there by bus and bring back the papers. Once, I remember, because the bus was crowded, the conductor insisted on hoisting my suitcase on to the luggage rack on the roof of the bus, and as he did so, remarked on its unusual weight. 'Yes,' I said, 'all my books are there.' That day the lock of the suitcase I was using wasn't of the securest; and I thought that if I was a character in a film, the lock would burst open on the way, and the bus would leave in its wake a trail of illegal papers fluttering across the countryside. Nothing so dramatic ever happened.

My connection with the illegal press bought me into association also with another party professional who was quite a remarkable character in his own way. This was Henry Peiris, who had begun his political life as a follower of A.E. Goonesinha in his militant days, and then moved to the LSSP. Henry, particularly after a drink, would perform on request a lively impersonation of Goonesinha in his great days addressing trade union meetings. He edited the underground Sinhala paper, which meant in practice that he wrote the two pages of each issue singlehanded. I had to visit him in order to pick up copy and take it to the press. Henry was a good Sinhala writer, with a flair for agitational journalism and a gift for popularising theory, which I observed at a later period when I was no longer working 'under cover' and used to accompany him to workers' study classes.

Henry lived at that time pseudonymously in a house in a small row of tenements. The group which was in charge of the distribution of the paper also met there periodically, and in order to explain to his neighbours the frequent visits by a group of young men who would stay an hour or two, Henry had concocted the fiction that he was conducting classes in Sinhala. In fact, his only means of existence was the meagre, and often irregular, allowance he got as a party professional, on which

he supported a wife, and, in time, a child. It was on the hardships and sacrifices of professionals like Henry, Lorensz and others that the party survived these years.

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It may have occurred to some readers, from the names and identities of the people mentioned in this narrative, that the LSSP of those years was an overwhelmingly male party. Looking back over these pages, I see that Vivie is the only party woman I have mentioned. That corresponds to the reality of the LSSP's composition at that time. Some of the senior leaders of the party had brought their wives (or sisters) into the party, though in Vivie's case, as Pulsara Liyanage's biography of her has reminded us, it would be incorrect to think of her as simply a wife who came into the party through her husband; rather, it was her interest in and attraction to LSSP politics that was the beginning of her relationship with Leslie. Both Vivie and Selina (NM's wife) were to blossom out in India, and Vivie was to become a political figure in her own right after her return to Ceylon, while Selina was to grow as a significant left politician in Calcutta. But at the time of which I am writing, both were still in the shadow of their husbands. In general, women were still a tiny minority in the LSSP of the war years, and there were no women in the governing body of the party. The only interesting case I know of a woman who came into the party neither as wife nor as sister was Susan de Silva - an all the more interesting figure because even externally, she had the marks of a liberated woman, wearing short hair and smoking. But I never even met her until, briefly, after the war, and then she was in the opposite faction to mine, which unfortunately excluded any possibility of closer understanding. She was later to publish a partisan pamphlet about the factional struggle titled *The Destruction of the LSSP*. Even in the LSSP's student group at the university in my time, there were no women. The CP

group had Sita Wickramasuriya, who was to marry N. Sanmugathasan, but there was no comparable figure in the LSSP until the Meedeniya sisters (Iranganie and Kamini) of a later generation.

I suppose, if asked, we would have taken this male preponderance in the party for granted, assuming complacently that in a capitalist society it was only natural that women should be more politically backward than men. Having read Engels's *Origin of the Family,* we knew, of course, that women were oppressed, but we all thought that the only way to end that oppression was to make the socialist revolution. Action on specific women's issues, and still less, separate organisation of women for them, were still undreamt of.

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I want to devote a page to a matter that will be of less concern to the generality of readers, simply because it is of interest to me who came into the party while in the university's English department. In that department there were three students in my time who were with the LSSP. But we were also, one hundred per cent, literary-critical followers of F.R. Leavis, as the entire department was - staff and students. Doric was a partial exception, but that was because of his intellectual resistance to any cults, and even he didn't offer any considered critical position as an alternative. I wouldn't have thought of Doric as a Marxist literary critic: he seemed to keep his academic thinking and his Marxism nearly always in separate compartments.

How did it happen that we three student LSSPers in the English department weren't aware of the contradictions of being Marxists in politics and Leavisians in culture? Or that we didn't see the socially reactionary character of Leavis's counterposing of minority culture to mass civilisation, of his idealisation of the pre-industrial 'organic community', ignoring

its oppressive elements, or of his celebration of order and reason in Pope or Jane Austen?

Of course, we didn't have available to us anything which could offer us a basis for translating our political Marxism into a credible position on culture. The only 'Marxist' writing on literature we had come across were the crude theorisings of British Stalinists like Christopher Caudwell, Ralph Fox and Philip Henderson, at which any Leavisian would, justifiably, turn up his nose. Anything better - Franz Mehring or Georg Lukacs or Bakhtin/Voloshinov - we didn't know of, and most of it was still untranslated into English, anyway. Even Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* was still unknown to us, though I had read *The History of the Russian Revolution, My Life* and *The Revolution Betrayed* with great intellectual excitement.

There was, however, an unfortunate consequence of being both Leavisian and Marxist: both encouraged you to think of yourself as being one of the elect. As a follower of Leavis, you were one of the discriminating minority, and as a Marxist, you were part of the revolutionary vanguard. Combine that with adolescent cocksureness that you have all the answers, and the result was bad for one's character. I can't judge how far the damage went in my case, but I know of somebody else who was thought of as brash and arrogant for precisely these reasons.

In our confusions about culture we didn't get any help from the internal climate of the party. Of course, I don't mean that we should have been given a party line on Leavis. But what I do mean is that the LSSP of those years was oblivious of the political significance of culture, in the fullest sense of the term, in Ceylon, just as it was blind to the specificity of women's issues - in both cases because of its mechanistic economistic view of society. The consequences of this limitation were much more generally important than the

intellectual schizophrenia of a small bunch of students of English: I shall come to them later in this book.

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I was not yet nineteen when I began working for the LSSP; and before I leave this chapter, I should perhaps confront a question that may have occurred to some readers in the course of reading it. Was there an element of adolescent romanticism in becoming involved in the life and work of the underground? And did the element of personal danger accompanying it enhance that romantic appeal?

I have already conceded, in another connection, that one can't be conscious of all one's motivations. But when I try to recover the frame of mind in which I participated in the underground, I don't remember that I felt any romantic glamour or thrill in being part of that life. For one thing, some of the tasks in themselves were humdrum, even though the circumstances in which they were performed made them unusual. Taking a letter to Leslie and bringing back a reply was, after all, the revolutionary equivalent of a peon's job. Some of the other things I did were even boring and tedious: for instance, as a member of the paper distribution group I would post about fifty copies each time of the paper to names and addresses that were on a list: they were those of old pre-war party members with whom the party still desired to retain some indirect contact. This involved addressing the envelopes, sticking stamps on them and taking them out to be posted in small batches in order to minimise the chances of being detected - hardly exciting work. Because of my 'under cover' role I was given strict instructions not to participate in student activities - political debates and discussions - where I would have to disclose my political opinions; so there was no question of my cutting a dramatic figure like that undergrad in the red shirt.

I rather think that in doing the kind of work I did for the party I was actuated by motives like those which had made me decline to take pansil at the age of fourteen: there was something I believed, so I had a moral obligation to act in conformity with it. Perhaps it was a kind of puritan earnestness that one might have been more comfortable without. As for the element of danger, it's possible that the reader may inflate it in the light of today. Transporting illegal papers, one was then in less danger of being caught than one would today: there were no check-points, and the police were less numerous, less vigilant and (I have reason to think) less intelligent. And as my two later encounters with the police, narrated in Chapter Four, will suggest, even if one was nabbed, it involved no threat to life and limb.

3

The Vanguard, And Where It Wanted To Go

The last chapter should have given some impression of the character of the wartime LSSP's organisation as a political party. It wasn't a party that you could join by filling a form, paying a membership fee or declaring your support for it. You had to be recruited into it, and this meant that the party organs had to be satisfied that you understood and accepted the party's political objectives, and that you could be relied on to participate actively in its work. It strikes me that some readers, unfamiliar with the history of revolutionary Marxist parties, may have concluded that this character of the party was a consequence of its need to elude the colonial police in the special circumstances of wartime. Not so. The semi-illegality, and later complete illegality, into which the wartime colonial state forced the LSSP certainly accelerated the party's movement away from the loose, open, radical mass party it had been before the war. But there were ideological forces of a very different origin that compelled that transformation.

There is a long story behind this which concerns the thinking and debates in the international Marxist movement about the structure and organisation of a revolutionary party. They began as early as 1903, when Lenin split the original Russian Social-Democratic Party by his conception of a tightly knit, disciplined, centralised organisation. The party would be the means of advancing the interests of the working class, and ultimately of its emancipation, but the party would always be ahead of the class, as a vanguard with a superior level of consciousness and a total commitment to the revolutionary tasks. This was the issue over which the Russian Social-

Democratic Party split into 'Bolshevik' and 'Menshevik' factions. Not all Marxists at the time accepted the Leninist, or Bolshevik, conception of the party. Rosa Luxemburg didn't, and Trotsky went so far as to say, in 1904, that in the event of the victory of Bolshevism, 'the party organisation would then substitute itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee would substitute itself for the organisation; and finally a single dictator would substitute himself for the Central Committee'. Today that reads like a farsighted prophecy of the future history of the Soviet Union. But Trotsky forgot or abandoned these criticisms when he joined the Bolshevik Party in mid-1917, and the great prestige of the Bolsheviks as the party that had led the October Revolution made their model that which revolutionaries in every part of the world, including Trotskyisis, sought to emulate.

There are people who have held that the growth of dictatorship in the post-revolutionary Soviet state was, if not caused, at least favoured by the character of the ruling party. But this question is irrelevant in the local context, since the LSSP never formed a government of its own. What will arise in my story are the special problems created by the adoption of the model of the vanguard party in colonial Ceylon.

The vanguard model assumed, of course, that party cadres would have a higher level of theoretical understanding than the ordinary worker. This required not only instruction in party groups but also reading and study of Marxist literature. Of course, even in Europe working class revolutionaries would have experienced educational and cultural problems in this undertaking, but these could be surmounted by diligence and the exercise of those natural gifts of intelligence that are to be found among all classes of the population. There were, therefore, generations of European workers who learnt to read Marx, Engels or Lenin. But the worker in the LSSP who was willing to make the same efforts as his European counterpart had an insuperable barrier to surmount - a linguistic one. Without English he could have no access to the Marxist classics, or

even popularisations of Marxist theory. I could read John Strachey before I was seventeen, and a little later, I discovered that superb popular exposition of history and socialist theory that must have educated so many young people of that time - Leo Huberman's *Man's Worldly Goods:* from these I progressed to the Marxist classics. What did the Sinhala reader who was turning to socialism have? From my time in the party I can remember only a translation of the *Communist Manifesto* and a summary, about a hundred pages, by Leslie of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution.* Otherwise the Sinhala-speaking party member was limited to the party paper and the study class, which could offer him a body of slogans and formulas, but not much more. (The Tamil reader was perhaps a little better off if he could have access to Marxist literature from South India.)

Thus the cultural gulf between the English-speaking élite and the Sinhala and Tamil-speaking masses, which has been one of the continuing national problems of this country, was reproduced as a gulf in political culture among the party cadres of the LSSP. This, on top of the great differences in life-style and economic level, made for a cleavage among them that the egalitarian appellation of *sahodaraya* couldn't bridge. Doric, for instance, would turn up at a meeting of the party's governing body with a tin of Gold Flake and puff away during the discussion, and if one of the indigent professionals tried to cadge a cigarette off him, he would answer: 'No socialism before the revolution.' Looking back, I would like to apply to the internal life of the party cadres Marx's dictum that said, 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their social existence; on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.' (Marx was wrong only, in that same famous passage that became the foundation stone of historical materialism, in jumping from 'social existence' to economic relations as the determining element: social existence includes but is so much broader than economic relations. The recognition of this is something for which we have to thank

the later feminist movement, as we have to be grateful to them also for insisting that power permeates all social relations and that the personal is therefore indivisible from the political.)

In practice, in admitting candidates to party membership, the ruling organs didn't make such exacting demands in theoretical understanding of workers as it did of student or middle class aspirants to membership: otherwise the party would have had no worker members at all! But that gulf in political knowledge had its effects on the organisation and structure of the party. If the party was the vanguard of the class, then presumably the ruling organs of the party were the party's vanguard - in dedicated activity and in political consciousness. The first could come from commitment of oneself, the second could originate in life experience, but this had to be completed through theoretical understanding. When I look back at the Central Committee (soon to be renamed the 'Regional Committee', or RC, when the LSSP became a constituent section of the BLPI) of that time, I recall that there was a small minority of worker members. But this was tokenism, for the discussions were in English, the language in which the majority were most articulate: only when a decision had to be taken were short summaries offered in Sinhala and Tamil. And if what was at issue involved controversial theoretical positions, the worker members would have been out of their depth. In these circumstances they could have been little better than Uncle Toms. There lay the roots of the factional struggles that were to rend the party in 1942 and after.

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In what direction was the LSSP hoping to lead Ceylon society? National independence and socialism, of course: these had been stated as goals even in the original 1935 founding manifesto. But how were these to be achieved? The manifesto contained

no clear answer to that question. But when the LSSP reconstituted itself as a Marxist party in 1940-41, its answer was: through revolution. But what kind of revolution?

The 1939 resolution of the party, on which the Stalinists were expelled, only condemned the Third International. But as it moved from that point onwards to complete commitment to Trotskyism, the LSSP also adopted certain positions on the character of the future Ceylon revolution that represented a further rejection of Stalinism. In colonial and semi-colonial countries, the Communist parties of the world then held, there would be a revolution in two stages. In the first stage, under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie, a democratic revolution would overthrow imperialism and liquidate the remnants of feudalism. In that revolution, the working class and its party should co-operate with the national bourgeoisie in so far as they played a progressive, anti-imperialist and anti-feudal role. Thereafter, and probably after a period of capitalist development, the revolutionary party of the working class would lead the masses to the overthrow of capitalism through a second, a socialist, revolution.

The Trotskyist perspective was very different. In colonial and semi-colonial countries, Trotsky contended, the belated development of a bourgeoisie meant that that class was weak, and had grown up in dependence on imperialism and in close interrelationship with feudalism and the feudal classes. Hence the bourgeoisie in these countries couldn't be expected to play any revolutionary role. It was left to the working class to lead even the struggle for national independence and against feudalism. But in doing so, the working class couldn't stop at these bourgeois-democratic tasks: they would have to go forward to the overthrow of capitalism. There would be no revolution in two stages: the bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolutions would be 'telescoped'. That was, in substance, Trotsky's theory of the 'permanent revolution'.

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To the question that is often asked, 'Why did the LSSP embrace Trotskyism?' there is at least one answer to be found in the fact that Trotskyism was a political theory that must have seemed tailor-made for Ceylon. Trotsky could even have taken the Ceylon bourgeoisie and its political leadership as a demonstration piece of the incapacity of that class to play a militantly anti-imperialist role. None of the figures who are now celebrated annually as 'national heroes' and whose statues adorn our streets (except for the Labour leader, A.E. Goonesinha) even wanted universal franchise at the time of the Donoughmore Commission: the British had to thrust it down their throats. The LSSP could have found in the political record of the Ceylon National Congress and the compradore role of the indigenous bourgeoisie in the colonial economy a confirmation of the Trotskyist position. But culture was probably no less important than politics and economics. Ceylon was the perfect example of the success of the colonial objective, envisaged in Macaulay's famous minute, of the creation of a native class that would be British in every respect except the colour of their skins. Perhaps the best icon of that success is the photograph of D.S. Senanayake, in top hat and tails, hoisting the lion flag on the 4th February 1948 as the symbol of independence.

Whether these realities justified the acceptance of the theory of permanent revolution is a question I shall face in the last chapter. But by 1941 the LSSP had adopted a new, Trotskyist programme that envisaged that the working class, at the head of the poor peasantry, would carry through a revolution in which the anti-imperialist, the anti-feudal and the socialist tasks would be telescoped. I remember sitting for several afternoons in the early months of 1941 in a deserted corner of the grandstand of the Colombo racecourse as one of a study class of three (the other two were Dickie Attygalle and Bala Tampoe) while S.C.C. Anthonipillai took us through the new party programme. (This was a higher-level class, for party cadres, than those I had earlier attended.)

Could the working class, a minority in a country in which capitalism was still underdeveloped and there was no heavy industry, lead a socialist revolution? Apart from the Colombo working class, the LSSP rested their hopes in the estate workers, in their strategic position in the economy, their high concentration in their places of work, and what was thought to be their complete proletarianisation - the fact that, having been deracinated from their village roots in South India, they had, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, 'nothing to lose but their chains'. Some later Marxists have disputed this view, claiming that the estate workers then, far from being fully proletarianised, had not yet reached the condition of the 'free' wge labourer, free to sell his labour power, since they were indentured and bound to their estates. Be that as it may, the LSSP's conception was different, and the 1941 programme assuned that the estate workers would play a key role in the coming revolution.

Even so, there was the question whether the Ceylon working class - urban and estate - could, in isolation, take on the might of the British empire in a revolution. It was this doubt that led to the endeavours by the LSSP in the course of 1941 to bring together the scattered small groups in several Indian cities who had already moved towards Trotskyism. These were to be, together with the LSSP, the nucleus of the future Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India. India, though itself a predominantly peasant country, had a much more advanced industrial economy than Ceylon and a substantial proletariat concentrated in the big cities; it was also seething with nationalist and anti-imperialist discontent that would soon come to the boil.

It was with these prospects and hopes, and with an unawareness of the time-bomb ticking away in the party's organisation, that the LSSP entered the fateful year, 1942

4

The Fateful Year - And After

Towards the end of 1941 Japan entered the war, and with this, what had seemed to most people in Ceylon a remote European conflict came nearer home. When in the next few months Japan took Burma, Malaya and Singapore, an invasion of the island appeared imminent. The LSSP, for its part, thought there was a possibility of more intense repression, either by the colonial regime whose security was threatened, or by a Japanese army of occupation, and that its own survival would in either case be in jeopardy.

It was the position of the four party leaders detained in Kandy that caused most anxiety. But it was not only their personal safety that was of concern to them and to the rest of the party leadership. Ever since the outbreak of the war, there had been an underlying conviction in the minds of the LSSP leaders that the war would bring about a revolutionary crisis. Consciously or unconsciously, the example of the First World War, during which, and in some measure because of which, the Russian Revolution had triumphed, stimulated such imaginings. Trotsky himself had, only a few months before his death, expressed his firm belief that the war would provoke proletarian revolution. There was in Ceylon no sign of pre-revolutionary unrest, but in India the nationalist movement was moving towards collision with the imperial regime, and the fact that the Japanese army stood on India's borders would accelerate this process. Meanwhile the impending launching of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India made it desirable that more leading members of the LSSP, apart from those who were already there (Anthonipillai, Leslie, Vivie, Hector, Karalasingham), should operate from the sub-continent. Thus, a combination of different considerations was pushing the party,

in the early months of 1942, into planning the jailbreak of the four detenus.

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Early in 1942 my family, like so many others at the time, left Colombo to seek a safer home near Galle. I stayed on in the city, on the basis that I had to attend university classes and to study, which was true, but the family's evacuation left me free to participate more fully in the party's preparations for the approaching critical period. Temporarily I was living with Allan Mendis, another party activist, and Lorensz in a top-story flat on Darley Road opposite St. Joseph's College; from here we would watch, on the 5th April, the air battles during the Japanese raid on Colombo.

Colombo was now full of British troops, and at an RC meeting it had been urged that in the event of the maturing of a revolutionary crisis, the role of the British forces might be decisive, and therefore some attempt should be made to influence them by propaganda. The first step was to be the distribution of a leaflet that was intended to educate the troops, in some measure, about the imperialist character of the war. Lorensz and I wrote the leaflet, but I remember that we borrowed the most rousing sentence in it from an article Doric had written for another purpose: 'To the rising sun of Japan and the setting sun of Britain we oppose our own blood-red banner of revolt.' The leaflet was titled 'A message to British soldiers, sailors and airmen from the workers and peasants of Ceylon'. (More than fifty years later, I used that title for a similar leaflet in *Among My Souvenirs*, where it isn't the first-person narrator, Dave, who is the Samasamajist student but another character, Wije.) The leaflet was distributed by hiring some street-boys to stand outside cinemas and hand it to white men in uniform as they came out at the end of a show: the boys, being illiterate in English, must have thought it was a piece of advertising. Simultaneously Dickie Attygalle slipped

some copies into the pages of magazines in the YMCA library, much frequented by British troops. Over the next few months Dickie was able to convert two British army men to Trotskyism by making friends with them at the YMCA and gradually broaching the subject of politics. I met one of them who came to the Darley Road flat; he had been a member of the British CP before the war, but Dickie had won him over. He even sang a song for me, which he said Trotskyists in Britain used to taunt Stalinists with: it was sung to the tune of 'My Darling Clementine':

Aged worker, aged worker,
What a sorry fate is thine!
Comrade Stalin doesn't love you:
You're behind the party line!

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Much has been written of the jail escape of April 1942: it has, like the Bracegirdle affair and the 1953 hartal, become one of the legendary events of LSSP history, and it has also been overlaid with myth-making and the dust of later political differences. Professor Ranjith Amarasinghe in his study of the LSSP says that Robert Gunawardena was 'instrumental in planning the escape', citing as his source an account of Robert's political life given by him to a newspaper thirty years later. All I wish to say about this is that the escape was a party operation, decided on by the party's governing body, that several people were involved in its preparation and execution, and that therefore it is inappropriate to credit one man, whether Robert or anybody else, with its 'planning'. To open the doors of the prison was a simple business once the sympathetic jail guard, Solomon, had been won over, and this had been done by the detenus themselves. To conduct them to Colombo in the course of the night also involved little hazard since it had been ensured that the principal jailor, Neville de la Motte,

would be out for the rest of the night and no discovery of the escape would therefore be made till morning. But much more needed to be done to ensure the continuing safety of the detenus after their escape.

Since this is a personal record, I shall tell the story of my own minor involvement. About a fortnight before the escape, I was told to move to a house that was intended to be the hideout for Colvin and Solomon; I was to be its visible occupant. Doric had found and rented the place (his role in such matters was vital since he was unknown as party activist). It was ideally located, set near the back of a fairly large garden, so that from the road nobody was likely to observe life inside the house. A party comrade, a young (Sinhala) worker from the hill country, had been recruited to help with housework and marketing; I shall refer to him as R. The story that had been told the landlord was that the house had been rented by my uncle so that I could travel to the university from there; the same story was to be given by R. to any neighbours or their domestics who might be inquisitive.

Colvin and Solomon arrived on the night of the 8th. Colvin had the long beard that he had grown while under detention. In the six weeks or so that I lived with him I found him affable and easy-going, if a trifle paternalistic, which was understandable in view of the difference in years and eminence between us. He would talk to me over the dinner table about Marxist theory or about the party's early days, which I didn't know at firsthand; he once re-enacted for me his cross-examination of Sergeant Suraweera before the Mooloya Commission (one of the great performances of his legal as well as political career), and even drew a diagram on paper to elucidate it. Sergeant Suraweera was the policeman who fired the shot that killed the estate worker Govindan; the official police version was that the police party were in danger of their lives from a gang of threatening workers, and that the shot was therefore fired in self-defence. Colvin's purpose was to show that this was pure invention, and that the distance

between police and workers was such that the former were in no danger from an unarmed crowd. If he had asked the sergeant straightforwardly, 'Where were you?' and 'Where were the workers?', the answers would, of course, have been lies. So Colvin had worked out a long line of cross-examination in which he asked the sergeant about seemingly irrelevant features of the landscape and distances, and the latter answered them in all innocence, not realising till the last question had been answered that he had been trapped. As one might expect of Colvin, the re-enactment was also a great theatrical performance.

Colvin was hero-worshipped by Solomon; he was a young, simple, warmhearted character, and it was easy to see how he could have been moved by both admiration and sympathy for the detenus to throw away security and a career. He told me privately that Colvin had spoken to him of the threat to their lives that the detenus feared in the event of an invasion: 'We don't mind fighting and dying, but we don't want to die like rats in a trap.'

I had lived with R. in the weeks preceding the escape on a footing of partial equality, trying to submerge in the comrade-relationship the differences in class and culture, and we had been quite friendly: I was young enough for him to feel easy in sitting at the same level or eating with me at table, though he did all the housework. But Colvin, although he always treated R. kindly, was too imposing a figure, and the differences in age, class and hierarchical position too vast, for R. to have ventured the same thing, nor did Colvin invite him to do so. R. thereafter ate in the kitchen. I felt guilty about this. I was, of course, familiar with the distance between masters and servants: my family had always kept at least one servant, and often, two; one could do so in those days even on a lower middle class income, because there was always a plentiful supply of people of both sexes from peasant families willing to work for food and a mere pittance as wages. If I had thought about this at all, I would have regarded it as a

natural accompaniment of the existing social order. What troubled me was that R. wasn't a servant but a party comrade. If I had made an issue of his position in the house, it might have been said that R. himself would feel awkward about sitting with the three of us, which would probably have been true. To be consistent I should have proposed that we share the housework: that never occurred to me, but if it had, the idea of Colvin making tea or cooking dinner would have been found either comic or horrific by R. So, as with Doric's cigarettes, it was 'no socialism before the revolution', and I, only feeling fruitless shame and guilt, tried to appease my conscience by sometimes slinking into the kitchen and briefly chatting to R. while he washed up or swept the floor.

It may seem to some Marxists even today that I was unnecessarily worrying over a triviality, and that indeed would have been the general response of party people then if I had raised the question: I was being either utopian or moralistic in fussing over relations between individuals instead of getting on with the proper business of furthering the revolution. Yet, the case of R. was only a microcosm of the larger problem of the social and cultural differences among the party cadres themselves that I have already mentioned. These differences were soon to surface in the impending factional struggle - though not in any way that would lead to their constructive resolution. But, in a still broader perspective, wasn't there in the problem of R's position in the household a glimmer of the problems of transforming social consciousness and social relations, though I couldn't have conceived it in that way then?

A year later, after my cover had been blown (as I shall relate in due course), I used to accompany Henry Peiris to workers' study classes. Henry had a brilliant talent for popularising ideas, and I once heard him explain the rise of the Soviet bureaucracy by his parable of what he called *'Minipe massina'* (the brother-in-law in Minipe). In Henry's story, Ceylon had made the revolution, and the working class was in power; the focus of the story was a former worker-

revolutionary who had risen to an important position in the state and, making use of that position, had married a bourgeois woman. Her brother, however, was a good capitalist who had engaged in counter-revolutionary activities, had been sentenced to penal servitude and sent to join the convicts who were cutting the Minipe Canal. To the great amusement of the class, Henry would narrate how, in the early years after the revolution, the wife would plead with her husband on behalf of her brother, 'Aiyo, darling, you don't know how he's suffering!', but the husband would sternly rebuff her because these were still tense years, with a civil war on. But time would pass, the revolutionary state would stabilise itself and the regime grow more relaxed; the wife's appeals would succeed and the *'Minipe massina'* would be released. A few years later, he might even apply to join the party, because it was now the necessary means of making a career, and he would be admitted. The moral of Henry's parable was that this pattern, repeated by thousands of *'Minipe massinas'*, would bring about the degeneration of a post-revolutionary society.

In Henry's story it was the infiltration of the revolutionary party by elements with an alien class ideology that might lead to the growth of a bureaucracy. No doubt this was a part of the story of the Soviet Union, but it wasn't the whole or even the most important part. The Stalins and the Molotovs didn't come from outside the Bolshevik party: they had grown up with it.

If the LSSP's dreams of the forties had been fulfilled and they had led a victorious revolution, wouldn't the social and cultural gulf between the leaders and the led have entrenched the former as a bureaucracy? This, of course, is futile speculation since the LSSP were never within striking distance of achieving their hopes. What is more pertinent is that that same gulf led to a distance between daily personal existence and theoretical and intellectual convictions, and in

the long run the former was to prove more powerful. Once again, Marx was right in saying, 'Social existence determines consciousness.'

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A few days after his arrival Colvin sent me with a letter to Philip in his hideout. This was the first time I was to see Philip since that evening I have described when he dropped in at a university study class; and that hadn't been a personal encounter, since I was on that occasion a member of a group. In the intervening period I had gathered that Philip was the dominant figure in the LSSP, the Marxist of longest standing, greatest political experience and deepest theoretical learning, and I had realised that all the other leading figures of the party recognised him in that character. It will probably be hard for readers who didn't know the LSSP of that time from the inside to credit this fact, accustomed as they are to the later ascendancy of NM, Colvin and Leslie. But I had sensed even in Doric, who wasn't readily given to yielding intellectual supremacy to anybody else, a marked deference towards Philip when he spoke of the latter; and in the few days I had spent with Colvin his conversation had been full of Philip and his unrivalled abilities as a revolutionary leader. Moreover, I had been able during that same period of Philip's incarceration to form some impressions of my own regarding his intellectual stature. Philip, from his place of detention in Kandy, used to write a periodical letter to the party leaders outside. Once or twice Doric, with an air of conferring a favour on a young comrade, had let me read these letters, and it was evident that he regarded them with the same respect that one imagines members of the Bolshevik party treated Lenin's missives from exile during the first world war. I, too, had been greatly impressed on reading those letters. Philip wrote with an extraordinary vigour that was enhanced by a fecundity of metaphor and a play of mordant wit that was especially biting

when he spoke of the leaders of the Ceylonese political establishment. (These qualities survived in the best of his parliamentary speeches in the post-independence period.)

My estimate of Philip will naturally provoke a question. How can his intellectual and political talents be squared with the squandering of them in his later political life? The answer is that Philip was a divided and contradictory personality that contained two fatal flaws. Together with, and in spite of, his powerful analytical abilities, he had a propensity to be swept by strong emotional reactions which could sometimes carry him away entirely. His other deep-seated weakness was that he was unable to co-operate politically with other people on a footing of equality. There was an authoritarian element in him and a strong conviction of his unfailing correctness and the indispensability of his personal role that made it necessary for him to be always the unquestionable authority. That is why, in the period on which the LSSP was just about to enter, his successive alliances broke down: first with Colvin, then with NM. The pattern was to be continued into his later political life until he was left the leader of a political party in which he was the only star.

The reader may well guess that it was with a certain awe that I entered the lion's den that day in 1942. I was only partially reassured by the fact that, as I have said before, Philip was remarkably gentle in personal conversation. Of the substance of the conversation that day what I remember is that I asked him what he thought of an article that had recently appeared in the American Trotskyist journal, *The New International.* It was about the controversies between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin over party organisation. Rosa had, like Trotsky before the Revolution, been deeply critical of Lenin's centralised model of the revolutionary party. The author of the article argued that these differences must be understood in the context of the very different circumstances in which the two leaders were functioning: Rosa in the relatively more open conditions of German democracy and Lenin under a

Tsarist autocracy that made the closed party, tightly controlled by the centre, a necessity for survival.

'I don't agree with that,' Philip said. 'Whether you agree with Rosa or with Lenin, you must recognise that they had very different conceptions of the party. You can't just rationalise those differences away,'

He said no more, and I didn't know then that he believed that Rosa had been right on this question against Lenin. It was a mark of Philip's independence of mind that he should have made this judgment in the face of the towering authority of Lenin. But by pure accident I had hit on an issue - party organisation - that was to be at the centre of the approaching storm in the LSSP and in which Philip's predilections were to be a driving force.

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About a fortnight after the escape, I was travelling by tram to Maradana. I was on my way to the house of one of my classmates at the university whose name was Farook. When the rest of the family migrated temporarily to Galle and I stayed on in Colombo, I told Mother that I wouild be living with Farook and gave her his address in Maradana. Farook was also a party member and therefore agreed to cover up for me; but though he guessed I was involved in some underground activity, he didn't know what or where because such secrets were shared only with those who needed to know. That day I was on my way to Farook's to check whether there was any communication from Mother I needed to answer to keep her happy.

As I boarded the tram an older man who was seated there spoke to me. I recognised him: he was a neighbour of Farook, and I had spoken to him briefly once or twice; but I don't now recollect his name, so I shall call him Mr. X.

'Where are you staying now?' Mr. X asked me.

'At Farook's,' I said.

'Oh no, you are not.'

I stared at him.

'Have you seen today's *Daily News?'* Mr. X went on.

'No.'

'There is an ad saying you are missing.'

'Some mistake,' I muttered, but inwardly I was shaken.

I got off the tram and made my way to Farook's house, to find him as disturbed as I was. What had happened was that Mother, worried about me after the air raid on Colombo, had come up from Galle to see me. Farook had been constrained to say I was no longer there and he didn't know where I was. Mother, now deeply alarmed, had gone to see my elder brother, who was then an army officer, and he had inserted the ad, giving his own name and address for anybody who had any information about me to communicate with.

I rushed 'home' and told Colvin of the disaster. Colvin, as always kindly in personal matters, was less concerned about the possible threat to his own security than about the distress of my mother; he insisted that I go and see her at once. I made the journey to Galle, and reassured her. Later, a friend of both Farook and me said it was lucky for me my brother hadn't offered a reward: if he had, Mr. X wouldn't have let me go but taken me by my collar and led me to my brother's army quarters.

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Prof. Amarasinghe refers in a three-line endnote to a chapter of his book to what was, at the time it occurred, a startling event and one that was momentous in its consequences for the party. The note reads:

> Philip Gunawardena's well-known and very controversial allegation against Doric de Souza, that the latter was 'a police spy', was made during this period.

'This period', as reference back to the main text shows, was the period after Philip's rearrest in India, his return to Ceylon and his reconstitution, together with NM, of the LSSP, in distinction from and in opposition to the BLPI. This dating is incorrect. The time to which Prof. Amarasinghe refers was when Philip first made his allegation against Doric *in public.* But he had already made it in the underground years - in fact, at the very first RC meeting after the escape.

This makes a very big difference to one's comprehension of the accusation and the impact it had. When Philip reiterated it publicly after the end of the war, that was in the context of an open split in the party, and many people outside its ranks may have taken it as one of those indiscriminate personal attacks that often accompany political infighting. When Philip originally made the charge in May 1942, it was in the presence of barely fifteen people - but for us it was a deadly serious, in fact, an explosive event. That's why Prof. Amarasinghe's relegation of the matter to a three-line endnote is disproportionate to its importance. It's likely that divergent political tendencies within the LSSP would have surfaced sooner or later and brought about a fission of the party. But this could have happened in other and less traumatic circumstances. In what did happen, the personal dimension was dominant from the start: it sprang from deeply felt animosities which expressed themselves as a deadly accusation against one individual.

It's necessary also to place the event in the context in which it occurred, when most of the party leaders were living 'under cover' - a claustrophobic existence that combined the confinement of a prison with the insecurity of illegality, a life cut off from contact with the outside world except with those few people who came and went. It was an abnormal environment in which suspicions and resentments could take root and spread. In this situation what might otherwise have been dismissed (in customary Marxist fashion) as 'merely personal' became magnified into a major internal party conflict.

If I shut my eyes, I can visualise the scene and the locale. It was a large house that had probably been built for a Muslim family: it had carved wooden screens shutting off the rear part of the house from the veranda and the sitting-room, bedrooms located so that they afforded plenty of privacy, and a courtyard at the back in which one could walk without being observed by anybody outside. If my conjecture is correct and the house had been designed for both the seclusion and the convenience of Muslim ladies, it was also admirably suited to those of fugitive revolutionaries. The house had a spacious back veranda overlooking the courtyard, and it was there, with RC members disposed on sofas and chairs, that Philip made his sensational accusation.

It's perhaps an after-effect of the shock of the situation that, in spite of my good verbal memory, I can't now recall how Philip led up to the charge and in the course of what discussion he made this intervention. It's as if a bomb had gone off there on that secluded veranda, demolishing every trace of what had been there before. All I can retrieve from memory of what preceded the direct charge was that Philip circled the subject for a long time, with hints and suggestions, and when a RC member (I can't now be certain who) asked him, incredulously, 'Are you saying there is a police spy in the party?' he answered 'Yes'; and then, when the other went on, 'And are you saying the spy is *Doric?*' he repeated, 'Yes.' The shock was general: everybody sat frozen there for some time, then people began getting up and drifting into the courtyard and other parts of the house, silently. In that silence Colvin took me aside, and almost whispered, 'Don't let this upset you too much: he's still the one man who can lead us.'

In his book Prof. Amarasinghe also refers to the accusation as 'very controversial'. *Controversial* is a neutral word: what needs to be said is that the allegation was preposterous. Nobody there could possibly have credited it, for they all knew that Doric had been so deeply involved in the running of the underground organisation that if the charge

had been true, there could have been no illegal press, no escape from jail, no meeting there that day on that veranda. Neither NM nor Colvin, who were to be on Philip's side in the ensuing factional struggle (the first for several years, the second for a briefer period), ever echoed that charge. Its absurdity was too patent for the point to be laboured here. What was more disturbing, however, than the charge itself was Philip's motivations in making it. It was evident that underlying it was a deep emotional disturbance that he was unable to control, and whose nature one could only guess at. This enigma led to some rumours that circulated in the party, and, years later, even percolated to the outer world. I know these were based on unfounded conjecture, but I will say no more on this subject.

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At the next RC meeting the Philip group (not yet a formal faction) secured the election to the RC of three members of working-class origin. This was in keeping with the position they were soon to take - that the RC was overstaffed with 'petty-bourgeois functionaries'. One of the three new members was G., the operator of the underground press, and another was R. who had been living in Colvin's 'safe house'. The third was M. whom also I knew and had worked with. He had engaged in many underground operations, including driving one of the cars on the night of the escape. Physically robust, he was also perfectly intrepid.

I was no longer living with Colvin; he had shifted to other premises, My mother came back from Galle, but she didn't wish to live in her own house in Ratmalana, which was thought to be too close to the airport for safety. The house was kept shut, she found a small house in Kottawa, and I lived there with her. (I mention these details here because the two houses were soon to be the setting of a drama in which I would be involved.)

Meanwhile the political situation in India was moving to a climax; the Indian national movement would soon launch the 'Quit India' struggle. This intensified the desire of Philip, Colvin and NM to cross Palk Sttrait. Shortly before their departure (Robert would also go with them) there was another RC meeting. I was imprudent and brash enough to criticise the Indian plan as 'adventurist', urging that the party should concentrate on strengthening its local base. For this parochial view I was, verbally, slapped down by NM, who in the course of his reply said, 'We can't all be as learned as Comrade Hamid': this. from a double-doctor to an undergrad, was irony indeed. But there was no difference of opinion on the Indian venture between the two factions-in-embryo in general: Doric was as firm as NM in rejecting my view. On his departure Philip left an article which was published under his personal name in the underground newspaper. It was titled 'On the Eve of the Indian Revolution' - a fair indication of the sanguine expectations with which the voluntary exiles set out. But they also left behind a legacy of simmering factional differences: the next RC meeting was disrupted by M., G. and R. putting out the lights.

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One afternoon, only a few weeks later, on the way home from the university I went, as I often did, to the 'safe house' where Edmund, William Silva and Lorensz lived: the last two were wanted by the police on detention orders, while Edmund had hanging over him also a charge of breaking jail in April. As I opened the gate, I glimpsed some strangers seated on the veranda and realised the game was up. But it was too late to retreat, so I walked on up to the veranda and asked for Aloysius. He was a young clerk in the library of the university Union Society, and was the party member providing cover for the three wanted people in the house. One of the men sitting there answered that they were from the CID and had to detain

for investigation any people who came there; he asked me to sit down and wait. As I was to learn later, the CID had raided the house in the night, and Edmund, William and Lorensz, as well as Aloysius, had been taken into custody; the men on the veranda had been left there to apprehend anybody who fell into the trap.

G. was also there; I suppose the impression that his presence was intended to convey was that he too had come there unawares and had been detained. But I was deeply suspicious of him from the moment I saw him and made no attempt to speak to him. The evening wore on, and nobody else came. It was after dark when the CID men decided to take me, and ostensibly G. too, to a police station to be detained there. They took us on foot to the Wellawatte police station; it was a long walk, but I don't think they were being cruel: they were probably concerned to avoid the possibility of an escape if they had tried to make the journey by bus under the conditions of the wartime blackout.

I had had time to think during the long evening. It was obvious that they would search my house, and I knew that in the drawer of the desk in the house at Kottawa there were some old copies of the illegal party paper, which it was an offence to possess. I decided to play for time, though not knowing exactly how this might help, and when at the police station I was asked for my place of residence, I gave them the address of the house at Ratmalana, which had been shut for several months. I was then put into a police cell; I didn't see what happened to G., and I was not to see him again till five years later in different circumstances.

Later in the night a young Burgher officer from the CID arrived at the police station and told me he was taking me to Ratmalana because my house had to be searched. With his small party of men he took me there by car. They found the front door shut and padlocked. A neighbour who had been roused by the voices and the torches of the cops came out, and they asked him about the house. He said the house had

been empty for months and he didn't know where my family was living. The young CID officer appealed to him to persuade me to tell the truth. I realised it wasn't possible to stall much longer, so I said, 'Alright.' We drove back to Wellawatte, and I gave them the address of the house in Kottawa. But it was now very late, and the CID officer decided not to disturb my family at that time. He phoned the police station nearest to Kottawa, gave them my mother's address and asked them to go there in the morning and tell her to come to the Wellawatte polce station, bringing with her the keys of the Ratmalana house. He told me he would have to search both houses where I had been living. I was put back into the cell, and spent the night there, not on the cold and hard concrete slab, but in a chair I had been given in view, I suppose, of my middle class status. When a constable took me out in the morning so that I could wash, he told me, 'We are all very sorry.'

It was almost midday when Mother arrived with an aunt of mine. We were taken in a police vehicle to Ratmalana. The search yielded nothing dangerous to me, and the cops didn't examine anything except the desk Mother identified as mine. Then we made the journey to Kottawa. When they opened one of my desk drawers there, I saw that the party papers which should have been there were missing, and I knew my gamble had paid off. The cops went through my books, and took Shaw's *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism* and a copy of the Pope's encyclical on *Atheistic Communism*, as well as two authentically Marxist texts: I can't now remember which. These last two books belonged to the party, and had a stamp on them which said, 'C.L. Copy' - 'C.L.' for 'Central Library'. (This was a small collection of books that had last been housed in the same house where Edmund and others had been arrested; the books must have been confiscated by the police.) There was, however, a copy of Marx's *Capital* staring the searchers in the face but they ignored it, presumably because it was 'capitalist'. At Kottawa, too, they didn't touch anything except my own desk.

When we got back to Wellawatte, the CID officer told me he would try to get me released that evening. An older man who was there, and who was apparently somebody in authority at the Wellawaatte police station, growled at me (he was evidently displeased that I was to be released), and said, 'If only you had been a little younger, I could have sent you to the barracks for the men to play the game with you.' I turned away from him to the young CID officer, in whose eyes I sensed an expression of distaste at this coarse remark, and said pointedly, 'Thank you for treating me nicely.' I was released around six that evening: I took a bus to Bambalapitiya and went into the Majestic Theatre where the film of Shaw's *Major Barbara* was on. I thought the equivalent of the first two acts of the play, ending with Barbara's disillusionment with the Salvation Army, was excellent, and the rest, with Barbara's acceptance of Undershaft's gospel of the guns, a great disappointment. After dinner, I caught the last train to Kottawa; the baby train was even slower than usual, and there were long waits on the way (perhaps the engine kept breaking down, under wartime conditions), so it was nearly midnight when I got home. Mother was relieved to see me; although the cops had told her I would be released, she hadn't believed them. In the morning she didn't reproach me, but gave me back the papers she had taken from my desk after she got the police message; she had talked to the woman next door, a simple village woman who, with her husband, ran a small *kadé,* and she had bravely agreed to hide them in her own house. I was touched that, although Mother disapproved, she had enough respect for what I was doing not to destroy the papers, which would have been the obvious thing to do. But there was no point in keeping them, so I put them down the pit of the latrine at the back of the house. Months later, I found in a cupboard in the house at Ratmalana a package, wrapped in brown paper, and when I opened it, there were about a hundred copies of the leaflet for British troops, left over after distribution; I had put them there and forgotten about them. These too were now

useless, so I took them into the back garden and burnt them. It was farewell to the underground life.

My suspicions of G. became a virtual certainty when I learnt that the underground press had been raided and confiscated around the same time that Edmund, William and Lorensz were taken into custody. What remained uncertain, and is still so to me, is the motivation of G. for what he probably did. Did he become disillusioned with the party after the factional differences broke out, and did he simply decide to make some money by turning informer? Or did he suppose that there was nothing wrong in giving away the press and betraying three wanted people because they were all part of the petty bourgeois faction which needed to be undermined?

I met G. five years later on a train going to Galle. He was with his wife, whom he had married in the last period of the underground press. They were both well dressed, and they were travelling second class, which the old G. would never have done, so I concluded that he had done well out of his thirty pieces of silver. Some time after the party's return to legality, he applied to rejoin it, saying he had been unjustly suspected of giving information to the police. The party readmitted him, on the ground that the case against him had never been proved. Whether the re-entry was an act of contrition I don't know. I last saw G. marching in the LSSP parade on May Day, 1956. A few months later I read in an LSSP paper that he had died.

I never had reason to suppose that if G. turned informer, either M. or R. was a party to it. I never saw R. again and believe he is probably dead. I last met M. about ten years ago; he was an old man, frail and with failing sight: it was sad to see the once vigorous and proud figure shrunk to that condition.

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I want to do justice to the old enemy of that time - the colonial police -, but in order to do so, it's necessary to cut in time to a point about a year and a half later when I had my second encounter with them. By then I had graduated, and was teaching at Ananda. But Lyn Ludowyk had also persuaded me to read for a doctorate, and had even secured a small stipend from the university to enable me to do so. I had once done a tutorial for him on Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge drama, in which I had made one of my rare attempts to bridge my twin worlds of literary criticism and Marxism: I tried to find in the discontent of the revenger an expression of the consciousness of intelligent and marginalised young members of the aristocracy whose values were threatened both by rising capitalism and by a despotic monarchy. I don't know today whether there is anything in this, but Ludowyk was impressed, and wanted me to develop it into a full-scale dissertation. It was a mark of the atmosphere of the English department then that the subject was located in the traditional academic terrain even though the treatment was to be unorthodox. I agreed to Ludowyk's proposal and spent some time reading both revenge plays and the social history of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods; then I got bored with the whole business and chucked it. Ludowyk never quite forgave me for this, but I am glad I gave up, for if I had gone on with the doctorate, I would have been locked into the academic circuit, and that would have been a fate worse than death.

In December 1943, during the school and university holidays, I accompanied Allan Mendis on a trip to Madras. In order to evade wartime censorship of letters sent by post, Allan was carrying with him a letter to the party in India, but this was written in cryptic language that no outsider could have understood. You didn't need a visa then to travel to India, but when you bought your train ticket, which had to be done in advance, you had to give your name. Soon after we boarded the train in Colombo, a former acquaintance of Allan greeted him. He sat down opposite us and stayed with us all the way.

During the ferry crossing between Ceylon and India, two policemen conducted all three of us to a room on the boat and thoroughly searched us; they found and confiscated the letter Allan had on his person. When we got to Madras and took a room at the YMCA, Allan's acquaintance also did so. By now Allan was suspicious of his presence; he went out and phoned Tony (Anthonipillai), then, waiting for a moment when the third man was out of the room, he told me to get my suitcase packed; he had already paid the YMCA bill. On the next favourable opportunity we darted across the street and jumped into a bus; while we were waiting for it to start, we saw the third man come out of the YMCA and walk along the other side of the street: he may have been looking fir us, but he never saw us.

We spent three weeks in Madras and met Tony and his wife Caro, Vivie and Karlo (Karalasingham). After we got back to Colombo, both Allan and I were separately questioned by the CID. My interrogator was a young ASP, Algy Perera, an intelligent cop. He asked me why I had gone to Madras; I said 'for a holiday', and mentioned temples and other spots I had fictitiously visited. Where had I stayed? 'The New Brahmin Hotel' was my answer. The address? 'Sorry, I don't remember.' When the interrogation was over, I told him the police had searched my house in 1942 (which he must have known anyway), and had taken some books which I would like to have back. I mentioned Shaw's *Intelligent Woman's Guide* and the Pope's encyclical. He laughed heartily and said Shaw might write a play about it if he knew. He went in and came back with these two books. I started saying, 'There were two other books...'; he smiled and said, 'I'm sorry, I can't return those to you.'

Allan had a tougher problem: he had broken wartime regulations by carrying a letter on his person, and was liable to be prosecuted, Rather than risk a jail sentence, he went back to India, and stayed with the party underground there.

Some years later, after his return to Ceylon, he happened to run into his former acquaintance; the latter confirmed that on that trip he was performing a mission for the CID. I hope they sacked him for his incompetence.

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Now to draw conclusions from these two experiences with the colonial police.

On the first occasion the only moment of unpleasantness I had was in the remark made by the officer at the Wellawatte police station, and that was no more than a passing irritation. Otherwise, I was treated with consideration and forbearance, and with no coercion. Even when the CID officer found I had been lying about my place of residence, his response was not to twist my arm but to appeal to the neighbour to persuade me to tell the truth. All this was no doubt a recognition of my class position: I was a university student at a time when all such students were *mahattayas* and *nonas* of the English-speaking classes. However, it might be said that the police had on that occasion nothing to gain from subjecting me to any form of coercion: they had already captured the illegal press and taken into custody the three wanted people who were still in the country; they had possibly learnt from G. that I knew nothing more that would be of use to them.

But the second encounter was even more striking as an example of police self-restraint. The police had thought it worthwhile to send a man all the way to Madras to trail Allan and me, obviously in the hope that we could lead them to some bigger fish. But when that failed, they didn't try to extract information from us under duress. For all they knew, we might not have stayed in Madras, we might have travelled to other cities in India and met Philip, NM, Colvin or Leslie, whom they must have been anxious to capture. Yet this possibility didn't induce them to try extra-legal methods. Algy Perera in

interrogating me couldn't have been more courteous, though he couldn't have been fooled by my talk of the New Brahmin Hotel and so on. As for Allan, if he had stayed in Ceylon, he might have been prosecuted for violating a defence regulation, but he was given no more tough treatment than I was. The conclusion is inescapable: that in dealing with us the colonial police stayed within certain legal norms.

This squares with what I know of the experiences of other middle class LSSPers who were taken in by the police at that time. The four detenus of 1940-42 weren't sent to a common jail but accommodated in a separate building: otherwise the escape would have been much more difficult, They were well fed: Henry Peiris used to write in the party paper about *'hira bath kaka dhuk vindhina Samasamaja nayakayan'* (the Samasamaja leaders who are suffering on prison food); but a party comrade told me that when he went with some others to see them, a jail guard came in with a tray of cake and tea and served the visitors!

No doubt the police were less gentle with working-class political suspects. I once listened to the story of four workers who were taken in on suspicion of working for the LSSP: they had been systematically kicked by a police officer with boots on. But the very fact that we were outraged on hearing their story was an implicit recognition of the fact that we took for granted that there were some restraints the police should be expected to observe. What would we have thought, with our experience and consciousness of that time, of the refinements of torture and the extra-judicial executions by the security apparatus of a later time? Again, Govindan was shot by the police during a strike, but the fact that this was an exceptional event is confirmed by the fact that it sparked a nation-wide agitation and the appointment of a commission of inquiry. One man's death, and, in terms of the distinctions of today, a Tamil estate worker's at that! Think of all the tens of thousands who have died in the last few decades without even the routine of an inquest.

These contrasts between the colonial period and later times cut, of course, in two ways. In contrast with the anti-state rebel groups of the last three decades, whether in the North or in the South, the LSSP believed in the necessity of mass revolution but not in terror against individuals or in assassination. The encounter between them and the colonial police was a contest played according to certain rules: on the one side, by liberal legal norms, for the most part; on the other, by certain conceptions of revolutionary morality. However, Prof. Ranjith Amarasinghe makes an acute observation when he remarks that one reason why Trotskyism may have been attractive to the intellectual leaders of the LSSP was that it must have seemed nearer than Stalinism to the liberal democratic ideas they had imbibed from their education, even though Trotskyism wasn't in fact a liberal democratic ideology. If so (and I think that is true), a certain degree of influence by a liberal ideological tradition was shared by both state and rebels in the colonial period. By the '70s and '80s the JVP and the LTTE were children of a different political culture, and the liberal democratic norms had been eroded as far as the state was concerned.

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To return to the chronological narrative, the factional struggle intensified with the majority of the RC appealing to the central committee of the BLPI against what it considered the deviation from the Bolshevik road by the Philip-led faction; the latter reacted by declaring itself formally as a faction under the title of a 'Workers' Opposition' and calling on rank-and-file members to overthrow the petty-bourgeois elements in control of the party apparatus. This dreary story has been told elsewhere, and I don't wish to recapitulate it here, particularly because I think (with the wisdom of hindsight, of course) that both factions were blind to the heart of the matter. Philip and others were right in thinking that the governing organs of the

party were deficient in people with experience of mass politics, but on the other hand they didn't see that populist appeals to the working-class rank and file were not an answer in the face of the failure, of which both factions were guilty, to raise the level of political education and consciousness of the working class cadres. Meanwhile, the party was split, in fact though not yet in public, and the faction to which I belonged did little more than keep what was left of its structures intact, by conducting study classes and group meetings, but it was cut off from the possibility of any broader dissemination of its ideas by the loss of the press. Even our former cover names were known to the police: there came the day when Dickie's brother, John Attygalle, a senior police officer, tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'So you're Comrade Rudra of the LSSP?' Dickie had responded with his well-known saturnine grin.

Meanwhile the BLPI was stillborn politically. It had spectacular successes iu the trade union field in Madras, where, however, its organiser, Anthonipillai, soon built himself up as an independent force in the trade unions, and ended by supporting Congress politically. Philip had (I think, correctly) urged that the Trotskyists shouldn't be hasty in forming a separate party but should work in existing left organisations such as the Congress Socialist Party and gather support for its ideas through activity and propaganda. But the majority suffered from the same illusion that led Trotsky to launch the Fourth International: that the possession of a supposedly correct programme would make people rally round the party. The mass political confrontations with imperialism that the LSSP had expected in India materialised, in 1942 and again at the end of the war, without the BLPI being able to influence the course of events. It was to limp on till 1948, when the remaining members joined the Socialist Party as individuals. In Ceylon in 1945 the jail doors were opened for the political detenus, but they emerged as members of two contending parties, now even in name. The post-war story of the LSSP lies outside the scope of this book, and it is not for me to write it because I moved out of the party early in 1946.

5

Epilogue

I have already acknowledged that the original leadership of the LSSP, in their intellectual abilities and potentialities, outshone any other political grouping in the country in their time, but this acknowledgment must be qualified by recognising also the creative sterility of their Marxism. None of the LSSP leaders and intellectuals left behind a single Marxist work of enduring value.

It's no good saying they were too immersed in day-to-day political activity to have time for original work. Not only Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and Mao but also many lesser figures in Marxist movements produced their theoretical writing while active, either in pre-revolutionary struggle or in the post-revolutionary exercise of power. Even in jail or in hiding, where some revolutionaries have done their best intellectual work, what did the LSSP leaders produce? I have already mentioned Leslie's small summary of the *History of the Russian Revolution;* Colvin in detention revised his pre-Marxist doctoral thesis on the early British period for publication and wrote a book called *Whither the Soviet Union?* - virtually a regurgitation of *The Revolution Betrayed* -, and NM wrote a pamphlet on free education. Even Philip, who had in many ways a more original mind than any of the other leaders, produced nothing lasting, nor did Doric.

Lenin's first political work was his book, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, which refuted the Narodnik utopia that Russia could bypass capitalist development and advance to socialism through the *mir,* the traditional village commune. Lenin demonstrated the falsity of this idea by examining the actual processes of development in the Russian village which showed that the *mir* was already disintegrating under the impact of capitalism. None of the LSSP

leaders or intellectuals ever made any such original study of the actual social relations obtaining in our society. This failure was common to all parties of the local left: all they did was to impose successively Trotskyist, Stalinist or Maoist schemas on Ceylonese/Sri Lankan society. The two CPs could be pardoned for that failure; they had to conform to the changing ideological twists and turns of the Soviet or Chinese line. The LSSP were intellectually free, but what did they do with that freedom? It was left to a later generation of Marxist intellectuals - notably, Newton Gunasinghe - to undertake the original analysis of Sri Lankan social relations that their predecessors had failed to make. I am compelled to conclude that in their Marxism the LSSP leaders shared in the derivative and dependent character by which our culture has been marked in so many fields.

But leaving aside original work, the LSSP's record even of translation of political literature into the indigenous languages was meagre in the extreme. The CP did more, at least on the level of texts like those in the Little Lenin Library. Perhaps they were able to draw on the material resources of the Soviet Union; but no matter: they were conscious of the need in a way that the LSSP weren't.

In 1964, after the split in the LSSP brought about by NM's proposal for coalition with the SLFP, Karlo (V. Karalasingham) wrote a pamphlet in which he discussed the reasons for 'the collapse of the old leadership'. The left (anti-coalition) faction to which he belonged had been decisively defeated at the party conference, and he was one of those who quit the party to form the LSSP(R). In his pamphlet Karlo ascribed that defeat to the low theoretical consciousness of the majority of the party cadres, and put the responsibility for that situation on Colvin and Leslie, who had been responsible for years for the party's political direction, of which, until 1964, NM had been only an executor. He charged them with the failure to educate

the party membership politically. But the pamphlet ended optimistically: Karlo found fresh hope in the new Sinhala-educated generation who were coming out of the universities:

> These are the elements who take over from now; and they do so on the higher plane of the positive achievements and enduring conquests already made. This is the guarantee that the new revolutionary leadership shall take the movement to its historic goal.

That new radical Sinhala-educated generation was in fact to emerge. But when they did so, they went neither to the LSSP nor to the LSSP(R) but to the JVP, because the JVP spoke their own language - in more senses than one. Meanwhile Karlo had gone back to the mother party; in 1970 he became a director of Air Ceylon, and he wasn't troubled in 1971 by the repression of the new generation whose advent he had hailed.

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I began this book with two lines, as epigraph, from an elegy by W.B. Yeats for the sixteen Irish revolutionaries who were executed by the British after the Easter uprising of 1916:

> *We know their dream; enough*
> *To know they dreamed and are dead.*

The LSSP leaders underwent no such martyrdom, though they too endured privations and sacrifices in varying degrees. Yet, their dreams of the 'forties were never realised, even to the extent of those of the Irish revolutionaries. Why was there this gap between dream and fulfilment? In the effort to answer that question one has to confront the LSSP's commitment to Trotskyism - not its international anti-Stalinism but its adoption of the theory of the permanent revolution.

Although the LSSP has long departed in practice from permanent revolution, entering into successive coalitions with a party it would once have called 'bourgeois', the theory remains a sacred cow to be revered among older members of the party. I have already said that Ceylon seemed to confirm the theory: the Ceylonese bourgeoisie and their political leadership were incapable of leading a militant struggle against imperialism. But this can hardly be said of the Indian case. The Indian national movement did win political independence for the country (and we were also beneficiaries: it was because of the struggle and sacrifices of the Indian people that we were presented with independence on the proverbial platter). The BLPI, and its constituent unit in Ceylon, cried in 1947, 'fake independence!' This was a case of blindness induced by theoretical dogmatism. The underlying syllogism was this: Independence, according to Trotskyism, can be won only by a proletarian revolution; no such revolution has occurred in India; therefore there can be no independence. This was to shut one's eyes to the reality that the struggle of the Indian people had made it too costly, both militarily and politically, for Britain to try to hold on to India any longer. As time went on the simplistic syllogism would be replaced by more sophisticated analyses pointing to the continuing dependence of the Indian economy on imperialism. But once one goes beyond the constitutional legal conditions of independence to the real effective exercise of sovereignty, independence becomes not an all-or-nothing affair but a matter of degrees - and that not only for ex-colonial countries, according to the Trotskyist paradigm, but for all states in the contemporary world. Is Britain, our former imperial mistress, independent, in that larger sense, today? Since the Second World War she has been dependent on both the financial and the military power of the United States - which is the real meaning of the 'special relationship'. Indeed, and especially after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, is there any country in today's world that is independent in the absolute sense - except the United States? If I may borrow something

I have written elsewhere, Shelley's tribute to poets as 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world' reads today like a description of the IMF and the World Bank.

It is true that the achievement of independence by the Indian national movement was qualified by its inability to resolve the Hindu-Muslim conflict, and that this failure resulted in the horrors of partition, the continuing antagonism between India and Pakistan, the running sore of Kashmir and the ascendancy today of militant Hindu nationalism, which may well lead to further horrors in the future. But can these be taken as proof of the Trotskyist assumption that, while the bourgeoisie of colonial countries cannot guarantee national unification, only the working class can through a proletarian revolution?

Where bourgeois nationalism in India failed to solve what Marxists called 'the national question', did socialism in Russia do much better? When the iron lid of the party dictatorship was lifted in the late 'eighties, it was apparent that seven decades of socialism had done little to transform ethnic relations and popular consciousness in this respect: they had only pushed the antagonisms under the surface. When political liberalisation made it possible for these to express themselves openly again, they not only provoked outbreaks of violence in different parts of the Soviet Union but contributed to its disintegration in 1991. Even more strikingly, in former Yugoslavia half a century of socialism did nothing to prevent the explosion of appalling ethnic savagery in the last decade.

I am not impressed by those surviving orthodox Trotskyists who will say about the ethnic conflict and violence of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, 'It wasn't the failure of socialism, it was the failure of Stalinism.' As G.V.S. de Silva observed of similar arguments, that is to take (in the philosophical sense) a completely idealist position that is incongruous in the mouths of professed materialists. Socialism then becomes not something that has ever existed in the real world but only a set of ideas in the minds and texts of some

Marxist thinkers. The fact remains that contrary to the theory of the permanent revolution, socialist revolution in Russia and Yugoslavia failed to solve the 'national question', just as much as bourgeois nationalism did elsewhere. In fact, it can be argued that the one-party state in both countries (and it was Lenin, not Stalin, who first banned other parties in Russia) made the problems of minority nationalities more insoluble by excluding the political pluralism that could have helped in their resolution. Perhaps we should conclude that neither bourgeois nationalism nor socialism has any simple panaceas for ethnic conflict, and that it can be eased only by slow, long-term, patient endeavours on many fronts - economic, political and cultural.

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Trotskyism has been actually that variety of Marxism most unsympathetic to nationalism; this followed naturally from the theory of permanent revolution. It was assumed that nationalism was a bourgeois ideology, so if the bourgeoisie of colonial and semi-colonial countries had no revolutionary role to play, nationalism could be only a diversion from the liberating tasks of the proletariat.

I have already suggested that, as far as the role of the bourgeoisie and their political leadership in relation to imperialism was concerned, Ceylon was a text-book case for that part of the theory of the permanent revolution. But this very fact meant that there was an opening for a socially radical, militantly anti-imperialist movement basing itself on a Ceylonese nationalism (not Sinhala or Tamil). In the years between 1935 and 1940 the LSSP seemed to be playing that role: its great battles - Bracegirdle and Mooloya - enhanced its position in that respect, particularly because of the timorousness of the so-called nationalist leadership. And in those years the LSSP was the only genuinely national party in existence, with its bases in the urban working class and sections of the peasantry in Sinhala areas, in Jaffna and among

estate workers. In addition, it was supported by progressive sections of both Sinhala and Tamil intelligentsia, including those who were to become the first generation of left-leaning 'political bhikkus'.

But these potentialities were foreclosed after 1940 by the LSSP's adherence to doctrinaire Trotskyism. Some of the differences over which the BLPI and LSSP diverged between 1945 and 1950 came from Philip's strivings (he had NM too with him then) to form broadly radical alliances, which were abhorrent to the orthodox Trotskyists of the BLPI, with their commitment to the twin tenets of the permanent revolution and the vanguard party. Philip's line was subsequently discredited in the eyes of the left by his successive alliances with Bandaranaike and Dudley Senanayake, but this doesn't necessarily mean that he was wrong in the strategies he sought to pursue between 1945 and 1950. Whether the LSSP could have come to power if it had espoused a socially radical Ceylonese nationalism is, of course, impossible to determine, but at least that might have taken part of the sting out of the contending sectarian nationalisms that have torn our society apart.

The inadequacy of the Trotskyist position comes out starkly when we look back at the nationalist battles over language of the 'fifties.

In 1943 all parties in the State Council had committed themselves to the ultimate replacement of English by Sinhala and Tamil as official languages. The party was then underground. However, after its return to legality, language didn't figure in the party's agenda between 1945 and 1954. For instance, in the programme adopted at the 'Unity' conference of June 1950, where the split in the party was healed (except for Philip who quit to form the VLSSP), language was not even mentioned, either in the 'fundamental aims' or in the 'transitional programme'. In its concentration on the class struggle and the economic base, the LSSP would have assumed that language was, at best, a 'superstructural'

question, or worse, a diversion by the ruling class from the real class issues. (Actually, language was a class question, even an economic one.)

In 1952 S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, having left the UNP, fought the general election of that year partly on a platform of speedy implementation of the State Council resolution of 1943. This is the position that the LSSP should have taken: democratisation of the administration required giving people access to it through the two indigenous language (while preserving, and extending to wider groups of the population, knowledge of English for educational purposes). The pre-war LSSP had been sensitive enough to such issues to demand that business in the lower courts be conducted in Sinhala and Tamil as well as to ask for the provision of facilities for people to make police station entries in these languages. But that awareness of the importance of language for the people's democratic rights had been submerged in the post-war years by the narrowly economistic Trotskyism to which the party had moved in the underground period.

It was only when the agitation for 'Sinhala only' began in 1955 that the LSSP was alarmed. At the party conference in April of that year the political resolution contained the following observations:

> *The potentiality of this new factor in our politics* [the language question] *has not in fact been grasped by our party thus far.* We have no doubt seen the swabasha question as a question of national unity. But *we have not sufficiently grasped the necessity, or the potentialities, of advocating it in the form and as a means of the struggle for the completion of our national independence.* The party will certainly have to take up the swabasha question much more as its own, instead of leaving it in wrong and reactionary hands. [My emphases]

But it was too late. The avalanche of Sinhala linguistic nationalism was about to descend after Bandaranaike's shift from two official languages to one. In October 1955 NM moved his motion in parliament seeking a constitutional amendment to guarantee parity of status for the two languages. This motion would have encountered less unpopularity among the Sinhala-speaking people if the LSSP had actively agitated for the replacement of English as official language by Sinhala and Tamil in earlier years. As it was, NM's motion was seen as a last-ditch stand by an intelligentsia who were more comfortable with English.

The LSSP's attitude to Tamil nationalism in those years was equally uncomprehending. The Communist Party had at one time, in conformity with current Stalinist theory, gone so far as to advocate the right of self-determination for minority nationalities in Ceylon. The LSSP rejected even federalism. It is revealing that in the debate on the motion he introduced asking for parity of status for the two languages, NM warned the Sinhala majority that if they rejected parity, they would strengthen the demand for federalism, which was 'unworkable' in a small country. Behind the LSSP's rejection of federalism was the Marxist preference for centralised states and its underestimation of the potency of nationalism (federalism in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia had been only a cover for the dominance of a single party). Ironically, what happened in 1964 and after was like a Freudian 'return of the repressed', as the LSSP became a prisoner of the same Sinhala nationalism it had repudiated. In 1965-66 the party opposed Dudley's language regulations as a violation of the 'Sinhala only' Act, and in 1972 Colvin sponsored a constitution that consecrated Sinhala as the only official language while rejecting the language and other demands of the Tamil people.

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In writing this personal record of what Prof. Ranjith Amarasinghe has called 'the heroic days' of the LSSP, I haven't

been actuated by any feelings of nostalgia: I am too conscious of roads not taken, of possibilities left unfulfilled, for that. Unlike those who look back to those years as a political Eden before the Fall of 1964, I see the later decline as inherent in the limitations and partialities of vision of the earlier period. In the national context Trotskyism, as I have argued, was a dead end, and the vanguard party had no viability once the LSSP moved into the period of open mass politics: the form remained without the content as the centre of gravity shifted to parliamentary politics. The vanguard model was born under the conditions of Russian autocracy; the assumption it implied, that one party had a monopoly of programmatic wisdom, was incompatible with a competitive political system. In the contemporary world, in societies possessing such a system, the motor of social change has been not a single party but a combination of many forces, including not only political parties but also social action groups of various kinds, and Sri Lanka hasn't proved an exception. In the gap between social actuality and the LSSP's original theoretical assumptions when it entered on the road of revolution, guided by doctrines of permanent revolution and Bolshevik organisation, I find the explanation for the melancholy outcome of its endeavours. So much talent, dedication, courage, sacrifice - and so little, in relation to its original dreams and hopes, came of it!

Regi Siriwardena spent five years during the Second World War as a young student and, later, teacher, working for the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, which was then functioning illegally and underground. These were the years when the party committed itself to Trotskyism, attempted to build an all-Indian party of the same character, ran a clandestine press and organised the prison escape of four of its leaders; they were also years when it was divided, behind the veil of secrecy, by a bitter internal struggle. Regi Siriwardena tells the story of these years as a participant and witness who combines inside knowledge with detachment, having been withdrawn from the party for over fifty years and having no record to defend and no alignments to uphold. His narrative interweaves the personal with the political, and includes some candid impressions of the personalities, both famous and less known, who figured in the drama.

Regi Siriwardena has been, in the course of a long and varied life, teacher, journalist, literary and film critic, script-writer, translator, poet, playwright and fiction-writer. His publications include Poems and Selected Translations (1993), Octet: Collected Plays (1995), The Lost Lenore (1996) and Among My Souvenirs (1997). Although he has withdrawn from party politics since the period chronicled in this book, he helped to found the Civil Rights Movement of Sri Lanka in 1971, and has worked for the last fifteen years as Editor, ICES, Colombo, for which he edits the quarterly journal. Nethra.

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