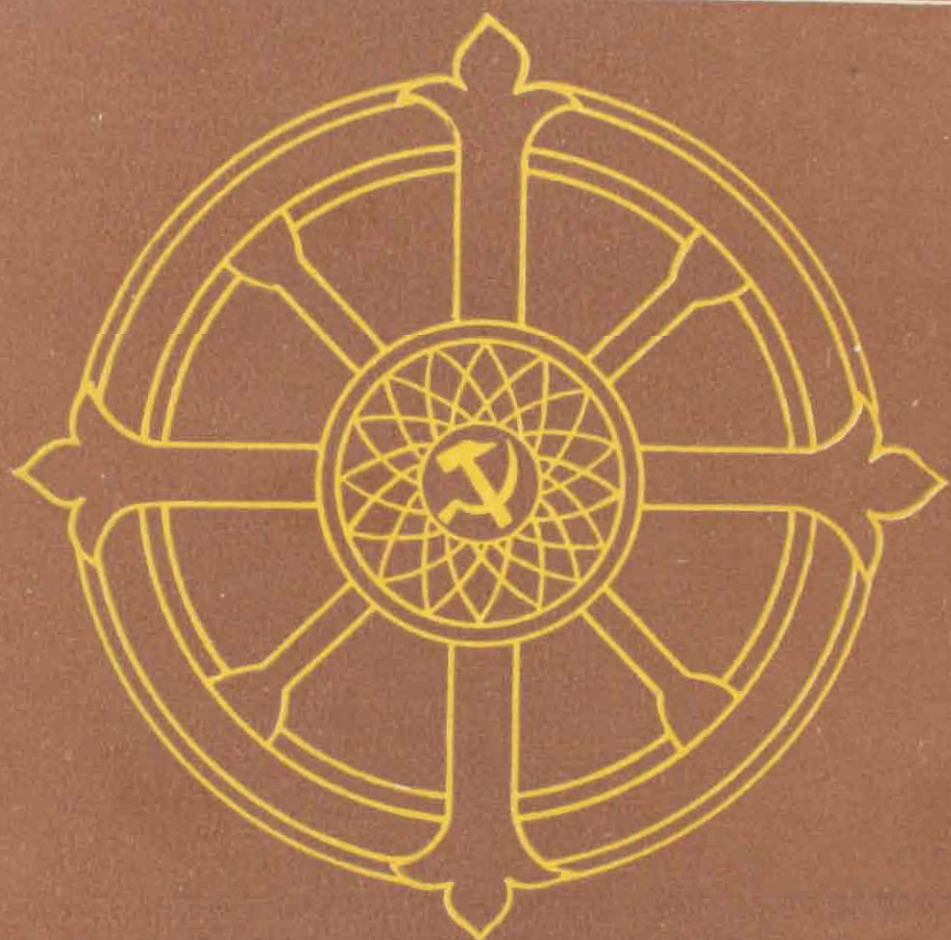


Violent Lanka



**The day
for slaughter**

YOHAN DEVANANDA

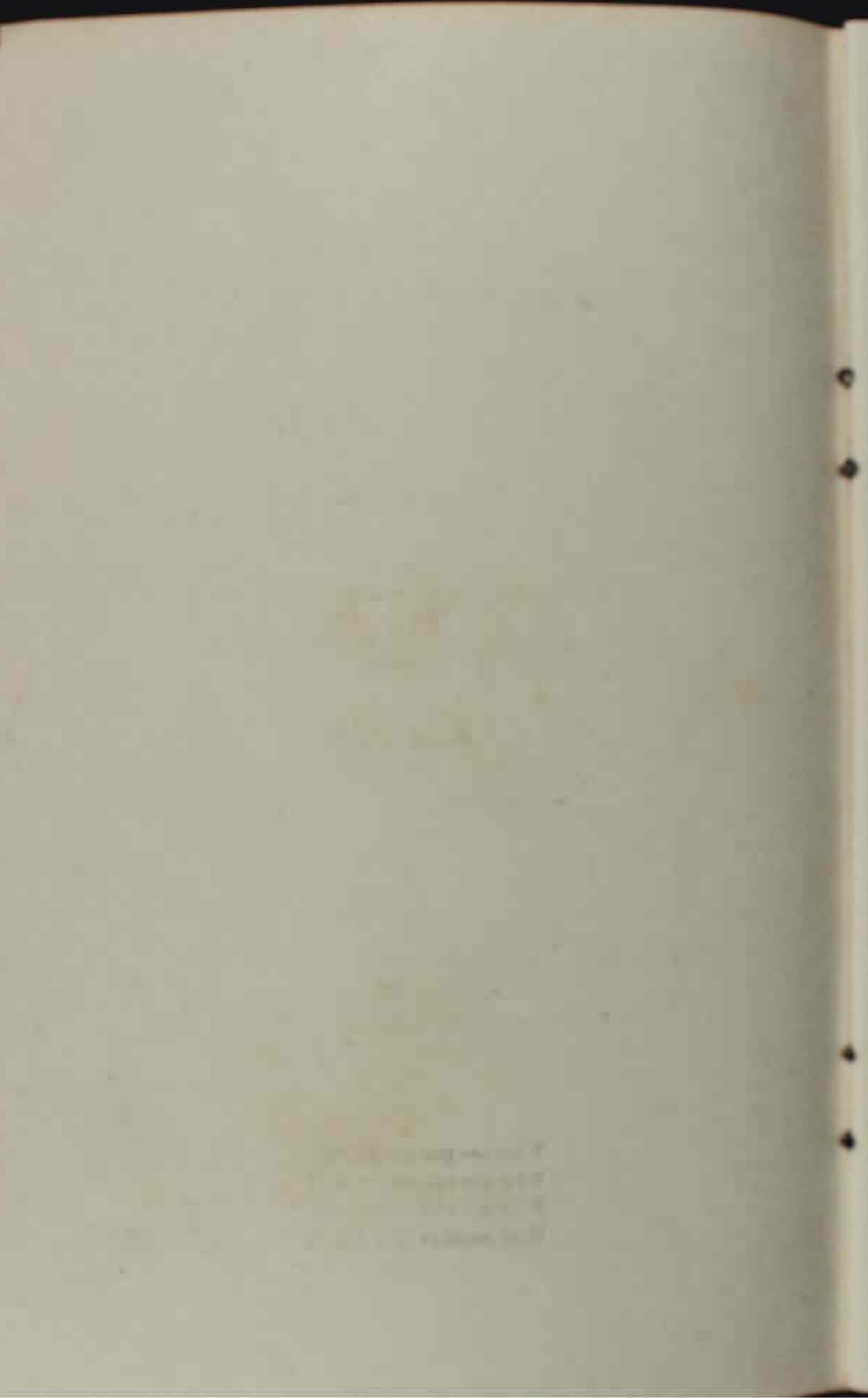
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An Interpretation
of the Revolt of April 1971

Who are the misguided ?
Who are the terrorists ?
Who are the robbers ?
Who need rehabilitation ?



Preface

"Violent Lanka" is not so much the work of an individual as the outcome of a dialogue with the people. The scene of this dialogue has been the village of Ibbagamuva, six miles from Kurunegala, where there has developed, from about 1960, a Buddhist-Christian-Marxist dialogue arising out of an action-reflection movement at grass-roots level. First, there was the life and work of the Devasaranaramaya, a Christian monastery along indigenous lines. Then was founded the Devasarana Collective Farm as a result of a movement for Land Reform. At this Collective Farm there has grown a community of collective farmers, most of them Buddhists from the villages roundabout—young as well as older farmers—who are daily engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry as well as in work and struggle for a new society and a new humanity. They are first of all directly involved in the production process, and also at the same time attempt to take seriously both religious commitment and political action. The interpretation behind "Violent Lanka" is thus the articulation of a community experience.

The symbol of the Devasarana Collective Farm, depicted on the cover, signifies the living dialogue of ancient dharma and modern ideology in a process of action—reflection. The common theme of this dialogue is development—justice—liberation.

Yohan Devananda

Devasaranaramaya, Ibbagamuva, N.W.P., Sri Lanka
July 1977

Preface to Second Edition

There are important factors in the April 1971 uprising and in the general situation in the country that have not been dealt with in this interpretation. For instance, the population explosion, unemployment and the lack of job or work orientated education, other defects in the educational and cultural spheres, the caste and racial problems, the unbalanced economy, the foreign exchange crisis, etc.

In particular, a word of explanation may be necessary concerning a comment made (in the Commentary) on certain Tamil leaders. This may appear to have been an insensitive comment to have been made by a Sinhala brother without due consideration of the serious nature of the racial problem in the country. But it must be remembered that similar comments were made about Sinhala leaders too. It must be freely admitted that the Sinhala-Tamil problem is a serious one. It is one of the subjects that must become a matter of honest and open public dialogue in the country. There may be some wise leaders on both sides who are prepared to make concessions. But various confused and inflamed feelings, suspicions and fears among certain sections of the people on both sides have arisen due to unwise leadership and policies over a considerable period of time. So necessary compromise and reconciliation may not be immediately possible in practice. In this matter, public dialogue, guided by wise leadership, is absolutely essential to prepare the way for solutions.

The main intention in the interpretation put forward in "Violent Lanka" has been to focus attention on the injustice and violence—both open and hidden—that lies behind the authorities, laws and institutions of society. This is a problem common to the whole world. There is increasing recognition, throughout the world, of the nature of this problem. There is also an increasing movement for liberation of people everywhere from the oppressions under which they labour. This movement seeks to develop what is usually called a socialist way of life and thereby build a new society and a new man. This is the hopeful and encouraging aspect of this modern age. We are witnessing the birth of a new age.

It is often said that this movement for liberation is vitiated and made ineffective by unrealistic and Utopian ideas. In particular, it is said that there is an insufficient understanding of the frailties and corruptions of human nature and of the difficulties inherent in transforming society. Some would add that there is insufficient faith in God or insufficient development of the spiritual stature of man. Thus, it is said, all attempts to build a new society and a new man sooner or later end in corruption, failure and disillusionment. For instance, this is what has happened—so it is said—in the pioneering experiments in socialism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere.

But, nevertheless, the present unsatisfactory state of society is a fact. Injustice, corruption and conflict is widespread. There is a state of crisis everywhere. Laws and institutions that may have served their purpose in former times no longer suffice—no longer produce the goods. Conditions have changed on a vast scale. It is imperative that new solutions and new structures be found. Man himself is incomplete and the spirit of creativity that moves within him is boundless. The challenge of circumstances produces revolutionary hope and a flood of possibilities. All of life and human history is caught up in a conflict of the possible and the real, the future and the past.

So the ideals and methods of socialism continue to be relevant despite failures in achievement. In fact, they become more than ever relevant as time goes on. They have to be understood in greater depth. There has to be continuous further development of awareness, among both leaders and people, of the problems involved. ("Revolution of mind and spirit" or "Conscientization"). This development can only take place side by side with determined experiment and action to bring about the radical changes that are necessary. Attempts at change in structures and change in ideas and spirit must proceed together. Neither can be achieved without the other. Here the great, though costly, pioneering experiments in socialism, in the Soviet Union, China and elsewhere must be studied and certain principles that have been proved valid must be followed, with due adaptation. Also, lessons have to be learnt from mistakes and failures. Here, no doubt, there is room for a healthy dialogue between Marx, Christ, the Buddha, and Mao! In the pursuit of the truth a safe rule is—"ever further beyond and ever deeper within"!

There were, undoubtedly, certain unfortunate aspects in the Revolt of April 1971. These cannot be excused lightly. But attempts to dismiss the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna as merely "petite-bourgeois", "adventurist", "ultra-leftist", "fascist" etc., and their revolt as merely an attempted "putsch" are not convincing. Despite their faults, they were, undoubtedly, part of the deep movement of liberation. Though they lacked widespread mass support, they arose from among the masses of the people. In fact they may well have won such support in due course if they had time to build their movement further and not been provoked into action by the government's efforts to suppress their movement. Of course, the efforts of the government to suppress them may well be understood in view of the preparations for violence on the part of the J.V.P. that were discovered. These are controversial matters. Their strategy and methods may well be called in question. But it must be admitted that there was a genuine revolutionary spirit in the J.V.P. and that there were people in it who lifted up a vision and were prepared to die for it—and did, in fact, die for it.

Recent evidence has revealed various divisions and betrayals, corruptions and failures in the movement. But this is not surprising. The members of the J.V.P. were mostly young people, somewhat immature, inexperienced, with slender resources, and, above all, were fighting against tremendous odds—more sinned against than sinning. It has become increasingly clear how grievously they were provoked and how severe were the methods used in suppressing the revolt, with substantial help from several powerful foreign countries. What is surprising is how much they achieved. They shook a whole nation and called it to corporate penitence and corporate search for a more just and more effective way of life.

It may be mentioned here that the understanding behind the interpretation in "Violent Lanka" came out of common consultation and dialogue. It grew out of a particular grass-roots situation. This was the work of an open People's Committee for Land Reform at Ibbagamuva that began in 1970. It was an attempt at grass-roots level—leavened by outside contacts—to study common problems and search for solutions. Discussion, study and reflection led to action on the basis of available resources. Action started with shramadana work and later a Collective Farm was started. This movement has been described in a document entitled "The Ibbagamuva People's Committee, the Devasarana Collective Farm and Perspectives on Land Reform" and was compiled for the Ceylon Studies Seminar that was held at the Peradeniya Campus of the University of Sri Lanka in August 1972. It is by no means a powerful movement. It is limited in many ways. But this contact with grass-roots activity—this confrontation with the hopes and aspirations as well as the disappointments and despair of the people—their gifts and abilities as well as their weaknesses and limitations—has, perhaps, enabled a more sympathetic understanding of the J.V.P. than is common with those who have not had a similar experience. Thus the interpretation behind "Violent Lanka" is not so much the work of an individual as a community experience. It is the outcome of a dialogue with the people.

The present government in Sri Lanka was decisively elected to power in May 1970 on a Manifesto that committed it to certain socialist goals. It contains some members, at least, who have, in the past, shown an undoubted commitment to the socialist cause—though not all of them, perhaps, have had sufficient understanding of the need to trust the people and to work alongside them in the struggle for development and liberation. There is now widespread and growing disenchantment with the efforts of the government to usher in the socialist era. Examples of authoritarianism, corruption and inefficiency abound. Thus there has to be criticism and alternatives must be explored by the people. There must be freedom for this. But the intractability of the situation—the difficulties inherent in the task of social transformation—and these include questions of foreign pres-

asures—must be acknowledged. Also, there have been some genuine attempts on the part of the government to bring about necessary changes. These also must be acknowledged and there must be a patient effort on the part of the people to cooperate with the government in its progressive policies. The widespread corruption and decay in society is the inevitable accompaniment of a social order that is collapsing. The people must learn to see behind and beyond this to the new order that is struggling to emerge and they must cooperate with the government in creating the new spirit and new structures and institutions that the conditions and needs of the times demand.

In these tasks it is absolutely essential that the government should recognise the true worth of the people, trust them and encourage honest and open dialogue among the people—especially at grass-roots level—on the common problems facing them. Of these problems there is none more important than that concerning the causes and consequences of violence in society. These must be understood at depth and solutions sought.

For instance, the causes of the violence that is often involved in revolutionary transformations must be understood. A revolutionary movement which aims at a socialist reconstruction of society does not restrict itself to constitutional or parliamentary methods alone. This is because the resistance of vested interests to revolutionary social change usually assumes a violent form which may have to be met by mass revolutionary action as the only effective means of enforcing the will of the majority. It is in this context that the need for organized mass revolutionary violence arises. Such action should arise only out of a revolutionary mass upheaval and not through conspiratorial action of groups or individuals apart from the masses. Further such violence need not necessarily be armed violence. Various other forms of collective resistance may be sought. For instance, increasingly, the developing countries must get together to protect themselves against domination by greater powers. Further, links must increasingly be developed between progressive forces of all countries, both “developed” and “under-developed”.

After the cataclysmic event of April 1971 it was natural that the government should resort to various hard measures and special emergency regulations for a time. But, though a certain vigilance and preparedness will always be necessary, it would be fatal to continue to rely on hard measures and emergency regulations indefinitely. To wait for a return to former securities and so-called peace would be futile. Insurgency is not something that can be wiped out as long as there are deep underlying causes in society. Incidents are bound to continue. They may increase. But the time has now come—in fact is overdue—for the Government to have the courage to venture in openness and freedom among the people—welcome criticism—learn

from the people and win their trust and cooperation. The mass media must be fearlessly used to encourage this dialogue. Politicians and parties must go to the people and work alongside them. Existing machinery of People's Committees, Cultivation Committees and District Development Councils can be used in this and developed further. There has to be knowledgeable and trained leadership and careful planning and organisation of this dialogue. But it must be set forward without delay and training programmes developed concurrently. Everything depends on it.

It is not, of course, being suggested that the whole country should be transformed into a vast debating society or that everyone can at once participate in equal measure in the dialogue! But teachers must be prepared to be learners too and learners to be teachers as well. Without development of the spirit of dialogue there will be no development of true motivation or understanding and so no participation of the people in the planning of the government. Economic and technical know-how cannot bear fruit without the development of proper human relationships through dialogue. The various revolutionary forces in this country must recognise each others' worth and unite in the common struggle for liberation. The struggle for liberation must increasingly unite people of all groups. It must obtain for the people their due place in society. Leaders must arise from among the people who appreciate the potentialities of the people and draw them out. Recognising the deepest needs and yearnings of the people for liberation and brotherhood they must inspire them with a vision of a new society. Agricultural and industrial techniques have to be learnt as well as cooperative and collective methods of production evolved. The development of individual personality, initiative and personal freedom has to be fostered together with recognition of common responsibilities. Technology and human relations are intimately connected and both have to be rooted in reality, in the soil of the country, and integrated with indigenous culture. It is only as the people are inspired with a vision of a new society and begin to work together in a spirit of brotherhood, with confidence that it is in their power to shape the future that the spirit will be generated for the hard work and sacrifice that can creatively transform society.

Yohan Devananda

Devasaranaramaya, Ibbagamuva, N.W.P., Sri Lanka
December 1972

“ A Word
to you who have great possessions.
Weep and wail
over the miserable fate descending on you.
Your riches have rotted
Your fine clothes are moth-eaten
Your silver and gold have rusted away
and
their very rust
will be evidence against you
and
consume your flesh like fire.
You have piled up wealth
in an age that is near its close.
The wages you never paid
to the men who mowed your fields
are loud against you
and
the outcry of the reapers
has reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts.
You have lived on earth
in wanton luxury
fattening yourselves like cattle
and
the day for slaughter has come.”

From the Bible—Letter of Saint James 5. 1-5

When a poor man
takes a few coconuts
from his rich neighbour's land
to feed his children who are in need,
that is robbery,
according to the law.
He can be convicted,
perhaps even jailed.

When a rich man
lives in wanton luxury,
spends infinitely more than he needs
on food, clothes, amusements,
while others are starving, naked, wretched,
that is legitimate.
There is no law
to convict him.

The laws are made by the rich,
who make them,
not to convict themselves
but to oppress the poor.
If the poor made the laws,
it would be a different story.
The rich may then be seen
in their true colours.

When a rich man
owns hundreds or thousands of acres,
while there are others
who do not own an inch,
that is not robbery
that is because we must,
at all costs,
safeguard the sacredness
of private property,
which means just reward
for the labour of ancestors
so that descendants
may not labour.

When an employer
pays himself infinitely more
than the worker—than his own servant
that is not robbery
that is merely just reward
for education and culture,
that is the way
to encourage initiative and enterprise.

When a poor man
in desperation,
gets drunk,
picks a quarrel,
draws a knife,
kills,
that, obviously, is murder—violence,
punishable by death.

When company directors
sack workers with impunity
and so condemn whole families
to penury and want,
that is not violence,
because no knife has been used.
No knife need be used,
a peremptory word suffices.
Labour tribunals need not be feared overmuch,
loopholes can be found, laws delays, political influence.

When politicians and government officials—
whatever the party in power—
ignore basic needs and just complaints
of the people,
on a vast scale,
daily, continuously,
that is not violence
because no blows have been dealt
visibly, materially.
No blows need be dealt
because
power, authority, influence
is on their side,
and the might of the armed services and police
stands behind them.

When religious leaders—
church dignitaries, mahanayaka theeras,
church committees, dayaka sabhas—
embrace vested interests,
exert various dubious moral pressures,
enjoin passive compliance on the people,
in the name of religion and peace,
that is not violence—
only religious obligation and duty.
They talk endlessly, mouthing empty phrases
in out-dated language
on abstruse doctrines,

slaves to useless customs and superstitious ceremonies,
raising funds continuously
from the people
for buildings and institutions
and for bolstering their tottering position and prestige.

But they are silent and inactive
on the things that really matter,
the things that really concern people—
social change, land reform, employment,
human relationships, human dignity,
involvement with the people,
being alongside the people
in dialogue;
for without dialogue,
without a truly sensitive and truly human relationship,
there can be no inspiration,
no teaching—no learning
no communion.
So our religious leaders, by and large,
remain aloof, out-of-touch, clueless,
irrelevant,
unheeding and unheeded.

And what about the police and the armed forces?
Immaculate in shining uniform and belt,
they march faultlessly to step.
Supposed to be symbolic
of discipline, of controlled strength.
But their basic method, tactic, with the people—
a sound thrashing—guilty or not guilty.
Everyone knows it.
How do they keep the peace?
If a policeman's hat is filched,
the offender may have to pay for it with his life.
If a soldier is actually hurt,
a whole village may be destroyed.
Utterly disproportionate retaliation,
that is the order of the day
the cement of our society,
violence.

And now that there has been a revolt
all hell has been let loose,
the innocent slaughtered with the guilty,
the normal law of utterly disproportionate retaliation
writ large.
Many of the finest young people in the country—

mauled, mutilated and massacred.
All hell has been let loose.

No doubt there are decent individuals,
even some saints,
at all levels, at all times,
up to a point,
well-meaning, refined, conscientious people,
up to a point,
free speech, universal suffrage, democracy,
up to a point,
fine buildings, shops, parks, temples, churches,
a certain outer polish and calm,
up to a point,
but also, always, dark, murky, turbulent forces beneath the surface—
individual character and the character of society
is exceedingly complex
a strange mixture of good and evil.

Basically, the system stinks,
the system of law and order,
the system dominates individuals,
the ultimate sanctions rest on
violence,
no less violence,
because it is often hidden, indirect, subtle violence,
not recognised as violence.

Yes, in our society
there is legalised robbery and violence
in normal times—
respectable men of power
in sangha, church, and state,
robbing in broad daylight,
violent,
spilling the blood of the people
continuously
in complete freedom,
with impunity,
proud and unrepentant,
self-righteous, complacent.

This is not a situation peculiar to Lanka,
this is as far as we have got
in our civilization,
in the world.
Violence rules
in the U.S.A., Europe,

in the U.S.S.R.
in China
in Vietnam—North and South,
in India, Pakistan, Burma,
in Lanka.

Harold Laski
summed it up:
“The government of a people,
in the last resort,
rests on force.”

We have spoken so far
only of the relations between people
within a nation.

What of the relations
between nations?

The U.S.A., omnipotent, omniscient,
has half the income
of the whole world.

What proportion of it is spent
on the development
of under-development?
infinitesimal.

Where is the justice of that?

Is that God's will?

Australia and Canada, affluent nations,
have tiny populations
and wide open spaces,
while China and India, poor and struggling,
have teeming populations,
dreadfully over-crowded.

Where is the justice of that?

Is that God's will?

And what of Hiroshima and Viet Nam?

Let us not blame it all
on the U.S.A., or the Soviet Union
or China.

We cannot absolve ourselves.
Hiroshima and Vietnam happened
because of hatred in the heart of man everywhere.

I am responsible.

It is my fault.

We must change ourselves,
change our society, our world.

We must never finally commit ourselves
to the status-quo
anywhere in the world.

Another political scientist
has summed it up:
"Kingdoms are robber possessions."

So, established law and order
it is not as simple as all that.
There is established injustice,
established disorder, massive institutionalised disorder
naked oppression,
masquerading under the guise of law and order,
continuously, all the time.

What has this to do
with that higher law and order,
that sublime dharma,
which takes precedence over all human laws,
and towards which all human laws must tend?
That has been put very simply
by Karl Marx himself:
"From each according to his ability
to each according to his need."
The Buddha, too:
"Go ye now, monks, and wander
for the good of the people
for the happiness of the people
out of compassion for the world."
And Jesus Christ:
"The Sabbath was made for the sake of man
not man for the Sabbath,
therefore the Son of Man is sovereign
even over the Sabbath."
Saint Paul put it another way
"The written law condemns to death
but the Spirit gives life."

So, laws and institutions
must serve the people
not dominate them,
they must liberate
not enslave the people.

All this, the people are learning.
There is a world-wide movement of history—
a movement for liberation.
So, however bad things may seem,
let us always remember,
the people are awakening,
the people are on the march—

from slavery to freedom
from egotism to brotherhood—
the struggle for emancipation is going forward,
that is the meaning of history,
the nature of man, of dharma, of God.

We have to mould our society accordingly,
patiently,
with invincible hope.

We have to go forward—
from a society that is still based
largely on violence and competition,
on an idea of man
as essentially selfish and corruptible,
to a society that will be based
essentially on community—on transformed human relationships,
on free consent and co-operation,
on faith in the infinite possibilities of man,
under dharma, under God,
not Utopianism
but realistic as well as idealistic—
taking account of all realities,
both good and evil.

What further upheavals,
disasters, tragedies,
must we pass through
before we acknowledge this?
How long will we rest content
with a debased idea of humanity
the idea of the essential corruptibility
of human nature—
which has been the basis
of the status quo?
How far has this so-called realism got us?

Radical changes are necessary,
structural changes,
revolution,
land reform, collective farms, reformed co-operatives,
changes in ownership, management, and production,
not merely in distribution,
also changes in worship and preaching, in teaching and learning,
changes that will bring about new relationships between people,
new attitudes,
changes that will enable people to be people,
not merely animals,
not merely things, instruments or pawns,

changes that will make possible
a new society, a new man,
a new heaven, a new earth.

It was for this essentially —
whatever else may have been mixed up in it —
that the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna revolted,
and for this essentially —
nowever imperfectly understood —
that many of them have laid down their lives.
They have been mostly youth so far —
young men and women, teenagers,
but they are rooted in the mass of the people,
in both towns and villages,
across the length and breadth of the country.

They had utterly lost confidence
in the leaders of this country,
both religious and secular,
of whatever established religion
and of whatever established party,
and they had utterly lost confidence
in the laws and institutions of this country —
that they could ever be reformed
by the normal processes.

Let us not dismiss them too easily
as misguided terrorists,
immature fanatics,
megalomaniacs.

How can we dare condemn them?
They are our sons and daughters,
we have produced them —
we, parents, teachers,
priests, politicians,
employers, workers,—
they are our progeny
flesh of our flesh
spirit of our spirit,
we are responsible for them,
we must stand alongside them.
If they are in the dock,
so are we.

Yes, they have been violent.
They have attacked police stations,
killed people,

damaged public property,
looted shops,
confiscated guns,
(what multitudes of people
even some temples and churches
had put their faith in guns!)
Yes, they have been violent.
But right or wrong,
their violence has been a response
has sprung from
our violence, our injustice.
We must recognise, acknowledge that —
everything, just everything
depends on that.
Otherwise, there is no basis for dialogue
for reconciliation
for peace.
There is no hope at all,
if there is no heart-searching, no humility.
Heart-searching and humility is not weakness
it is being strong enough
to face reality,
strong enough for peace.
We must get off our pedestals
of judgement of others
and judge ourselves,
only so can we speak to others,
connect, get across,
reconcile,
make peace,
peace that will last and make possible progress,
because based on justice.

But there was more to these young men and women
than violence.
Yes, much more.
There was idealism
somewhat Utopian no doubt,
but, nevertheless, idealism,
and they were — so many of them — so committed,
ready to lay down their lives.

Also, there was a certain knowledge and awareness
of historical realities, and of the essential priorities.
There has been a long ferment of ideas
in the movement of the Left,
and this has had its impact on these young people —
though somewhat ill-digested,

and not fully articulate.
Quite a significant proportion
of the young intelligentsia of this country
has been involved in this revolt,
and of course not the intelligentsia only.
Our bourgeois middle-class left-intellectuals
have always felt that only they,
with their study circles and books,
are ripe for revolution.
But the peasants in the villages
and the workers in the towns
have suffered oppression,
endured, persevered,
and have preserved,
developed,
the will to resist —
they too are ripe,
perhaps riper,
for revolution —
a part of a world-wide movement of history.

The young people of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna,
children of these peasants and workers —
many of them in the universities or just out of them,
in the central schools or just out of them,
or just beginning to earn —
are heirs of all this.

There was also,
undoubtedly,
a certain real love for the people —
they fought because they loved.
In the earlier stages especially,
in numerous incidents and encounters
there was genuine evidence, beyond question,
of their care for the people,
although they attacked government institutions.
Above all, they knew how to die,
heroically, for a cause, for the nation,
for the people, for religion,
as far as they could see.
Yes, for religion too.
Fundamentally, these young people
were religious,
they were not against religion
but against the practice of religion
as they saw it in their elders.

It was not a complete vision.
Of course, there was much that was lacking.
They did not wait to win the support
of most of the workers in the towns
and of most of the peasants in the villages.
They lacked really substantial mass support,
a serious weakness.

Also, they lacked the faith and the patience
to work and fight openly, non-violently,
for a revolution
of the mind and spirit
that, supremely, can bring about
every other revolution.
They did not place their faith
unquestionably, primarily, in love.
They did not believe
that love was a power
above every other power.

Are we surprised?
Did we teach them what they lacked?
Did our lives testify to those truths, those ideals?

The Lord Buddha taught:
"Preach, monks, the dharma,
which is lovely in the beginning,
lovely in the middle,
and lovely in the ending.
Explain both in the spirit and in the letter
the good life
that is completely fulfilled,
wholly pure."

The Buddha and his disciples
drew the people and liberated them
by the sheer attractiveness,
in depth,
of the dharma they preached,
and lived—
a glorious part of history and culture.
But have our Buddhist bhikkus and Buddhist laity in the present
drawn our youth or liberated them?
How compelling, in depth,
has been the dharma they have preached,
and lived?

The Lord Christ said:
"I have come

that men may have life
and may have it in all its fullness.
I am the good shepherd;
the good shepherd lays down his life
for the sheep."

The Christ and his disciples drew the people and liberated them
by a dharma preached in all its fullness,
and by a life lived in all its fullness,
in sacrificial care and service of others—
an inspired past.

But have our Christian ministers and Christian laity in the present
drawn our youth or liberated them?
How full in sacrificial care and service of others
have their lives been
or the dharma they have preached?

Karl Marx taught:
"From each according to his ability
to each according to his need."

It was a philosophy and a programme
for both justice and efficiency,
forged by both head and heart,
a union of realism and idealism,
an identification with the oppressed masses,
a call to liberation
that has fired the imagination
of modern man.

It achieved positive results,
though limited,
nevertheless, first fruits,
in Russia, China,
Cuba, Tanzania,
and elsewhere.

Our traditional left parties and leaders,
in this country,
certainly drew our people
and prepared the way for liberation—
in fact, a fine record.

But have they held our youth in the present?
or lost them?

What has happened to the original sacrificial fire?
What has happened to the living links with the masses?

Who are the misguided ?
Who are the terrorists?
Who are the robbers?
Who need rehabilitation?

Comment

This has not been an attempt to write poetry. Words have been arranged in a particular way in an attempt to put certain things down as simply, clearly, and briefly as possible.

It may be dismissed by some as exaggeration. However, it is very necessary that a serious attempt be made to understand the violent protest of young people today against those in authority and their laws and institutions.

A historical parallel may help. In 1517, Martin Luther posted his ninety-five theses against the Church on the Church door at Wittenburg. This was a ruthless exposure of the corruptions in the doctrine and practice of the Christian Church of his day. It was a violent protest. It was the beginning of the great Protestant Reformation.

One can imagine the Pope of that time—no doubt a man of immense refinement, erudition, and culture—meditating in his Chapel at the Vatican Palace in Rome and gazing at the frescoes on the ceiling; these frescoes had just been executed by Michelangelo, the greatest artist of the time and possibly of all time; they represented a magnificent spiritual vision of the heights and depths of the universe, of the total reality.

One can imagine the Pope thanking God for this superb achievement of the human mind and spirit, which was, moreover, a product of the Church and commissioned by the Papacy. And then, one can imagine the noble Roman turning to contemplate the violent protest of that vulgar German monk, a coarse Hun, who had dared to question the integrity and credentials of the successor of St. Peter, the chosen apostle of Christ himself!

Such are the complexities and the ironies of history. The protest of Martin Luther and subsequent developments led to much division, strife, and bloodshed. All the upheavals and tragedies of those times are, of course, to be deeply regretted. But, in the perspective of history, there can be no doubt that Luther's protest was a valid one and that the Protestant Reformation was an integral part of the evolution of the best modern traditions of democracy and liberty.

The Religious Scene

I really do know at first-hand what a deep and lasting impact the Buddhist religion has made on the life and culture of the people of this country, and how this life and culture of the people has been sustained and nourished through the centuries, despite foreign domination and a long and progressive decay of indigenous institutions and social life. The Sangha and the people deserve great credit for all this.

I believe that, by God's grace, I have a deep respect for and commitment to the religions of this country. But, nevertheless, I am sure that the time has come for some very plain-speaking. Our religious leaders, clergy and lay, and religious power centres (of all religions in this country) are, by and large, with only few exceptions, hopelessly out of touch with the people and thus clueless with regard to the things that really matter to the people.

Too many of our powerful bhikkus still live in a medieval world and keep hankering after the glories of a past age. Their attitude to the modern world is dreadfully puritanical and narrow. They cannot possibly win our youth if they persist in this attitude. Then, they are allied to powerful vested interests and, naturally, have no real interest in radical social change. Their sermons are full of philosophical and scientific arguments for the truth of Buddhism, and of vague moralizing, but show very little understanding indeed of the great movement of liberation that is sweeping the whole world and so exciting our youth. Above all, there is a lack of real dialogue with the people. This is accentuated by the persistence of absurd medieval habits. For instance, bhikkus do not greet others in the normal way, and laity are not supposed to sit in the presence of bhikkus or, if they do so, must sit at a lower level. This is supposed to be a way of honouring the sublime Dharma. This sort of attitude may have been very charming and fitting in a medieval setting but it is utterly out-of-date in the modern world. It is extremely doubtful that the Buddha himself moved about among people in this way. At any rate, it is impossible today to really get alongside the people in this way and develop a really creative and worthwhile personal relationship, based on mutual confidence and trust. I am not suggesting that true indigenous values should be thrown overboard. But there is an urgent need for liberation from outworn attitudes and forms in order to creatively work out a living synthesis of the old and the new.

However, things have begun to change. There have always been representatives of the Sangha, who have actively participated in liberation movements, and today, quite a number of young bhikkus have been involved with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. Then, the young lay Buddhists, who form the core of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, are basically intensely religious. They are not much concerned with traditional rites and customs but they are certainly conscious of a deep sense of loyalty to Buddhism and their motherland and have a passion for social justice, with a considerably intelligent understanding of the issues involved. Moreover, they have shown a deep commitment by their readiness to lay down their lives. There are innumerable authentic stories of the heroism with which they met ruthless mauling, torture, and death. The great cry with which they faced the bullet was: "Mau bima nethnam maranaya" (The motherland or death) or "Janatha Vimukthi Peramunata Jaya Weva" (Victory

to the People's Liberation Front). This kind of behaviour as well as numerous examples of considerate treatment of the people in the heat of the conflict have won a great deal of sympathy for them among large sections of the people—even among many who disagree with their views.

But, of course, it cannot be said that these young people are mature, fully-integrated people. Caught between two worlds, two cultures, they have deep inner conflicts, which often erupt in terribly unfortunate and tragic and even petty ways. In the present conflict, too, they have under increasing pressure from the security forces and civilian helpers, reacted with cruelty and revenge. They are really very complex characters and indiscriminate praise as well as indiscriminate blame are both out of place. What is needed is a truly human attitude to them, that is both sensitive and firm, and the development of a dialogue relationship.

The Christian power centres are, generally, no less cut off from the people, clueless, and out-of-date. Christians in the towns have been heard to congratulate themselves: "Our Christians have behaved well in this crisis. We have not got involved with the J.V.P." But there is no reason to be so pleased about this. As someone has pointed out, this is like suggesting that the Nobel Prize for Peace should be awarded to paralytics. If Christians have not been involved in the J.V.P. this has been because they are not generally interested in radical social change. Our church services, sermons, and religious instruction of the young have very little relevance to the real problems of people and the deep movement of history—the social cataclysm—in our midst. Our ideas of God, faith, and prayer smack far too much of magic and superstition. These have to be re-thought and renewed. When we think of witness we still think far too much in terms of making others Christians rather than in developing genuine human relationships, at depth, in a common search for the truth and a common action for justice.

However, here too, change has begun. Radical groups like the Christian Workers' Fellowship and the Outlook group are working vigorously to develop new attitudes. There is a ferment in the Church at large. There have certainly been Christians involved in the J.V.P. though it is not known how many.

I have not associated sufficiently closely with Tamil and Muslim people and their interests to comment with much certainty about their attitudes. But I believe that the situation here, too, is basically the same.

They have the normal—though, no doubt, serious—problems associated with being minorities in this country. Yet, they have made outstanding contributions to the history and culture of this country.

In the past, there have been great leaders who thoroughly identified themselves with wide national interests. For instance, Ananda Coomaraswamy, a Tamil, was a world authority on Buddhist as well as Hindu religion, philosophy, and culture. He was a man of the world who was also a spiritual giant. There were others, too, though not all, of course so outstanding. But the present leaders of the Tamil community appear, on the whole, to be a sorry contrast to that kind of universality of vision. There are too many small, petty men among them—complacently convinced of their own integrity and infallibility. But there are, already, vital younger elements who are making their protests heard and their presence felt. The Muslims, who also have made their own distinctive contribution to the life of this country, had also tended to get out of touch and be exclusively concerned with their own material advancement. But they have recently begun to show remarkable flexibility and vitality in adaptation.

It is highly probable that there are many more Tamils and Muslims in the J.V.P. than is at present generally known.

The Political Scene

Let us give credit where credit is due. There have been doughty fighters in the movement for independence. We can salute them. There have been great workers for important social welfare measures. We can salute them too. So far, we have been speaking of those who are now regarded as conservatives. Then, there have been the traditional left parties who have done a great work, amidst constant opposition, in preparing the ground for socialism, and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party who, under S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, made a very important break-through in 1956. All credit to them too.

Now, to come to the immediate present. It was Mrs. Bandaranaike who was able, through sheer strength of character, to forge and hold together a United Front of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the two traditional left parties—the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Trotskyist) and the Communist Party—and thereby make possible the defeat of the conservative United National Party who had staged a come-back (1965 to 1970). The situation was thus open for a real socialist advance.

In some respects, a promising start was made in the first few months. A State Trading Corporation was set up, the reform of the Cooperative Societies was being taken in hand, plans were being drawn up for a new Constitution on radical lines, and a substantial amount of money was set apart for creating employment.

But, on the other hand, a terrible rot set in right from the very beginning. No sooner were the elections over than frantic transfers of

government servants, mostly teachers, were the order of the day—partly righting previous wrongs, partly revenge, and partly rewarding favourites. As a result, some schools became over-staffed and others under-staffed—in some cases the situation was ludicrous. The children certainly suffered. Then, the first set of 2500 appointments for unemployed graduates were given on the basis of lists provided by M.P.s, and not on merit. The M.P.'s certificate became a sine qua non for employment. Jobbery and nepotism made things worse.

Originally, it had been necessary, in the interests of justice, that the domination of privileged interests through the bureaucracy should be broken by political intervention. In the process, political intervention was resorted to for party and personal ends. Gradually political interference became the order of the day. It reached extreme proportions in the period 1965 to 1970. The period following the 1970 election was a violent reaction to what preceded. M.P.'s and Ministers seemed powerless to resist these pressures. Certain wrongs were righted. But new injustices were perpetrated. The people's confidence in the government was fairly severely shaken by this kind of thing. Matters were further aggravated by the sudden compulsory retirement of government servants over 55 years. This affected whole families, and the government ignored protests from various associations all over the country.

Then, even more serious, the government prevaricated on the subject of Land Reform. This was a vital matter. Taxing the rich is only a half-way house to socialism. The fundamental structures of society remain the same. Changes in the structures of ownership, management, and production as well as distribution, which will enable the transformation of human relationships, are, thus, essential. But the government began to emphasize the difficulties and to point out the serious financial problems involved. It began to look as if the government had not the vision or the will to undertake radical change. The fact that several prominent members of the government were extensive property owners made matters worse.

Also, there was delay in implementing the promise of People's Committees and finally a scheme was put forward where the ultimate power to appoint both members of the Committees and the Chairman was vested in the hands of a Minister.

So, very rapidly, opposition began to build up against the government. This opposition was spear-headed by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna in an extremely lively and imaginative manner. Here was a group of young people with vitality and with dynamic personalities who expressed themselves very forcibly in choice and telling phrases in the Sinhala language. They drew enormous crowds, though mostly

young people, to their meetings. It soon became evident—through a somewhat elaborate programme of simultaneous posting of slogans throughout the country—that they had supporters in most parts of the country and were a highly organised movement.

The government attitude to this movement was the saddest part of its record. There was vigorous denunciation of it from public platforms and a public statement by the United Front condemning it. But there was no attempt to get on terms of dialogue with it — no attempt to approach it at a human level. No doubt, it was a movement with dangerous tendencies and the government would have been justified in investigating it and even, perhaps, taking a certain firm action against it. But the tragedy lay in its having no clues to approach a vital and powerful section of the youth of the country in a human way. They just could not connect or communicate. This was a serious failure at the political level. And it still remains the basic problem of the government. It should perhaps be added that there were certain back-bench efforts to maintain a really radical tone. Also, there may have been certain behind-the-scene approaches. One government M.P. has been arrested since the revolt.

Earlier indications (that is, fairly soon after the May 1970 election) were that the J.V.P. were prepared to wait about two or three years to see whether the present government would deliver the goods. Meanwhile, they would act as a pressure group and at the same time prepare themselves vigorously for action, in case the government did not measure up to the radical changes that were necessary. It is still being hotly debated as to what precipitated the decision to revolt in April 1971*. Was it rapid disillusionment and disenchantment with the inner attitude of the government and its leaders? Was it the influence of other leftist forces — either foreign, local or within the government itself? Was it the influence of “reactionary” rightist forces, whether foreign or local, which attempted to use the J.V.P. for its own ends, that is, to overthrow a “progressive” government? Did the J.V.P. sense that the government was hot on its heels and it

* The choice of the actual day, also, is most interesting. It was timed for (in fact a little before) the traditional or indigenous Sinhala and Tamil New Year and also the Christian Easter. This choice was denounced by certain leaders of society, who interpreted it as an indication of contempt for traditional religion and culture. But leaders of society often forget the essential purpose of the various ceremonies of the New Year, and are themselves therefore guilty of unfaithfulness to traditional religion and culture. The New Year ceremonies are meant to be essentially a time of renewal. There has to be remembrance of the past-with thanksgiving and penitence-in order to go forward with new visions, new experiments and new ventures in the present and the future. It is when people forget this that they get tied down to out-of-date and lifeless forms and so become separated from the real needs of the people and corruption sets in.

was a case of now or never? Were genuine radical and idealistic elements in the J.V.P. overpowered and dominated by corrupt and power-hungry forces?

Here, we are in the midst of raging controversy. Passionate exponents of opposing views produce apparently convincing evidence in support of their positions. In such a situation, it is impossible to give an objective survey of the facts or a detached interpretation. Also, it would be unrealistic to expect any one theory to fit all the facts, nor would a purely rational explanation suffice, as confused and irrational forces also operate.

However, the sequence of events in the last few months or so is fairly clear. The expectation of a counter-revolution (of Rightist forces) and the need therefore to be prepared to meet this threat had always been part of the thinking of the J.V.P. In a great mass rally in Colombo in August 1970 they had declared publicly that they would support the government if they pursued a radical programme and had promised help to protect it in the event of counter-revolution measures. In a similar highly successful mass rally in Colombo on February 27th the following year it was now evident that they believed that the expected counter-revolution would be directed against them. Rohana Wijeweera, who is popularly believed to be their leader, declared that they would take action only if the government attempted to suppress them.

They must have started secret manufacture of hand-bombs on a large scale early in 1971 and about this time they also began to step-up their recruitment of the youth — especially the younger element, including teen-agers. There was tremendous emphasis in their whole thinking on the need for action as contrasted to endless discussion and planning.

On March 6th, there was an attack on the American Embassy in Colombo. This was almost certainly engineered by another opposing group of youth with intent to incriminate the J.V.P. A Police Officer was killed as a result of this. This alarmed the Police and thoroughly alerted them.

On March 10th, there was an accidental explosion at Esalamulla in the Dedigama area (in the interior) in which five youths were killed. The government declared a State of Emergency on March 16th and began to deploy the military. On March 20th there was a further accidental explosion of bombs on the Peradeniya University Campus. It was now obvious that the J.V.P. was arming itself on a wide scale and the hunt was really on in earnest. By the beginning of April nearly 500 had been arrested by the government since the declaration

of the Emergency. The J.V.P. obviously felt that they could not wait any further. So they struck on the 5th of April—beginning with a series of simultaneous attacks on Police Stations throughout the country.

The question of the actual extent of foreign influences is too complicated and the facts too obscure to be gone into in detail here. Soon after the outbreak of the revolt, the Ceylon Government asked all the officials at the Embassy of the Democratic Republic of North Korea to leave the country (but diplomatic relations were not severed). It is known that there has been a lively Ceylon-North Korean Friendship Society in action. It has not yet been disclosed whether anything further lay behind this. Increasingly, Ceylon will be open to diverse influences from various quarters of the globe. We are, after all, approaching—or rather groping towards a “One World”! We have for long been open to innumerable influences from the West—political, religious, cultural, and financial influences. We have survived. Now, the influences from the East are increasing. There is no reason to be alarmed about this. We will survive. We must trust the people of our country and act wisely towards others. History has shown that small nations can hold their own among larger powers. Today, Viet Nam is a conspicuous example of a poor and comparatively isolated people holding out against the most powerful nation in the world (and one which has many allies). The will of a united people for survival and liberation is an incalculable power. Also, there are various balances of power operating in the world.

So, instead of opting for any one theory that is partial to any particular side and reacting against others, what is necessary, at this time, is to understand the real nature of the conflicting forces and to work towards integration and reconciliation.

There is conflict everywhere in the world—conflict between nations, conflict within nations, and conflict within the heart of man. There is conflict between the world that is passing away and the world that is struggling to be born.

So the nature of conflict itself has to be understood. The violence used by the J.V.P. has to be understood in the context of violence in the world and violence in Ceylon. Here is the crux of the matter. So many people entrenched in various positions of power, privilege, and comfort have reacted in outraged horror at the violence of the J.V.P. But they have been too self-righteous and complacent to understand the violence that they themselves have been guilty of. They have to learn that the law and order they boast of has often been a disguise for ruthless exploitation. It is true that we have inherited certain valuable, even great, traditions of justice and liberty, which have served our society well—up to a point. For these we must be thankful. There are, certainly, things that have to be treasured and guarded. (Also, things that may have served their day and can be dispensed with). But it is precisely the best that we have inherited

that is the starting point for the judgement of our society. Understanding the need for change and revolution is part of our being true to our own best traditions. We have taken pride in the many complimentary titles that have been ascribed to Lanka—Enchanted Isle, Pearl of the Indian Ocean, the Dharma Dvīpa (the Island of the Dharma). We now have to face the fact of Violent Lanka. For we also have among us tragic oppressions which are a state of established injustice—established disorder. Violence that is subtly exercised, hidden, and not recognised as violence can be infinitely greater in effect than isolated outbreaks of violence, which are easily recognized to be violence.

The violence of the J.V.P., therefore, has to be viewed in the light of the violence that lies behind the massive institutionalized injustice of our society. Further, if the violence of the J.V.P. arose out of a concern for justice, then that violence can, in a sense, be said to have been motivated by love—even though it may not be the highest form of love, and even though it may be mixed up with less worthy motives.

If this is recognized, there is a basis for reconciliation, for integration. Ceylon stands between the Western and the Eastern power-blocs. She is non-aligned. But, as S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike pointed out very forcibly at the United Nations, non-alignment is not a negative, uncommitted policy. He said: "We are committed to the hilt." His own commitment to his ideals led to his death at the hands of an assassin. The government of which the present Head is his own wife should surely appreciate the commitment of young people who have given their lives not only in this country but in similar ventures in other parts of the world. In another earlier memorable speech on the day Ceylon gained her Independence, Bandaranaike said that Britain's granting of Independence to Ceylon did not arise out of weakness. It was an attitude that "was strong enough for peace."

So there is the task of integration. At the political level, there has to be integration of the best in the world order that is passing away with the best in the world order that is struggling to be born. (Ho Chi Minh's North Viet Nam had the courage and imagination to place a quotation from the American Declaration of Independence at the head of their Manifesto for a new and independent Viet Nam.) At the cultural level, there has to be integration between modern values and indigenous values, and at the religious level there has to be integration between the traditional world religions and the modern philosophies of Marxism and Secularism. It is because people have been so narrow, confined and confining, in their attitudes, that there have been so many explosions and outbursts. New life and energy refuses to be cribbed and confined. Thus we need to be both committed and

open if the work of integration is to go forward. It is through integration* that reconciliation and peace will come.

Now we must return again to the actual April assault of the J.V.P. On the 5th, a series of simultaneous attacks were launched on numerous police stations in various parts of the country in both town and village areas. Other points of attack were such public utilities as bridges, banks, telegraph wires, and shops. Guns all over the country both in private homes, firms, institutions, and estates were seized. The insurgents had large supplies of hand-made bombs but, on the whole, were not very heavily armed.

It was an attack that really shook the whole country. Very few had realised how wide the power of the J.V.P. had spread and how strong it was. (From the outset, it was essentially a secret movement). But they generally had not the support of the village peasant and the town-worker. Even of the youth of the country they were a minority. They got control over only a few areas. They failed to seize power.

The government security forces went into action and within the first week it was evident that they were getting the upper hand. The rebels took to the jungles in many parts of the country. Later many have surrendered or been arrested. With increasing pressure being put on them both by the security forces and certain civilian helpers the rebels have retaliated by the burning of buses, post offices, and by attacks on the civilian population too.

The exact situation at the moment (end of May) is not clear. Anything that is written now may soon be out-of-date. There are many who believe that this attempt to seize power was a trial blow—a trial of strength—that more is to follow in the future—that there are many in the movement who have still not come out into the open—that this will be a continuing struggle.

The part played by the security forces has now to be considered. Certain hard things have to be said. But it must be said that this is essentially a criticism of the system and not so much of individuals. Many individuals of the police and the armed services showed an outstanding devotion to duty and a fine, courageous spirit at a time of great personal danger. The country as a whole owes a great debt of gratitude to them. The government had no alternative but to take firm action and for this it had to rely on the security forces. Also it must be remembered that many in these security forces come from a

* Integration is to be distinguished from syncretism. In syncretism diverse elements are combined but do not harmonize. They still pull in different directions. In integration diverse elements are united in true harmony that is creative and positive in its results.

background very similar to that from which came the young men of the J.V.P. These are, to some extent, sensitive to the general revolutionary ferment. Also it is felt that there has been some infiltration of the J.V.P. into the security forces too.

But the system was such—the system of a society organised on the basis of violence—that an unspeakably tragic situation developed. The normal law of utterly disproportionate retaliation came into operation. The police, who had been directly attacked, reacted more ferociously, on the whole, than the armed forces. The innocent suffered with the guilty. In fact, all hell broke loose. This does not mean that it was everywhere the same. There were many areas in the country that were not directly touched by the conflict. There are many people who have not themselves seen any conflict as such. But there is no doubt that the spirit of hell was let loose. Many of the finest young people in the country have been mauled, mutilated, and massacred. Many village homes have been burned down. For a country with a small population (about 12 million) the numbers affected have been fairly considerable. It is impossible to give numbers but there is no doubt of the tragedy of it all.

The hunt goes on. People are still being arrested. (The shooting of arrested people has been a common feature of the whole action. This has continued well beyond the frantic early days of the revolt. Exactly what proportion of those arrested have been shot will never be known but, undoubtedly, large numbers have been shot.) Suspects are being rounded up. Many of those who had been known to have held radical views or associated with radical thinking have been questioned. More are being investigated. Petitions by and information from various people—many of them by those bent on personal revenge—are being followed up. Many who have had no connections at all with the J.V.P. have suffered. Will this go on indefinitely?

Here, a fundamental question must be posed. Are the J.V.P. essentially a comparatively insignificant minority of misguided youth who have been indoctrinated and led astray by a coterie of power-hungry politicians? If this is so, a policy of continued "mopping-up" will succeed. But this is not the case. Whatever their weaknesses may be and whatever other elements may be mixed-up with them, the J.V.P. are essentially part of a movement of history and have spontaneously sprung up from the heart of the people. Their struggle is part of the struggle for liberation throughout the world. So a policy of "mopping-up" will not only fail, it will accelerate the development of the very tendencies that are sought to be checked, though at a terrible cost. Their movement has already been strengthened by martyrdom, and every innocent person suffering at the hands of the security forces tends to turn an increasingly larger number of people against the government.

We now turn to a consideration of the action of the government in this crisis. The United Front government had come into power in the May 1970 election with an overwhelming majority. Clearly, they had no alternative but to take firm action to put down the revolt. For this, they had to turn to the security forces—that is, the armed forces and the police. Various military men were appointed as Coordinating Authorities in different areas and, to all appearances, were given a free hand to go ahead. It has already been pointed out what followed.

To what extent the government tried to mitigate the excesses of the security forces is not known. Certain private admonitions must surely have been made? But the people got the impression that no such attempt was made. Some maintain that the government gave a firm order to destroy the rebels, and a public broadcast by a prominent Minister at the height of the crisis, in which he assured the people that the rebels would be “ruthlessly stamped out” lends support to this view. Also, while several public announcements were made by the government in which the security forces were congratulated and thanked, none of these contain any admission of the severity of their methods nor any word to restrain them.

If some way had been found for certain responsible members of the government to be positively associated with the Coordinating Authorities to ensure that justice was tempered with mercy, things may have been different.

In the early days of the revolt it seemed that all the Ministers and, with some exceptions, the M.P.'s were, as far as is now known, not to be seen in their electorates. It is quite likely that they felt their lives were in danger and went into hiding. One M.P. was injured and his story, with pictures, was splashed in the newspapers. But, significantly, there were no government*martyrs!

The civilian population, on the whole, did not take an active part in the struggle as such. It has already been pointed out that the J.V.P. had not the support of most of the town workers and the village peasants. In fact, large numbers of them are strongly opposed to the J.V.P. They could not actively help the security forces as they were unarmed but they played a very important part in keeping the essential services going. A few also helped the security forces in a volunteer capacity and in certain areas vigilance committees were formed. But there was also a great deal of sympathy for the young people who were being attacked. If the government had followed a more enlightened policy in putting down the revolt, they would almost certainly have received very much more wholehearted support from the civilian population.

* The word government as used here does not include the security forces. There were, certainly, many in the security forces who gave their lives in the defence of their country. This is definitely something of which the whole nation can be proud.

The Prime Minister's broadcasts to the nation from time to time during the crisis were, on the whole, reasonable and restrained. Her call to the rebels (towards the end of April) to surrender was hailed by a local newspaper as "a high-water mark of statesmanship." This was an exaggeration. The call was addressed "to misguided youth". It was not done at all imaginatively — it was just normal political behaviour. (If it was addressed, for instance, "to our sons and daughters who have rebelled against us", that would certainly have been extra-ordinary.) Further, it was not an "amnesty", as certain quarters have called it. An amnesty is a free pardon. A pardon, as such, was not a part of the offer. The assurance that the Prime Minister gave was that those surrendering would not suffer violence. This was, of course, good common sense.

The Prime Minister made a further important announcement. Those surrendering would be rehabilitated and thus prepared to re-enter society as normal human beings. This was certainly wise and, to some extent, promises well for the future. A committee was appointed for this purpose. This Committee is now (with the help of two hundred interrogators) examining those who have surrendered and is classifying them according to the seriousness of their involvement. Plans are being worked out for their rehabilitation in various ways — re-orientation classes, practical work in agriculture, reconstruction etc. (About 12,000 young people — including several hundred young women and girls — are being examined at the moment. This figure is said to include those who have been arrested. It is believed that the number of young people actually involved in the J.V.P. is about 40,000. But this can be only a rough guess. The greater number of those who have surrendered are likely to be on the fringe of the movement.)

However, it is not yet clear that there is a sufficient spirit of dialogue in the attitude of the government. If the whole concept of "rehabilitation" is to have any chance of being applied successfully it is of the utmost importance that those responsible for the work of rehabilitation should understand the nature of the issues involved. There is a real sense in which the whole society to which we belong has been misguided. Our whole society has been involved in violence. Therefore our whole society needs rehabilitation. The guidance and care — and this may, of course, include a wise and firm reproof — that has to be exercised in a special way over the surrendered and arrested youth of the J.V.P. must be part of a radical reorientation, with serious self-examination, of our people as a whole, including, of course, the government.

As this is being written there are encouraging reports in the press that the government intends to go ahead with radical measures for land reform, changes in the educational structure, a dynamic

housing policy etc. and that these decisions are being taken jointly by the Ministers of the United Front — the S.L.F.P. the L.S.S.P. and the C.P. This shows that the Prime Minister has succeeded in continuing to hold together the three parties of the United Front and intends to press on with a radical programme. This is a remarkable achievement for there must have been a strong attempt behind the scenes from the Right to break the alliance of the Leftist parties. In fact there were persistent rumours that certain Ministers would be dropped in a Cabinet shake-up. However, the problem of translating intentions into action still remains.

There has been some very strong criticism against the government in this whole interpretation. But it is, nevertheless, the contention of this interpretation that, whatever the faults of the government, it has a clear right to rule at the present time. There is no feasible alternative at the moment. No one would seriously suggest that the U.N.P. (the Conservative party that is in the Opposition) would have done better in this crisis. It may well have done worse. The faults of this government in this crisis are essentially the faults of our Society as it is at present organised.

This interpretation is being written to help stimulate the search for a deeper understanding of the issues involved, which is urgently necessary if further tragedy is to be averted and positive action undertaken for the future.

But the final word must be one of hope for the future — invincible hope, unflinching determination, and patience! Even at the starkest moment of tragedy there has always been hope, for it is not a meaningless struggle — it is part of the struggle for the liberation of man, and that struggle will always go forward, whatever the set-backs, as long as there are people who believe in it. Every conversation, every encounter that develops this understanding can be a step forward, an opportunity for the confirmation of hope, a promise for the future.

Note on Previous Editions

"Violent Lanka" was first written in the heat of events in May 1971. A few typed copies were circulated.

A year later this was published in mimeograph form and a second edition of this was produced about six months later.

A Sinhala translation was also published in mimeograph form in 1972.

The present Bishop of Winchester, then Canon John Taylor, General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, published the verse section of it in England with the CMS News Letter No. 375 November 1973, and an abridged version of the prose section of it was published also in England by Sir John Lawrence in the Journal Frontier, Vol. 16 No. 4, Winter 1973.

A complete English edition was published in book form by Gazelle Books Co, P. O. Box. 21267, Nairobi, Kenya, in 1975.

A Thai translation of it was published by the Komol Kimtong Foundation, 1715 Rama 4th Road, Bangkok, in 1974. A Norwegian translation was published in the Journal Kirke Og Kultur No. 1, 1975, Gyldendal Norsk Forlag. Two German translations have been made. One of them has been privately circulated by a group, in mimeograph form, in 1976. The other translation, produced by the publishers Jugenddienst — Verlag, has not been published yet.

Besides this, extracts and quotations from "Violent Lanka" have been published in various books, journals, posters, etc. in Sri Lanka, India, England, and elsewhere.

Other Devasarana Publications

(A Selection)

If They Had Met (1968)

Manifesto for a New Reformation (1970)

New World Liturgy (1973)

Judgement Again At Peradeniya! (1976)

Living Dialogue (1977)

නව පෙරළියක් සඳහා ප්‍රකාශනයක් (1970)

ප්‍රවේශ්ව ලංකා (1972)

නව ලෝ වන්දනා (1973)

ආයෝග නඩුවකි පෙරාදෙණියේ (1977)

දේශපාලන පිරිකරුවන්ද? නැත්නම් අපරාධකාරයන්ද? (1977)

Comments on "Violent Lanka"

How valuable and yeast-like even small groups (unafraid and clearly envisioned) performing in present circumstances could be. "Violent Lanka" and now "Judgement Again At Peradeniya" are the work of a true poet, whose vital function in these confused and complacent times is to disturb meaning, and to reject the common-place image and hackneyed phrase. People (in the increasing majority and especially so in times of a kept press and creeping fascism) are content to go along with ready-made and current opinion, and generally received formulas. They will be outraged by the unrefined raw statements of the reality around them.

**H. A. I. Goonetilleke, Librarian, Peradeniya Campus,
University of Sri Lanka.**

Whenever people ask about '71, I find the best thing is to give them "Violent Lanka" to read. Then one can start to discuss. Often no further explanation is necessary. I have been re-reading it myself. It is really so good, its simplicity and clarity, and truly fine balance between objective description and feeling. Its language is so simple that even people whose English is not good can not only understand but also appreciate it.

**Suriya Wickremasinghe, Attorney-at-Law,
Civil Rights Movement, Sri Lanka.**

The subject of the poem is the injustice and ruthlessness—both open and hidden—in society.... It is relevant far beyond Sri Lanka..... It involves the reader personally and feelingly in an issue which is too often discussed theoretically and controversially.

The Rt. Revd. John Traylor, Bishop of Winchester, England.

Words pop out of the pages of "Violent Lanka" with immense vitality. The issues discussed pertain specifically to Sri Lanka, but they are applicable to any country in the world, and in particular to countries of the Third World. The major intention is to focus on the expropriation, injustice and violence practised by people in positions of authority in any society in the world, and to point out that there is an increasing desire of people to liberate themselves from exploitation and oppression.

Abel Ndumbu, "Target", Nairobi, Kenya.