

REPORT: Sri Lanka and the IMF nut-cracker

LANKA

GUARDIAN

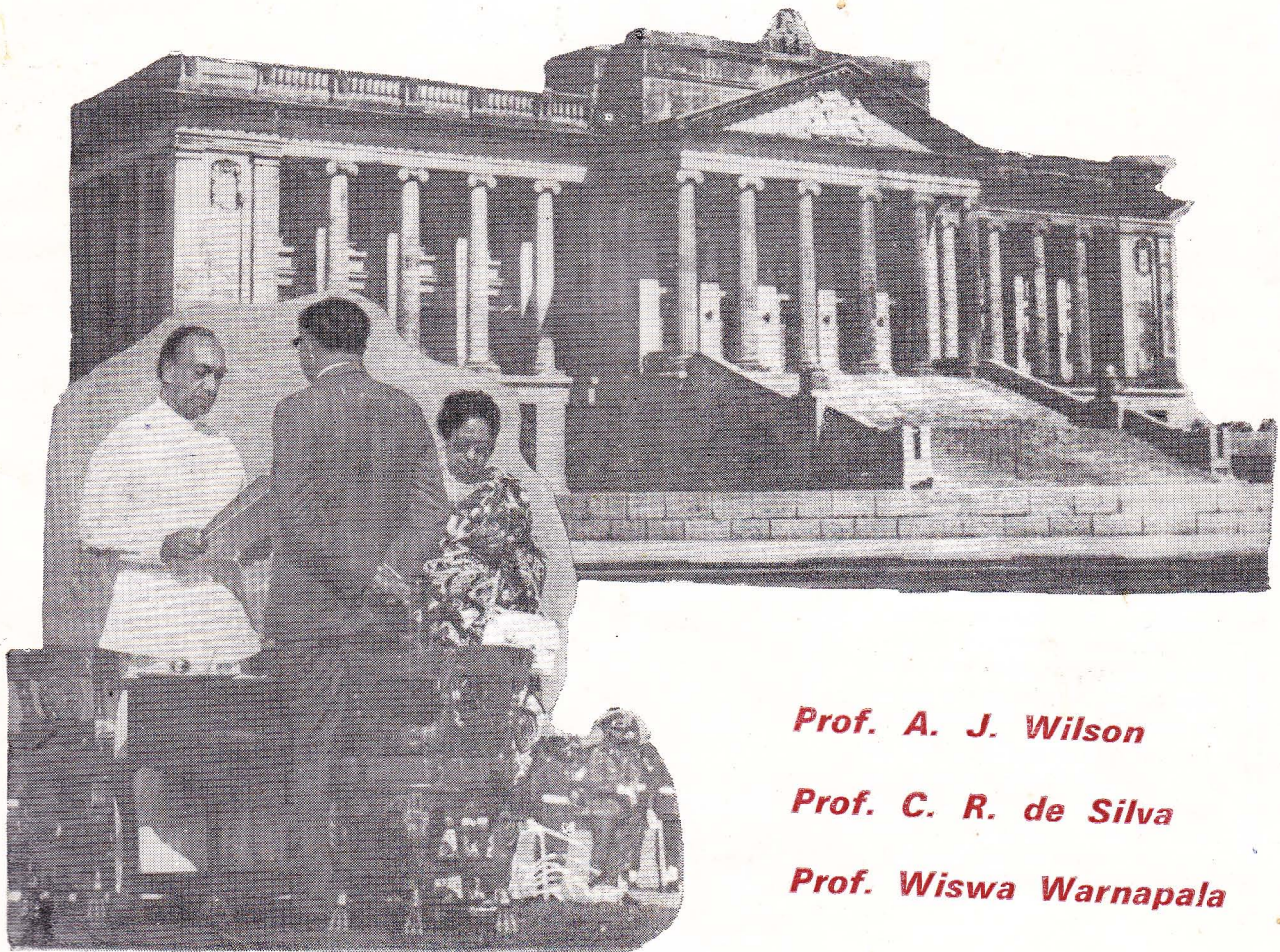
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PRESIDENCY, PARLIAMENT, P.R



Prof. A. J. Wilson

Prof. C. R. de Silva

Prof. Wiswa Warnapala

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ANURA and DCs

There was unusual interest in one of the current series of Wednesday seminars conducted by the Centre for Society and Religion, because the subject was Development Councils, and one of the speakers billed was Mr. Anura Bandaranaike. Mr. Bandaranaike surprised his audience by explaining that he was not there that evening as a spokesman of the SLFP, but as an individual.

It soon became clear why Mr. Bandaranaike, in a lucid analysis of the legislation, directed his criticism at the 'undemocratic' and 'over centralised' character of the institutions it seeks to set up, eschewing on the other hand the communal feelings SLFP propagandists have sought to rouse against the Act. And indeed, if one criticises the DCs as too much subject to centralized control, one can't logically maintain at the same time that they are going to divide the country, as some SLFP spokesmen have said.

Since the SLFP's opposition to the DC Act has alienated the TULF, which had earlier made some tentative moves to link up with the SLFP-led opposition outside. Or was he only taking a line which was aimed at the CSRs generally anti-communal audience?

Mr. Bandaranaike laid himself open to a quiet piece of irony from the Centre's soft-spoken Fr. Tissa Balasuriya. Thanking the audience for the patient hearing they had given him, Mr. Bandaranaike remarked that he was used to being heckled, and sometimes had to forget his Royal College upbringing and resort in 'Mariakade Language'. Fr. Balasuriya, whose institution functions from Deans Road, gently remarked that the Centre was quite happy to be in Mariakade.

CHARITY OR PREVENTION?

There has been much effusion of humanitarian sentiment in the State-Controlled Press over the case of the CTB worker who is

dying of a condition caused by inhaling Diesel fumes. But while nobody questions that it is a good thing to help this unfortunate worker and his family, the most important questions have been forgotten. How is it that a worker—in a State enterprise at that—has his life shortened by neglect of health safeguards? And how many such other cases are there which go unnoticed and unreported?

A glance at the factory legislation on the statute book shows that the law provides for inspection and regulation of industrial enterprises to protect the health and safety of workers, but there is hardly any attempt to enforce these provisions. And it is the State enterprises which are least often inspected and checked for this purpose.

With the door open to foreign capital, and the possibility of hazards and polluting industries being exposed to Sri Lanka, effective safety and health regulation is going to be more badly needed than ever before, to protect workers as well as others. Neither charity nor workmen's compensation can be a substitute for prevention.

ILLICIT LOVE

The "Sunday Times" certainly did well to spotlight the case of the Sri Lankan housemaid in Abu Dhabi who was sentenced to six months' jail and 50 lashes. But although the 'Times' patted itself on the back a week later on the ground that its story had provoked a CRM appeal to the Government for intervention, the paper can hardly be congratulated on the manner in which it reported the story, which must have created prejudice in the minds of many readers against the victim.

The headline said the girl had been sentenced to lashes "FOR PROSTITUTION." This was contradicted by the body of the story, which said the girl had "an illicit love-affair" with a man servant in the same house. There was clearly therefore no

(Continued on page 32)

Press Freedom

Mrs. Indira Gandhi, addressing the newspaper editors of India, is reported to have posed the question: "Is the freedom of the press greater than the interests of the country?" If we concede what is implicit in the question viz. that there is indeed a conflict between the two, our answer must be a resounding "NO". But we have learnt from bitter experience that politicians tend to see the interests of the country as identical with and indistinguishable from their own political ambitions. So Mrs. Gandhi's rhetoric is immediately suspect. In this context, it is heartening to recall that when the US press started serialising the stolen Pentagon papers the US government failed in its attempt to get the Supreme Court to interdict the publication of further instalments.

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even though the court accepted the government's submission that the country was at war and that publication would endanger national security. The court ruled that the right to a free press was more important than the possible damage to the nation from disclosing such secret information. Our own government has repeatedly affirmed its allegiance to the ideal of a free press but it is unfortunate that it has taken no steps to divest itself of control of the two major newspaper groups in the country.

Boyd Almeida

Dematagoda

A Correction

I have read the article, "Anatomy of a strike" by Jayantha Somasundaram. Therein, he makes the totally unfounded statement that our Federation did not participate in the recent strike. This statement is based on the fact that one of our unions did not strike.

I know that the writer of the article is politically hostile to us. That does not give him the right to distort facts.

Hundreds of our members stand dismissed because of their participation in the strike.

I shall be obliged if you will publish this correction.

N. Sanmugathan
General Secretary

Energy Crisis

When the bad polemist finds himself with his back to the wall he is apt to turn either sarcastic or irrelevant. Mr. Karunatilake does both. Called upon to substantiate his averment that "the ruling and mercantile elite (sic) barked the CEB unions into submission and overruled power cuts" all he can do is to claim that at some time or other which he is not definite about, there was an article by someone whose identity he either does not know or chooses not to reveal, in the Daily News (which, pardon me, I do not

mean to read J. C. 3, ii), which allegedly inquired if power cuts were "really necessary." This is a far cry from "barking" and "overruling" by the r. and m. elite." He sarcastically "bows" to my "more experienced judgement" about "the airconditioning of the backsides of secretaries" (still harping on those callipygous tuberostities) and proceeds to introduce an irrelevant issue: the superiority of electric fans, which circulate fresh air, to air-conditioners, which "cool and recirculate our own exhalations." Even in this irrelevancy he manages to be wrong. Mr. K should know that air-conditioners have exhaust fans that expel used air from the room as fresh air comes in.

Don't get me wrong — all I'm saying is that even in criticising an inept administration the truth is always the most effective and slipshodness and fake indignation counter-productive.

Dr. Costain de Vos
Kollupitiya

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Caught in a nut-cracker?

NEWS
BACKGROUND

Is Sri Lanka getting caught in an IMF-IBRD nut-cracker? While the question is of vital importance to the people of this country, it is also of absorbing interest to all students of international economic trends and the impact on Third World politics. Portugal, Turkey, Zambia, Egypt, Tanzania, Kenya, Jamaica are a few of the more recent cases which help illuminate the basic problem and the political troubles and turmoil, and social discontents, it produces. Even advanced nations like the U. K. and in-between countries like Portugal have experienced difficulties caused by the same problem. In Paris, the Finance Minister 'exploded in anger' on hearing the cautionary warnings sounded by the Bank and some western donors on the accelerated Mahaveli project, and such high-cost schemes like housing, urban development and the new capital. His colleague, Mr. Gamini Dissanayake, was also present at the Aid Group meeting in early July. His participation (it was the first time that 2 Cabinet Ministers had attended the IBRD-sponsored annual meeting of the consortium) was made necessary by the decision to devote part of the time to a discussion on the Mahaveli.

In fact, the temperature rose and tempers got frayed after the ritual coffee-break. Mr. Dissanayake did some tough talking on behalf of the government's policies, especially its preoccupation with the massive problem of unemployment.

He repeated the same argument, spiced this time with some sardonic remarks about rising unemployment in some western countries (the UK is an obvious example) when he addressed the BMICH conference on September 3/4. The conference was jointly sponsored by the Financial Times and the GCEC.

As far as the government is concerned, there will be no brakes on the accelerated Mahaveli project. Will government

spending on the other projects, selected for special scrutiny and criticism, be pruned? Has the government a real choice? Both the government's financial experts and the foreign advisers, including the resident representatives of "the two sisters", share a strong scepticism about these projects which have no immediate or high economic return. But how much can be cut? And what of the politics of this sensitive question?

According to the WEEKEND's usually well-informed commentator, MIGARA, the two Ministers had the full backing of the President himself when they answered the critics in Paris.

But as many Third World countries have come to learn the hard way, the banker is often in a position to call the tune. The same thought finds more acidulous expression in an adage familiar to the International community of economic pundits. When it starts to rain, the banker takes away the umbrella.

The IMF unfurled an umbrella. It threw a net or offered us a cushion. The favoured metaphors are many but they all add up to a single exercise — the IMF's extended facility which has covered the three budgets of the UNP. The UNP reaches its half-way mark, and the fourth budget will reveal how far it has been caught in a crunch.

To keep these projects going at the same pace and on the same scale, money has to be raised, both locally and outside. How much can be mobilised from domestic savings? And what effect will this have on living standards?

It is argued that loans and aid can be obtained from other foreign sources — OPEC, the Kuwaiti Fund, and other Arab sources. Finally, we can raise loans from commercial banks.....paying of course much higher rates of interest.

But there's a catch here. IMF support is vitally important not only in terms of how much is

given. It creates what the bankers and the businessmen call a 'climate of confidence'. Although the two agencies are known as the two sisters in the popular vocabulary of the international civil service, the IMF is really 'Big Brother' in the smaller, well-knit family of world bankers. When Big Brother gives its blessings to a government and extends its support, the commercial bankers turn a more attentive and confident eye on the IMF's protege.

Conscious of the cold facts of economic life and sensitive to the IMF's invisible influence, some governments acquiesce in what they regard as inescapable, however unpalatable that may be, and whatever burdens it may cast on the people. Portugal had to do that, after a fierce political tussle within the country. Turkey has edged towards chronic political violence and near-anarchy. Chile chose military dictatorship, neo-Fascism and Friedmanism, two sides of the same coin. Others went through hard bargaining and extracted some 'concessions' but these proved temporary victories, as in Zambia, Ghana, Peru etc. Jamaica refused to toe the line, and Prime Minister Manley's radical government which has to face elections soon, meets threats from every quarter and de-stabilisation, Chile style, can be the price Jamaica has to pay for its brave gestures of independence.

Social disturbance and the anxieties created in the minds of Third World leaders and the elites of these societies are converted into constraints on economic choices and policies. Self-interest alone determines this. No ruling group wishes to adopt measures which lead inevitably to mass hardship, social tension and its own alienation from the people. These dominant groups would like to retain some measure of independence or autonomy in decision-making.

(Continued on page 4)

INVESTMENT AND ECONOMIC CHOICES

The discussion at the recent conference sponsored by the Financial Times and the GCEC outlines the main issues as seen by the government, its economic advisers and by foreign experts. This report was published by the F. T.:-

SRI LANKA'S current account deficit, amounting to Rs. 3,500m (£90m) in 1979, is expected to double by 1984, as an inevitable consequence of the Government's efforts to restructure the economy, according to the Finance and Planning Minister, **Mr. Ronnie de Mel**.

Citing the fundamentals of Government economic policy, the floating exchange rate, the phasing out of subsidies, the emphasis on export-led economic growth and massive public investment in infrastructure **Mr. de Mel** said that Sri Lanka would therefore expect the support of the international community in the medium term.

He was speaking to a conference in Colombo on business prospects in Sri Lanka, sponsored by the Financial Times and the Greater Colombo Economic Commission. **Mr. de Mel** said his Government did not intend to plan for the whole economy but solely for the role of the public sector.

Public sector investment 1980-84 was estimated at just over half total feasible investment of R126bn in both the public and private sectors during the same period.

Major projects include the Mahaweli River development programme, without which Sri Lanka's entire economic strategy could flounder, said **Mr. de Mel**. More than half total public investment was expected to come from foreign sources.

Examining the role of the banking and financial sectors, **Dr. W. Rasaputram**, Governor of the Central Bank of Ceylon, noted that several foreign banks had established branches in the country to take advantage of recent political and economic development.

He said that the establishment of foreign currency banking units in 1979 had led to an expansion of Sri Lanka's role as a financial centre. It was envisaged that the active participation of the commercial banks in the units would result in the establishment of a well-organised off-shore banking centre.

Commercially viable private sector projects have less of a chance to get off the ground in Sri Lanka than public sector ones, according to **Dr. Johannes Witteveen**, formerly managing director of the International Monetary Fund and now adviser to the board of managing directors, Amsterdam-Rotterdam Bank. Differences in financial resources, managerial capacity and the quality of personal support between public and private sector planning had contributed to this state of affairs.

As Sri Lanka's export-led industrialisation programme developed, the private sector would have to seek diversified sources of financing, in which investment banks could play a positive role.

From an investment banker's point of view, Sri Lanka is a very attractive country in terms of its potential, notwithstanding current short-term problems, according to **Mr. John L. Boyer** of the Honkong and Shanghai Bank.

Noting Sri Lanka's high credit rating in international money markets, **Mr. Boyer** estimated that the country would require additional foreign loans and direct investments to cover its deficit of \$ 1bn (£415m) up to 1984. Advice on such capital inflows and their applications would fall within the scope of investment or merchant banks familiar with Sri Lanka.

Mobilisation of capital development is one of the most difficult problems facing everyone involved with Sri Lanka's economic development, **Mr. James B. Wiesler**, executive vice-president of Bank of America's Asia division said.

Project financing might have to be structured so that lenders were willing to rely for repayment on the cash flows generated by the venture itself.

Caught in...

(Continued from page 3)

But the nature of the national economy, the vested interests of those who support these groups and the inherent character of the chosen economic strategy reinforces, step by step, year by year, the basic condition of dependence.

Politics in the Third World show a confusing, zig-zagging movement between these polarities, but the general direction is towards dependence and with it, restraints, restrictions, repression. For Park, Pinochet or Somoza, the way is clear; for a Marcos, not so easy; for an infant Zimbabwe, and a young Mozambique, the nature of the predicament is a painful discovery. For Third World rulers who perceive and face electoral pressures, the problem of increasingly limited options is all the more acute.

El Salvador: the next Vietnam?

FOREIGN
NEWS

El Salvador constitutes, at the present moment, the weakest link in the chain of imperialism. Indeed, Central America has been identified as the 'front line' of the struggle between U.S. imperialism and the peoples struggling for national and social liberation. What is most significant is that this front line is situated precisely

in the 'rear' of U.S. imperialism! It is this that has unnerved the U.S. to the point of drawing up plans for military intervention. President **Fidel Castro** has publicly warned of the strong possibility of such aggression in the event of a Reagan victory. He has also warned the United States, that such aggression would definitely

lead to the creation of a second Vietnam, on the very doorstep of the U.S.

In anticipation of such an intervention, the Oppositional forces in that country have taken a step which signals a **qualitatively new stage** in their struggle. There has occurred a political merger of the most significant sectors of the revolutionary opposition. They have set up a common political leadership and a joint headquarters of the organisations that are calling for armed struggle. This has replaced the Revolutionary Mass Coordinating Body (CRM) which existed since last December.

In a joint statement addressed to the Salvadorian people, the peoples of Central America and the rest of the world, the Salvadorian revolutionary organisations announced that they have "reached a new and higher level of unity" and have set up "a unified leadership which will draw up and implement a single political-military line and will lead the peoples revolutionary struggle to final victory". The aims of the liberation struggle were identified as "the formation of a revolutionary - democratic government and the realization of profound, far-reaching, political, social and economic changes."

The 4 organisations which have signed the declaration are the **Farabundo Marti People's Liberation Forces (FPL)** headed by Sr. Carpio, which is far and away the most important of the revolutionary groups in the country; the **Communist Party of Salvador (CPS)**; the **National Resistance (RN)** whose slogan is "armed struggle today — socialism tomorrow"; and the **Party of the Salvadorian Revolution** together with its military arm the **Peoples Revolutionary Army (PRS — ERP)**.

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Archbishop Romero's last sermon

"The Church which advocates God's rights, God's law and individual human dignity, cannot remain silent when confronted by so much abomination. We want the government to realise that reforms serve no purpose if they are stained with so much blood. In the name of God, then, and in the name of his suffering people, whose laments reach the sky, louder everyday, I implore, I beg, I order in the name of God: Stop the repression!"

These words are part of the last sermon preached by Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, who was shot outrageously in El Salvador on the 26th of March 1980. Two days before the killing, the Archbishop had made a speech from his pulpit calling on the army to refuse to fire, if ordered to gun down civilians. For several years, Romero had used the pulpit in El Salvador to plead for justice, democratic rights and equality for the poverty-stricken people of the country.

El Salvador is run by an 'oligarchy' of 14 families, while the mass of people live in poverty. The regime remains in power by the use of savage repression and is responsible for more than 4,000 deaths in the past 15 months alone. The 'Oligarchy' is backed and financed by the U.S. Millions of dollars worth of military aid has been flowing in over the past few months. No doubt the U.S. would be anxious to prevent the powder-keg of El Salvador taking the same revolutionary fate as Nicaragua.

"I am quite worried by the news that the Government of the United States of America is analysing the means to accelerate the arms race in El Salvador by sending military equipment and advisors to 'train' 3 Salvadorian battalions in logistics, communications and intelligence. If this information is correct, the contribution of your government, instead of helping to increase justice

and peace in El Salvador, will undoubtedly increase injustice and repression against the people who have been struggling for so long to obtain respect of their most fundamental rights."

After the death of Bishop Romero, the U.S. Congress approved the additional sum of 5.7 million dollars for military aid for the Government of El Salvador. Bishop Romero, affirming his faith in the following manner: "Christians have no fear of combat, they know how to fight but they prefer to speak the language of peace. Nevertheless, when a dictatorship threatens human rights and the common good of the nation; when it becomes intolerable and closes all channels of dialogue, understanding and rationality — when this occurs, then the Church speaks of the legitimate right to insurrectional violence..."

"To determine the movements of insurrection, to indicate the moment when all the channels of dialogue are closed, this is not the task of the church. To the Oligarchy I shout a warning: "open your hands, give up the reins of power, because the moment will arrive in which your hands will be severed..."

When questioned "Will you as a pastor, continue at the side of the people?" "That is what I propose to do and I ask God to help me to be sufficiently strong, because I fear the weaknesses of the flesh... in difficult moments we all suffer fear, the instinct for self-preservation is very strong, and for that I ask for help..."

"Help not only for me, but for all those who are carrying out this pastoral work, that we might remain at our posts because we have much to do; even if it only be to collect the corpses and to administer absolution to the dead... the flame of social justice must always remain alight in the hearts of the Salvadorian people."

IRAN DEBATE

The statement of "The Organisation to Support the Islamic Revolution in Iran" says that the organisers of the Seminar — Iran — **The Way Forward** — claimed that Iran had accomplished a socialist revolution and not an Islamic revolution and therefore finds fault with this. In actual fact the whole purpose of the seminar was to focus attention on the impasse of the Iranian Revolution which having taken an "Islamic" road is now at a dead-end. The seminar was under the title: Iran — The Way Forward — thereby focussing attention to the need for a new approach. No speaker at this seminar sought to sail under false colours which the so-called Organisation to support the Islamic Revolution in Iran has chosen to foist on them. In fact, every speaker in varying degrees sought to emphasise the limitations of the Khomeini leadership and the need to break out of these shackles if the revolution in Iran is to go forward.

The Iranian people had two broad aims in getting rid of the regime of the Shah. One, a desire to be free from despotism and rule by terror; and, two, to rid the country of imperialist manipulation particularly that of American imperialism. Has the Iranian peoples demands for democratic freedoms, right to self-determination and an end to poverty and oppression of women met by the Khomeini regime? NO. Nowhere is the need for a secular state more urgent than in Iran. Why do we say this?

In the name of an "Islamic Republic", Iran is being turned into a country dominated by Persian chauvinists. Khomeini and the ruling leadership by and large are Persians and belong to the Shi'ite sect of Islam whereas the non-Persian element in Iran who constitute a significant number of the population belong to the Sunni sect. The rights of these groups can be guaranteed only by a secular state in Iran. This may sound paradoxical but

The following statement was issued by the Committee for Solidarity with the Iranian People

the truth of this will be obvious to anyone who thinks a little on this matter. A Persian-Shia dominant Muslim state will by its very nature and logic erode the rights of the non-Persian minority Sunni Muslims. A secular state will be neutral as between the races and sects and will therefore promote or give equal rights to Persians and non-Persians, the Shias and the Sunnis. Already even at this stage of the "Islamic Revolution" the dominance of the Shia sect is enshrined in the Constitution of Iran itself i. e. only person of the Shia sect can be the country's President. This is within Iran but Iran lives in the world and in the Middle-East in particular. And in the Middle-East an "Islamic Republic" in Iran taking the form of Persian-Shia dominance is an open invitation to engage in internecine warfare on a sectarian basis and to divert the attention of the Muslim masses from their historic goal which is the elimination of American imperialism from the Middle-East. Do these people not realise that an "Islamic Republic" in Iran in the particular form of a Persian-Shia dominance is the best gift that they can give to Israel propagandist manipulation. That is why it is necessary for true friends of Iran to emphasise or stress this aspect of the matter and demand that Iran's best interests is served under a secular banner.

It is well known that Iran consists of diverse races and the Shia earlier and Khomeini now base themselves on the Persian element but what is important for revolutionaries is to realise that there is a non-Persian and Semitic element (the Arabs, Kurds, Turkomans, Azerbaijanis, Baluchis, etc.) and they constitute a significant number. The non-Persian minorities played a significant role in the struggle against the Shah and

Khomeini had denied them their rights which they expected from from him on the overthrow of the Shah. The pleas of the minorities for a "human regime which would respect political freedoms and rights throughout Iran, and the realisation of national rights for all nations in the form of autonomy or a Federation in free Iran" have only earned the wrath of Khomeini. Khomeini brands those who fight for these rights as "servants of American Imperialism and Zionism maintaining connections with element of the Pahlavi regime." The gap between the Khomeini regime and the minorities has widened to the extent of being unbridgeable. The despair of the minorities is best mirrored in the declaration put out by the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran calling progressives all over the world and in the UN to initiate action to "prevent genocide and annihilation of the Kurdish nation." The same appeal says that in Iran "all national minorities not of Persian origin, or of the Shi'ite sect are threatened with extinction. In an earlier statement issued by us in May 1980, we said that traditional reaction in Iran had used Persian chauvinism as a cement to hold together the diverse national elements viz. Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Turkomans, Arabs, Baluchis, etc. within the framework of the regime of the Shah and pointed out that the Iranian revolution for its very survival must decisively break with the Shah's policy on this vital matter. In fact what one witnesses today is that Khomeini is not only broadly pursuing the policies of the Shah in this respect but also seeks to formalise the annexa-

tion of the three islands occupied by the Shah in 1971. The Iranian Revolution cannot advance in this manner—on the basis of the denial of democratic and national rights of the non-Persian minorities and the alienation of very necessary Arab support in the region of the Gulf. There is no gainsaying the fact that Khomeini's doings far from eliminating American imperialism in the region have contributed largely in strengthening the American military presence in the Gulf region. That is why we who are concerned with the forward march of the Iranian Revolution had to sound an alarm bell that Persian-Shia dominance, which characterise the Khomeini regime is an incubus on the Iranian masses and the sooner they shed this incubus the better it is for the advance of the of the Iranian revolution.

One speaker at the seminar did in fact refer to Khomeinism. He took up the position that in the name of Islam very un-Islamic things are happening in Iran. In support of this statement he said that Islam abhors regimentation and compulsion and these form the very hall mark of the policies of the "Islamic rulers" in Iran. Islam preaches brotherhood but in Iran, as was the case in East Pakistan in 1971, Muslims are made to kill Muslims in order to perpetuate the dominance of a particular race and this is repugnant to the teachings of Islam, he stated.

It is not without significance that the organisation to support the Islamic revolution in Iran refer to Afghanistan and sees in the defence of the 1978 Revolution in Afghanistan the claws of the Russian bear. We are with the Afghan people in the struggle to seize the lands from the landlords. We are with the land-reformers. We are with those who want education and thereby end illiteracy and ignorance. We are against selling of children and child-brides. We are not thereby opposed to Muslims or Islam. We are opposed to these mediaval practices which brings dishonour to Islam. ●

El Salvador . . .

(Continued from page 5)

The Declaration significantly invokes "the memory of the beloved and unforgettable archbishop of the people, Oscar Arnulfo Romero", and goes on to say that:

"The Salvadorian people are proud of the new church, identified with their cause, that was built by priests who have been assassinated, and their martyr archbishop. We are sure that church and all Christians who are faithful to the basic founding principles of their revolution, will continue to remain firm, fighting shoulder to shoulder with the people all the way to the end."

The common international line of the Salvadorian revolutionaries is of much interest as well. The Manifesto states that:-

"The Salvadorian people and their revolutionary and democratic organisations admire the example, firm stand and sovereign dignity of Cuba, which they view as the vanguard of the Latin American peoples in the struggle for social justice, freedom, development and true national independence. They feel great admiration for and solidarity with the people of Nicaragua, and their exemplary revolutionary efforts: liberated Nicaragua, now truly democratic and independent, advances victoriously towards development, prosperity and social justice"

" Their struggles and victories — those of Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Iran and Zimbabwe — inspire and teach us to help our people understand that all people have the same enemies at whose head are the U. S. imperialists "

This assertion made by incontestably revolutionary forces, is a slap in the face of those who see Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea and Angola as "Soviet puppets and who deny the legitimacy of the revolutionary processes in Ethiopia and Afghanistan. It is also a slap in the face of those

who claim to be immaculate Leninist internationalists but condemn Iran, Ethiopia and the fraternal efforts to defend the Afghan revolution. The joint manifesto offers a clear perspective in identifying the foremost strategic enemy of humanity i.e. U.S. imperialism. The Salvadorian revolutionaries clearly reject any diversionary slogans concerning a non-existent Soviet social imperialism!

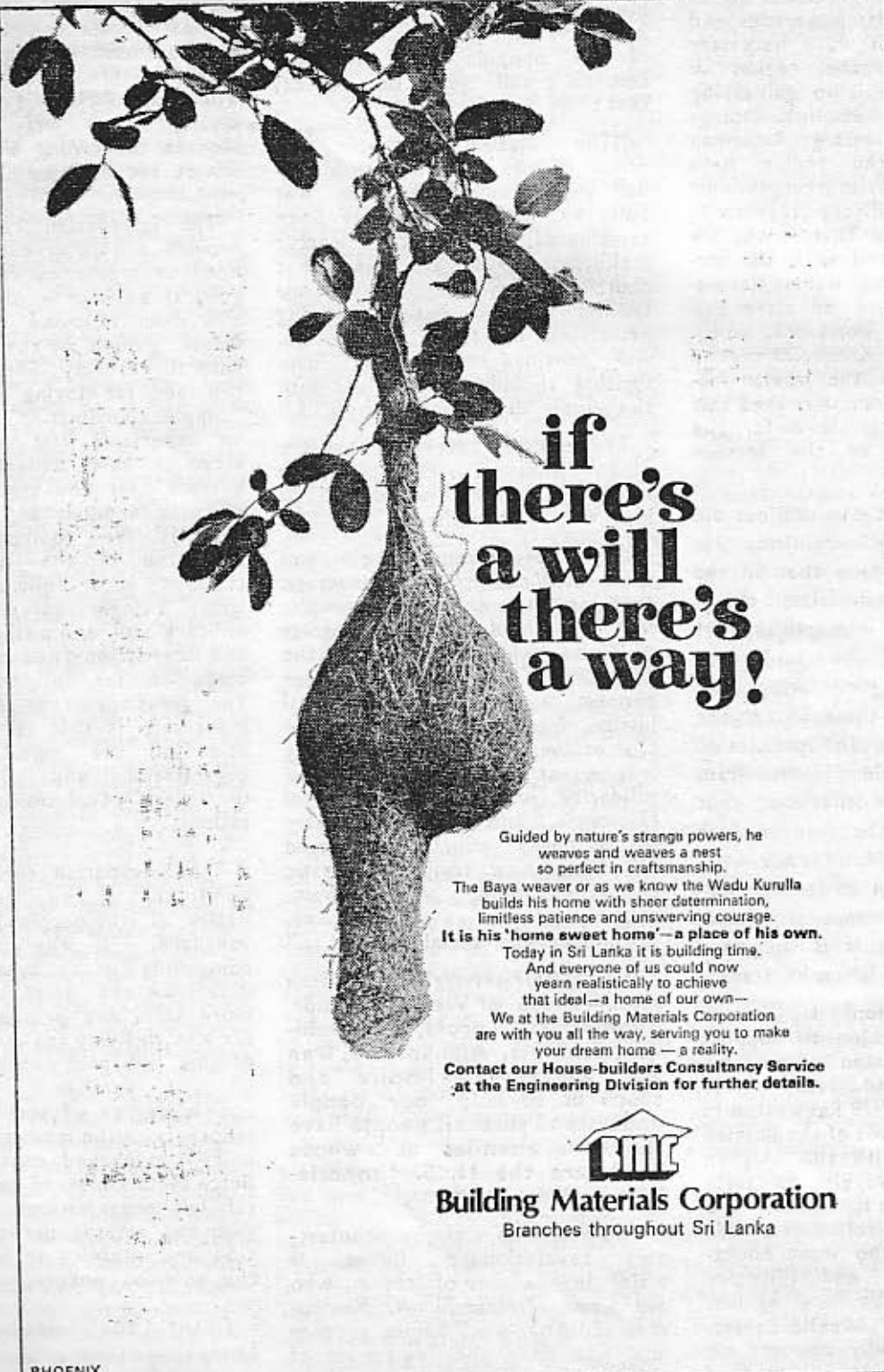
The Salvadorian revolutionaries provide a shining example of the need to create conditions for the general unification of all the peoples democratic and revolutionary forces, guided by the principle of natural respect. They point out the need for moving forward from "simple coordination", which is an imperative first step, to the stage of "unity, understanding and alliance" for the struggle against common enemies and the march towards the common goal of liberation of the people. The creation of a unified vanguard, with "a single leadership, a single military plan and a single national and international line is the highest stage so far in this process. The great advantage of the unified leadership is that it can "draw upon all the moral, political, organisational and military skills of (the) revolutionary organisations."

The Salvadorian revolutionaries admit that if the "deep rooted desire of (the people) for a unified vanguard, is the main force compelling us to overcome our difference and unite in an evermore solid and profound manner. Only in this way can we be worthy of this insurgent people."

This degree of sensitivity and sceptivity to the masses' desire for unity is in marked contrast to the fierce sectarianism of certain radical left organisations whose slogans and actions perpetuate division and disunity in the face of the common enemy.

Finally, the Salvadorian revolutionaries issue a warning to the United States:-

(Continued on page 23)



**if
there's
a will
there's
a way!**

Guided by nature's strange powers, he weaves and weaves a nest so perfect in craftsmanship.

The Baya weaver or as we know the Wadu Kurulla builds his home with sheer determination, limitless patience and unswerving courage.

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Towards an alternative model

by Dr. A. J. Wilson

In the modern world we are faced with choosing, in a limited manner, from four or five model constitutional systems designed to suit national genius and particular socio-economic environments. There is firstly the Soviet model with its variations but that is a model which is not a practicable proposition within our present framework. Secondly there is the British parliamentary system which has survived for a couple of centuries. That system however is more an accident of history. It often escapes the attention that there were three and sometimes four houses of Parliament at different times in the constitutional evolution of Britain, that the King used to preside over cabinet meetings until George I, because of his Germanic upbringing, failed to understand the English language, that until recently and even now the British system works so well due to an agreement on fundamentals between the principal parties, neither seeking to step beyond certain defined limits and that the success of cabinet and parliament is largely because of two national characteristics—the habits of a business civilization where bargain and compromise characterise commercial transactions and a kind of team spirit transferred from the playing fields to Parliament—the game must be played according to the rules whoever wins or loses.

We must not also forget the fact that there have been anti-democratic features in the British system. There was a revolution headed by Oliver Cromwell who before he established his Instrument of Government in 1653, which incidentally was the first written constitution in the world, expelled the members of the British Parliament urging them in the name of God to depart and go. Secondly there was the execution of a British King, Charles I. Thirdly, the franchise

"By the sheer arithmetic of the proposed P. R. system, the UNP cannot be defeated." This was perhaps the most provocative remark made at a two-day seminar organised by the Marga Institute in co-operation with the Sri Lanka branch of the inter-parliamentary union.

Participants in the seminar included many of the most important political figures in the island, eminent academics, lawyers, parliamentary officials and other experts. The seminar was declared open by the Speaker, President J. R. Jayewardene; Prime Minister R. Premadasa, Opposition Leader A. Amirthalingam and many others, representing various shades of political opinion addressed the distinguished gathering. The presidential system, the role of parliament and the opposition, the proposals on PR were some of the main topics. Since the discussion is of absorbing interest to all students of national politics, we publish several of the papers presented at this symposium.

in Britain was only conceded in mealy dribbles, ultimate universal franchise coming only in the late 1920s. Lastly the British do not have a written Constitution, by which is meant, a constitution committed to parchment which when disputed is justiciable in the courts of law. There are many bits and pieces of the Constitution in legislative acts, judicial decisions and the writings of authorities such as Anson, Dicey, Jennings and Samuel de Smith, but the question always arises as to where we should go for the British Constitution. The danger is that in the hands of another people with a different set of traditions, such a Constitution can become the plaything of politicians.

We had a written version of the British Constitution from 1947 to 1977. This constitution left many things to be desired. There were no strict rules which guided the executive, and in particular the Cabinet. The Cabinet was virtually the master of Parliament. Parliament was more or less a rubber stamp. Secondly the Prime Minister was a Prime Minister in the all powerful sense of the British Prime Minister without of course being hedged in by the traditions and conventions that restrict the British Prime Minister. And more importantly the Prime Minister was also an American President. The office had become plebiscitary in character. The person who

took office acquired tremendous presidential authority.

The third model is that of the Fifth French Republic which was tailor-made for Charles de Gaulle but which has worked reasonably well in the hands of his successors Georges Pompidou and Giscard D'Estaing. The system is a half way house between the presidential and parliamentary systems but there is no gainsaying as to where power lies. The French President is powerful. Parliament is his forum, in a sense his creature but only so long as he can muster enough forces from the centre, the eternal morass as it is called in French political circles. In other words the French have a wide centre from which a wise President can construct a coalition and he has the further advantage that he is backed by a hard core of Gaullists. So the system works and has worked well so far but because of only one factor—there is a complementary majority that binds the two sectors of government—president and parliament. The moment that relationship disintegrates as when there arise contradictory majorities, there is likely to develop conflict between the President and the popular house. That possibility is ever present and Giscard D'Estaing sees it already looming in the horizon.

There is this likelihood under our present constitutional system

—the danger of contradictory majorities. Five alternatives are available in such an event. The President may revert to the role of a constitutional head of state—that fact has been seriously discussed in France. The President and the new Prime Minister could come to an understanding as to how power should be shared. Could this happen if there are irreconcilable differences between the two opposing personalities? A fragmented legislature resulting from the workings of proportional representation could possibly mitigate the rigours of the conflict. Thirdly there could be outright conflict between President and Prime Minister. The new Prime Minister may refuse to seek accommodation with the President. He or she in the aftermath of victory may seek a mandate through a referendum to clip the powers of the President, not constitutionally, because there are prescribed procedures, but as a means of exercising moral pressure on the Presidential incumbent. Fourthly, the President can seek to construct a national government by attracting support from parties opposed to his party in the hope that such a coalition will command a majority. Lastly he can dissolve Parliament in the hope of securing a different result. But if the same result repeats itself, then he is finished.

Two conditions that provide motion to the French system need to be underscored. Firstly the absence so far of contradictory majorities as between Parliament. But more importantly French ministers vacate their seats in the legislature when appointed to a cabinet post (Article 23 of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic). They are not therefore encumbered with the day to day chores of parliamentary life. More importantly the French administrative machine, unlike ours, is a highly efficiently organized technostucture. It has always been so. France has been the administrative state and in the context of the frequently collapsing cabinets of the Third and Fourth French Republics, it was the French civil service that kept France's administrative life

in motion. Tack on to this, the highly sophisticated technostucture that the three elitist Presidents of the Fifth French Republic have fashioned out for the purpose of carrying out the decrees of an economic state and one can understand why France in a sense has partially realised its economic dream.

These conditions are unfortunately lacking in our own environment. Quite a few of the island's top civil servants carry vestiges of the colonial past. Many of them are attuned to Westminster-style politics, steeped in Laski, Jennings, Greaves, may be Samuel de Smith. Even the British have changed. There might no doubt be on the part of civil servants in Sri Lanka efforts to keep in touch with recent development but the thinking, is in many vital matters, along the Westminster groove. Civil servants with a colonial past transmit similar values to their juniors. But there is yet another and more stultifying contradiction. A technostucture which is an effective administrative machine that will be at the beck and call of the President of the Republic is an absolute *sine qua non* for the transit to French presidentialism. We on the other hand face the danger of falling between the two stools of British parliamentarism and French presidentialism. The bureaucracy has not as yet accustomed itself to the new system. A modern presidential superstructure has been grafted on to a structure used to different methods of getting things done.

But there is something much more serious that is happening. If we compare the levels of education, professionalism and expertise that used to prevail in the legislature prior to 1956, the differences become stark. Since 1956, our legislators have tended to be drawn from a wider provenance. We have, to use contemporaneous language, transited to the age of the common man. The same applies to ministers in the pre- and post—1956 periods. Our political institutions are unfortunately not geared towards initiating ministers

into the intricacies of government. Nor does our system provide, as in France or the United States, for the appointment of experts from outside the legislature to key cabinet positions. The question then arises as to how the uninitiated minister could be educated. This has not always happened. On the contrary serious erosions have been made into our political system as a result of the intrusion of a third force. It is a third force that is neither responsible, or answerable or accountable to any popularly constituted mechanism. The danger to the new structures is that this third force comprise two elements. There are the old world British-trained generalist, jack of all trades civil servants. The administration has in addition been infiltrated by party faithfuls and party bureaucrats. In other words we have the British-trained anachronisms, transmitters of outdated non-relevant values, working side by side with party men. Since 1956 the party has increasingly tended to merge with the bureaucracy and to manipulate it.

In the pre-1955 period the political interest of ministers of the cabinet and higher civil servants tended to coincide as they were drawn from the same social milieu or ascended to it by successful matrimonial arrangements. In the post-1956 period, the party hack strained at the leash to become the administrative superman who would manipulate the inexperienced mortal, the political minister. In effect quite a few senior administrators today are in fact co-ministers or what one may call counter-ministers. They are policy-makers and they implement policies nominally approved by those of their political chiefs who are inexperienced ministers. This smokescreen of anonymity behind which the higher administrator conceals himself must be removed. He has to be made to come out in the open and he should be examined by legislators on the implications of this policy.

The fourth model is the Swiss type of government. In a way the period of the operation of the Donoughmore Constitution, 1931-1947,

provided us with the use of one important stand of the Swiss system. The Donoughmore executive, the Board of Ministers was like the Swiss Cabinet which is called the Federal Council. The Council is a body of seven members elected by the two houses of the Swiss Parliament. Like the Board of Ministers used to do in certain instances, the Swiss Cabinet carries out the decisions of the legislature whether it likes these or not. There are, no doubt, in the Swiss system various checks on the legislature such as the referendum and the initiative. There is also the fact of the comparative smallness, prosperity and stability of the country. But the point worth noting is that the Board of Ministers functioned reasonably well in a legislature in which it did not have a coherent majority and with which it was not always in agreement. There was besides, the Executive Committee system under the Donoughmore Constitution. That system glossed over the unnecessarily sharp division between government and opposition which is prevalent in the Anglo-Saxon style of politics. Members were made aware of the government's plans and could at times have these improved or modified. The acerbity of party strife was thereby minimized. What is more the committee system provided an excellent training ground for the member of the legislature. He learned a great deal about the working of the governmental apparatus and this in many ways prepared him for ministerial office in the future. And most important of all, the civil servant and other public servants had, if necessary, to appear before an executive committee, answer questions and if the need arose, defend policy which he may have had a hand in formulating. In this way opportunity presented itself to the legislator to get to the heart of the matter. The civil servant or the public servant did not, like his counterpart of today, live like the Cyclops in irresponsible freedom.

The American system, the last of our models, is characterised by the national plebiscitary nature of the presidency, the sepa-

ration of powers and the supremacy of the constitution. The design was meant for negative government, the frontiersman state and the needs of what was in the beginning an agricultural society. But it has adapted itself to the changing environment and checks and balances intended to place roadblocks on positive state action have tended to be under-utilized in times of crisis, giving rise then to a Caesaristic presidency. Members of the Cabinet are, as in our system and the French Fifth Republic, the President's agents, not quite his colleagues. And they do not have to suffer the slings and arrows of the gladiatorial arena that mark British Parliamentary government and our Presidential-Cabinet system. What is however most useful to us in the American model is the wide range of activities covered by Congressional Committees. Apart from these being conduit pipes that connect the otherwise compartmentalised executive and legislature, their investigative powers and the fact that public officials and other personages are obligated to appear before them when summoned, do, to a great extent, make way for open government and a degree of accountability.

Four of the five models discussed have characteristics in them which can be utilised to improve the Presidential—Cabinet system of the Second Republic. We are closest to the Fifth French Republic but our political ethos is by no means exactly the same. Consequently modifications are called for not only to meet the needs of modernisation but to suit the system to the requirements of a Third World state involved in the development exercise. At the political level, it could engender a greater endeavour if the nation-building ministers did not have to sit in Parliament. Some ministers could continue to remain in the legislature especially those concerned with managing the Government's majority. This would include the Prime Minister who is in fact the leader of the House and chief of the Government's majority. A committee system which combines in it aspects of the

Congressional committees, the Donoughmore executive committees and the committees which ran parallel to the ministries in the Fourth French Republic may serve several purposes. Ministers who are not members of the legislature, high level bureaucrats and other public personages could appear before committees to explain and defend policy. Proposed legislation could, provided a strict time-tabling is adhered to, be subjected to the scrutiny of such committees with members of the Government and Opposition participating. In that way compromises could be effected and differences or conflicts between the opposing political formations might be mitigated. The chances of bipartisan legislation in these circumstances are rendered better. The opportunities for investigative committees as well are vast. Given that we have a bias towards petition-mongering and anonymous letter-writing, such committees could serve as a useful release for pent up public anger by unearthing or aborting scandal. Where the administration is concerned, the techno-structure needs complete overhauling. The bureaucracy must be brought in line with a state that is on the threshold of the twenty-first century. Only then will our political system become updated like the steamlined economic and administrative state of the Fifth French Republic. None of these changes can be wrought by executive fiat. Specialised presidential commissions or committees need to examine existing conditions, recommend necessary changes and the rates at which transformation should occur. Alternatively we are likely to have a presidentialism superimposed on a cabinet-type situation under which only a tinkering with the structure could take place.

Which system is best ?

by Dr. C. R. de Silva and S. W. R. de A. Samarasinghe

Elections to the legislature in Sri Lanka have been conducted on a "plurality system" for over twentyfive years, and ten general elections have been held in the country on that basis since the introduction of universal adult suffrage in 1931. In fact, until a few years ago, the plurality system seemed to have become an accepted part of Sri Lanka's democratic structure, for not only was it adopted in the 'Soulbury Constitution' of 1946/8 but it was also retained in the Constitution of the First Republic in 1972. Moreover, despite the disillusionment of the influential United National Party (UNP) with the plurality system after its disastrous performance under it in 1970, there was no organised political campaign in favour of changing the system to one of proportional representation (PR). The UNP which had also become a convert to a Presidential System of Government in the 1970's clearly promised to end the Westminster System if returned to power but their election manifesto of 1977 avoided any mention of PR. Nevertheless, when the new UNP Government of 1977 proposed a change from the plurality system to one of PR the opposition to the proposal was somewhat muted and the system of PR introduced produced surprisingly little debate and analysis in political and academic circles. The authors of this paper are convinced that given the present constitutional structure, the political forces, and the cultural diversity of Sri Lanka a system of PR has distinct advantages over a system of plurality in the election of representatives to parliament. However, they are not convinced that the PR system that has been adopted in the Constitution of 1978 is necessarily the best for the purpose. Therefore this paper will briefly give the arguments for adopting

PR in Sri Lanka under the present Constitution, describe the system adopted, review its relative merits and demerits and propose an alternative system.

Majoritarians and proportionalists have been arguing about the merits of their respective systems for almost two centuries but these theoretical arguments have to be considered in the context in which the system has to be implemented. In Sri Lanka there appear to be two major arguments in favour of the retention of a system of PR under the present Constitution. The first is dependent on the role of the Legislature and its relations with the Executive and the second rests on the political and social conditions which prevail in the country.

The Constitution of 1978, in contrast to its predecessor, envisages a limited role for the Legislature. Unlike in the Westminster System where the executive in the form of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet depends for its tenure on the pleasure of Parliament, the new Constitution provides for an Executive President with a fixed term of office elected directly by the people. Thus the more frequent emergence of a party or a coalition of parties with a working majority in Parliament which is one of the advantages of a pluralist system assumes diminished importance. Moreover, it is likely that elections to the Legislature on a plurality system would make confrontations between the Legislature and the Executive more frequent. As the President is elected for a six-year term and the Legislature can be dissolved before its full term of office, it is likely that the Legislature and the Executive could be controlled by different parties. Sri Lanka's experience with the plurality system has been that

the victorious party generally wins a disproportionate share of seats in the Legislature. For example, in July 1960 the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) with 33.6 per cent of the votes won 49.7 per cent of the seats in the Legislature. Under PR system they are likely to have won much less and thus would have given a UNP President more room for manoeuvre. Similarly the UNP victory in 1965 would have been less clearcut under a PR system and might have left an SLFP President with the option of building an anti-UNP majority in the Legislature.

Secondly, Sri Lanka does not have a culturally or ethnically homogenous population. The Sinhalese, the majority ethnic group constitute 71.0 per cent of the total population according to the census of 1971 and the dominant Sinhalese Buddhist group consist of just around two-thirds of the population. Of the minority groups, Sri Lanka Tamils, who make up 11.1 per cent of the population, have had reasonable, if not equitable, representation in Parliament under the plurality system largely because they were the majority community in a distinct geographical area. However, the 'Indian' (or Plantation) Tamils who constitute 9.4 per cent of the population and are dispersed in the hill-country would not have equitable representation in Parliament under a plurality system unless multi-member constituencies are created. In a situation where political party differences often reflect ethnic divergencies a PR system would give the Tamil minority a better chance of entering Parliament from even outside those areas where they predominate. Therefore unlike the plurality system, a PR system could be a step in the direction of national integration. Apart from the question of ethnic

minorities there is the existence of a multiplicity of parties. It is well known that a plurality system works best in a two-party system, and its advocates have argued that a genuine two-party system has emerged with the two major parties gaining 81 per cent of the vote in 1977. However, in the previous five general elections the share of the two major parties together has fluctuated between 51 per cent and 71 per cent of the total vote and it is by no means certain that the dominance of the major parties is firmly established.

Thus what seems most desirable in the designing of an electoral system for the Legislature of Sri Lanka in the current context seems to be a system which provides for a stable government without granting excessively disproportionate advantages to the party victorious at the general elections; a system which mirrors opinion in the country while also encouraging the choice of persons whose personal qualities make them suitable to shoulder the burden of Government.

In order to achieve these objectives the framers of the 1978 Constitution have selected a system of PR called the Hamilton Method. This method was first proposed by Alexander Hamilton in 1792 but it has also been known as Vinton's Method of 1850, or 'la repartition au plus fort reste', or the Method of the Largest Remainder.

The system is used under the Constitution of 1978 both for the apportionment of seats among the different electoral districts and (with modification) for the allocation of seats among different parties or groups who contest in each electoral district.

The actual operation of the system is briefly described below. In the first place the whole country is divided into a number of multi-member electoral districts (once and for all) by a Delimitation Commission appointed by the President from among persons not actively engaged in politics. The number of electoral districts is fixed by the Constitution at not less than twenty and not more

than twenty-four. The total number of seats in Parliament is fixed at 196 and of this number thirty-six are to be distributed by the Delimitation Committee among electoral districts so that the nine provinces obtain four seats each. This demarcation of electoral districts and the distribution of the thirty-six seats cannot be altered thereafter except by Constitutional amendment.

The Hamilton Method is used for the apportionment of the remaining 160 seats among the electoral districts according to the electoral register in use for the election in question. In the first place the total number of qualified voters (or electors) is determined. In 1977 for instance there were 6,667,589 electors. This total is divided by 160 and the result brought up to the next highest integer (e.g. for 1977 this would be 41,673). This result is the qualifying number of electors and each electoral district is entitled to one number for each qualifying number of electors registered for that district. Thus, for example, Kalutara district with 432,834 electors would have been entitled to a minimum of 19 seats while Trincomalee, with 97,417 electors would have been allotted 2 seats and Jaffna with 403,261 given 9 seats. If the total number of seats thus allocated came to less than 160 the remaining seats would be allotted to the electoral districts with the largest residue of electors for whom seats have not been allocated. The seats allocated on a provincial basis would be added to this total and thus Kalutara district would have had 11 seats, Trincomalee 3, and Jaffna 13.

Once the election is held, the allocation of seats to the different parties or groups is also done according to the Hamilton Method. However, in this instance the method is used with three modifications which totally distort the method. In the first place the party which receives the highest number of votes is given the first seat without prejudice to any seats it may gain at a later stage. Secondly, any list of candidates which does not obtain one-eighth of the total votes

cast is regarded as eliminated and all votes cast for this list are treated as invalid. Thirdly, the total number of valid votes is not divided by the total number of seats vacant, as is done in the pure Hamilton Method, but by the number of seats less one, and the resulting qualifying vote is used to allocate all the remaining seats among the contesting parties. Thus, for example, had the scheme been in operation in 1977 in the Kalutara district the UNP can be presumed to have obtained 206,710 votes, the SLFP 94,168 votes and the United Left Front (ULF) 80,585 votes. All other lists having obtained less than 1/8 of the votes would have been disqualified. The UNP would have been awarded the first seat by virtue of having the highest poll. It would have gained five other seats according to its poll making a total of six while the SLFP would have gained three and the United Left Front two seats.

The Hamilton method or modifications of it are used for PR in Italy, Costa Rica, Denmark and Luxemburg and it was at one stage used in Israel. This method was also used for the apportionment of seats in the House of Representatives in the United States from 1850 to 1900. However, it has been rejected in a number of countries after the discovery of what is known as the Alabama Paradox in 1831. In that year it was found that the system would have given Alabama 8 seats in a House of 299 but only 7 seats in a House of 300. The paradox is not an isolated quirk but does occur frequently with the Hamilton method and it was the major reason for its abandonment in the United States.

The Alabama Paradox raises questions about the political acceptability of the Hamilton method for both the apportionment of seats among electoral districts and the selection of legislators. There could well occur a time when an electoral district can be found to lose a seat because the number of seats to be distributed was 160 rather than 159 but perhaps the operation of the

Alabama Paradox is more likely to lead to political upheaval if and when it occurs in the distribution of seats among parties within an electoral district. Table I shows how it could occur. With identical totals of votes polled by parties of two different elections, a smaller party could lose a seat simply because the number of seats allocated to the district has risen by one as a result of changes in the electoral register.

Far more significant, however, are the distortions arising from the nature of the modified Hamilton method in its application to the distribution of seats among parties within each electoral district. The first modification is the award of the first seat to the party with the highest poll. As the total vote for this party is also considered in the allocation of all the other seats in the district this amounts to a weightage in favour of the largest party. The smaller the number of seats in the electoral district the greater would be the proportionate advantage to the largest party. Thus, had the method been in operation in 1977 the UNP would have gained 82,900 votes or 63.4 per cent of the total votes and 64.4 per cent of the valid votes in Matale district. The SLFP would have obtained 35.0 per cent of the total votes and 36.6

per cent of the valid votes amounting to 45,735. Under the present Constitution the UNP would gain 4 of the 5 seats and the SLFP only one. This is an extreme case but as Table II will illustrate if the twelve electoral districts (which according to the 1977 voter figures would have elected eight members or less) are considered, the UNP with 55.1 per cent of the valid votes would have gained 61.7 per cent of the seats while the SLFP with 35.0 per cent of the valid votes would have obtained only 28.3 per cent of the seats. Had the Hamilton method been used without this modification the results would have been 56.7 per cent of seats for the UNP and 33.3 per cent of the seats for the SLFP which seems a more equitable result.

Secondly, there are electoral distortions which arise from the alteration of the method by which the qualifying vote per member is calculated and by the elimination of all lists which poll less than one-eighth of the total vote. In the pure Hamilton method, (which incidentally was the one proposed for this calculation in the draft Constitution) the qualifying vote is calculated by dividing the total valid poll by the number of seats to be filled. In the 1978 Constitution the qualifying vote is calculated

by dividing the total vote by the number of seats to be filled less one. This modification resulted in a built-in bias against the largest parties. In the case of the largest party the bias is neutralised by the allocation of one seat to it before any calculations are made. However, as Table III illustrates the method acts as a disincentive to coalitions among middle-sized parties for they could lose seats by joining together unless they can attract sufficient extra votes to become the major party. Thus in an area like Ratnapura where a Leftist coalition is reasonably certain of obtaining $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of the vote there is no incentive for them to form a common list with the SLFP. This tendency to splinter is checked at the lower levels by the $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent cut-off point. Indeed the adoption of a system with an inbuilt tendency to encourage schism appears to have forced the framers of the Constitution to have a cut-off point to discourage the proliferation of small parties. Two major fears have been expressed in relation to this measure. In the first place it is stated that it would inhibit the smaller (largely left-wing) parties from trying to enter the Parliamentary arena and would turn them away from Constitutional procedures to underground activity. Secondly, it is argued that this measure, by stifling the growth of small parties, might lead to the fossilization of the current political party system. These arguments may be overstated. Many of the smaller political parties did attempt to enter the Legislature even under the more difficult conditions of the plurality system, and indeed few of the parties which gained representation under the previous system would be shut out by the one-eighth threshold. Secondly the current system does not bar the rise of new parties, specially those with a strong regional base any more than the plurality system did. Finally it may be remarked that the $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent requirement on a district level is not much more difficult to obtain than say, 5 per cent on a national level which is one of the qualifications for obtaining

TABLE I

Hypothetical Election Results—Kurunegala Electoral District 1990 And 1991						
<i>1990 Elections</i> —Electoral Register of 1689. No of Electors ... 200,000						
Seats to be Allocated—15. Total Valid Poll ... 189,000						
Qualifying Number of Electors ... 13,500						
Party	...	A	B	C	D	E
Votes Polled	...	43,400	43,300	41,700	30,600	30,000
Seats	...	1 + 3	3	3	2	2
Residue of Votes	...	2,900	2,800	1,200	3,600	3,000
Additional Seats According to Residue	...	—	—	—	1	—
Total Seats for Party	...	4	3	3	3	2
<i>1991 Elections</i> —Electoral Register of 1990. No of Electors ... 240,000						
Seats to be Allocated—16. Total Valid Poll ... 189,600						
Qualifying Number of Electors ... 12,600						
Party	...	A	B	C	D	E
Votes Polled	...	43,400	43,300	41,700	30,600	30,000
Seats	...	1 + 3	3	3	2	2
Residue of Votes	...	5,600	5,500	3,900	5,400	4,800
Additional Seats According to Residue	...	1	1	—	—	—
Total Seats for Party	...	5	4	3	2	2

TABLE II

Operation of the Current Prsystem in small Electoral Districts in Terms of the 1977 General Election Results

Electoral District	Total seats	Total polled	Total spoilt	Total unspoilt	Total valid	Total rejected	Total rejected as a percentage of total unspoilt	Qualifying vote per seat	UNP		SLFP		TULF	
									Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
Matale	5	131,919	639	131,280	128,635	2,645	2.1	32,169	82,900	4	45,735	1	—	—
Nuwara Eliya	5	138,788	1,350	137,438	112,283	25,158	18.3	28,070	62,520	3	49,760	2	—	—
Hambantota	6	164,077	525	163,552	151,640	11,912	7.2	30,328	91,262	4	60,378	2	—	—
Manar-Vavuniya	3	72,604	240	72,364	61,596	10,768	14.9	30,798	22,373	1	—	—	39,223	2
Trincomalee	3	83,393	346	83,047	81,984	1,063	1.3	40,992	39,279	2	20,041	0	22,664	1
Batticaloa	4	116,746	1,269	115,477	103,395	12,082	10.5	34,465	31,002	1	19,375	1	53,018	2
Amparai	6	137,581	800	136,781	129,456	7,325	5.4	25,892	66,026	4	35,727	1	27,703	1
Puttalam	6	188,202	498	187,704	177,786	9,918	5.4	35,537	104,687	4	73,099	2	—	—
Anuradhapura	8	176,828	656	176,172	164,902	11,270	6.4	23,555	94,239	5	70,663	3	—	—
Polonnaruwa	3	74,911	214	74,697	72,620	2,077	2.8	36,310	43,317	2	29,303	1	—	—
Badulla	8	192,360	1,100	192,260	182,789	8,471	4.4	26,113	114,052	5	68,737	3	—	—
Monaragala	3	72,057	321	71,736	69,866	1,870	2.6	34,983	39,982	2	29,884	1	—	—
	60	1,549,466	7,958	1,541,508	1,436,949	104,559	6.8	—	791,639	37	502,702	17	142,608	06
Percentage of total Poll											51.4			9.3
Percentage of Valid Votes											55.1			9.9
Percentage of Seats											61.7			10.0

*Excludes the votes of those parties which failed to gain 12.5 per cent of the total unspoilt poll.

Source of 1977 General Election Data: *Ceylon Daily News, Parliament of Sri Lanka 1977*. Lake House, Colombo, Undated.

representation in the Legislature in the Federal republic of Germany. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the 1/8 threshold limits what is claimed as a key advantage of PR systems—the ability to produce a Parliament which accurately mirrors public opinion. And there is little doubt that it should be lowered if compensatory

adjustments can be made to control schisms.

Finally, attention needs to be drawn to the power given by the Constitution to the party hierarchy in preparing the list of candidates. It is the party that prepares the list and the voter has to either vote for the entire

list or reject it altogether. What is more the party is empowered to change the names in the list or even to substitute other names from those on the reserve list after the elections are over. It is possible to argue that political reality will deter parties from making too many unpopular nominations but in the present situation when hardly any party in Sri Lanka had developed a truly democratic organisation the power given to the party bureaucracy seems excessive. The party's strength is further enhanced by its power to replace any member of parliament who attempts a backbench revolt by the simple device of expelling him from the party and filling his seat in Parliament with a more pliable party supporter. It may be questioned as to whether this system would continue to attract persons of integrity and character to Parliament.

(To be continued)

TABLE III

Incentives Against Coalition by Middle-sized Parties

Party	Votes Polled		Seats According to 1978 Constitution		Seats According to Hamilton Method	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
A ...	4,500	4,500	3	3	2	2
B ...	2,000	—	1	—	1	—
C ...	1,800	3,800	1	1	1	2
D ...	1,700	1,700	0	1	1	1
	<u>10,000</u>	<u>10,000</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>

(1) Parties C & D contest separately

(2) Parties C & D offer common list



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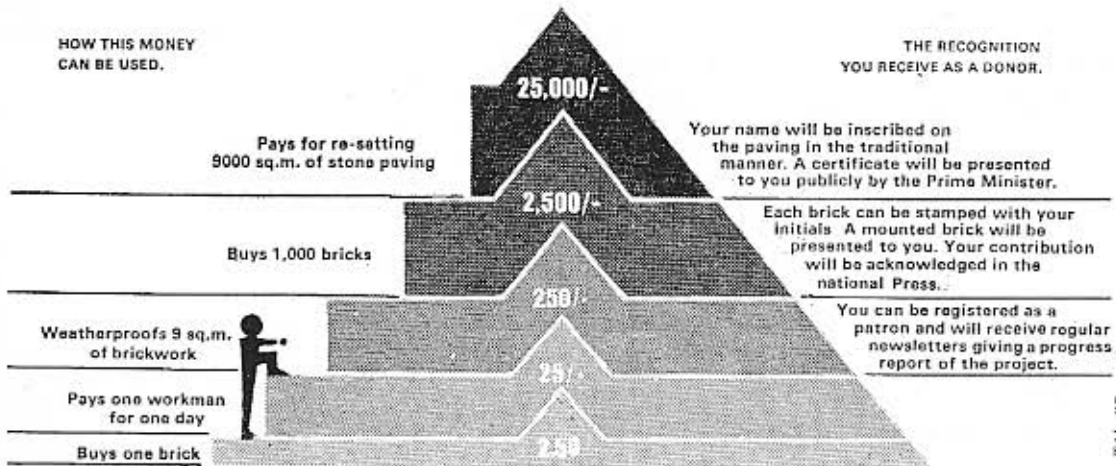
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The role of the Opposition

by Dr. W. A. Wiswa Warnapala

(Associate Professor in Politics, University of Peradeniya.)

The growth of parliamentary institutions during the past four decades could be considered a vital aspect of the constitutional heritage of the country. To a large extent they derived both inspiration and vigour from the theory and practice of parliamentary government in Britain. The impact of this relationship, though strongly felt in the arena of the Sri Lanka mode of parliamentary government cannot be evaluated apart from the process of mass-oriented politics which surfaced with the introduction of adult franchise in 1931.

The means of managing the political conflicts of a colonially-exploited state became a major political problem and the appearance of political parties introduced a vital device for the successful operation of parliamentary institutions. However, it did not immediately result in the emergence of a parliamentary Opposition capable of playing the role of an alternative government. Numerous factors associated with the evolution of the constitutional structure and certain inherent weaknesses in the polity, affected the growth of parliamentary institutions in the initial phase of parliamentary government in Sri Lanka. The parliamentary institutions, in the course of the last four decades, demonstrated both adaptability and stability. This characteristic has been recognised as a unique experience. The parliamentary Opposition which played the most important role in the achievement of this distinction, owed its success to a variety of factors. Among them the role of the Marxist parties and the adapting of British parliamentary procedure in the context of a polity of a developing country, stand prominent.

The examination of the nature and the role of the Parliamentary Opposition in Sri Lanka needs to be prefaced with a discussion of the functions of an Opposition in a parliamentary system of government. The traditional role of the Opposition, which in effect, was associated with the evolution of the parliamentary institutions of Britain, deserves to be discussed in order to see how it was adapted in countries where systems of government have been patterned on the Westminster model. The development of the modern political party as a legitimate instrument of political activity introduced a new dimension into politics. The function of the Opposition has therefore, to be assessed in association with this development. The political parties, which became an essential feature of the British system, developed on the basis of 'opposition' to the 'Government'. This inevitably resulted in the tendency towards a two-party system, which came to be recognised as the most important aspect of parliamentary government. Recognition of the two-party system as a prerequisite for the proper functioning of parliamentary democracy brought about a change in the nature and organisation of the parliamentary Opposition. Though party politics has already emerged in seventeenth century England, formal organisation of parliamentary political parties into an 'Opposition' took place only towards the end of the 18th century. The growth of political parties, thus necessitated recognition of the Opposition as a legitimate constitutional device which was expected partly to guarantee the stability of the British system of Government. Institutionalisation of the Opposition, though stemming from the nature and organisation of political parties, was supported by the political culture of the particular country. The characteristics of

the polity, in the main, conditioned the nature of functioning of the parliamentary Opposition.

The growth of the two-party system as an essential feature of the system brought about a complete change in the role and functions of the Opposition, and the need to maintain an agreement on fundamentals encouraged Harold Laski to see the whole process as 'a mimic warfare' between political parties. Since the development of the two-party system and the agreement on fundamentals afforded opportunities for them to 'safely bicker' the party was expected to play the role of 'the loyal' or 'normal' Opposition, which in turn, acted as the alternative government. The 'normal Opposition', according to Robert A. Dahl, 'seeks limited goals that do not directly challenge the major institutions of the system'. This, therefore, meant that it extends support for the prevailing institutions, ideology and the basic social, economic and political institutions. This approach emerges as a result of acceptance by the Opposition of the need to concentrate on limited changes within the established framework of ideas and institutions. The understanding that the Opposition recognises the Government's right to govern and in turn the Government 'officially' recognises the right of the Opposition to function as the alternative Government is integrally related to the consensus achieved by the major parliamentary parties. The Opposition, therefore, is office-seeking, and its role is not merely confined to the criticism of these who are in power; it seeks to replace them and its role as critic of the activities of the Government is inseparably associated with its own desire to gain office. The parliamentary system, owing to the existence of a two-party system with clear-cut policies, provides opportunities for alter-

nation of Governments, and it is this tradition which makes the Opposition believe that it enjoys reasonable expectations of office. The 'normal' or 'the loyal' Opposition, therefore, is concerned with achieving office within the established constitutional framework. In other words, both the Government and the Opposition are committed to the preservation of the Constitution. The assumption here is that they accept the framework within which they operate, and those issues on which they oppose are permitted by the agreed rules of the parliamentary game. This tradition of the system demonstrates that 'the loyal Opposition' provides 'limited opposition' according to which 'it is concerned with criticising and seeking to change some aspects of the established system, while at the same time accepting its main features. The loyalty to the Institutions of State and the readiness to accept office without a shock to the political traditions of the nation have conditioned the traditional role of an Opposition in a parliamentary system.

The techniques of the opposition, which were enumerated by Jennings in his *Parliament*, came within the functions of the loyal Opposition and were primarily directed towards converting the electorate in support of the Opposition. The purpose of the Parliamentary Opposition was, therefore, to 'appeal to the floating vote' and the Government was expected to manage its affairs in such a way as to see it did not run the risk of facing a defeat. The purpose of Opposition criticism was to maintain some relationship between Government policy and public opinion. It was this which demanded the Opposition to display 'enlightened self-interest'. In other words, it meant the adoption of a responsible attitude on national matters. Its role as the alternative Government made the adoption of such an attitude desirable and useful in the context of a parliamentary system where the main parties have agreed to respect the fundamentals of the State. A responsible Opposition could most attack the Government from every angle

without presenting a coherent series of alternatives, and because of its expectation to achieve power at the next general election, it must 'advocate only what could be put into practice'. Failure to present a viable and consistent alternative to the policy of the party in power is certain to weaken the effectiveness of the Opposition as an alternative Government. Berriedale Keith illustrating this part of the role of the parliamentary Opposition said that 'an Opposition which knows that it is anxious to secure power is entitled to harass the Ministry in every way, but such action is not proper, if the Opposition to the Ministry is aware that it cannot attempt to form a Government.' The parties in the Opposition cannot be expected to adhere to the assumption of Keith because they are compelled to appeal to the electorate irrespective of their ability to form an alternative government.

Since the primary purpose of the Opposition is to criticise the Government, the major part of this operation takes place inside Parliament. Parliamentary debate, according to Jennings, is one of the instruments of the Opposition. The criterion of effectiveness of the Opposition is its ability to utilise available parliamentary opportunities to such an extent that both the Government and the electorate are successfully influenced. No Opposition can dislodge a Government which commands a working majority. This is linked with the view that under normal circumstances governments are not disturbed by the immediate pressures of the Opposition. The main burden of the Opposition, therefore, is to make use of parliamentary time 'to speak to the electorate' and to build up a case which it hopes to press home at the next general election. The execution of this responsibility by the Opposition depends on several important factors, some of which are integral to the nature and functioning of the political parties.

The ability of the Opposition to maintain some cohesion within its own ranks is an important

factor. An Opposition hoping to capture power must appear to be competent and vigorous and capable of running an alternative Government. This role of the Opposition is tenable in a political system which recognises the existence of two parties.

In a multi-party system, party cohesion, which is a primary requirement for the proper functioning of the parliamentary system, does not exist, and the political parties, therefore, do not accept the role of alternative government unless their coming to power is accompanied by the general reform of the social order. A multi-party system does not provide the ideal situation for the parliamentary game of politics. Parties in such a system are certain to challenge the very foundation of the parliamentary system. Such characteristics affect the effectiveness of the Opposition, and in turn, give birth to pragmatic orientations to their parliamentary strategies.

The evolution of parliamentary institutions and the socialisation of political parties within this system during the past four decades indicated that the system encouraged the growth of a Parliamentary Opposition, which in a variety of ways displayed certain unique characteristics. The comparative parliamentary stability which Sri Lanka experienced in this period could be partly attributed to the nature and functioning of the Parliamentary Opposition. The Donoughmore system, though not destined to convert itself into a system of government by political parties, saw the emergence of an Opposition confined to personalities and to a political party, and the opposition in this context, was largely ideological. This Opposition, in its incipient form, became the basis on which the Opposition at the very inception of parliamentary government has organised. The experience of the Donoughmore system, with its disincentive impact on the formation of political parties, naturally interfered with the development of parliamentary institutions, and this was particularly seen in the arena of the parliamentary Opposition. The emer-

gence of the parliamentary Opposition in its initial phase (1947-52) could be examined on the basis of (1) the attitude of the Government (2) the demand for recognition of the Opposition and (3) the nature of the organisation of the Opposition.

The lack of homogeneity became the main characteristic of both the Government and the Opposition in the initial period, and the UNP, which formed the Government, was a collection of incompatibles belonging to four heterogeneous groups. The opposition to the policies of the UNP, as Jennings noted, came from the Left wing political parties, which primarily constituted the official Parliamentary Opposition. The lack of homogeneity within the ranks of the Opposition conditioned the attitude of the Government, and this, coupled with the nature of the ideologies which the parties in the Opposition professed delayed the recognition of the Opposition as an official Parliamentary Opposition. The Marxist parties, though forming the strongest Opposition to the Government, demonstrated no ability to form themselves into a common front capable of providing an alternative government. The bitter quarrels among the Marxist in the Opposition and the tendency to concentrate on theory rather than on practical politics resulted in the strengthening of the position of the UNP. This disunity in the ranks of the Opposition, therefore, provoked Prime Minister, D. S. Senanayake to emphasise the need of 'an united and effective Opposition' with common ideas. The ideological commitment of the parties in the Opposition and the disunity in their ranks influenced the front bench spokesmen of the Government to view the Opposition as one 'which seeks not to criticise the programme and policy of the government on its

merits alone but for uprooting and destroying the whole structure of the State'. J. R. Jayewardene, who was then Minister of Finance, elaborating the existence of this fundamental disagreement on the nature of the State, said the Opposition 'utilises the functions not to form an alternative government but as a means to destroy the democratic state'. An attempt was made to treat the members of the Opposition as 'enemies of the State', and this attitude underwent no change till the cross-over of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in July, 1951.

S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike referring to the UNP Government's attitude to the Opposition, said 'the Opposition was just brushed aside and treated with contempt' 'When I was a Minister', he added, 'I was told you know the LSSP and CP do not believe in democracy', and therefore, they must not receive any recognition; this clearly indicated that the Government was not prepared to accord that position without recognition of which no Opposition can function efficiently in a parliamentary system. The Opposition, remains disunited. It consisted of 20 Marxists and 24 non-Marxists, and the Government repeatedly appealed to S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike to convert the Opposition to a Parliamentary Opposition. Jennings saw the absence of a democratic Opposition capable of forming Her Majesty's alternative Government as the fundamental weakness of the Island's political system. The spokesmen of the Government, after the formation of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, saw two divisions within the Opposition -

- 1 Marxist Opposition
- 2 Democratic Opposition

This division, as explained by Howard Wriggins, interfered with the development of an effective parliamentary challenge, and it helped the Government of the UNP to survive inside the first Parliament. The necessity of a 'democratic Opposition' became a subject of discussion at the Madampe Sessions of the Sinhala Maha Sabha in 1951, and the view

was expressed that there was no 'democratic parliamentary Opposition' to the party in power. The view was that the voters have been deprived of the fundamental democratic right of choosing from two or more parties.

The formation of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party in September 1951 and its emergence as a considerable electoral force at the 1952 elections brought into the forefront the possibilities of an alternative government under the leadership of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. The status of the Opposition, as anticipated, assumed a different character because the SLFP represented 'a democratic alternative to the UNP' and this, according to A. J. Wilson, improved the situation considerably for the Opposition'. The size of the opposition, though it could not be compared with that of the Opposition in the first Parliament, demanded some adjustment in regard to the election of the Leader of the Opposition, and S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, who had nine seats in parliament, was able to obtain the support of the four members of the CP-VLSSP Front to become the Leader of the Opposition.

(To be continued)

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The Committee system

by Nihal Seneviratne

(Deputy Secretary—General, Parliament)

The Committee system was first introduced to Sri Lanka under the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931, 16 years before the advent of the Parliamentary system. Constitutional provision was made for the business of government to be carried out by a Legislature of fifty elected members, elected on the basis of universal adult franchise which not merely legislated, but administered the Island through seven committees elected by the Legislature. The Committees in fact performed both legislative and executive functions.

Each Executive Committee elected its own Chairman who was then appointed Minister by the Governor. Each Committee also decided on issues pertaining to the departments assigned to them. The Chairman of each Executive Committee, before he gave directions to the department in question under him, was obliged to place before the State Council for ratification such directions. However, it is to be noted that the State Council had the power to reject the Committee's view embodied in the form of a report once it was submitted for ratification to them. Public servants manning these departments were called upon to appear before these Committees when their departments were under scrutiny. Dr. A. J. Wilson, commenting on the role the Executive Committee played, states thus: "The Executive Committees formed the keystone of the Donoughmore framework. These Committees provided a valuable training ground for those Ceylonese State Councillors who were interested in getting insights into the day-to-day functioning of the Government departments. There were many who availed themselves of the opportunity. In this respect the

Executive Committees were the nursery for the future Ministers of Independent Ceylon." However, the inherent defects and shortcomings of the Executive Committee system soon began to surface. The growth of a much needed party system was curbed and more importance was attached to the Private Member and the Chairman of each Committee, depending again on how enterprising, ambitious and forceful each one of them was in winning for his own parochial area, more programmes of development. Governor Andrew Caldecott summed it up neatly when he wrote in his Reforms Despatch of 1938 -

"that there was no determining, co-ordinating, eliminating, controlling or designing face behind the administrative machine and that everything depended upon bargaining and compromise."

The Committees, as we know them today, were set up after the adoption of the Soulbury Constitution which gave for Sri Lanka a Westminster model of Government. Under the provisions of the Ceylon (Constitution) Order-in-Council, 1946, a Parliament was set up which consisted of the Governor and 2 Chambers, namely, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives consisted of 101 members, 95 being elected and 6 Nominated by the Governor, when he felt that some important interest was not represented.

Under Section 81 of that Constitution, the first Standing Orders for the regulation of its Parliamentary business and the preservation of order at its Sittings, were made by the Governor in September 1947. The Constitution also empowered the House of Representatives to amend

or revoke any such Orders and section 21 vested in the House of Representatives the power to provide for any other matters by its own Standing Orders.

Professor K. C. Wheare, in his Government by Committee, states "that the essence of a Committee is that it is a body to which some task has been referred or committed by some other person or body and asked or required to carry out this task. Further, the notion of a Committee carries with it the idea of a body being in some manner or degree responsible or answerable, in the last resort, to the body or person who set it up. It lacks original jurisdiction and acts on behalf of another body." Parliamentary Committees, as we understand them today, bear a very close resemblance to this general definition of Committees in that they are elected or appointed by the House, present their report back to the House and work under the direction of the Speaker.

The gradual, yet extensive, growth of Committees in a Parliamentary democracy has prompted many students to describe Parliamentary government as government by Committees. In Sri Lanka, over the years since 1947, one finds that there has been a rather extensive use being made of the Committee system for a variety of purposes, intended, the final analysis, to produce better results out of a Parliamentary system of government. The Committees consist only of Members of the Legislature freely elected by the people so that in fact their authority is derived from the people, and therefore occupy a strong and unique position.

Parliament today is called upon to transact a great deal of business and perform a number of

different activities. It is very evident that today a large and ever-increasing portion of state activity is beyond the ordinary control and supervision of parliament. Such constraints as the limited time at its disposal and the enormous volume of work before a Legislature, makes it impossible for every matter to be discussed in detail on the Floor of the House. The only opportunity Members of Parliament have of inquiring into the inner workings of the administration and having a closer examination and bring about some effective control is through these Committees. They have been and are appointed to deal with as diverse subjects as administration, legislation, scrutiny and investigation. Committees have shown themselves ideally suited for examining such diverse subjects. Committee sittings are a more effective method of supplying Parliament with information that can be supplied by debate or question. The working of Committees to scrutinise and investigate performs a vital role in the conduct of activities by the central administration and is an effective instrument for keeping both Government and its officials in check.

Most Committees are appointed to deal with specific items of business requiring expert and detailed consideration. Parliamentary Committees have shown themselves to be particularly useful in deciding matters, which on account of their special and technical nature, are better considered in detail by a smaller number of Members rather than by the House itself. Moreover, when such matters are considered by Committees, more time is available on the floor of the House for discussion of more fundamental issues of policy and thereby prevent Parliament from getting immersed in details. The whole idea of using Committees is that a group of persons shall undertake a task collectively, expeditiously and effectively. Matters dealt with by Committees are usually considered more effectively in a non-partisan atmosphere where the procedure is more flexible and informal, accommoda-

ting different views and effecting compromise through give and take, which is accomplished more easily in committee than in Parliament. It therefore becomes clear that the structure of Committees provides ways of representing opinion in the country while leaving the ultimate controlling power with Parliament.

At sittings of these Committees, Members of Parliament are empowered to call for all relevant papers, documents and records. They continue to sit even daily notwithstanding any adjournment of the House. They need not sit in one place and very often in fact hold their sessions in different places, especially with a view to examining some site or collecting some special evidence. Above all, they are empowered to summon any witness they desire for examination, be they public servants actually implementing the policies laid down, employees in the private sector or other witnesses who may be called upon to give expert testimony. They bring to the process of government, in the formation and application of policy, the opinions of experts, of interested parties and even of laymen to Parliament, who normally would not find a forum for themselves.

Parliamentary Committees, as they are known and are in use in Sri Lanka today, could broadly be classified into 3 main categories:

1. Standing Committee — Legislative.
2. Special ad hoc Committees, and.
3. Consultative Committees — a recent innovation.

Let us briefly discuss each separately. In determining the membership of these Committees, individual interests of Members and their wishes regarding which Committees they would like to serve on are taken into account. As far as possible, the different parties are represented approximately proportionate to their numerical strength in Parliament and their composition largely determined by party membership.

As can be expected, one of the major functions of a Legislature is the passage of legislation. After a Bill is introduced and read the first time, the Bill is put down for Second Reading by the Minister in charge, for a specific date. On this occasion there is a general debate on the principle of the Bill covering all its merits and demerits. After the Bill has been voted upon and read a Second time, the Bill could be referred either to a Committee of the whole House or to a Standing Committee. Such Committee then examines clause by clause of the Bill, including new Clauses, Schedules, etc., and approves or rejects amendments proposed by the Government and by the Opposition.

It may be noted that there is a greater tendency today for Governments to take up more Bills in a Committee of the whole House rather than submit them to Standing Committees. A Committee of the whole House is in effect all the Members of the House participating in the Debate with the two important differences, viz., that Members are allowed to speak more than once and move Amendments. It has been noticed over the years that more Members wish to participate in Committee stage debates and therefore Governments have acceded to this pressure. This practice has its advantages as well as its disadvantages. Although a greater variety of Members representing a wider spectrum of opinion do in fact get a chance of voicing their views and placing it on record, a more detailed and specialized study of the clauses is not possible.

When a Bill of a technical or complex nature has been passed by the House at its Second Reading, it is usual for the Government to accede to a request made that the Bill be sent to a Standing Committee. In Sri Lanka, 2 such Committees comprising 20 Members each, are set up at the start of each Session with the extra proviso that any other Member interested in particular Bill could be co-opted to the Committee, with a maximum

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The Committee . . .

(Continued from page 21)

of 15. Away from the hustle of the Floor of the House, Members of the Committee sitting normally on a non-Parliamentary day, study in a more relaxed and less formal atmosphere, the provisions of the Bill, quite often in a non-partisan spirit. If the Committee so desires, at these sittings members of the public could be invited to give evidence. This has been a fairly common practice. A formal report of the Committee is drawn up incorporating the Amendments accepted and presented to the House by the Chairman. It may be noted in passing that the House thereafter gets a further opportunity of debating the Report and moving further Amendments at the Report Stage before the Bill is finally read the Third time and passed.

The second category of Parliamentary Committee which I referred to as Special Committees set up for ad hoc purpose would cover the activities of the following:-

- Standing Orders Committee
- Privileges Committee
- Public Accounts Committee
- Parliamentary Business Committee
- Committee of Selection
- House Committee

The first Standing Orders of Parliament as mentioned earlier were made by the Governor in 1947. They continued in force till 1972 when the Republican Constitution was enacted. Section 37 of that Constitution specifically referred to the continuance in force of the Standing Orders of the old House of Representatives just as much as Section 74 of the present Constitution ensures the continuation of the Standing Orders in the National State Assembly. Today, any motion for the amendment of Standing Orders which is presented, stands referred to this Committee. This Committee, set up at the commencement of each session, consists of the Speaker and his two Deputies and usually four other Senior and experienced Members.

The Public Accounts Committee was originally constituted upon the agitation made by some members of the Legislative Council to have some agency of the House itself to ensure that the moneys voted by the Legislature are directed for the purposes intended and are spent correctly and economically. At the outset, the audit carried out by the Colonial Auditor was placed before the Government and his reports were then laid before Parliament. However, with the grant of Independence in 1948 the position changed. The Auditor-General's Annual Report is now laid before Parliament and the Legislature is in a position to assert its rights over the Executive in regard to the control of public funds appropriated by Parliament.

Since 1947, the Public Accounts Committee has been set up by Standing Order for the examination of the accounts showing the appropriation of the sums granted by Parliament to meet public expenditure, together with the Auditor-General's reports. A committee of seven is appointed at the start of the Session which elects its own Chairman who, by tradition, is a member of the Opposition well versed in the financial procedures of Government — at times a shadow Minister of finance.

In scrutinising the appropriation Accounts and the report of the Auditor-General, the Committee has to satisfy itself that —

(1) the moneys shown in the accounts as having been disbursed were legally available for and applicable to the service or purposes to which they have been applied or charged;

(2) the expenditure conforms to the authority which governs it;

(3) every re-appropriation has been made with proper authority and in accordance with the Financial Regulations of Government. The statement of accounts referred to would include the accounts of local authorities and the Auditor-General's reports therein.

Another important function of the Committee is to examine whether any money has been

spent on any service during a financial year in excess of the amount granted by Parliament for that purpose. This is a serious breach of financial practice and the department in question having had to answer for its conduct to the Treasury and satisfy the Public Accounts Committee, has then to be indemnified by the House upon a recommendation made by the Public Accounts Committee. The Standing Orders spell out in detail the functions of the Public Accounts Committee in this regard.

El Salvador . . .

(Continued from page 7)

"As we were holding our meeting to agree on setting up the Unified Leadership, a closed doors meeting was taking place in Washington between Brezezinski and several Pentagon generals on the one hand and elements of the Latin American Christian Democratic leadership and government officials on the other, with the aim of coming to a treacherous agreement favouring military intervention in El Salvador."

"We have already defined our position regarding an eventual military intervention by the U. S. alone or in alliance with others: we will hold out and fight as long as necessary to kick the invaders out and defeat their internal instruments and servants. No intervention is going to stop the Salvadorian revolution....."

"The peoples of Central America and their revolutionary organisations are fully aware of the grave danger that a military intervention in El Salvador would represent to their vital interests, and we have not the slightest doubt that they will fight shoulder to shoulder with us."

"Yankee imperialism will not trample upon our soil with impunity; never before has it been so likely that the threat of imperialist aggression will unleash a concerted response on the part of our peoples to hold their positions and cause the imperialists a humiliating defeat as in Vietnam."

— D.

The root of all evil?

by Reggie Siriwardena

I have only the vaguest recollections of Gunadasa Amarassekera's novel, *Karumakkarayo*, which I must have read when it first came out three decades ago. But what I do remember is the stir it caused among the Sinhala literary *avant-garde* of the day, who greeted it as a step forward in the moral emancipation of literature because it dealt with the forbidden themes of eroticism, adultery and incest. Seeing Tissa Abeysekera's adaptation of the novel for cinema, I find that the film, for all the ostensible daring of its subject-matter, does nothing more in the end than reinforce — and I suspect this is true of the novel too — the puritanical and sexist values of the Sinhala middle class.

What is one to make of the heroine of the film — the seductive figure from a more sophisticated world who brings havoc into the lives of the village family into which she marries? Her first affair with her brother-in-law may be understood, and even accepted by the audience, because her husband is made out to be sexually inadequate. But what motivates her in her second illicit relationship with her father-in-law — a relationship which defies the incest taboos, which involves infidelity to both husband and lover, and which cannot be supposed to spring from sexual attraction of any normal kind? Are we then to take the heroine as sexually pathological, as simply a nymphomaniac? Such a subject would be almost intractable material for cinema because it would run the risk of turning into a clinical study. However, let us grant that a film-maker of unusual genius might be able to turn even aberrant sexual behaviour into the material of a work of art by approaching it with insight, understanding and compassion.

This, however, is not what Tissa Abeysekera has even attempted in his film. There is no endeavour to understand the heroine

of *Karumakkarayo* from within, to explore what makes her act as she does. And since her character therefore remains inexplicable by any normal canons of behaviour, the audience can only fall back on the crudest stereotypes which are readily available in our culture — that she is the seductress, the vamp, the embodiment of that demonic force of female sexuality which, unless kept safely under lock and key by social and moral repression, will break out in all its destructive power.

And in concluding that this is the meaning of *Karumakkarayo*, the audience will find ample encouragement in the film. For not only at the end is a home ravaged and three men destroyed by a woman's sexuality, leaving one of them so shattered that he renounces the world, not only do these events manifestly imply that women like Soma Akka are the root of all evil, but the moral judgement is explicitly and stridently made by the sister-in-law. The scene where she does this is a crucial one for an interpretation of the film; it can be used, in fact, as a text-book case of the way in which form in a film determines meaning. I therefore propose to describe it as fully as I can.

At this point in the film, after the heroine's death in childbirth, the survivors of the shattered family have gathered in the home of which they are soon to be dispossessed: the husband of the dead woman, his brother (her lover) and their sister. The father has vanished, having sold the family land (the discovery of this fact has just come as a violent shock to the other members of the family). The three of them have been talking at table: the sister, who has always distrusted and hated the dead woman, then gets up and walks away from the others towards the foreground of the shot, with the camera holding the other two in the background, and in this position she delivers

a violent moral tirade against the evil woman who destroyed the family, the bitch, the whore, etc. The effect is both unnatural and theatrical in the bad sense: a person talking in a fury of anger doesn't turn away from the people she is addressing, she would instead direct her outburst at them. But what the sister does, of course, is very much like an actress walking downstage to face the audience (that is why the scene seems so much like melodramatic theatre), and when she speaks she is looking directly into the camera, and therefore her violent rhetorical speech is hurled straight at the audience and gets an overwhelming weight. She is the director's mouthpiece, he is speaking directly to the audience through her — that, whether Tissa Abeysekera was conscious of it or not, is the effect the scene carries, if the language of the cinema means anything.

A friend remarked to me, after seeing *Karumakkarayo*, that it was 'a reactionary but well-made film'. Alas, I can't agree with that charitable judgement. It is strawling and diffuse: I am astonished that Tissa, who produced that miracle of tightness and economy in the script of *Nidhanaya*, and who has just given us another very well-knit script in *Ganga Addara*, should have been so lacking in control in the script of his own film. The whole election sequence, for instance, which might have carried some social point in the novel, seems irrelevant and tediously overblown in the film. It was a disaster to have asked Vijaya Kumaratunga to play a role which called for so much emotional expressiveness (he is convincing only when he can underplay, as in *Bambaru Avith* or *Ganga Addara*). Geeta Kumarasinghe, on the other hand, leaves one convinced that she had it in her to make the role something more than the blatant sexist stereotype which is all that the film requires her to be.



CINEMA

A sincere attempt, but not without faults

by H. A.

Our Cinema audience is already to receive works of arts. The days when works of pompous mediocrity posed as genuine art are fading out. The audience is maturing. This is by and large the result of social change followed by the boredom of seeing puerile films over the years.

“**Karumakkarayo**” is a serious attempt to cope with this situation from the point of view of the Cinema artist. Using the story in Gunadasa Amarasekera's novel ‘**Karumakkarayo**’ — one of the celebrated works of the late fifties — Tissa Abeysekera, the director and script-writer of this film ventures to meet this problem of survival facing our film artists today, namely that of keeping pace with the audience.

Tissa Abeysekera has not restrained himself unnecessarily on account of the novel's one time celebrity, in freely handling the raw material available in it. Yet, paradoxically enough, the major weakness of the film appears to be a weakness in the novel itself.

The novel fails to unite in depth the underlying social forces epitomised by characters like like Piya-dasa with the individual problems and confusion in the lives of its principal characters: Soma Akka, Willison, Veladan Mama and Gunapala Aiyah. Can the artist plead ignorance, as it were, by relating everything to a stanza in **Vissuddhi Magga** suggesting that all is confusion? The protagonists may act in inexplicable confusion but the artist, the supreme creator of the protagonists, should know better.

He cannot leave the reader to conclude that the confusion is due to confusion that in unexplained and inexplicable. The film ‘**Karumakkarayo**’ suffers from that weakness the source of which is traceable to the novel.

On the other hand the film has failed to capture the lyrical aspect of the novel which is one of its strong points. This I think is due to a certain cinematic flaw that cannot be explained in great detail in a short article of this nature. However, all these flaws ultimately boil down to the single question of utilizing the camera image and the sound (not just words which should in fact play a subordinate part in a film) to create an emotional experience. The camera angles and the shots in general lack rhythm and balance in ‘**Karumakkarayo**.’ Shots seen from the same angle fall on the screen repeatedly for no reason giving rise to a boredom that is jarringly and loosely broken by intermittent sex sequences.

Although the film resorts to dialogue a little too much, somehow, some of the moving and powerful pieces of dialogue found in the novel have been left out. (For example the following words uttered by Soma Akka in the embrace of her brother-in-law, Willison: ‘Why are you afraid... I'll chase Aiyah away.... Shall I kill him?’)

Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that ‘**Karumakkarayo**’, by virtue, of the seriousness of the attempt, definitely and distinctly rises far and above the other Sinhala films currently screened.

Films like ‘**Karumakkarayo**’ are important in that they set the tempo among film artists to create films grappling with life without inhibition in order to improve the quality of not only our films but of human life around us as well.

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EXPERT GENTS TAILORS

The Tamil literary scene — Marxists vs Formalists

by Samudran

Sri Lanka's Tamil literary scene has never been devoid of theoretical controversies, a consistent feature of such controversies has been the significant role played by the left wing artists and critics. In the fifties and early sixties, when the progressive cultural movement in the fields of poetry, short story, novel, theatre and literary criticism gathered momentum under the initiative of the Communist Party, the Tamil conservatives became crudely and blatantly reactionary in their retaliation. They were outraged by the cry of the Progressive Writers Union that art and literature must serve the struggle of the masses for national liberation. They were even more outraged by the open advocacy of a socialist order for Sri Lanka by the Marxist members of the union who were fully committed to Socialist realism in art and literature. The Vellala casteists were deeply disturbed by the poetry of depressed caste writers who articulated passionately the need to stand up and fight the barbarous menace of untouchability and who called upon their brothers and sisters to participate in this struggle.

In the mid and late sixties, as the progressive writers' movement continued its development at a more rapid pace, the right wing began to adopt a more sophisticated theoretical offensive. By then it had acquired a few articulate spokesmen who were more conversant with the contemporary trends and with campaign of the world imperialist mass media against revolutionary nationalism and socialist realism in art and literature. The right wing now began to operate under the garb of petty bourgeois humanism, "an art and a literature free of politics and propaganda," "a system of values beyond Marxism-Leninism," "the primacy of form over content" and so on and so forth. However it has to be accepted that the

more enlightened bourgeois critics among them were able to capitalise on certain genuine aesthetic shortcomings in the emerging tradition of Sri Lankan Tamil progressive art and literature in its attempt to blaze a new trail the young movement had to struggle alone. It had very little help or inspiration from the experiences of its Sinhala counterpart. Even the more enlightened bourgeois critics were of no help as they were all, true to their type, formalists of various shades. Moreover the movement had to fight the formidable, highly commercialised South Indian publishing houses which flooded Sri Lanka with their third rate "popular" magazines and novels.

The Tamil progressive movement had also to resist several reactionary forces simultaneously. While the dominant anti-imperialist trends in Sinhala art and literature often manifested chauvinist tendencies, the works of Tamil anti-imperialist writers stood for national unity; they gave over to the class struggle. They were fully opposed to Tamil chauvinism. The enthusiasm shown by the Tamil progressive writers for national unity was often been ridiculed and belittled by the Tamil right-wing as an enthusiasm not adequately reciprocated by their Sinhalese counterparts.

The mid and late sixties were a period of heightened activity, on an unprecedented scale, by the Maoist oriented sections of the Writers' Union. It would not be an exaggeration to state that this period showed all the signs of a qualitative leap forward in theatre and creative writing. The already revived folk drama was taken to a new height when Munnaguru's **Sankaram** (Destruction), with its revolutionary content depicting social evolution based on historical materialist premise, was staged.

The Tamil theatre gained a new dynamism with the arrival of N. Suntharalingam, Tassisius, Sivandan, Pathmanathan and several others, who united revolutionary content with significant experimentation with form. Leading Tamil poets like the late Pasupathy, Murugaiyan and many others penned some of their best revolutionary poems during this period inspired by the anti-caste struggles in Jaffna. Many young poets and short story writers from the plantations made significant contributions to the evolving radical tradition. Problems of the exploited and oppressed Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese people found a central place in this progressive literature and art.

It was during this period that Marxist writers and critics engaged themselves in deep theoretical debates and discussions. In addition to the battles with bourgeois and right-wing tendencies the movement also had to contend with an intense ideological struggle between revolutionary Marxism-Leninism and revisionism at national and international levels. These struggles had their impact on art and literature too. The role of aesthetics and content-form relationships come to be recognised as serious issues of artistic praxis. In a sense, the experiences of this period were mixed and rich.

There were broadly two categories of literature purporting to be revolutionary. One was inspired by ongoing mass struggles, mainly the anti-caste struggle led by the Communists. The works of this category had greater realism and vitality as they had successfully captured the reality of a people mobilized to fight. The other type of works included abstract flights of fancy of writers who remained separate from the struggles.

It was from the latter category the right wing critics often picked their examples to stifle the pro-

gressive movement. It is however first category that was most vital in that it constituted a positive advance towards a revolutionary literature of a higher quality.

Marxist critics like Kailasapathy rightly upheld this tendency and gave it all the encouragement. They stood firm against the right wing which quite assiduously put forward its old wine of formalism in new bottles.

The wave of activity continued into the mid seventies and thereafter began to lose momentum. Since the split of the Communist Party in 1964 the progressive writers union had been divided into two factions, "Pro-Peking" and "Pro-Moscow." The seventies saw a further disintegration into several factions. This was also a reflection of the tragic disintegration that had set-in in both wings of the Communist Party.

The pioneers of the Tamil radical theatre movement, whose names have been already mentioned, are today conspicuous by their inactivity. So much so in a very recent polemic K. Balendra, one of the most active drama producers at present, has sarcastically referred to one of them as an "ex-dramatist." Incidentally, Balendra deserves our attention when we look at the Tamil theatre today. Looking at the impressive list of plays produced by him within a short space of three years it would seem that he has chosen to specialise on translations. Early this year he produced a Tamil translation of Brecht's "The Exception and the Rule." However, neither the politics of Brecht's nor the concept of the epic theatre seems to appeal to his own heart. Judging by Balendra's productions in general, he is more committed to stage-craft per se than to any ideology, although he has shown a slight tendency towards existentialism.

While the radical theatre is in the doldrums, Balendra's translations have gained considerable popularity among the middle class theatre goers. These translations are bound to have some impact on the developing Tamil theatre tradition. However, reproduction is

not an art but a craft, and the role of translations is often overstated by some critics. Translations are by no means substitutes for original plays although one cannot deny that properly chosen translations can have positive effects on a growing tradition.

The current decade has begun with a revival of an older controversy which has brought about a polarization reminiscent of the stirring sixties. It is a "two line" struggle waged by bourgeois formalists on one side and Marxist critics on the other. It is aesthetic again. The formalists have repeated their old charge that Marxists do not pay sufficient attention to artistic criteria. Professor Kailasapathy is the main target of this attack. He has been accused of promoting his 'slogan mongering minions' as creative writers. Unfortunately the current debate has generated more heat than light. A disappointing feature is the incapacity of the formalists to refute the Marxist position theoretically. Instead, they have resorted to personal attacks on some Marxist intellectuals and have thus expected their own theoretical bankruptcy.

It seems that the formalists have not been able to make any advances in their theoretical position for the last ten years while the Marxists have made genuine attempts at a re-evaluation of their past and have advanced considerably towards a better understanding of the aesthetic issues of art and literature in the Sri Lankan context.

These formalists do not seem to be aware of the current anti-Marxist "innovations" of their European and American mentors. As a result they fight the Marxists with out-dated theoretical "weapons."

Yet another strange feature of the formalist side is the pseudo-Marxist pose of some of its members who were until yesterday talking of a philosophy "beyond Marxism-Leninism." Although the poverty of theory of the formalists is disheartening, as the strength of the challenge offered in such debates is determined by the eny-

my's strength of theory, the controversy has helped to bring certain basic issues a clearer focus. Art is time conditioned; so are aesthetic values. The dominant values of aesthetics in our society are by and large derivatives of the ruling aesthetics of the dominating capitalist countries. Local bourgeois critics, writers and the mass media at large play a vital role in the adaptation and dissemination of such super imposed values. As pointed out by Lukacs, bourgeois aesthetics suffer from two extreme weaknesses; insistence on immediate reality and the isolation from material reality of any aspects reaching beyond immediate reality. The existentialist overtones and the philosophical Idealism of the formalists can be traced to these inherent weaknesses of bourgeois epistemology which underlies bourgeois artistic reflection.

The undue, highly one sided, emphasis on form and "beauty" is not accidental. As Ernest Fischer noted, the problem of form and content is not only confined to the arts. In politics, when the position of the ruling class is threatened it tries to make out that form is primary and content secondary. It would use devious means to conceal a changing content. Thus the undue prominence to the bourgeois parliamentary form as a sacred institution of democracy while the content of bourgeois state becomes more and more repressive. The role of the formalist artist in a class society is to prettify its democratic facade and cover up all its filthy, repressive, exploitative reality. One is treated to an isolated aspect of human existence with all the artistry and if necessary with a little bit of petty bourgeois humanism. Many an artist plays this subservient role to the establishment quite unconsciously.

Unfortunately even some progressive minded critics are victims of a great illusion. They believe in the formula that bourgeois art has beauty but no content while proletarian art has content but not enough beauty; their solution therefore is to marry bourgeois form with proletarian content. The attempts of some to evaluate

Tamil progressive literature on the basis of widely accepted bourgeois aesthetic standards are the result of this fallacy. Its worth heeding Lunacharsky's advice: "Writers infected by the formalists, these typical representatives of bourgeois decadence, have been known to try to adorn and embellish their honest and weighty content with various trickery, thereby ruining their work."

It is true that many Tamil revolutionary creative work suffer from genuine aesthetic deficiencies. But, the remedy does not lie in a return to bourgeois aesthetic values. Such deficiencies must be recognised and the writers must struggle for greater completeness and beauty, from a proletarian stand point. In the final analysis aesthetic deficiencies are often related to deficiencies in content. They are in many instances the result of the artist's inadequate mastery of the reality he attempts to portray. This inadequacy is manifested in the artistic reflection. Not all those who claimed to be progressive and revolutionary writers produced works worthy of

their claim. Some have even done violence to realism by misrepresenting behavioural phenomena. Some have only sported the label of "progressive writers" while writing reactionary stuff. However, despite these liabilities, the Tamil progressive movement succeeded in creating a radical tradition which has seen its ups and downs during the past three decades.

Issues of form-content, and, typicality-individuality integrity have occupied the minds of eminent marxist thinkers like Plekhanov, Lunacharsky, Gorky, Mao, Lu Shun, Lukacs, Thomson, Fischer, Brecht, Benjamin and many others. Although one finds differences in views on certain aspects of aesthetics among them there is unanimity on the primacy of content over form. They are all agreed on the role of art and literature as an instrument of the mass movement to promote the class struggle.

It is essential for the marxist critics of our society to address their minds to the creation of the appropriate aesthetic standards for progressive art and literature

that are relevant to the Sri Lankan context.

The pioneers of the Marxist tradition of Tamil literary criticism, like Kailasapathy, Sivathamby and others of their generation have successfully provided us a basis for the theoretical development in this sphere of the struggle. Their contributions are largely based on the premise that art and literature constitute an element in the realism of superstructure that has to be used consciously by the mass movement to "provoke a revolutionary attitude to reality, an attitude that changes the world in a practical way"; to use the words of Maxim Gorky. However, the task of evolving a more comprehensive theoretical system is yet to be accomplished. Unfortunately the opposition from the local formalists is not challenging enough in this regard, and the forward movement is consequently not as dynamic as one would wish it to be. After all it is the dialectic again. Let's hope for more serious provocations.

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The working class learns in defeat

by H. A. Seneviratne

The cabinet had noted on July 30, that "for all purposes the strike had ended." This was what the government controlled Ceylon Daily News reported on July 31. But the state of emergency declared by the government on July 16, in order to deal with the strike situation continued for all purposes.

The emergency was allowed to lapse only on August 15. The political and economic inexpediency in continuing a state of emergency with thousands of strikers kept out on the pretext of their having vacated posts was obviously becoming problematic for the government.

Meanwhile, the emergency had served its real purpose. The strike that threatened the government was smashed. The sathyagraha launched to rescue the strikers who were deemed to have vacated their posts was thwarted. Although it is still uncertain as to who were responsible for turning the August 08 sathyagraha into a smashing of shop windows, windscreens of cars and glasses of C. T. B. buses, in Colombo, the threat of a real mass protest was averted by the government — for the time being of course — under cover of emergency powers.

This massive operation of the government, had to undermine, by its very nature, the sterile trade union bureaucrats as well as their politically impotent and already exposed counterparts in today's "Left movement." This was simply because the government did not need and, therefore, did not wish to clash headlong with the working class for the time being.

This does not mean that the government did not undermine the interests of the working class. That is what it has been doing all the time. Any bourgeois government has to do so in its own interests. Indeed, the blanket notice of vacation of posts issued

by the government on the strikers undermined the interests of the working class to the core. But even this was done after having fixed the onus on the so-called leaders of the working class who, the government said, had misled the workers.

The vacation of posts notice effectively prevented the strike from escalating. But it also blocked a large number of strikers from returning to work once the strike became a failure. The government was breaking the strike whilst helping to maintain a strike situation, for all purpose.

This paradox had to be resolved, for the class struggle is not a game of chess which could be concluded with a stalemate situation. The resolution of the stalemate in this context was no doubt irksome to the government. But the simple fact was that its non-resolution was, to the government too, politically and economically more disadvantageous than its resolution.

The government had announced that the number on strike — or the number that kept out of employment as the government preferred to call the strikers — was 40,356. The credibility gap between the masses and the government was so yawning that nobody ever believed in this figure, and it was right not to believe. Whatever the figure the government was placed on the horns of a dilemma. At the time of writing this article (16.08.80) the indications were that the ending of the emergency would be a fore-runner to the reluctant reinstatement, in whatever manner, of the strikers with a view to attempting to efface the ruthless and the utter reactionary nature of the operation that smashed the strike.

As one looks back soberly at the events that led to the strike in its proper historical perspective it would seem that an outbreak of a battle was as inevitable as its defeat.

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The stage was set for a confrontation after an anti-government picket died as a result of retaliatory action by pro-government gangs on June 05. The anti-government picketing campaign, although nominally organised by the Joint Trade Union Action Committee (JTUAC), was a spontaneous show of protest against unbearable living conditions. The impressive and militant funeral march of June 09 was a further development of this protest. The JTUAC leadership was probably waiting eagerly to grab this situation in order to exploit it to regain their lost status among the working class.

There arose, then, the small incident that always triggers off a major outburst. Twelve railway workers were suspended for participating in the anti-government picketing campaign on June 05. As in 1976, the militant railway workers changed the conflict of their fellow workers who were subjected to unjust disciplinary action into a class conflict that broke the three year lull of overt non-action among the working class. Several thousands of workers came out on strike at the Ratmalana workshop on July 07.

It is now known that the JTUAC took a decision on July 15 to call its membership out on July 21 or on a date before that. Thus there was no clear decision, to start with, as far as the date for the strike was concerned. Later, the 18th was apparently fixed by the JTUAC for the launching of its strike. However, some of the JTUAC unions, which were politically led by the break-away group of the LSSP—the Nava Lanka Sama Samaja Party, (NSSP) came out on strike on July 17. This self-centred attempt to score a point over the others in the JTUAC was tantamount to an act of sectarian opportunism.

In fact the entire handling of the general strike by the JTUAC leadership *en bloc* was smacking of opportunism and self-interest rather than class interest. It had hurriedly fixed a premature date, apparently amidst strife for the general strike. What it wanted

was to regain **by** opportunism the status it had lost **through** opportunism **for** further opportunism. In this situation there was also opportunism within opportunism as seen from the action of the NSSP leadership.

The workers who came out on strike on July 17 on the orders of their NSSP leadership would have looked round and found themselves isolated in a state of emergency. Some of them had even gone back to work on the same day. This must have seriously dampened the mood of the workers who were preparing to come out on strike on and after July 18.

Despite this initial setback and despite the government's declaration of emergency on June 16, some sections of the organised working class, including the members of the UNP's Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya in workplaces like the Government Press, came out on strike. The Government had already announced on **July 17**, that workers who did not report for work on **July 18** or on any day after that date during the continuance of the emergency would be deemed to have vacated their posts. Three public meetings were conducted by the ruling UNP, with full publicity given over the mass media, whilst all opposition meetings were completely banned and all criticism subject to severe censorship. At these public meetings the government indirectly terrorized the masses in general and the working class in particular.

In short, subjective conditions required for the strike wave to surge forward were prevailing. But just the opposite happened. The wave receded! Why did this happen?

School masters of the working class will attribute the failure of the strike to the fact that it was not well planned and not orderly. General strikes cannot be planned with such great precision since spontaneity is an important element in their eruptions, even if there is preparation. Nevertheless, spontaneity in itself cannot take the class struggle very far unless it is properly directed by a leadership with a singleness of

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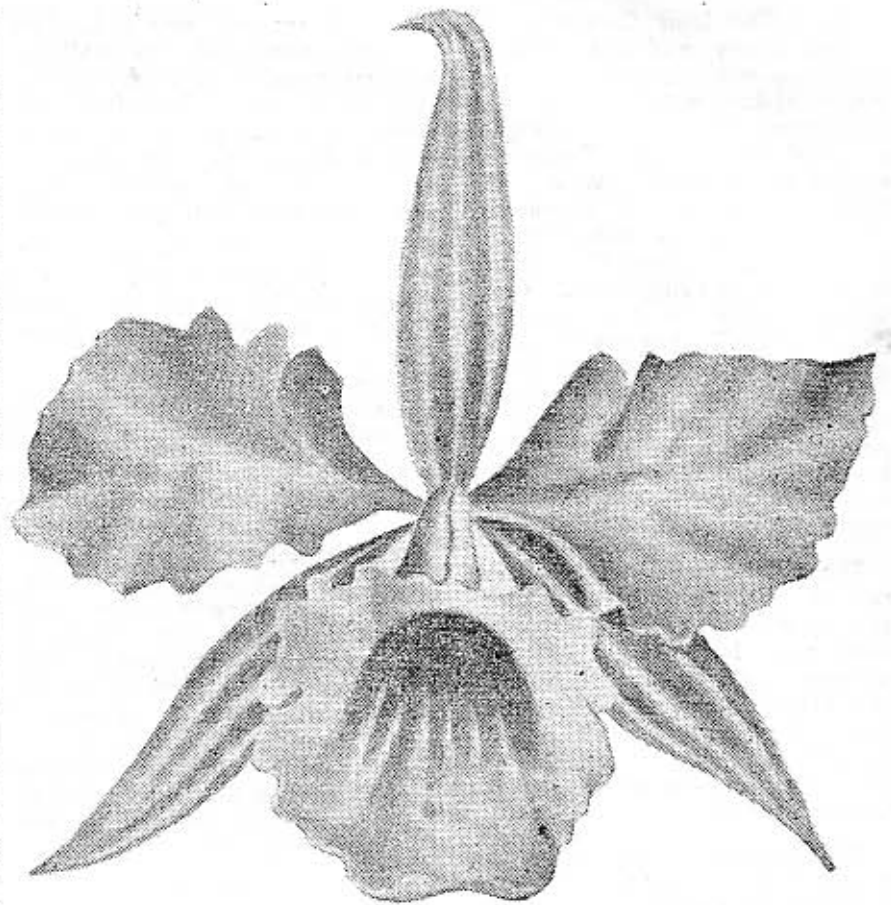
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purpose. The JIUAC leadership that "led" the strike in this case had no singleness of purpose vis a vis the working class apart from using the working class to achieve their own individual opportunistic ends. They also lacked unity themselves precisely because they are a set of assorted opportunists.

The Ceylon Mercantile Union (CMU), the Ceylon Bank Employees Union (CBEU) and the Ceylon Estate Staff Union (CESU) who were important members of the JIUAC did not participate in the strike. The leadership of the CMU-CBEU-CESU trio, describing themselves as "independent organisations", had instead written a joint letter to the president, requesting a settlement of the strike.

The negative stand taken by the CMU in particular was most detrimental to the success of the general strike as well as to the CMU itself. The CMU had in the past earned the reputation of being the most militant trade union in the country. But in an undeveloped and fast deteriorating capitalist state strangled by a declining imperialism, mere trade union militancy reaches its dead end unless it links up with the political struggle for emancipation of the masses under the leadership of the working class. The moment the striking unions were threatened with confiscation of funds under the emergency, the CMU which is already enjoying a non-recurring cost of living allowance under the CMU-Employers Federation Collective Agreement, along with the CBEU and the CESU, calling themselves "independent organisations" went under to the threat. This also is another kind of opportunism that leaders of "pure" trade unions have to practise for their own survival when they are hemmed in by the class struggle and the reactionary state. The JIUAC was split into two: the "independent" CMU-CBEU-CESU and the rest of the unions under the leadership of the SLFP, CP, NSSP etc.

True enough, the idea of winning economic demands under conditions that were intollerable was the driving force of the



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strike. The Joint Committee of railway unions had put forward two economic demands once the strike action propelled by the suspension of their colleagues took off the ground. These two economic demands were the increase of salaries of all employees by Rs. 300/- and a Rs. 5/- grant for each point of increase in the cost of living index. These demands were in turn adopted by the JIUAC. But any economic general strike will inevitably transform itself into a political one in the present stage of political and economic crisis of capitalism mainly because governments, for their own survival, will have to crush such strikes.

The reactionary measures and the life and death attitude adopted by the government transformed the July strike into a political phenomenon. Neither the JIUAC leadership as a whole nor the political parties behind it, except for the SLFP leadership, were capable of coping with such a situation.

The government then posed the question as to what would happen if it fell as a result of the strike. To this, there could have been only one answer in the present context: 'Elections'! But then did it mean that the workers would get their economic demands even if the SLFP were ready for elections and won it? There was in fact no answer from the SLFP or its representatives and allies in the JIUAC. Even the SLFP could not have answered that question, for the answer was: 'NO!'

Moreover, the opposition parties still had their unresolved political problems within and between themselves. Only the LSSP and the MEP had joined their inevitable United Front with the SLFP. The CP, the NSSP and perhaps the other nonentities were still in the process of overcoming the difficulties that confront them in moving towards a similar position.

The strike came at a time when the working class was gradually detaching themselves from their existing trade union leadership whilst remaining in the same organisations for tactical reasons. An alternative trade union leader-

ship had not yet emerged. The working class had no political leadership with a political organisation of its own. Therefore, the strike was like a battle courageously fought by the advanced sections of the working class army without a real general staff.

This battle is, however, not without its achievements as far as the working class is concerned. The government was psychologically weakened. How long can a government survive with such a set back and a working class so completely hostile?

In this strike the working class was also able to take a further step in asserting itself whilst at the same time detaching from its decadent leadership. Class-consciousness was enhanced with a high degree of political education received through bitter experience. Most of all, this battle brought to the open, after three years of death-like peace, the inner social and class development of Sri Lankan Society amidst complete economic degradation and ruin.

The July strike will go down in our history as a prologue to resolving many weaknesses in the working class movement including that of finding an alternative trade union leadership and a political organisation of the working class. ●

Trends... (Contd: from page 1)

question of prostitution, but why call the love-affair, "illicit"? Is a love affair between an unmarried man and woman necessarily "illicit", even if it leads to pregnancy? As CRM pointed out in its letter to the Government, the girl had done nothing which was an offence under Sri Lankan law. Or did the reporter think "illicit" meant "clandestine"?

What is happening about CRM's appeal for intervention? The British Government successfully intervened recently in another Middle Eastern state in the case of a British woman who was sentenced to lashes over a matter of alcohol. Is Sri Lanka, whose constitution declares "cruel and inhuman punishment" illegal, to be silent in such cases?

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