

LANKA

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Drugs, MNCs and poor — U. Karunatilake

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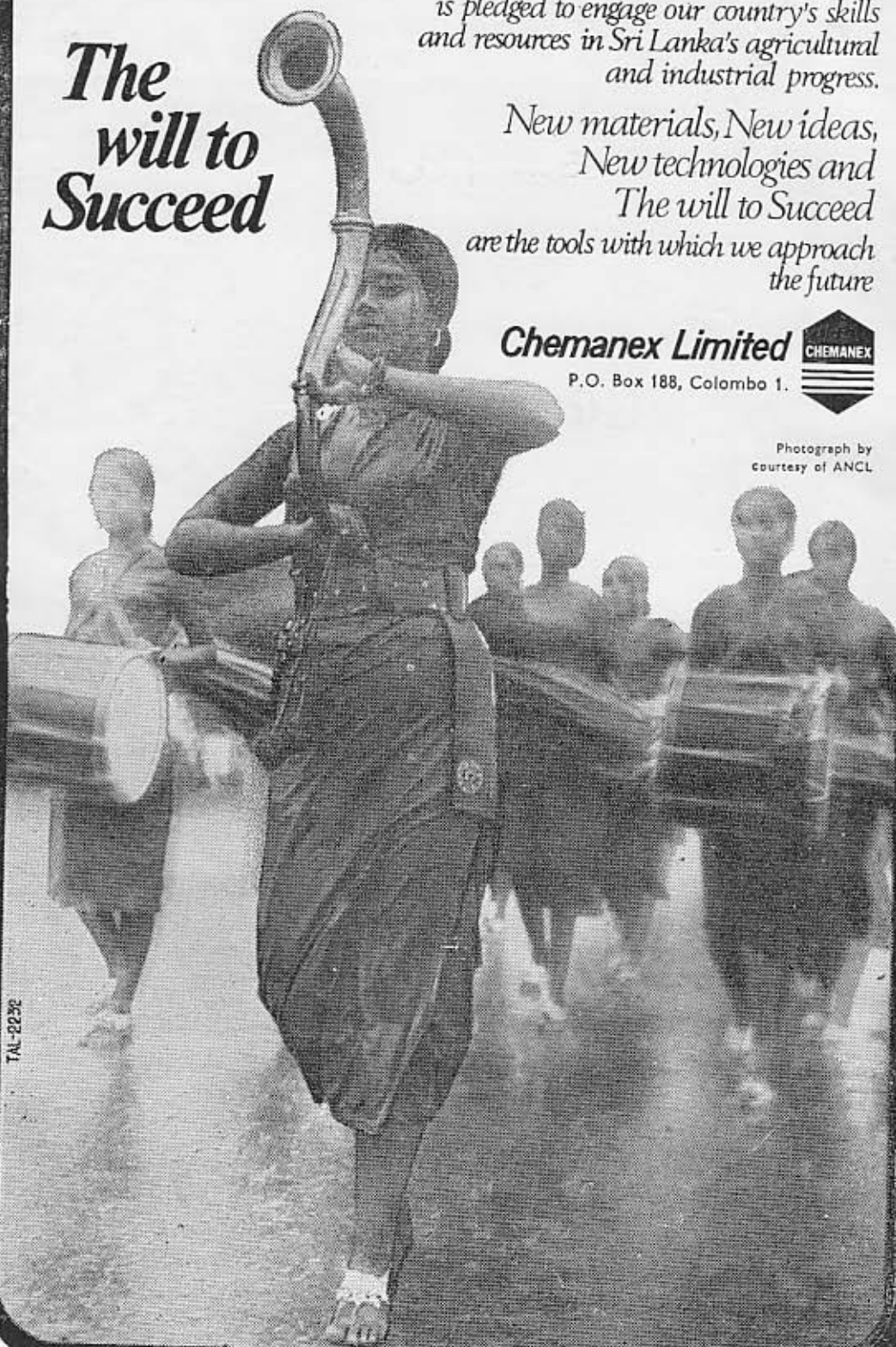
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Caste in Jaffna

I am writing this to correct certain mis-leading statements appearing on the above subject in the report on Jaffna in your issue of 15.6.79 by Gamini Dissanaiké.

He is under-playing the existence of caste in Jaffna and goes so far as to say that all temples are now open to all. This is simply not true and is a statement made without proper investigation. To cite the example of the Udupiddy M. P., who happens to be a member of the so-called depressed caste is like saying that Carter's appointment of Andy Young as Ambassador to the U. N. means that there is no Negro problem in the USA or that Rajadurai's defection to the UNP means that all Tamils support that party.

In fact, in recent times, there has been a recurrence of caste violence. There is one reason for this. The so-called depressed castes do not own land. They live in the lands owned by the so-called high castes, who obtain rent or get paid in service or in kind. With the increase in land prices, there is the temptation to evict former tenants in order to obtain better rents. These conflicts led last month to the burning down of a hut belonging to a member of the so-called depressed castes in Punnalaikadduwan. The arsonist was freed on bail.

Similar incidents took place in Kaithady last month. Clashes over land disputes climaxed on the day of the car festival in the local temple when the so-called depressed castes tried to join in pulling the chariot in which the diety was being taken round the temple. The so-called high castes promptly cancelled the festival and removed the diety and placed it inside the

temple. This led to further incidents, in the course of which several of the so-called depressed castes were rounded up and assaulted by police! But, the so-called depressed castes refused to be cowed.

It was these incidents which gave rise to the Black Belt movement. This was nothing but an attempt by the TULF leadership and certain other organisations to deflect the anti-caste movement. They want to condemn violence in general —

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(Passed by CA)

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He came to Jaffna

Not since Charles de Gaulle made that famous statement on Quebec separatism has there been anything like that utterance reported in the local press until the Indian High Commissioner went to Jaffna. Of course Mr. Abraham was on the side of the fence, so to say. He reiterated the Indian stand on Eelam explicitly declared earlier this year by Prime Minister Moraji Desai.

Of course de Gaulle's statement was described by some people as an historic gaffe. However it took courage. So did Mr. Abraham's public pronouncement in the heart of Jaffna. "Foolhardy" was the contrary view. After a heated exchange with some Tamil youth on the question of India and Bangladesh (East Pakistan, then) the police thought it safe to give the Indian diplomat a heavy protective escort. Some TULF politicians were highly critical of the Abraham visit. At the US Independence Day reception one politician was heard to say: "If the Massachusetts resolution supporting Eelam is interference in internal affairs, is the Indian statement criticising separatism non-interference?"

The Lord's goods

The affair of those curious crates from Singapore which threatened to build up to cyclonic proportions as a political scandal seems to have been discreetly closed. It is widely believed in SLFP circles that what really blew the lid off was a phone call to the Customs from an Opposition VIP. Who actually paid for those goods? Some good Singaporean Samaritans? With a truly Christian zeal but not without a satanic smile, a SLFP'er commented: "It is just and proper that the Lord's goods should be distributed among his poor children by the Social Services Department."

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Letters . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

not caste violence, in particular. They also want to condemn the revolutionary counter-violence of the so-called depressed castes. The Satyagraha they called for on the 17th, of last month was a miserable flop. Despite vastly exaggerated accounts in certain sections of the daily press, only 72 people participated. They did not get the support of the so-called high castes nor the confidence of the so-called depressed castes.

Now, TULF leader Cathirvelupillai has come forward with another stunt. He wants to practice the barbers' profession. Gandhi once cleaned latrines in an attempt to abolish caste in India. But it did not succeed. Caste is certainly the Achilles' heel of the TULF. Men who claim on platforms equality with the Sinhalese are unwilling to grant the same equality to Tamils among their midst who speak their tongue but, by an accident, happen to belong to another caste.

Colombo 3. **N. Sanmugathasan**
(Passed by CA)

Anti - Arab ?

We are supposed to be great friends of the Arabs. We send ministers to request petrol supplies urgently. We ask for loans, aid, investment, and for higher salaries to thousands of Sri Lankan minor employees. But when OPEC raises the oil price, the price of their only valuable national resource which you correctly stress is "non-renewable" then all our "national" newspapers start a barrage on the oil-rich Arabs. I write to congratulate you for your honest and well-informed articles on the facts behind the oil price increase. Brain-washing was a term popular during the Cold War-Korean War. The

Reds are supposed to have brain-washed their prisoners. It looks as if the so-called educated Sri Lankans who write to our local papers have been brain-washed by the western propaganda machine.

Gampola. **A. L. M. Marikkar**

No such incident

Whilst reading your 15th of June 1979 issue I came across a totally incorrect statement in the article, "A deceptive lull? by Gamini Dissanaiké.

He states:- "Things also heated up at a Tamil Congress meeting when a speaker made a personal attack on Mrs. Amirthalingam. And when a youth from the audience climbed the stage and requested the speaker to guard himself against uttering such personal insults the speaker quickly retorted by calling the youth a 'terrorist' and asking the police to watch him!"

As one who was present on the stage at every Tamil Congress meeting, might I say that no such thing occurred at any of our meetings, anywhere.

No speaker wasted his time by making personal attacks on Mrs. Amirthalingam at any meetings. No youth from the audience has ever dared to climb our stage without being invited to do so. Nobody has been given the opportunity to request any of our speakers to guard himself against uttering personal insults about any person. None of our speakers or supporters has been foolhardy enough to term anybody a 'terrorist' and then show utter cowardice by asking the police to watch him.

All speeches were taped by the police during the last local bodies elections. If such a thing occurred, I challenge Dissanaiké to prove it by asking the police, who were present at all our meetings.

G. G. Ponnambalam Jr.
Colombo 7. (Gen. Sec., ACTC)

Whose voice ?

I do appreciate the point you made in your issue of July 1st. It was absurd, if not shameless, of the

Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation's producers to broadcast the commentaries on UNCTAD by the Voice of America, the official mouthpiece of the leader of the First World, not the Third World. But you actually missed or ignored the juiciest part of this ludicrous performance. One VOA commentary that I heard spoke of the "so-called Common Fund." What would our most distinguished economist, Dr. Gamani Corea, the so-called Secretary-General of the so-called UNCTAD say of the so-called Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation?

H. S. A. Gunawardena
Colombo 6.

Trends . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

The unanswered question, added an Opposition frontrunner, is whatever happened to those holier-than-thou codes of conduct for important people?

The K. L. Connection

Not a day passes without some kindly allusion in the press to Singapore as the 'model' nation. Now it's Malaysia's turn. On his return from a trip to Singapore and K. L., the I. G. P. Mr. Ana Seneviratne has made the interesting observation that the special training abroad our security forces had in the past was perhaps the wrong type. Courses were generally held in UK, US, Yugoslavia etc. Army officers have also gone for guerrilla training and jungle war to India and Pakistan. But the new IGP finds Malaysian terrain the most relevant for our purposes. The Malaysian security forces have unsuccessfully fought the Ching Peng (Pro-Peking) guerrillas in the thick jungles on the Malaysian-Thai border for many, many years. Even joint Malaysian-Thai military operations have failed to "clear" the jungle of the guerrilla force.

CP and Left trends

With understandable relish, the **DINAKARA**, (the SLFP's answer to **ATHTHA**) scooped the story of the CP's decision to hold an extraordinary three-day session of its Central Committee, starting on the 13th.

Any report on "final decisions" would be premature. But the discussion itself is critically important — for the C. P., for the ULF and therefore for the LSSP, and for other 'new' Left parties, including the largest and most active of them all, the JVP, and the (new) LSSP, the Vasu-Vikramabahu group. It is bound to have a ripple effect throughout the Left movement now badly fragmented. It could even influence at some future date, may be distant but foreseeable, any relationship (front, pact, electoral alliance or understanding) between the Left and the SLFP.

In fact, these criss-crossing influences are already evident. The LSSP CC has been studying documents analysing the present political situation and the discussion has inevitably led to a critical assessment of the party's role today, its tactics, possibilities for re-organisation, the ULF relationship etc. There was an informal move to have the old triumvirate (NM, Colvin, Leslie) made 'patrons' and two younger men moved in as Chairman and General Secretary. (The fancied candidates were Anil Moonesingha, the last of the British Labour leftwing 'Trotskyists', and Athauda Seneviratne). The move failed.

Middle-level LSSP'ers have also held informal chats with leading figures in the 'Vasu' party in an effort to patch up differences. Some young CP'ers have had discussions with prominent JVP'ers. With the CP Youth Congress scheduled to meet next month, the pressure from the CP youth and student wings is an important factor in CP decision-making today.

The extraordinary CC session is a direct follow-up of the party Congress which ordered the CC to act on the recommendations made in the main resolutions, and the Gen. Sec's report. The fact that it has taken the CC more than a year to convene for this particular task is an indication that the pressure has built up slowly but steadily.

Readers of the **L. G.** may have followed in several of our issues (May 1, May 15, June 1, and "Local polls and the Left", June 15) how some of these issues emerged. But one has to go back a little further into Left history to understand what's happening now. The CP split in 1972 over the CJC Law. (This fact will be crucial when it comes to talking to the 'new' Left). Three MP's quit but they came back. So these 'radicals' or 'hardliners' or whatever were inside the party. Not so with the LSSP.

The LSSP "radicals" quit the party to fight from outside its fold. The CP trio returned to the fold and so the "two-lines" so to any, were contained. After the ULF's decimation at the polls, soul-searching or self-criticism, was inevitable. Both parties went through the exercise, examining most of all how the tactics of coalition with the SLFP had worked. "Unity and struggle" was the common Marxist position, the shared perspective of both. But how much 'unity' and how much "struggle"? Did both suffer needless losses by allowing the interests of coalition unity to supercede the interests of independent struggle and separate identity?

Both Congresses produced 'reports' which revealed many common points but the CP analysis seemed to the more self-critical and searching, probably because it was the junior partner and its "hardliners", notably S. A. Wicks

and Sarath Muttetuwegama were inside the party at the top. But the CP's final report was itself a watered down version of a document prepared by the radicals. General Secretary Keuneman's literary dexterity was put to good use in "containing" differences. However, the composition of the C. C. reflected the true balance of forces, with the young radicals well placed.

"Whatever the decisions" a high-ranking CP'er told the LG "the LSSP will remain our closest ally. But we will not allow that alliance to curb our own independence and our right to have other agreements or understandings with other leftist groups on specific issues or on given occasions".

A sign of the Times?

While the SLFP is locked in an increasingly bitter internal strife, political observers turned their attention for a moment to the ruling party and thought they spotted in the resignation letter of Mr. Sirisoma Ranasinghe, the **TIMES** boss, the first sign of a crack in the unity of the United National Party. "Of course the Sirisoma affair is hardly as important as the Sirima squabble but it is interesting" said an LSSP CC member.

On the day that the **FOCUS** hit the streets with its colourful cover story "All the President's Men", one of the personalities identified with the Praetorian Guard, Mr. Sirisoma Ranasinghe was marching out of the **TIMES**, a job he had been given when Advocate E. Paul Perera, another of the President's men (not featured in **FOCUS**) moved over as Mr. Upali Wijewardena's No. 2 at the FTZ.

Did Sirisoma quit to devote more time to his business? In

(Continued on Page 9)

Salaam and salami : JR's grand strategy

In a few weeks time the NSA will take up a Bill to ban separatism. The press says that this "tough, new law" will also enable the government to proscribe parties advocating separatism and to fight threats variously described as 'terrorism' and 'subversion'. The Parliamentary Privileges Act may also be amended. Evidently there are second thoughts on the need to preserve 'the sovereignty of parliament'.

The shape of JR's grand strategy is now clearer. His government started off with an oppressive burden it never bargained for — race riots after the post-election violence.

Since then however JR has been saying "salaam" to the Tamil people (especially in the south) while, the good general he is, following "salami tactics". He has been cutting off the political support base of the Tamils, slice by slice. First Mr. Canagaratnam from the EP; next Mr. Thondaman from the CWC, and finally, the best catch of all, Mr. Rajadurai the most senior TULF MP from the east. He has tried to "isolate" the TULF and geographically "confine" it to the north, so that he can say to the country and to the world outside that the TULF demand for Eelam has only support, if at all, in the peninsula.

Now he readies himself for the final offensive. But first the heavy propaganda barrage of the past few weeks.



President Jayewardene

Several serious questions arise from the present situation. Tough laws can help law enforcement agencies fighting 'terrorism' but (an important but) laws and enforcement alone cannot eradicate the danger IF the 'terrorism' has deep socio-political roots. That's the plainest lesson of so many situations in contemporary world politics.

Secondly, law alone cannot possibly "solve" a political problem i.e. the felt grievances of an embittered people.

Thirdly, there is the inherent danger in tough laws that can be used indiscriminately i.e. for purpose for which they were not avowedly intended. The threat is to that "climate of freedom and democracy" which the UNP made such a major election issue.

Associated with that is the UNP's "climate of confidence" i.e. the climate that can bring in large-scale foreign capital, the investor's climate.

The recent propaganda barrage has a special danger of its own. In an editorial "The Catholic Messenger" referred to the "communal tensions that are building up again" and "of the provocative statements and portage in the national press".

Quoting Voltaire ("I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it") the **Civil Rights Movement** issued this statement.

"In a democracy, persons are free to put forward their proposals for solutions to the problems that face society. Others, are free to oppose those proposals, and to campaign for alternative solutions.

"One person might feel, for instance, that our economic prosperity and territorial security can be assured only by a powerful neighbour, and therefore urge union with India. Another might say we were really better off under the British, and launch a campaign to persuade the government to invite our colonial rulers back. Yet another will say that our problems can be solved only if the Tamils are accorded a separate state. Another will roundly condemn all these suggestions and say that the only solution to our ills is a world government.

"The very essence of democracy is freedom to express and try to persuade others to agree to one's proposals, coupled with equal freedom to criticise - to ridicule even - and to counter them."

(Passed by CA)

This issue has been slightly delayed as some of the articles had to be submitted to the Competent Authority.

Havana : backstage moves

by Mervyn de Silva

After official visits to Pyongyang and Peking Foreign Minister Hameed will have talks with Vietnamese officials later in Colombo. In all of them the Kampuchean issue must feature prominently. Although China is not a non-aligned member Peking has a direct stake in the question. According to correspondents visiting China recently, Peking is gradually coming to terms with the political reality in Kampuchea, though publicly maintaining a pro-Pol Pot stance. Even Prince Sihanouk has been making rude remarks about Pol Pot at private banquets and exclusive interviews.

Despatches from Peking suggest also that Deng Xiaoping who took the leading role in the invasion of Vietnam has rapidly lost ground within the party to Chairman Hua Guofeng whom he had overshadowed sometime ago.

In any case the word "Democratic" was dropped in the Colombo communique in its reference to Kampuchea, a sure sign that the Bureau was paving the way for a clear decision at Havana. In spite of a bout of boorishness by Egypt and some heckling-cum-filibustering by a few Francophone countries who did not understand the proper procedures of a Bureau meeting (or were out to cause some confusion) the Colombo meeting was an achievement for the government and a personal success for Mr. Hameed.

JR's gesture

President Jayewardene's decision to go to Havana, anyway, made it already clear that he was not ready to make even a 'symbolic' gesture which the West and China could gleefully interpret as a slap in the Cuban face. So it stands to reason that Sri Lanka, whatever the last-minute pressures, will not join a dwindling minority in open or tacit support of a Pol Pot or Idi Amin.

Meanwhile one of Castro's top aides Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, has been visiting Belgrade, Delhi and other capitals, including Colombo. A member of the Yugoslav Presidency has also been on a trip to Malaysia and the region. The focal point of all this hectic diplomatic activity is of course the Havana summit.

While Sri Lanka is the current chairman and Cuba will be its successor, Yugoslavia, like India, is an 'elder statesman'. Yugoslavia's role, both public and backstage, continues to be of absorbing interest to diplomats, analysts and commentators.

Yugoslavia

"Yugoslavia is nervous about losing its Chair" remarked a delegate from one of the newly liberated African states who attended the Colombo meeting. He was using the word 'Chair' in the narrow academic sense of 'professorship'. Yugoslavia has indeed become a donnish theorist of non-alignment often inclined to 'lecture' the juniors and new entrants on the principles and procedures of the movement. Though this professorial tone and somewhat proprietorial attitude to the movement have irritated some African and Latin American members, it is not a simple question of an awkwardness in diplomatic manners. There are serious historical reasons for it.

Its strategic location (central Europe) and its historic conflict with Stalin shaped the foreign policy of independent, Marxist Yugoslavia. To strengthen this policy with international support, Yugoslavia shrewdly identified itself with the emerging Afro-Asianism (a third force) which soon matured into non-alignment. By sponsoring the first summit and by its tireless and substantial contributions to the success of the

movement, Yugoslavia was able to gain a pre-eminent position in the group.

This did not however remove a basic anachronism. Asia, Africa and Latin America were the geographic contours of the group, Yugoslavia was European. Besides this tricontinentalism (a physical fact), there were common historical and economic factors which strongly conditioned the political-psychological outlook of the vast majority of the non-aligned. It is the common experience of colonialism. Nearly all these countries have been the victims of imperial conquest and plunder. **Political independence has been attained. Yet their national economies have been structured in such a way that they remain economically dependent on a West-dominated world system.** Hence the cry for a N.I.E.O. which is both a protest and battle against an iniquitous world system, managed and manipulated by the U.S. and its allies, western Europe (the old colonial masters of the poor nations) and Japan.

Thus when economic issues dominate any international forum (UNCTAD, for instance) the under-developed countries or Third World in which the non-aligned form a large group, the agitational attack is always aimed at the West. Criticism of the USSR and socialist countries is either marginal or on very specific issues. On fundamentals, on the basic question of structural change in the world economic order, the Third World and the non-aligned find themselves pitted against the West for the elementary reason that structural change means changing the system created by, protected and perpetuated by the West. In short, whatever the bilateral or group differences and disputes between the poor nations and the

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Non-alignment (2)

The bases of US policy

by A. W. Singham

One of the dangers of a fundamentalist approach to world politics is that it tends to divide the world into simple minded categories. The world is often divided between cowboys (good-guys) and Indians (bad-guys) and this has disastrous consequences for world politics. This type of fundamentalism has led the U. S. to misunderstand the politics of the non-aligned movement.

The present antagonism of the U. S. towards the non-aligned movement is nothing new. Indeed, every American administration since World War II has been openly hostile to the emerging role of the non-aligned movement in world politics.

This movement emerged originally as a direct result of the Cold War and the dismantling of the European Empires in Asia and Africa. The newly independent nations of Asia and Africa met for the first time in Bandung in 1954. The movement as it is known to us today, however, did not become a more formalized organisation until its first Summit meeting in Belgrade in 1961. It held its 5th Summit in Colombo in 1976 and is now preparing for the 6th Summit in Havana this September.

In essence, the non-aligned nations represent a broad social movement which comes together from time to time to discuss and take action on a number of global issues.

From its very inception, the movement has stood out as the spokesman for international peace; the very phrase of 'non-aligned'.

The movement has never striven to attain an ideological 'purity' or conformity: with a sophistication unequalled in almost all other international movements, the nations of the non-aligned have realized the absolute necessity of co-existence between the forces of capitalism and socialism. The major criteria for membership

was, and still remains, that a nation should not be a member of the existing world military pacts. This criteria for membership was introduced at a time when the nations of the world were gradually being coerced into becoming members of broader military alliance systems such as NATO, CENTO, and SEATO. However, as the Cold War began to abate, the nations of the non-aligned movement began to turn their attention to global economic issues primarily because they tended to be poor nations themselves. Indeed, the Western press has often depicted the Summit meetings of these nations as being the meeting of the beggars of the world.

The Truman administration laid the foundations of U.S. foreign policy towards the new nations of Africa and Asia. This policy has not changed over the years in any substantive way in that the major goal of the United States still appears to be one of saving the so-called non-aligned world from communism. The policy of anti-communism was continued by the Eisenhower-Dulles administration, the Kennedy-Rusk-Johnson administration, the Nixon-Kissinger administration, and now seems to have become the dominant theme of the Carter-Brezinski administration.

Interestingly enough, every American administration has singled out for attack the leaders of the non-aligned nations not necessarily because these nations were communist, but rather because they made moral claims at being either outside of or above the conflict between capitalism and communism. President Carter in an interview with Hispanic reporters, and then later in his speech at Annapolis, seriously questioned the right of certain countries, i.e. Cuba, to claim to be non-aligned. However, the attack on the non-aligned status of certain nations by various U.S. administrations is nothing new.

John Foster Dulles made it quite clear that as far as he was concerned those nations who remained non-aligned in a moral war against the atheistic communism of the East were indeed acting in an immoral way in world politics. In the early '50's Nehru, and particularly India, was the subject of a massive attack by the Dulles-Eisenhower administration. The new analysis of the day seriously questioned India's non-aligned status. Dulles was particularly incensed at Nehru's attitude towards Communist China. For it was Nehru who engineered China's entrance into the family of nations by inviting Chou-en Lai to the Bandung Conference, and it was at Bandung that the blockade against China was broken. American policy makers were never able to forgive those Afro-Asian countries for their attitude towards China. Especially under suspicion at that time was India's spokesman at the U.N., Krishna Menon, who many saw as nothing but a Soviet puppet. Every leader of the non-aligned movement has, at one stage or another, been accused by various American administrations for being either pro-communist or pro-Soviet. Nasser of Egypt, Sukharno of Indonesia, Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka, Nkrumah of Ghana, and now Castro of Cuba, have all in turn been accused of being betrayers of the concept of non-alignment.

(NEXT: US, Cuba)

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The 'Political Bhikkhu' Movement

'Yellow - robed comrades' or pararthacharya?

by Kumari Jayawardena

During the years 1946-7 - a period of post-war economic dislocation, radical political upsurge and massive labour unrest in Sri Lanka - a movement of political protest arose among younger bhikkhus led by the monks of one of the foremost centres of Buddhist learning - the Vidyalankara Pirivena. The background to this movement was the dissatisfaction with the policies of leaders like D. S. Senanayake and the influence of the Marxist parties on the younger monks. Moreover, events abroad, including the Indian national movement, revolutionary and liberation struggles in China, Indochina, Indonesia and Malaysia, influenced the climate of opinion in Sri Lanka at that time.

In January 1946, two politicians came out openly against the involvement of bhikkhus in politics; D. S. Senanayake publicly expressed his disapproval of politicised bhikkhus and criticised the monks who listened to the debates in the State Council, and R. G. Senanayake declared that bhikkhus should not be involved in politics or electoral campaigns. The reply to these criticisms was the famous Vidyalankara Declaration entitled 'Bhikkhus and Politics', issued on behalf of the Vidyalankara monks by the principal of the pirivena, **Kiriwathuduwe Pannasara** in February 1946. Claiming that the sangha in Sri Lanka had always been concerned with the "welfare of the nation", and that it was the British, who deliberately tried to separate religion "from the nation", the

declaration criticised the political leaders who, were alleged to be continuing the British strategy of dividing the sangha from the people:

"We believe that politics today embraces all fields of human activity directed towards the public weal..it is nothing but fitting for bhikkhus to identify themselves with activities conducive to the welfare of our people - whether these be labelled politics or not..we believe that it is incumbent on the bhikkhus not only to further the efforts directed towards the welfare of the country, but also **oppose such measures as are detrimental to the common good.**"

The declaration thus categorically asserted the bhikkhus' right to intervene in social and political matters, and also emphasized their right to assume an oppositional role where necessary. In February 1946, a large meeting of bhikkhus from all over the island, presided over by **Polonaruwe Wimaladharm** discussed these issues; a resolution was passed stating that the laity had no right to interfere in matters pertaining to the sangha or to decide on the question of monks' participation in politics. Questions of social class and hierarchical cleavages in the sangha were also raised. For example, **Kalallele Ananda Sagara** claimed that the majority of monks were the sons of farmers and workers and that the alliance of bhikkhus with the working people had alarmed the capitalist class, while **Walpola Rahula** denounced



Walpola Rahula Thera

the higher echelons of the sangha whom he claimed, were in alliance with politicians such as D. S. Senanayake, who represented the interests of the capitalists.

The 'political bhikkhus' issue became one of the most debated controversies of the post-war years. Meetings were held all over the country and the issue was discussed in the State Council. According to Wiswa Warnapala, the politicians in the State Council, many chief monks and various associations such as the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress condemned the political bhikkhus who were referred to in a derogatory way as 'yellow-robed comrades'. On the other hand these bhikkhus received support from Left parties, progressive lay Buddhists and the younger monks.

In May 1946, the radical bhikkhus became an organised force; they formed the Lanka Eksath Bhikkhu Mandalaya with **Yakkaduwe Pragerama** as its Secretary and started

a paper called *Kalaya*, which was edited by **Kotahena Pannakitti**. The whole issue of the role of bhikkhus became the topic of many polemical writings. These included 'Bhiksuwage Urumaya' (The Heritage of a Bhikkhu) written by **Walpola Rahula** (which sold out in a few weeks) and 'Sangha Ratna' by a lay supporter, Dr. A. P. de Zoysa, who frequently presided at meetings organised by the political monks. The importance of Rahula's book lay in the emphasis he placed on the social content of Buddhism, arguing that it was based on the concept of **parathacharya**, (altruistic service to society) and was only ultimately a matter of escape from *samsara*. He described the intervention of the Buddha himself in the political affairs of his time and the manner in which the sangha had evolved in response to changing social and economic conditions. He argued that the sangha had been an integral part of the ancient polity and showed how this tradition had continued in the struggles of the people during Portuguese, Dutch and British rule.

Rahula contended that, continuing in this tradition, the bhikkhu had a duty to concern himself in the daily life of the people and claimed that this meant a deep involvement in their political affairs. It is also interesting to note, as a sign of the times, that Rahula's book while using Buddhist history and the Pali texts to justify bhikkhus participating in politics, also had citations from Laski, G. D. H. Cole, Shaw and other socialist writers, defining politics as an essential part of human life. Expressing the younger monks' dissatisfaction with traditional *pirivena* education, Rahula described the new generation of bhikkhus as follows.

"There are enthusiastic monks with a good knowledge of past history and concern for current problems, who at a time when the country and religion are in decline are not content to devote their lives merely to obtaining alms, reciting *pirith*, administering last rites and spending their time idling in the temples. On the contrary a large number of bhikkhus are keen on asserting their traditional role of working

for the freedom of the country and religion...and are eager to go forth and serve the masses."

Bhikkhus in Action

The bhikkhu's movement strongly advocated full independence for Sri Lanka and criticised D. S. Senanayake's acceptance of dominion status under the Soulbury proposals in 1946; it gave vigorous support to the Free Education scheme, and during the general strike of 1946, many bhikkhus came out on the side of the strikers; for example, the Daily News estimated that there were about 200 'political bhikkhus' at a mass meeting of over 15,000 people at Galle Face on October 1946 to support the strikers, where "monks conducted the proceedings of the day and some of them, including bhikkhu Rahula vehemently criticised the Board of Ministers." In the 1947 general strike too, bhikkhus supported the Left parties and openly associated with the strikers. Bhikkhu Rahula when accused of inciting bus workers to leave work during this strike replied that he supported the strikers as their demands were just, "They begged for the minimum necessities of life, and therefore I had to help them achieve their demands..My action was intended to render such assistance to the suffering people as the occasion demanded, according to my conscience and my religion."

At the general election of September 1947, the major parties including the U. N. P. had bhikkhus as speakers and supporters, the Left parties being helped by the radical bhikkhus who included **Walpola Rahula, Nattaniye Pannakara, Kalalle Ananda Sagara, Kotahena Pannakitti, and Naravila Dharmmaratne**. These bhikkhus campaigned all over the country and were very much in demand as speakers at meetings. Several bhikkhus - most notably Walpola Rahula and Ananda Sagara, worked against D. S. Senanayake at Mirigama, appearing on platforms for Edmund Samarakkody of the L. S. S. P. All the active bhikkhus, who also included **Bambarende Siri Sivali, Daramitipola Ratanasara, Talpawila Seela-**

wansa, Boose Amarawansa and Batapola Anomadassi, were clearly causing a scandal by challenging the local bourgeoisie for its lack of militancy vis-a-vis the British, for their denunciations of capitalism, and most of all, for their active support to Left parties and trade unions.

However this important phase in the history of Buddhist radicalism underwent a change. Some of the bhikkhus became demoralised by the vehemence of the attacks, including physical violence, that were organised against them, and others were caught up in the 'language and religion' fervour of the early fifties. The political bhikkhu movement became one of the components of the Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna which mobilised thousands of bhikkhus to work for the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) which under the leadership of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, achieved a landslide victory at the elections of 1956.

The Sinhala-Buddhist movement of 1956 which had a progressive content, in that it was a movement of the underprivileged against the English-speaking bourgeoisie, was again to show its communal side; the Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna became a forceful group which participated in pressurising the government to pass an Act making Sinhala the only official language; it was also among the groups that forced the government to abrogate the Bandaranaike - Chelvanayagam Pact in 1958, thereby preventing the possibility of a political accommodation with the Tamils. It went to the extent of resorting in May 1958, (as Urmila Phadnis has pointed out) to the openly provocative act of declaring a 'boycott week,' during which the Sinhalese were urged to refrain from any transactions with Tamils, an event which can be seen as a precursor of the communal riots of 1958.

Conclusion

This series of articles on bhikkhus and politics has shown that during the colonial and immediate post-colonial periods, Buddhism while remaining the religion of the majority of the people, had lost its position of privilege and there-

fore inevitably took on a dissident role. Although the top hierarchies of the sangha remained conservative supporters of established power, significant sections of the sangha were involved in peasant protests, nationalist and cultural revivalist movements and working-class struggles. It should also be noted that Christianity was associated with the imperial power and that it retained its position of influence well into the post-colonial period.

Today the situation is reversed; Buddhism has been given the foremost place in the constitution and it has become the 'established' religion. Not only is it an inevitable part of state ceremonial and ritual, but the leading bhikkhus have also become the beneficiaries of state patronage. It would appear that the sangha has to some extent lost its dissident role; certain bhikkhus are leading campaigns that are basically communal and chauvinist, while others are involved in cults of a fundamentalist type which are mesmerising large crowds of devotees. Against this, it is interesting to contrast the growth of radical dissent in the Christian Church which no longer enjoys its earlier position of privilege. But nevertheless the radical tradition in Buddhism has not been entirely submerged and there are still numerous militant bhikkhus who are active in all progressive movements and who are conscious of the social and political realities of the day.

What emerges from a survey of Buddhist monks in protest is that these instances were not merely the individual aberrations of a few isolated bhikkhus; on the contrary they reflected both the influence which important popular movements had on the sangha, and in turn, the influence that monks were able to exert during popular upsurges. Such a two-way process will continue - for as long as the masses remain devout, one cannot ignore the influence on the people of religion and religious leaders, and as long as bhikkhus remain in close touch with the people, it is only to be expected that monks will be drawn into popular movements for political and social change.

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Havana . . .

(Continued from Page 5)

socialist bloc, the main conflict of interest is between the Third World and the West. Since economics is generally the most potent imperative, mass frustrations in conditions of poverty and popular aspirations for a better life compel even those Third World regimes and rulers who may be "pro-west" into joining this global struggle even if it is at the level of ritual protest and rhetoric. This is so patently obvious to any student of the ongoing debates in all international forums that it may be taken as commonplace of contemporary politics.

And this is what puts a special strain on Yugoslavia's particular practice of non-alignment. Yugoslavia's "anti-bloc theory" may have seemed an unexceptionable rationalisation of the foreign policy interests of the 'new' nations growing up in the Manichean world of the Cold War. But as the world economic crisis of the 70's sharpened, the conflict between the poor nations and the West intensified. Furthermore, some of the new members in the group of non-aligned are successful liberation movements, the byproduct themselves of this sharpening struggle.

In the 60's, the US could be insolent about non-alignment and the Western media patronising. It is another matter today. (Arnaud

de Borchgrave's fierce exchange with Gaddafi in **NEWSWEEK** is most revealing).

(To be continued)

A sign . . .

(Continued from Page 3)

collaboration with the big French firm of Creusot Loire, Sirisoma runs a glass factory, the FTZ's single biggest joint venture. (Chairman of the firm is Mr. H. W. Jayewardene QC).

The question became a bit of a riddle when reports, perhaps journalistically embroidered, presented a different picture. Journalistic talk had it that a news item headlined "REMOVED" was to appear in the next morning's paper. "Removed" by whom? The Government? The President? Anyway, the item was spiked. The theory of a "leak" is widely accepted. The result had a touch of farce. It was not the C. A. who was "removed" but a top executive who was physically removed from the building ("frogmarched" thought some newspapermen) and deposited on the street below! Was he the author of the unpublished item?

Next came Sirisoma's letter of resignation to the UNP Working Committee. It did not accept the resignation and there are efforts to have the matter resolved before the Committee meets in the first week of August.

Sirisoma is a long-standing JR loyalist. When Sirima Power was at its height and the UNP was under seige, he stood firmly with the party. He stood with the Leader in the fierce inner-party battles of 71-73 and helped in launching the UNP's propaganda blitzkrieg in 1976-77.

What is surprising about the resignation threat is that recently Sirisoma strengthened his position with the Party leadership when his daughter married the Prime Minister's brother-in-law, now our man in Stockholm.

Sociology of admission formulae

by Sunil Bastian

The higher educational scene in Sri Lanka of the seventies had been studded with a number of schemes and formulae for the admission of students to the University. The Bandaranaike Government heeded the allegation that there was too great a proportion of Tamil stream students who had qualified for the science faculties—(specially to medicine and engineering) and arbitrarily set up a scheme of marks where the minimum entry requirements for a Tamil medium student was higher than for a Sinhala medium student. Since 1970 the Sri Lankan education system has had a quick succession of admission schemes. 'standardisation' in 1970 followed by a "district quota" system, then a combination of standardisation and district quotas; and now a new formula based on a number of criteria.

When Sri Lanka chose "the mother tongue" as the medium of instruction in higher education in the late sixties, some anticipated that a new aspect of the communal problem would come up. Very soon allegations were heard about overmarking, prior leaking of the question papers, etc. As usual most of the allegations were against the 'minority' community; a 'fact' that is difficult to explain unless we accept certain communal prejudices, claiming inbornness of some characteristics in some communities. The government of the seventies reacted to these allegations and demands arising out of them by introducing various schemes of admission, the overall result of which was to reduce the number of Tamil students in the University — "Ethnically, there is little doubt that the major blow fell on the Sri Lanka Tamils. The Tamil share of the Engineering admissions for instance fell from 24.4% in 1973 (standardisation only) to 16.3% in 1974

and is likely to fall to 13.2% in 1975 if the district quota system is applied without modification. The parallel figures for medicine would be 36.9% in 1973 25.9% in 1974 and 20% (estimate) in 1975. This estimate seems confirmed by a medium wise analysis of new admissions to the medical and dental faculties in 1975".)

(C. R. de Silva-Weightage in *University Admissions: Standardisation and District Quotas in Sri Lanka 1970-1975, Modern Ceylon Studies*).

- * If a 100 enter Grade 1, only 60 remain at Grade 5, 50 by Grade 8 and just 2 students go up to 'A' level. The drop-out figures among the underprivileged are very high in Sri Lanka.
- * Children of middle and upper-middle classes dominate the 'elite' faculties at Universities.
- * Only 39.2% of new entrants in 1976 were children of parents of the poorest layers of the employed who constitute 82.4% of the total employed.

The question of standardisation figured prominently in the formation of the T.U.L.F. It had become a key point of agitation among certain Sinhala groups, and also a question given very much prominence in the popular media, specially the national language press. The present government abolished the scheme that was called standardisation as one of its first acts after assuming power. But a new scheme which will be effective only for 1979 admissions had been introduced. There are indications of other new schemes in the near future.

According to the new formula 30% of the entrants will be on an all island merit basis, 55% on the basis of the populations in the districts and 15% will be for the underprivileged districts. As it was with the previous schemes, the legitimisation had come through slogans like, "giving a place to

the poor", "opening the doors of higher education to the underprivileged of our society", etc.. There had been protests and opposition to this new method of selection on a number of grounds. The criteria for determining an underprivileged area, and the fact that the number of students seeking admission from a particular district is not always proportional to the population of the district have been some of the issues under discussion. This means as

in the previous years the discussions had been primarily around the percentages and methods of selecting these percentages. Little attention had been given to the other aspects of this problem. For example, there had been very little thought on or analysis of the basic historical reasons that had given rise to this situation or about the reasons for the high priority given to this question by political parties and other groups.

Education had been recognised as the main path for social mobility for many of the social strata here. The introduction of the 'free' education in the late forties, setting up of a state-sponsored central school network and the switch-over to the mother tongue as the medium of instruction had been measures that brought education within the reach of a larger proportion of our population. A literacy rate of 78.5% in 1977

and participation rate of 70% are results of these popular measures.

Although this is true of the general picture, a detailed analysis will show us the great disparity that still remains in our education system. The disparity in facilities even within the state school system is glaring. The existence of a private school system adds to this disparity. A study of the social background of the pupils of the privileged schools, whether they are private or state will reveal the fact that the children of the upper social classes have a greater chance of getting into the schools with better facilities and thereby ensure themselves an education of better quality. Not only are the facilities in the schools attended by the poor of the slums, villages or the estates worse, but they also have less chances of continuing education to a higher level without dropping out. Drop-out figures among the underprivileged are very high. On the average, for the whole island, if a cohort of 100 enter Grade 1 around 60 remain by the time the cohort reaches Grade 5, 50 by Grade 8 and 2 go up to Grade 12, when 'A' levels are taken. Of these 0.9-1% reach the University level. The chances that a child from a slum, village or an estate finds himself or herself in that privileged lot are remote. This is specially true when we consider much sought after facilities like Medicine or Engineering. A study done on the social background of the University entrance for the year 1967 revealed that in the Medical and Engineering faculties 73% of the entrants were from private or privileged state schools, and 18% were non-school candidates.

(Uswatte Aratchy, G—From Highway to Blind Alley—a note on youth).

If we take into account that this 18% also will have some who were earlier in private or privileged state schools, the predominance of these groups in these faculties is quite evident.

A similar conclusion had been reached in a more recent survey done by the Ministry of Education. Studying the entrants of 1976 in relation to the occupational status

of the Parent/Guardian, the study concludes that, **"The distribution of entrants according to occupational status of parent/guardian shows a gross under-representation of manual workers and subsistence farmers who constitute 82.4% of the employed population.** Thus, 39.2% of the entrants had parents who were in occupational categories comprising manual workers, minor employees and subsistence farmers; 27.8% of the entrants came from families whose breadwinners worked as clerical hands and sales workers; 4.8% of the entrants hailed from homes of executive and administrative workers; 19.7% were children of professional workers. Parents of 3.4% of the entrants were unemployed. The entrants when viewed from the standpoint of chosen areas of studies fall into positions which clearly reflect a socio-occupational stratification. Thus parents of 36.5% of the science entrants were teachers; and professional workers together accounted for 47% of the science entrants. In contrast only 13.6% of the science entrants came from homes whose income earners worked as manual workers or subsistence farmers. The socio-occupational stratification has resulted in a vicious circle which through cause and effect relations favour children of teachers and other professionals"

(University admissions—A report on a study concerning background characteristics of students selected for admission to the University in 1976; Ministry of Education.)

All these seem to show us that the beneficiaries of our education system had been the middle classes and those closest to them either above or below. Our 'free' education system had been a clever device where the resources of the country were channeled for the benefit of the upper and upper-middle classes. By accepting the principle of 'free education' and by having along with it an education structure in such a way so that only the privileged had better chances of getting the best out of it, our 'welfare state' ensured the perpetuation of the class system through education too. On the other side this means that it will be the

interests of the middle classes and those closest to them that will be primarily affected by crises in the higher educational system.

The entry into higher education had become more and more competitive over the years. The main reason for this had been the lack of expansion in higher education in comparison to the numbers that began to go through secondary education (close to 70%) her numbers in the tertiary education are comparatively low. 141 per 100 thousand of the population in the mid-sixties when our education was really expanding, compared with 1605 per 100 thousand of the population in the Philippines or 225 per thousand of the population in India for the same period. In the seventies the "bottle neck" of the 'A' levels is felt more intensely. In this year (1979) for example the universities had to select about 5,000 out of a 40,000 who had qualified making use of the formula that had been specially devised.

The non-expansion of the higher education system is a part of a wider phenomenon of the crisis in our economic system, with an inadequate growth due to the dependent capitalist economic relations that prevail. The crisis makes it difficult for the welfare system to be maintained. Of the 4-5% of the GNP spent on education the greater proportion (roughly 18 times more) is used to maintain the already built-up structures rather than for new development. There is little capital investments in order to meet the growing demand. The official response has been arbitrary increase in the qualifications needed for the entry into the universities and various other formulae that never work. Now there are attempts to register private institutions for higher education. But will this not ultimately result in greater inequalities by giving better chances to those who could pay? Will it not be a further aggravation of the inequalities that are already there due to the presence of the private tuition and tutorials? Any form of going

(Continued on Page 20)

Drugs and poverty

by U. Karunatilake

So many Chemists in other fields ask us what on earth do you make in the Pharmaceutical industry? You dissolve something in water, colour it, bottle it and put on a label with a pseudo-scientific name. Or you convert some powder into tablets or capsules, put it in a bottle with an impressive label. Call that manufacture? Why can't you at least make Aspirin or Paracetamol in this country without importing it and converting it into tablets?

What we have to point out is that making Aspirin and Paracetamol is really not the job of the Pharmaceutical industry—it is the job of the Fine Chemical industry, which again either has to have a heavy chemical base, or depend on imported intermediates. Then you may ask how is it that some of the better known Pharmaceutical Companies abroad make their own fine chemicals? The answer is that they were making fine chemicals, long before they started making pharmaceuticals.

Bayer was making industrial chemicals long before it made aspirin, Ciba-Geigy, Sandoz and Hoffmann-La Roche were all set up to manufacture textile dyes, Hoechst in Germany was also in the dye business. In fact it was Paul Erlich who worked for Hoechst who developed the idea dyes could be used to carry curative agents into specific tissues. He observed under the microscope that certain dyes were taken up by certain cells in an organism. Thus he managed, after several attempts, to find a molecule that delivered Arsenic to the human tissues.

Without a chemical industry to speak of, how did the Pharmaceutical industry originate in Sri Lanka? The post World War II period, as

has been seen, was a period of intensive expansion for foreign pharmaceutical companies based solidly on the fine chemical industry in Europe and America. These companies soon found that Asia's teeming millions would provide them with an inexhaustible market for drugs. Even if they could not afford the other necessities of life they would be driven by poor living conditions to buy drugs to alleviate their own sufferings. Thus in this suffering and the desire of the newpost-colonial regimes to eliminate to some extent, the ravages of disease, the foreign pharmaceutical companies saw rich ground for investment. Most of them started up pharmaceutical plants in India and the results in India were so promising that they began to set up small plants in other Asian countries where incentives were offered by the Government for import substitution industries. Thus some companies began making pharmaceutical products in Ceylon by importing raw material for those products which were already selling in large quantities in the country. Whereas in India there was an already established fine chemicals industry and the Indian Government saw to it that starting materials for the drug industry were progressively provided by the Indian fine chemicals manufacturers, no such development took place in Ceylon.

Isolated industry

The pharmaceutical industry in Ceylon has thus remained an isolated industry. For the first ten years all the local companies were producing similar items mainly vitamin preparations, tonics and O. T. C. drugs. Growth was very slow because all were competing in a very restricted field, the field of best sellers where promotion won the day. Growth

In the controversy over the use of this drug, Salvarsan, which in addition to being extremely expensive, was highly toxic a well known pharmacologist of the time summed up the questionable origins of the pharmaceutical industry. This comment was made in 1907, but applies equally well to the pharmaceutical industry today.

"The chemical industry of our day produce various substances for which no market can be found. Under these circumstances the idea suggests itself that it might be possible to use these products as drugs. We know that a great number of physicians without rhyme or reason, go after every new remedy that is recommended to them. If any industrialist is but shrewd enough to advertise sufficiently he usually succeeds in increasing the sale of his product — for some time at least — thus enriching himself."

was slow because production was geared to an artificially stimulated demand and was not planned on the basis of the country's drug requirements. This is revealed in the fact that import allocations given to the local drug industry totalled about Rs. 6 millions (of which several millions remained unutilized) whereas the country's total drug bill was in the region of Rs. 50 million at that time. This stagnancy prevailed in spite of numerous incentives offered by the Government like duty free import of machinery and raw materials.

The pharmaceutical industry was declared an essential industry. Machinery and raw materials were allowed in duty free on what were termed 'certificates of essentiality'. Since the principle was import substitution, approval for local manufacture of a product was given on the basis of the foreign exchange difference between the cost of the imported finished drug

and the cost of the raw materials. This was a rather innocent start, and private sector ingenuity merely saw to it that there was about a 25% difference between the cost of the finished imported drug and the 'raw materials'.

At the start, the so called 'raw material' in several instances happened to be semiprocessed intermediates or concentrates. These either simply went into the hopper of a tableting machine to be compressed into tablets, or was diluted with purified water to give a famous liquid. In some instances either part or all the water content was also imported. This led to a chaotic state of affairs where some big multinational companies began to think that any of their famous brands could be processed by local manufacturers from intermediates merely showing a 25% saving in foreign exchange. The clamour from such companies became so troublesome that management in the local companies as well as at the Ministry of Industries realised that if this continued there would be absolutely no progress in the industry. No transfer of technology and no acquisition of local skills either in processing or in drug analysis.

Phased import

To counter this the principle of phased import substitution was established where within a period the intermediates would also be phased out and only basic fine chemicals and basic excipients would be allowed in. Thus local manufacturers who really wanted to develop the industry were in a position to tell their foreign Principals to agree to more basic manufacture or depart. Several of them agreed, and thus, a good amount of pharmaceutical processing know-how from some of the well known multinational combines in the West, became available to our technicians. Our Chemists, sifting through this know-how, were able to systematize it in the light of chemical and pharmaceutical disciplines, innovate and extend its applications.

The next stage in the development of the Pharmaceutical industry in Sri Lanka was the imposition of import control in 1963.

When the authorities were satisfied that a particular Pharmaceutical product was being produced locally from basic ingredients, and that the output was sufficient to meet the local demand, they ceased issuing import licences for the finished product. Thus most of the pharmaceuticals that were locally produced were removed from the import quotas of the trade. At the same time of course, raw materials came under licence, and the local manufacturers had to satisfy the authorities that raw material was being imported at world prices and there was a substantial and not a mere 25% foreign exchange saving. Price Control was also clamped down on drugs. At about the same time National Formulary control of drug imports was commenced and only drugs approved by the Formulary Committee could be imported or locally manufactured. Thus import licences for raw material were issued only for the manufacture of Formulary approved drugs.

All these incentives however did not wean the manufacturers away from random manufacture of a small range of items, similar products on which all appeared to be competing. Private sector manufacture of pharmaceuticals was, in fact, very private, and had no impact either in terms of health programmes or in terms of industrial output. The economics of the entire exercise was shockingly revealed at a conference in 1973 presided over by Prof. Bibile. At this conference a manufacturer claimed that, if left alone, and provided with adequate foreign exchange he would supply the country's drug needs. He was confronted by a Ministry official who pointed out that this particular manufacturer had utilized only Rs. 1 million out of a Rs. 3 million allocation in the previous year. So much for economic growth.

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Marxism and Eelam

by Laxhman Jothikumār

Chintaka in his attempt to separate the myths and realities on the Tamil question had got himself buried among his own myths and realities, and the Marxists have to salvage Marxism and (Tamils) National Question from the distortion and mutilation of Chintaka. A thorough exposure or criticism of Chintaka's dogmatic approach would have resulted in a big article for which 'Lanka Guardian' may not provide space, so, for the moment it may suffice to tackle the 'dogmatism of Chintaka' with these few observations:-

1. Marxism-Leninism is not a dogma, but a guide to action. Instead of applying Marxism dialectically to the National Question in Sri Lanka, Chintaka had dismembered Marxism and taken bits and pieces to present as dogmas for the solution of the problems of Tamils and in supporting and demand for self determination. Marxism-Leninism is a revolutionary science which cannot be applied to the national question, in isolation of the revolutionary perspective of a given country.

2. Chintaka by misquoting or partly quoting Lenin and Stalin, has not done justice to Marxism or the Tamil issue. It is necessary here to quote from Lenin and Stalin, the parts which Chintaka had conveniently omitted when he quoted them in support of the demand for self determination to Tamils.

After giving his famous definition on 'Nation' in his pamphlet on 'National Question', Stalin stated as follows, which was conveniently forgotten by Chintaka.

Stalin stated..... "But what solution be most compatible with the interest of the toiling masses? Autonomy, Federation or Separation? All these are problems the solution of which will depend on the concrete historical

conditions in which a given National finds itself. More than that conditions like everything else change and the decisions which is correct at one particular time may prove to be entirely unsuitable at another.....". In conclusion Stalin states,..... "If the dialectical approach to a question is required anywhere it is required here, in the national question....." Chintaka committed this very mistake of which Stalin warned, by not having dialectical approach to the national question in Sri Lanka. Chintaka is trying to prescribe the very medicine which Stalin prescribed for the National Question in Russia several decades ago, without examining the question in Sri Lanka dialectically and understanding the objective conditions.

In any event Stalin himself has settled this question several years after the publication of his pamphlet on "Marxism and National Question", by making the clear statement, that his article belonged to a particular historical period which should not be applied mechanically in another historical period.

Stalin states as follows in 1925 in his article 'The national question once again'.

"After all this, what significance can Semich's reference to the passage in Stalin's pamphlet, written in the period of bourgeois democratic revolution in Russia have at the present time, when, as a consequence of the new historical situation we have entered a new epoch, the epoch of proletarian revolution? It can only signify that Semich quotes outside of space and time without reference to the living historical situation and thereby violates the most elementary requirements of dialectics and ignores the fact what is right

for one historical situation may be wrong in another historical situation....."

If we substitute Chintaka in place of Semich, then it would seem that Stalin himself chides Chintaka for quoting Stalin, outside of space and time, by violating the elementary requirements of dialectics. Again in 1929 Stalin criticised those who misinterpreted his definition on 'Nation'.

Stalin stated...."one of the grave mistakes you make is that you lump together all existing Nations and fail to see any fundamental difference between them...." Stalin further states in 1929, "that his pamphlet on 'Marxism and National Question', and Lenin's well known articles on National Question, "refer to the period preceding the First World War when history made the bourgeoisie democrat revolution the task of the moment in Russia.....". Thus Stalin himself has criticised those who quoted from his article 'outside of space and time without reference to the historical situation', and advised not to lump all Nations together. Lenin on his article "Self Determination of Nation", states as follows:

"....the categorical demand of the Marxist theory in examining any social question is that the question be examined within the definite historical limits and if it refers to a particular country (for instance the national programme of a given country) that due account be taken of the specific features that distinguish that country from others within the same historical epoch....."

Lenin said that "..... the right of Nations to self determination means solely the right to independence in a political sense, the right to free, political secession from the oppressing Nation.....". This statement of Lenin is used in support of the demand for the self determination of the Tamils, forgetting that Lenin did not mean self determination formation of small states.

Lenin has stated as follows in his article in which he stated so much on self determination..." consequently this demand is by no means identical with the demand for secession for the partition, and for the formation of small states....."

Thus Lenin has stated clearly that his principle of self determination does not mean partition, or the formation of small states. In Sri Lanka when the TULF demands separate state, in practice it means partition and formation of a small state. Chintaka who quoted extensively from Lenin and Stalin, omitted the relevant statements of Lenin and Stalin which could be applicable to the conditions in Sri Lanka, and more than that failed to heed to their advice as to how, when and where, their writings should be applied. From the above, it is clear, that Chintaka had applied Marxism dogmatically and not dialectically, when he demands revolutionaries to support the self determination of Tamils.

4. Victory of proletarian revolution does not mean that the national question could be settled automatically like magic. Take for instance Vietnam. After the victory of proletarian revolution, there is continuous border wars between China and Vietnam, and the Vietnamese army has occupied Laos and Cambodia in furtherance of its national aims. Several lakhs of minorities from Vietnam had been expelled. If that kind of socialism is practiced in Sri Lanka after the victory of revolution, then the Tamils will live in the boats, wandering in the seas in search of countries which would accept them.

5. Chintaka who talks of revolution to achieve self determination, rather strangely bases his argument on the basis of the electoral victory of the TULF, unconsciously betraying his faith in bourgeois elections.

6. Lenin and Stalin wrote those articles on National Question to work out a programme for the Russian Marxists, to win over the majority of the population of Russian Empire, who were non-Russians, to the side of Revolution. In that concrete situation, they

but forward the demand for self determination of nations. Stalin himself has admitted later that his definition of Nation refers to the formation of nations during the period of rising capitalism. Lenin and Stalin who supported self determination before the October Revolution kept the nations together after the revolution in the name of revolution. How did Stalin, who wrote articles on self determination, apply his theory after the victory of revolution, in his homeland Georgia, should be revealing to Chintaka, if he takes time to ponder over this issue. Lenin's and Stalin's writings cannot be mechanically applied to the present historical stage. The very fact that more than one Nation occupies a country does not mean each nation has the right to self determination. In the event, India, Burma, Pakistan, China, Yugoslavia and several other countries would be torn to pieces.

7. The Tamils are oppressed and their struggle against national oppression is just and inevitable. But the demand for separate state in the name of struggle against national oppression is reactionary. This very demand causes provocation to the people of majority community and helps the bourgeoisie of the dominant nation to cause further division between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The correct solution to the problems of the Tamils, should be found, whether in a bourgeoisie or a proletarian state, within the framework of united Sri Lanka. Since the chances for an immediate victory of socialism in Sri Lanka is bleak, persons like Chintaka, without living in a dream world should see daylight, and find solutions to the problems of Tamils within the bourgeoisie state and the united Lanka. The petty bourgeoisie of the North push on the TULF for separation and the small petty bourgeoisie groups in the South demand self determination for Tamils in the name of Marxism. Pseudo Marxists should be exposed to find correct solution to the national question in Sri Lanka.

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Scrap the Foreign Service?

by W. Wiswa Warnapala

The argument has been advanced that the Overseas Service, from the very inception, assumed the character of a specialised cadre. The specialist role of the diplomatic service came under attack in the early sixties, and the Wilmot Perera Commission proposed the amalgamation of the Overseas Service with the Administrative Service. They wanted this group of officers to be designated the 'Diplomatic Class' of the Public Service, and this re-designation, they thought, was in keeping with the changes recommended in other areas of public service. The existence of services with privileges and exclusive characteristics like that of the Overseas Service, they argued, interferes with the idea of unity within the public service.

The utilisation of the Ceylon Civil Service Examination—after 1963 the Ceylon Administrative Service Examination—for the recruitment of the Overseas Service, in fact, became an effective argument for the amalgamation of the services. This common source of recruitment came to be utilised since the creation of the Ceylon Administrative Service in 1963. Though the professionalism of the Overseas Service has been emphasised by the opponents of amalgamation, no member of the career service was appointed as a Head of a Mission till 1970. Four members of the Overseas Service were appointed as Heads of Missions for the first time in the history of the Overseas Service, and this, in itself, was an indication that the professionalism of the career officials was not recognised in the appointment of the Heads of Missions. The career service, therefore, primarily functioned as the immediate subordinate arm of the political appointees who functioned as Heads of Missions.

The acceptance of the need to appoint Heads of Missions from outside the career service and the inclusion of these appointments in the area of political patronage tended to question the need for a specialist cadre. The view has been expressed that people outside the career service has been chosen as Ambassadors because they often reflected the political principles of the party in power. The Prime Minister, according to the tradition recognised since independence, is now free to draw into the Overseas Service talent from any quarter in Sri Lanka. The successful administration or the leadership provided by the political appointees as Heads of Missions amply demonstrate that 'no special expertise exists or is required for the Foreign Service which cannot now be acquired within a year'. This, in my point of view, provides yet another valid argument in favour of amalgamation of the Overseas Service with the Ceylon Administrative Service.

The abolition of the Civil Service in 1963 and the creation of Administrative Service along with the amalgamation of certain cadre in the public service generated a discussion on the need to amalgamate the Overseas Service with the administrative cadre. An attempt in the direction of amalgamation was made in 1964 and the Overseas Service lobby successfully thwarted this move by convincing the then Prime Minister of the need to maintain a special identity for the service. The Sri Lanka Overseas Service Association, displaying a trade union consciousness unknown to them, opposed the move for amalgamation and stated that 'we recognise that the Government may have the need in the future, as it has had in

the past for appointing persons with competence and experience in specific technical fields', to some of our missions abroad. They further stated that they did not protest against such appointments that were made in the past. The recognition of the right of the Government to induct 'outsiders' of various specialist fields into the Overseas Service became a tactful move by the overseas bureaucracy to prevent an erosion of both power and exclusiveness of the service. The question of amalgamation, though became a subject for discussion in the period immediately preceding the 5th Non-Alignment Summit in Colombo, received no support from the political leadership.

Non-career diplomats, who functioned as Heads of Missions, have had conflicts with the members of the Overseas Service. Most of these conflicts, though received no publicity, arose as a result of the resentment and hostility with which the career officials worked in a Mission, headed by a non-career diplomat. Professor E. R. Sarathchandra, revealing his experience as the Ambassador for Sri Lanka in France, stated that 'some of the conflicts between Ambassadors and officials of the Overseas Service take an ugly turn, they degenerate into campaigns of calumny and character-assassination which bring down the tone of the Missions, do damage to their reputation and interfere with the administration'. Professor Sarathchandra, elaborating further the nature of these conflicts which disturb the smooth functioning of the Missions abroad, stated that 'the authorities in Colombo who themselves belong to the Overseas Service either side with their own officials or turn a blind eye'.

Several factors, in my view, assist in the development of these conflicts. The Overseas Administration Division in the Ministry, which oversees the administration of the Missions, has framed rules and regulations relating to the routine administrative matters in the Missions in such a way so as to see that most of the administrative matters fall within the purview of the career official who, according to the hierarchy in the Mission, comes next to the Ambassador. The post of Head of Chancery—the administrative head of the office of the Mission—has been created and given to the most senior career official in the Mission with a view to reduce administrative powers of the politically appointed Ambassador. The Ministry and the Overseas Service, through the employment of such subtle distinction, have attempted to maintain a hold in the administration of the Missions and at the same time reducing the role of the Ambassador to that of the ceremonial head. The post of the Head of Chancery, in addition to its own administration role, gives the career official the opportunity to command authority over the subordinate officers. They, in association with the diplomatic officers, form some kind of a united front against the non-career Ambassador, and the Ministry does not object to this development because it expects the career officials and their Ministry-sponsored subordinate officers to express some solidarity. Non-career Ambassador may sometimes get some support from a 'seconded officer' like the Commercial Secretary and this unlike in the case of the Overseas Service Officers, was not a certainty. In this kind of set up, the career officials who are certain to receive support from the Ministry, tend to win the battle and this has been the experience of many a non-career Ambassador. The adjustment and survival, in the case of many non-career Ambassadors, depend on the dynamism of the individual and the nature of political support

which a person commands in Colombo.

The privileges of this segment of the island's bureaucracy could be characterised on the basis of such factors as the nature of the service, service abroad, the island's foreign exchange crisis, the prevalence of a large variety of import controls, the exclusiveness of the service and the easy access to political VIPs of the country. Though the salaries are provided in Pounds Sterling, the Overseas Minute provides for the payment of these salaries in the currency of the country of assignment and this, again, will be computed on the basis of the current rate of exchange. The Overseas Allowance, with which the basic salary of an officer is supplemented, take into account the cost of living in the country of assignment, an element of rent and expenditure normally incidental to a diplomatic assignment. The Overseas Service allowance was not made subject to Sri Lanka income tax. The Wilmot Perera Commission, for instance, pointed out the need to take into consideration such fringe benefits as Children's allowance, reimbursement of income tax on officers' salaries, annual passages for children to join their parents overseas etc. in the computation of the Overseas Allowance. Sri Lanka, in the determination of these allowances and benefits, follows India and this method of computing allowances, though useful, has certain disadvantages.

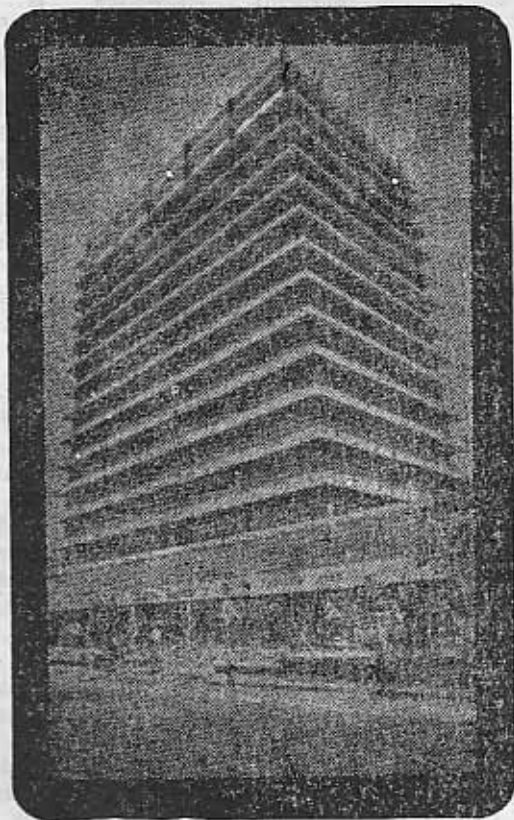
The Missions of India are heavily staffed whereas the corresponding Sri Lanka Mission may consist of a single diplomatic officer besides the Head of Mission. This, therefore, means that in the case of the latter, the single diplomatic officer was expected to bear the obligations which, in the Indian case, would be shared by several officers. The other reason is that a diplomatic officer from a small country like Sri Lanka could hardly be expected to indulge in lavish entertainment. The criticism has been made that some of the members of

the Overseas Service overlook this consideration. The entertainment allowance is paid according to the rank of the diplomatic officer. The anomaly in regard to this was the fact that certain officers collected the allowances without incurring the expenditure on entertainment, and the discovery of this perhaps led to the imposition of rule which requires an officer to send a quarterly statement describing the manner in which the entertainment allowance has been spent.

The concession presently enjoyed by the diplomatic officers to import a car—which has been used for more than a year in the country of assignment—came to be misused by certain officers. No adequate check was kept of the number of motor vehicles bought at market prices or the number imported after each assignment and they were sold at exorbitant amounts abroad or in Sri Lanka. Every assignment abroad made by the diplomatic officers entitled to import duty-free an assortment of expensive electric gadgetry and these, in the context of the rigid import controls that existed in Sri Lanka, became yet another source of privilege denied to the island's bureaucracy.

These characteristics of the Sri Lanka Overseas Service injected the feeling that the diplomatic cadre was an exclusive segment of the bureaucracy of the island. The exclusiveness of the Overseas Service, therefore, encouraged the diplomatic officers to treat themselves as a group of officers who were not expected to give expression to the aspirations of the people. They, unlike the public servants in other areas of the administration, did not have a local clientele whose assessment was a significant barometer. The lack of 'the administrative contact' led to the development of the 'ivory tower outlook' on matters of foreign policy, and the domestic interests, though theoretically expected to be reflected in the conduct of island's foreign policy, received

(Continued on Page 20)



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Dear Artie: I have this gas problem

WASHINGTON—Dear Artie: My husband came home at 10 o'clock last night, tired and worn out. I asked him where he had been, and he said he had had drinks with an airline stewardess in a cocktail lounge. I think he's lying. I believe he was out cruising for gas and found some. He gave me a cock-and-bull story about the airline stewardess because he knows that if I found out about the gas I'd ask to use his car.

What should I do? — *Big Bertha*

Dear Bertha. It sounds to me as if your suspicions may be correct. The old "drinks with an airline stewardess" alibi is used by every husband during a gasoline crisis. My advice to you is to search his pants pockets and his wallet for a credit card receipt from a gas station. If you find one, confront him with it, and tell him he either lets you use his automobile or you will speak to your lawyer. If, on the other hand, you find a receipt from the cocktail lounge, apologize for thinking the worst about him, which was that he got a full tank of gas and did not tell you about it.

— *A.B.*

Dear Artie: I am in love with a young, handsome, wealthy boy from one of the best families in town. He has a beautiful Lincoln Continental and a 60-foot diesel engine yacht. He wants to marry me in the worst way. But my parents want me to marry a fat, stupid service station attendant who works three blocks from our house. They say I have to think of my future, and their future as well. They also said a nice girl doesn't marry someone with a Lincoln Continental any more. What should I do? — *Tearful Annie*

Dear Annie: I'm afraid your parents are right. You'd be making a big mistake if you married a rich boy just because you loved him

when you have an opportunity to be the wife of someone who could supply your fuel needs for the rest of your life. Very few girls have a chance to marry a service station attendant, and you should be grateful to your parents for finding one for you. Tell your rich boyfriend to get lost.

— *A.B.*

Dear Artie: I am a bachelor and I like to have a good time. The other day I was waiting in a long line for gas and this good-looking chick with distress on her face drove slowly by. She winked, and I let her jump the line in front of me. We got to talking and she gave me the impression that after we filled up we'd go out and have a good time. But as soon as she got her 10 gallons of premium she just sped off and left me stuck at the pump. What do you think of this kind of girl?

— *Woeful Willie*

Dear Willie: I've received hundreds of letters from men who have had the same experience. There seem to be a lot of girls like that and there's a name for them—gas teasers. They'll do anything to get, in front of you, and then when they get all the fuel they want they act as if they don't know you exist. I hope this is a lesson to you. The next time you let a girl crash in front of you, ask her if you can hold on to her driver's license. If she refuses, you'll know she's just playing you for a chump.

— *A.B.*

Dear Artie: My boyfriend uses leaded gasoline in his car, and I use unleaded in mine. He doesn't want to get serious because he says mixed marriages don't work. What do you think? — *Soulful Sarah*

Dear Sarah: They can work but it's not easy. As long as you respect the other person's fuel needs, love will prevail. Many mixed marriages wind up with one of the parties being catalytically converted.

— *A.B.*

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Scrap . . .

(Continued from Page 17)

less attention because of such characteristics as imitations and arrogance which the Overseas Service officials displayed in the last three decades.

The privileged-orientation in the Overseas Service, as explained elsewhere, injected a feeling of arrogance and no 'outsider' was allowed for the simple reason that they did not want the others to know the inside. The arrogance and the inclination to be alienated from the people led to the adoption of life styles including the dress with which they could be distinguished from the rest of the bureaucracy and the people. According to the Overseas Minute, the dress needs the the approval of the Secretary of the Ministry and the dress (Sherwani and the trouser) came to be adopted. Though this was the mode of dress in the period immediately after the establishment of the Overseas Service, this system has now been changed giving the option to the officer to choose either the national dress, sherwani or the tie and coat. The Sherwani dress became unacceptable because it showed a close similarity to the Indian dress and above all, as T. D. S. A. Dissanayake pointed out before the Select Committee on Higher appointments, the waiters of hotels wore a similar uniform. The Overseas Service was so conscious of their dress that even the new recruits were asked to come to office in Colombo attired in tie and coat.

The Overseas Service officers utilising both their power and privilege, have successfully survived as the most exclusive segment of the island's bureaucracy, and the 5th Non-Aligned Summit of 1976, which was held in Colombo, was considered an achievement of this segment of the bureaucracy. The crisis, which engulfed the Overseas bureaucracy in the period 1974-1976, reached a temporary settlement because of the role which they played in regard to the 5th Non-Aligned Summit.

(Concluded)

Sociology . . .

(Continued from Page 11)

back on the relatively free system that prevails now by introducing any type of fees is going to hit the underprivileged still more. Therefore all solutions so far put forward seem to worsen the condition of the have-nots. This probably is the essence of the crisis in system which can move forward only at the expense of the have-nots.

The neurosis created by this problem in higher education is alarming. Education had turned out to be a process of intense devouring of the material found in the books in order to vomit them back at the examinations. What is its impact on the creativity of the youth? Their personalities? Or on their attitudes towards knowledge? Nobody bothers and they themselves have no time to think. For teachers it is a case of trying to finish the syllabus in time for the examinations. There is very little time for any free discussions or inquiry which should be a part and parcel of the learning process.

While on one hand the crisis in higher education distorts the whole learning process, it also brings out other distortions of our society. As we have shown, it will be the interests of the middle classes and those closest to them that will be primarily touched by the limitation of the places in the universities. These are the classes that have the best chances of 'making it in life' with the help of a university degree. This is true for both Sinhalese as well as the Tamils. The various formulae that come up are therefore attempts by the middle classes of one community to get over their counterparts in the other community in this acute competition for the university places. In reality the middle classes who are involved in this cut-throat competition comprises a minority of our population. But the power wielded by these groups in our society is so high that they are able to make a national issue out of it. Their control over the media is the key factor in this

process. Thus 'standardisation' becomes a key issue for a political program of one party in one community and it is also a rallying point for much political agitation in the other community. What is more important and more dangerous is the fact that this problem can be easily given a communal twist, and the middle classes and their allies who will not think twice before making use of such a dangerous means for their benefit have put forward the university admission problem as a communal issue. With the help of the media they are also able to drag a large section of the masses along with them,— the masses whose sons and daughters have a very remote chance of getting a place in the universities. They are given to understand that 'standardisation' is the key problem in higher education. The real crisis of the socio-economic system of Sri Lanka and its impact on education is kept out of the limelight. It also blunts the political consciousness of the masses whose demands should be for genuine democratisation in education, and not changes in the percentages allotted for this or that group.

Global defence

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— Robert S. Mc Namara

A borrowed tongue

by Reggie Siriwardena

In 1935 the poet W. B. Yeats (who had in an earlier period of his life written an admiring preface for Tagore's *Gitanjali*) began a letter to William Rothenstein with: 'Damn Tagore .. Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English. Nobody can write with music and style in a language not learned in childhood and ever since the language of his thought.' Yeats's generalisation seems plausible until one realises that Tagore, born into a privileged family in Calcutta, probably learned a good deal of English in childhood.

Certainly for English-educated Sri Lankans of my generation, the language 'learned in childhood and ever since the language of their thought' was English. Indeed, Sri Lankans brought up in this way used to pride themselves on their superior mastery of English, as compared with that of Indians, Pakistanis or Africans. Yet this proficiency and inwardness with the English language, were not matched by anything like the comparable achievement in creative writing in English that Yeats's observation would have led one to expect. Why?

I have recently been reading a good deal of contemporary Indian poetry in English, and have been struck by the fact that some of the most original and accomplished work is by poets who also write in their native languages — for instance, Arun Kolatkar, who is a poet in both Marathi and English, or Kamala Das (Malayalam and English). This is a phenomenon that has hardly been paralleled in Sri Lanka. The late Lakdasa Wikramasinghe, one of the rare exceptions, wrote poetry in two languages — but less convincingly, I think, in Sinhala. (I used to think that what seemed to me the dense fog of his Sinhala poetry

was due to my own inadequacies as a reader until I found Prof. Wimal Dissanayake saying, in a recent number of *Navasilu*, that he couldn't understand some of it too.) On the other hand, Dr. Sarachandra's recent attempts at writing fiction in English don't seem to be characterised even by the verbal grace which is the redeeming feature of his Sinhala novels.

The question, 'Why write in English?', has had a simple answer for most Sri Lankan writers in English because they had no choice anyway: it was the only language they could write in. The other answer that has sometimes been offered — that through English one can communicate with an international audience — seems to me at best a rationalisation, for the more normal mode through which a national creative literature communicates itself to an international readership is through translation. It is noteworthy that Arun Kolatkar or Kamala Das would probably have a different answer to give to the question, 'Why write in English?' One could work out the answer if one could compare their English poetry with their writing in Marathi and Malayalam. As it is, I can only speculate that the sophisticated ironies of Kolatkar's *Jejuri* or Kamala Das's frank expression of passion and sensuality go more readily into the borrowed tongue, but I may be wrong.

But returning to our own situation, we have the paradox that Sri Lankans of the privileged classes in the colonial and immediate post-colonial era could make their mark on the Oxford and Cambridge Unions, could use the English language with assurance, elegance and expressive force in parliamentary debate, the law courts, administration, journalism and the

academic life, but produced no outstanding creative writer in English. I should like to suggest that the seeming paradox was not a paradox at all.

It seems to me that the linguistic mastery of English-educated Sri Lankans went with a complete induction into English culture which was disabling when they attempted to use the language as a creative instrument to deal with the life around them. It is revealing that the better Sri Lankan creative writers in English have been lyric poets — Patrick Fernando, Yasmine Gooneratne, Lakdasa Wikramasinghe — because it is possible for a lyric poet to evolve a personal language and to maintain an individual relationship with a tradition of poetry in a foreign language. But a novelist needs more than that: his language has to be capable of reflecting the inner life and the social and personal relations of characters very different from himself.

Even in a monolingual culture, the novelist may fail to transcend the barriers of class dialect and linguistic usage, and in such a case unfamiliarity with or incomprehension of a way of using a language is in effect a failure in knowing a way of life. Think, for instance, of the inadequacies shown even by great novelists like Dickens or George Eliot in presenting working-class life (in *Hard Times* and *Felix Holt*), where the failure is revealed most manifestly in the unreality of the speech. But the problems are all the greater for an English-educated writer of fiction in Sri Lanka where all but a small segment of the population speak, in the most complete sense, a different language from his own.

The barriers are most evident when Sri Lankan novelists in English try to write about the village (and many of them have sought to do so, perhaps in an effort to overcome their own sense of uprootedness). Even in the most highly praised of these

writers, Punyakante Wijenaikē, I find in the prose a betraying quaintness and false poeticity when it seeks to express the thoughts and feelings of peasant characters. This, for instance, is a woman talking in *The Waiting Earth*:

'And then yet again at times he would come in the night and fall upon me with the strength of two men who had been starved of a woman for many years. And yet while he used me thus I knew his mind was elsewhere, on another woman, for he would stroke my face tenderly and whisper soft words he had never before whispered to me. Time after time it was my poor bruised body that lay suffering in silence in the dark.'

Neither idiom nor image nor rhythm is true to real speech, and the contrived literariness of it would be even clearer if one translated it into Sinhala. Strangely

(or not so strangely perhaps) the peasant dialogue in *The Village in the Jungle* by the foreigner Woolf stands up much better to this test.

Whether one can expect to create a tradition or a substantial body of fiction in a foreign language seems to me doubtful. The West Indian case is not relevant to our own because English in the West Indies has become the language of the whole community and has been transmuted into the linguistic expression of another culture. Even the Indian and African successes in English-language fiction are fewer than is often claimed (Narayan seems to me very slight — the English habit of describing him as 'Chekhovian' is proof of how little the English have understood Chekhov — while Raja Rao is downright bad, precious and self-consciously manipulated).

A parallel with the situation of the English-speaking

strata in Sri Lanka is that of 19th-century Russia; which was not a colony but whose aristocracy and upper classes spoke French. Readers of *War and Peace* will remember that the upper-class characters speak to each other in French and even pronounce Russian names with a French accent, just as their counterparts here anglicised Sinhala and Tamil names; and Tolstoy even said once that there were Russians who would be incapable of feeling the emotion of love if they were forbidden to think about it in French. Nevertheless, the great creative flowering of Russian literature in the same century was in the native language and not in French.

I am not trying to identify the position of Sinhala or even Tamil with that of 19th-century Russian — the language of a great empire and a vast nation — but it seems to me obvious that the mainstream

(Continued on Page 24)

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Palangetiyo : Fresh winds in Sinhala cinema

by H. A. Seneviratne

Vasantha Obeysekera's "Palangetiyo" points to the discovery of a true film art in this country. It is a bold attempt to pull out the Sinhala film from the morass into which it had sunk under the enormous deadweight of mediocrity which passed off as genuine talent or even genius. This mediocrity, thriving under the patronage of partisan critics and newspapers, outlived to the almost criminal detriment of real talent. Now, Vasantha Obeysekera has made a major breakthrough.

It was common among many of our "intellectuals", who are closely knit by their utter aloofness from society and their rank petty-bourgeois attitudes, to blame the artistic tastes of our people for the financial failures of films they describe as outstanding works of art. The indications are that Vasantha Obeysekera has given the lie to this misconception. Whilst producing a work of art he has succeeded in drawing the common people towards it and in surviving quite long in circuit despite the customary mercantile cut-throatism in the show business. This is an undoubted achievement particularly when one considers that the film is made entirely without the "stars" who are normally employed to attract the film-goer. "Palangetiyo" has proved that it is not the actors but the acting that matters.

"Palangetiyo" is an important landmark in the history of our cinema for yet another reason. It has shown that there cannot be form without content in a work of art. It has also shown that content is not an abstraction or something hidden by a veil of incomprehensibility for only the "intellectuals" to try to understand

and discuss over a glass of beer or something stronger in a pub. The strength of the film "Palangetiyo" lies in its simplicity.

This does not mean that there is no depth in what is contained in "Palangetiyo". On the contrary; it has a philosophy, however limited, that is based on social reality. The way in which it is presented reminds us of what Tolstoy once remarked to one of his friends and translators of his "What is Art? and Essays on Art", Aylmer Maude. He said "the sign of any great philosophy is that it generalizes a wide range of important ideas so that it can be explained to an intelligent boy of twelve in a quarter of an hour". This stands equally true even as far as art is concerned although many of Tolstoy's views on art and philosophy are outdated today. This is the simplicity I mean the case of "Palangetiyo".

It does not, however, mean that "Palangetiyo" is a masterpiece of the Sinhala cinema either. That is still to come. "Palangetiyo" has its weaknesses. Its main weakness in the matter of content lies in the end where the exemplary, self-sacrificing, tragic hero Sarath kills his wife when she involuntarily utters the name of her paramour, as Sarath was making love to her. At this point I think the film reaches an anticlimax, abruptly. The killing prevents it from becoming a tragedy in a classical sense. The real tragedy would have been the survival and the struggle for survival of both Sarath and his wife Kusum despite the knowledge of infidelity in the context of an exploitative and parasitic class society. As far as its form is concerned there are many instances — such as when we are

told by the doctor that Sarath had not eaten for three days — where the development of the theme depends on dialogue alone so that the visual aspect of it is undermined. The music and photography are also not in keeping with the general standard set by the Director.

With all these defects, "Palangetiyo" has succeeded in giving fresh hope for the Sinhala film which reached its zenith of hopelessness in the year 1978. As a member of the jury of the OCIC (Office Catholique Internationale du Cinema), Sri Lanka, the writer of this article urged the view, (eventually outvoted), that no work in the year 1978 had reached a sufficient standard to win the award. In a resume of the Sinhala film of 1978, recorded by the Sinhala service of the S.L.B.C., I stated, among other things, that the previous year marked the stagnation of the Sinhala film as an art and also as an industry. This resume was not broadcast for reasons best known to the S.L.B.C.. A review, similarly exposing the weakness of the film "Veera Puran Appu", written for the film journal "Sarasaviya", on its invitation, was also not published. These two instances show to say the least, the extent to which the ossified views of a few in the field of the Sinhala cinema have been entrenched in the small and petty minds of the manipulators of the propaganda machine. It is in this context that the achievement of Vasantha Obeysekera becomes even more valuable. His film "Palangetiyo" marks the stepping stone towards finding a film art rooted in social reality.

Love in the spring

I suppose most film-going readers of the **Lanka Guardian**, like other English-educated Sri Lankans, go to the Sinhala cinema only to see what are generally described as 'quality films.' There was a time when Lester James Perles was the only Sinhala film-maker who was able to appeal to this social stratum: more recently, younger directors like Dharmasena Pathiraja and Vasantha Obeysekera have also been able to win their approval. One of the achievements of **Palangetiyo** was that it was able to hold its own at the Majestic for seven weeks, with **The Godfather** and **The Day of the Jakal** also in town.

However, English-educated film-goers who like **Palangetiyo**, **Bambaru Avith** and **Sarungale** usually see nothing of the run-of-the-mill Sinhala cinema, and therefore have no background against which to measure their contribution to our film-making. Anybody who is seriously interested in understanding what is going on in Sinhala cinema should make the effort (even against his inclinations to see something of the routine commercial cinema in order to understand audience tastes and the dominant patterns of film-making, which are the realities with which the serious film-maker has to contend.

But the film I want to discuss now can't really be described as a run-of-the-mill Sinhala film: it has, in fact, been dignified by the State Film Corporation with a release in the prestigious fifth circuit; it has Malini Fonseka, Ravindra Randeniya and Joe Abeywickrema in the cast, playing with professional competence, and it is photographed with his customary craftsmanship by Sumitta Amarasinghe. But **Vasanth Davasak (A Day in Spring)**, currently released, should be seen by anybody who is interested in the social attitudes propagated and reinforced by the Sinhala cinema because it seems to me particularly

appalling in this respect. I should like to commend it to the attention particularly of any observer of the images of women and their role projected by the Sinhala cinema.

Vasanth Davasak begins with the young hero who has just graduated returning to his village and to the girl-friend whom he has been courting with her family's approval. He has, however, no immediate prospects of marriage because he is jobless; and he soon falls foul of the aratchi (the girl's uncle) who despises him as a social inferior. As the conflict between the aratchi and the hero grow, the former takes it into his head that the girl should marry his own son, who is a congenitally retarded character. He is treated in the film as a comic figure, and the film's makers contrive situations in which his mental infirmity is meant to provoke uproarious laughter from the audience!

In spite of the aratchi's pressures, the girl's mother tries to play for time rather than condemn her daughter to a wretched marriage; and the aratchi is ultimately infuriated to the point of hiring some thugs to abduct the girl. The hero rescues the girl, and in his rage kills the aratchi: he is tried and sent to jail.

Unaccountably, after the aratchi's death, the mother becomes determined to marry her daughter off to the retarded son. The heroine, despairingly, submits because it is her duty to obey her mother, though her high-spirited younger sister tells her not to be a fool. This, by the way, is an interesting pattern which was evident also in **Gehenu Lamai**: the film upholds the ideal of the docile, submissive heroine, but a safety-valve for more rebellious impulses is provided by

another girl, even though her values are not endorsed.

On the day of the heroine's marriage, her lover returns to the village, having been released from jail by an amnesty. The heroine learns of his return just after her marriage, and contrives to send him a message asking him meet her that evening in a secluded spot in the village.

At that point, glancing at my watch, I found that two hours were up, and the film was obviously approaching its denouement. What would be the ending? An elopement? Not likely, because it would offend the moral sanctities of marriage. Remembering the heroine's remark at an earlier point in the film that if she couldn't marry her lover, she would kill herself and fall dead at his feet, I decided that this was what the film was leading up to. But I was totally unprepared for the destiny the director had contrived for his heroine.

'I asked you to come,' were her words to her lover at the rendezvous, 'so that I could have your blessing to lead a good married life.' She turned her face away, glowing with noble self-sacrifice, the music swelled and the end-title came up while the tears of the audience fell like spring-time showers.

A borrowed . . .

(Continued from Page 22)

of creative expression of the life of our country will continue to be in the national languages — just as in India, where there is nothing written in English that can compare with the best short stories of Premchand or with Anantha Murthy's novel **Samskara**. There is a handful of Sri Lankan poetry in English and a smaller handful of short stories that I have read with pleasure (Sita Kulatunge's story, **The High Chair**, is the newest addition to their number), and I should be happy to greet the unlikely miracle of a great Sri Lankan novelist in English if he were to appear.

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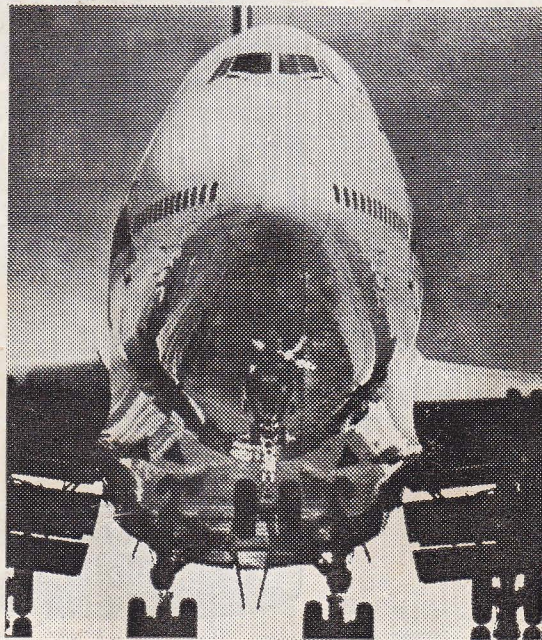
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