

★ THE J. R. INTERVENTION ★

LANKA

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PEACE: Few Hours to midnight
— *Paul Gaspersz*

U. N: The need for Reform
— *Horace Perera*

WOMEN: An Undeclared War
— *Julia Neuberger*

MAY DAY

INDIA and re-alignments
— *Mervyn de Silva*

The rise of Tamil Militarism
D. P. Sivaram

FEDERALISM: H. L. de Silva replies

FREE PRESS: The Battle Lines
— *Izeth Hussain*



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TRENDS

SAARC First

President Premadasa told a mass rally at Bulathsinhala that Sri Lanka had in the past looked to distant countries for her needs, but would henceforth be turning nearer home for imports. SAARC countries would get first choice for essential imports, the President said. Things could not only be had cheaper from our neighbours but we would also be contributing to the well being of the region, he said.

The President also said: "We are for friendly relations with all countries. However, we shall not tolerate any attempt overt or covert to subjugate us. We will not allow infringement of our sovereignty. We have already demonstrated this attitude, regardless of consequences".

Mahanayakes Will Continue Protest

The Mahanayakes of the Malwatte and Asgiriya

Chapters, the two highest ranking Buddhist prelates in Sri Lanka, have protested to the government against the move to hand over the management of state plantations to private companies. The Mahanayakes have seen it as a threat to the rights of the Sinhala people in the hill country.

The Mahanayakes have pledged that they will continue their protests.

Foreign Employment Up Last Year

The state's Foreign Employment Bureau and private foreign employment agencies found 65,000 jobs abroad for Sri Lankans in 1992. This is 23,380 jobs more than in the previous year.

The actual number finding employment abroad could be even higher as many go out through unregistered agencies and personal contacts. The number of licenced agencies last year stood at 237.

Briefly . . .

Banks say no

Banks said "no" to a pay rise demand and their employees staged a one-day walk out in protest. There was no serious disruption to banking as the walk-out was only at 3 o'clock one afternoon. Members of the Ceylon Bank Employees Union working in the Colombo branches of eight private banks joined the walk out.

Buddhist council against privatisation

An advisory council of prelates heading four main Buddhist sects have asked President Premadasa to halt moves to privatise the state owned plantations. In addition to the prelates the council (Buddhashasanika Buddha Katayutu Adhikshana Karyasadhaka Balamandalaya) has also heads of prominent lay Buddhist organisations.

They have told the president that about 50,000 hectares of land had been taken from Sinhala Buddhists by the former colonial rulers, thus pauperising the Sinhala Buddhist peasantry. Handing over this land now to private companies would only confuse the position further and would not in any case be a solution to the problem of mismanagement of the plantations, they have said.

Drought hits economy

Falling tea prices and the continuing drought posed a severe threat to the economy, financial sources told the media. A drop in revenue and increased expenditure on drought relief and refugees would push the government to a cash shortage; and falling tea prices would compound the crisis, these sources said.

(Continued on page 6)

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CONTENTS

News Background	3
Tamil Militarism	7
Jaffna Visit	9
U. N.	13
The Federal Alternative	14
Media	17
Women	24

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May Day — a curtain-raiser?

Mervyn de Silva

NEWS
BACKGROUND

Although it was some days after the event — the tenth anniversary of the new Parliamentary complex at Kotte, the ancient seat of government, which has regained its old name Sri Jayewardenapura — the *Sunday Island* and the *Sunday Times*, both privately — owned, made the correct professional choice of a frontpage picture. It showed President JR and his successor President Premadasa engaged in an intimate tete-a-tete.

The photograph does justice to a newsworthy event. It does more. It captures a moment which may well reflect a significant turn of events — those political developments which will lead to May Day, and the rival rallies, the UNP and the SLFP dominated demos and meetings. The new factor is the decision of the SLFP to accommodate the D.U.N.F., the breakaway UNP faction led by Messrs Gamini Dissanayake and Lalith Athulathmudali. (The use of the term DUNF "leader" by the press has itself become a controversial issue).

The S.L.F.P. is the party of the Bandaranaiques, S.W.R.D., its founder, and on his death, his widow, Sirima Bandaranaike. Though he was leader of the House, No. 2 in the UNP hierarchy, S.W.R.D. knew that the line of succession would not accommodate him — despite the fact that his own organisation, the Sinhala Maha Sabha had agreed before the first General elections to sacrifice its own distinctive identity in the interests of the larger "United NATIONAL party".

It was soon clear to SWRD that D. S., a towering personality who had his own ideas of succession and, what is more,

enjoyed the fullest confidence of the (British) Governor-General, was keen on making young Dudley Senanayake his successor. And so, S.W.R.D., in good time, quit the UNP to launch the SLFP, a crucial systemic change that was to decide the pattern of Sri Lankan politics. In short, a two party system. Or, more accurately, two coalitions or constellations — UNP and its much smaller allies, the SLFP and the well-organised, it assorted (Marxist) Left.

If the UNP line of succession was father-to-son, the S.L.F.P.'s was husband (S.W.R.D.) to widow, Sirima Bandaranaike. Dudley was a bachelor. His cousin, R. G. was a Cabinet Minister and frontline politician but far too individualistic and unsteady to make the grade. D. S.'s grandson, formed his own party and contested the last elections but couldn't really make the grade. When J.R.J. completed his second term, he picked his Prime Minister R. Premadasa to be the UNP's candidate to meet the challenge of the SLFP leader, Mrs Bandaranaike whose civic rights had been restored. (On the report of a Presidential Commission of Inquiry, the JRJ administration had stripped both Felix Dias Bandaranaike, Mrs. B.'s powerful minister, and Mrs. Bandaranaike of their political rights).

Somewhat prematurely perhaps, many an observer of the interesting developments in recent weeks, evidently believes that a major confrontation (a general election?) is imminent and that May Day will probably raise the curtain on that grand drama. The first such development of course was the decision of the D.U.N.F., to join the SLFP and its allies on May Day. The announcement astonished two

groups: (a) UNP activists, supporters-sympathisers who believed that the DUNF's chief aim was to have itself accepted by the party's rank-and-file as the legitimate UNP after exposing President Premadasa as usurper or deviationist. (b) the SLFP (parliamentary) group which had met a few days earlier, with Chief Whip Richard Pathirana present according to a D.N. report, and flatly rejected the idea of any association with the DUNF, on May Day.

But most of all, it must come as a shock to President JR. Dissidents, deviationists, defiant rebels — all this the UNP has seen, in his time. He himself was not always the strict party-liner. But aligning itself with the SLFP? With Mrs. Bandaranaike? To JR, this crosses the border from deviationism to treachery.

And so, **MEN AND MEMORIES**, both the book and the well-advertised ceremony to launch a work which few Sri Lankans have yet seen. (Evidently the Indian publisher VIKAS is dragging its feet!). But the main objective of the exercise has been realised. Helped by his soul-mate, the loyal Ananda Tissa de Alwis, and by the publication of an extract by the *Sunday Times* JR's onslaught on India, and its "betrayal" — the failure to fulfil pledges made in the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace accord — have made the former President the most uncompromising critic of Delhi, and its Sri Lanka policy. Which position, needless to add, makes the former UNP President and his chosen successor, soul-mates once more.

And 24 hours after the *Sunday Island* and *Sunday Times* frontpage pictures, we have another large page 1 picture of

Mrs. Bandaranaike in the company of Big Sister, and close friend Indira Gandhi. The report with the picture reminds the reader that Mrs. Bandaranaike was not only the world's first women prime minister, but the author of the Indian Ocean Peace Zone proposal, introduced at the NONALIGNED Summit in Lusaka in 1971.

Attitudes to the Big Neighbour is the battle-line. While Gamini Dissanayake and Ronnie de Mel (his wife, Mallika is a Vice-President of DUNF) have not only been staunchly pro-Indian but were the main "Peace Accord" initiators, Lalith Athulathmudali, the National Security Minister, was the bitterest opponent of India. In his view, India pre-empted a 'military victory' in Jaffna which he as National Security Minister, had so zealously sought.

The question is how many donor nations that encouraged and supported the Lalith-Gamini impeachment move, also give their blessings to the new DUNF-SLFP alignment, knowing full well the SLFP's position on the two vital issues — market economics, (the IMF-IBRD strategy)

and a negotiated resolution of the ethnic conflict?

The sole superpower, needless to add, pursues its own line, not always certain how this mounting pressure on the Presidency, will affect the stability of Sri Lanka, without which free market economics and human rights, have no real meaning. Besides, the sole superpower has not (not yet?) given a formal letter of appointment to India conferring the rank of regional hegemon.

It was May 27th (twenty seventh) 1987 (eighty seven) and the Indian High Commissioner, Mr. J. N. Dixit had called on him at his private residence just after seven p m. President J R Jayawardene remembers all that quite well. A man of spartan discipline, meticulous in his ways, Mr. Jayawardene has kept a diary since he was a schoolboy. In any case, it was a day that proved to be unforgettable.

Earlier that evening, he had spoken at a ceremony held at the "Bank of Ceylon" which had moved into a new head office. He had dwelt at length on the on-going "Operation

Liberation" in the northern peninsula. The Sri Lankan army which was doing exceptionally well was poised to regain control of the north and take Jaffna the capital. It had already succeeded in interdicting the LTTE's supply lines from Tamil Nadu. Mr. Jayewardene was aware High Commissioner Dixit had warned National Security minister Lalith Athulathmudali that India would not repeat not permit the Sri Lankan army to recapture Jaffna.

Mr. Jayewardene also knew that Mr. Dixit was bringing him a message from Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Mr. Dixit had recorded the message (or the gist of it) on the back of an envelope. Mr Dixit's summary read as follows:

- (i) deeply disappointed and distressed.
- (ii) thousands of civilians killed since 1983 (eighty three) has aroused tremendous indignation.
- (iii) your latest offensive in Jaffna peninsula has altered the entire basis of our understanding.
- (iv) we cannot accept genocide
- (v) do not force us to review our policies.

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How India betrayed us

J. R. Jayewardene

The Government of Central India continued to campaign throughout the world against the Government of Sri Lanka. The Indian embassies abroad became centres of support for the terrorists and separatist groups. This led to the reluctance on the part of some of the Western powers to supply arms and other aid to Sri Lanka. They were all anxious not to offend India.

The government decided to make an attempt to regain control of the Jaffna peninsula. 'Operation Liberation' which began in April 1987 in the Vadamarachchi division of the

North-Eastern part of the peninsula, was directed at preventing the hitherto easy movement of men and material from Tamil Nadu. By the end of May, Sri Lankan forces had gained control of this area. The LTTE, the most formidable Tamil separatist group, had suffered a serious setback, and in a region they had dominated for long.

At this point, India moved swiftly to prevent the subjugation of the Jaffna peninsula by the Sri Lanka forces. The Indian High Commissioner, J. N. Dixit pointedly informed Lalith Athulath-

mudali, Minister of National Security, that India would not permit the Sri Lanka Army to take Jaffna town. The same message was conveyed to me.

The demonstration of India's sea and air power achieved a number of objectives. It saved the LTTE from imminent destruction, stopped any further expansion of the Sri Lanka Army's campaign after Vadamarachchi, and reduced the Sri Lanka Government to military impotence if India continued to give more help to the terrorist movement, especially the LTTE.

(Men and Memories)

Open debate on Ananda's outburst

Roshan Peiris

Former UNP stalwart Anandatissa de Alwis' explosive remarks last week about the Indian betrayal of his leader J. R. Jayewardene, has stirred a new political debate.

Speaking at a ceremony on April 10 to mark the release of J. R. Jayewardene's autobiography 'Men and Memories,' Mr. de Alwis said India's destabilisation tactics had tragically hurt the man who had modelled his life and commitment on Mahatma Gandhi's principles.

DUNF leader Gamini Dissanayake an influential member of the Jayewardene Cabinet, and considered one of the key figures in charting the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord in 1987 said:

"If Anandatissa was expressing an important aspect of a complex problem, nations often have differences with one another, especially when they are neighbours.

"These differences one can accept. What fundamentally concerned J. R. Jayewardene during his Presidency was the fact that South India, with the Center consenting, encouraged and harboured violent groups on Indian soil. This he felt was unethical and unacceptable.

"How could those who are following the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi encourage violence? It is a fact however, that there was violence, even during Mahatma Gandhi's lifetime. Ultimately he was himself a victim of violence. There is always the ideal and the real, the abstract and the real politik.

"Tamil militancy is real. It cannot be wished away and Sri Lanka and India have learnt lessons from it in different ways.

Tamil Congress leader Kumar Ponnambalam:

"I do not know whether Dr. de Alwis' statement that India

failed J. R. during his rule was justified.

"Mr. Jayewardene felt India was not playing fair by Sri Lanka. After the U.N.P. had hammered the daylights out of Tamils in July 1983, he need not have had recourse to India. But he did so at every juncture.

"He continued to seek India's good offices till the end of his term and India at times responded handsomely."

Loganathan Katheswaran, an EPRLF leader:

"We do not wish to hold a brief for India in this controversy. But I do recall Mr. Jayewardene's statement after the August 1977 anti-Tamil riots when he said if the people want peace, I will give them peace and if they want war I will give them war? This was said at a time when there was hardly any armed resistance from the Tamil people.

"Then again in July 1983 during the anti-Tamil riots, I recall well the appearance of Mr. Jayewardene and members of his Cabinet on television where none of them showed any remorse over the massacre.

"If India got involved in problems of Sri Lanka the responsibility lies squarely with the successive governments of Sri Lanka which did not solve the problem."

Lakshman Jayakody:

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Bandaranaike government of 1970. "The fact remains that Mr. Jayewardene did try to get support from India, and India in doing so, looked after its own national interest, rather than the interests of a neighbouring country.

"The biggest mistake Mr. Jayewardene made was not

understanding India's thinking. India quite correctly thought first of its own national interests."

Cheri George, Deputy Indian High Commissioner:

"It is not an official government statement, and it is not our policy to comment on other people's statements even with regard to India."

Briefly...

(Continued from page 1)

In addition to falling prices production too was down drastically due to the drought. Sources in the industry expected the drop to be as much as 10 million kilogrammes in the first quarter of this year.

Drought

The monsoon has failed, and the rains when they come will not be enough to fill the reservoirs and the

tanks. The Met men do not expect rain till the end of May, and it will be delayed and weakened monsoon showers.

The persisting dry weather has not only curtailed hydro-power and tap water but has hit the rural farmer hardest. The situation of the rural farmer has become bad enough for the government to tell foreign missions in Colombo (according to an editorial in the government's *Daily News*): "If relief is not provided these categories of

farmers and agricultural labourers will face the grave prospect of not having food for their sustenance. If rain does not come in May there will be a real threat of starvation...."

About 600,000 people in the districts of Badulla, Puttalam, Trincomalee, Moneragala, Mannar, Vavuniya, Ampara, Kandy, Kilinochchi, Hambantota and Matara are severely effected. The government has appealed to donor countries for emergency food relief.

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Origins and Dispersion in South India and Sri Lanka

D. P. Sivaram

Introduction

Tamil nationalism in South India and Sri Lanka can be described in terms of two sets of ideas and beliefs.

The one, the purity and uniqueness of Tamil language and culture; the other, Tamil traditions which exalt military virtues and ideals.

These ideas and beliefs have dominated the vocabulary of anti-Hindi and secessionist agitations and propaganda of the Dravidian movement in South India in the 50's and 60's. The nationalism of the movement for Tamil language rights and regional autonomy in Sri Lanka was articulated in the same vocabulary after 1956.

The L.T.T.E.'s nationalism is also expressed in terms of these two sets of ideas and beliefs. But militarism — the spirit which exalts military virtues and ideals — has been the dominant and characterizing component of the L.T.T.E.'s Tamil nationalism from its inception.

The stated aim of the Tigers is to build a modern military structure.¹ The ideology of militarism plays an important role in their effort to create an efficient and advanced military organization. Therefore, in addition to standard modern methods of discipline, organization and training the L.T.T.E. inculcates the belief among its cadres — and propagates the idea among

Tamils — that it is part of an ancient and powerful martial tradition, to develop and sustain a motivated and fierce fighting force.

The Tiger symbol is considered the most important manifestation of this tradition. "Prabhakaran had a reason for selecting the Tiger as the national insignia of *Thamizheelam*. The Tiger insignia is an image rooted in Dravidian civilization. It is a symbol that illustrates the martial history (*Veeravaralaru*) and national upheaval of the Tamils. Our national flag is the symbol of the independent state of *Thamizheelam* to be created, **rooted in the martial traditions** (*Veera marapuhai*) of the Tamils".²

How is the L.T.T.E. able to thus define its militarism as being rooted in "Dravidian civilization" and Tamil traditions whereas the Sri Lankan Tamils have usually projected their cultural ethos as one which made them a community devoted to education, government employment, commerce and agriculture? Tamil politicians and intellectuals have in fact claimed that Tamil militancy arose from a perceived threat to these avenues of social advancement. The L.T.T.E.'s militarist definition of Tamilian identity is possible because Tamil militarism is an unexamined but important feature of Tamil culture and nationalism. This study therefore intends to examine Tamil politics in South India and Sri Lanka by addressing to questions —

- (a) What is Tamil militarism?
- (b) What were the social and political conditions

of its genesis and diffusion in South India and Sri Lanka?

The Dravidian movement has been studied primarily in terms of the Brahmin — non-Brahmin contradiction, in terms of the pro-British regional politics of non-Brahmin elites of South India,³ the Pure Tamil and Self respect movements, linguistic nationalism and secessionism.⁴

But the other important component of Tamil nationalism — its militarism has not figured in studies of the Dravidian movement.⁵ This is partly attributable to the influence of a historiographic tradition that has shaped concepts of Tamil culture and society in Dravidian studies. It arose from a strong political compulsion in the nascent and early phases of the Dravidian ideology to portray the Tamil people and their culture as peaceful and unwarlike.

Maraimalia Atikal, the father of the Pure Tamil movement wrote in English that "as we come to the study the life of the ancient Tamils from their most ancient literary work, I mean the *Tolkappiyam*, the age of which on the best internal evidence goes back to 1500 B.C., we see them already settled into, a highly civilized community **for the most part peaceful, but for a few infrequent feuds between one Tamil King and another.** It is to this continuity of a peaceful and highly civilized life enjoyed by the Tamils that we owe the existence of the Tamil language still in its pristine purity vigour and glory."⁶ Maraimalai Atikal's views are representative of the

The writer, a well known journalist, is widely regarded as an authority on the rise of Tamil militancy.

early Dravidian movement. We can see that, the nascent Dravidian school of Tamil studies — the concepts and beliefs of which have influenced the study of the Tamil nationalism is no small measure — is marked by its patent inclination to present the history of the Tamil people as the "continuity of a peaceful and highly civilized life."

If this was the view of the founders of the Dravidian movement, then where can one locate the 'origins' of Tamil militarism? Although South India in general and Tamils in particular have an insignificant place in the modern Indian army — the Madras regiment being the only unit of the southern region — the origins of Tamil militarism is closely related to the question of military and society in India.

The preponderance of north Indian peoples in the Indian army has led to the study of Indian militarism mainly as part of the evolution of society and politics in the northern parts of the subcontinent. The rise of the martial castes and classes of north India in the development of the Indian army has been skillfully analysed elsewhere.⁷ That ethnic, religious and caste groups which consider military service as their hereditary or natural occupation make better fighters in a modern army, is an idea that has played an important role in the formation of the Indian and Pakistani militaries. This idea — the martial races theory, which dominated British recruitment policy toward the latter part of the 19th century, is another orientalist discourse that has shaped modern perceptions of India's people's the martial north and the non-martial south. Thus in a book published under the official auspices of the government of India, recounting the martial traditions of the Indian army,⁸ there is not one tradition connected with a South Indian caste or class.⁹ The 'martial races' of independent India's military — the sikhs, Rajputs, Jats, Gorkhas,

Marathas, Punjabis, Dogras, Garhwalis, Mahars and Kuomanis are all north Indian castes and classes. Yet we find that in the early history of the Indian army South Indian groups such as Tamils and Telugus had distinguished themselves in the crucial wars which subjugated India to British rule.¹⁰

There are two phases in the decline of the South in the Indian army and the shift in recruitment towards the 'martial races' of the north in general and the north western parts of the subcontinent in particular; — what Stephen Cohen calls the Punjabization of the Indian military.¹¹

In the first phase the re-organization of the army after the mutiny of 1857 on the basis of recommendations made by the Peel commission in 1859 and the Eeden Commission in 1879 defined service and recruitment on a territorial basis to suit the policy of divide et impera. Drastic reductions were made in the Bengal army. Brahmins and upper castes Hindus were dropped in large numbers. Active Service for Sepoys was limited to their home Presidencies. And as there was no major internal security problems in the Bombay and Madras Presidencies, they became military backwaters. This was followed by claims that the fighting qualities of the classes in these regions had deteriorated. Reductions were recommended and made in the Bombay and Madras armies.

In the second phase the great threat of the Russian empire on the north western frontier of the Raj in 1885, followed by the Burma war of 1887 — 1889 created a massive need for manpower "belonging to races whose martial qualities were well authenticated."¹² As a result the territorial basis of recruitment for divide and rule was given up and castes and classes mostly from India's north west where the bulk of the fighting was done, were extensively recruited. Special social and eco-

omic privileges were extended to these peoples to ensure a reservoir of martial manpower. "To preserve their loyalty, conserve their martial spirit and enhance their prestige, the colonial state attempted to make time stand still on the northern plains".¹³ Thus began the rise and dominance of the Rajputs, Sikhs, Jats, Punjabi muslims and Gorkhas in the Indian army. The ideology of this process — The martial races Theory — is another orientalist discourse with its 19th century 'scientific' paraphernalia — that has contributed in no small measure to the evolution of modern perceptions of India's people's and regions. It sought to establish why some Indian peoples (those who were being extensively recruited) were martial and while others (those who had been dropped in large numbers) were not.

FOOTNOTES

1. 'Viduthalai Pulihal' (official organ of the L.T.T.E.) April — May 1991, Editorial.
2. Viduthalai Pulihal. Article of the Tiger insignia p. 3 Feb. March 1991. The flag with the Tiger insignia was declared as the national flag of Thamileelam on Great Heroes Day — 27.11.90.
3. Baker C. J. 1976. The Politics of South India (1920-1937). Vikas Delhi. Irshick, Eugene, F. 1969. Politics and social conflicts in South India, Berkely California.
4. Sivathamby K. Politics of a Literary style. Social Scientist. No. 68 March 1978.
5. It has been noted in passing in another context. "... all actions and activities (of the D. M. K.) were presented as activities of warriors preparing for battle. The protest against Hindi became a battle like Puranaanuru battles. . . ." — C. S. Lakshims. 'Mother, Mother community and Mother-Politics in Tamil Nadu. — Economic and Political Weekly October 20-29, 1990.
6. Maraimalai Atikal. pp. 34-35 Chin-tanai Katturaikal. English preface to second edition Kazhakam, 1961.
7. Stephen P. Cohen. The Indian Army. Its contribution to the Development of a Nation. Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1990. Revised Indian edition. The first edition appeared in 1971. "In the 18 years since this book was first

(Continued on page 11)

An Agenda for Peace

Paul Caspersz

Never have I used the word "agenda" with more regard for what it etymologically means: "things that simply have to be done". The clock in the Jaffna clock tower had stopped ticking at, if I remember rightly, sixteen minutes past six. Yet, with the Chelvanayagam Memorial Tower, it is one of a very few high-rise structures still to stand erect in the Fort area. But the fact that it and the Tower still stand gives hope (against hope?), that there are still a few hours, to midnight.

My two immediately previous visits to Jaffna had taken place just before the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord (cf. *Lanka Guardian*, 10:8, 15 August 1987) and seven months after it began to break down (cf. *Lanka Guardian*, 12:1, 1 May 1989). The first article ended:

(On 13 July) . . . I returned to Kandy. More hopeless? Or more hopeful in our helplessness? The time has come for our common humanity to rise up and say to everyone on every side: Enough!

and the second:

. . . Finally, though it may take years, dawn will break again upon the now benighted land.

The cry of humanity has not been loud enough and so the dawn has remained distant. Between April 1989 and March 1992 the cup of pain of the people of Jaffna had filled to the brim. Everyday life was very hard. They told the three of us (the others were an Anglican priest and a Methodist lady) that the prices of basic food items had decreased considerably from their previous extremely high levels. But they were yet much higher than in Kandy or Colombo. The poor,

as so often, are the overwhelming majority and suffer most. The average birthweight of babies, we were told, has decreased most alarmingly since the outbreak of hostilities in June 1990 and is now barely above 2 kgs. Rice was Rs 25-30 and sugar Rs 28-32 per kilo, kerosene oil was Rs 30 per litre, a box of matches Rs 3, a bottle of orange barley Rs 30, an egg Rs 8.50-10 (without day old pullets and the transport of commercial poultry mash (no deep litter is possible, so eggs can come only from free range fowls, for whom, when they get sick, no medicines are available). We found only vegetables and fish to be fresher and cheaper than in Colombo; for these the prices were moderate because of the difficulties of transport from areas of plenty to areas of scarcity, even if the latter were only four or five miles away. The price of petrol at Rs 2400 per bottle or more than Rs 10000 per gallon still hit the sky.

Travel and transport are difficult and hazardous. The journey from Colombo to Jaffna costs nearly Rs 1000 per person and takes a minimum of 15-16 hours; from Jaffna to Colombo, one is lucky to do it in 24, as no transport to the lagoon leaves Jaffna before 2 in the afternoon, and the Sri Lanka Army is ready at the Thandikulam checkpoint only at 9.30 the next morning. Vehicles run on kerosene oil, or a mixture of kerosene and vegetable oil, with a few drops of petrol for the initial ignition. Motor cyclists carry the petrol, as we would a ballpoint pen, in their shirt pockets in little plastic phials with long nozzles; the smaller phials cost Rs 80 and suffice for about ten kickoffs, while the larger ones cost Rs

150. Electricity has not been available for the past year and a half with adverse effects on education, industry and agriculture. When peace returns, ROTE (the Research Organization for Tamil Eelam) will have much to teach the rest of us about oil-saving, safe and sadly attractive bottle lamps and how to grow large cabbages and beetroot in the dry zone without chemical fertilizer and chemical insecticides: organic farming may be a fashion for the few elsewhere, in the North today it is the only farming possible. Torch batteries and candles are banned items for those travelling North.

"Why do they hide these things in their brassieres and underwear?" lamented the kindly Colonel at the entrance to Vavuniya where our van had to stop for the first inspection en route.

"Surely we are reasonable persons and would allow anyone to take 2 or 3 batteries for personal use, or 3 or 4 small candles." We hadn't the heart to tell him that we ourselves had already been courteously asked to empty the single torch we had in our team, though we were assured that we could collect the two batteries on our return journey.

Most severe of all the hardships — at least for those who had money to satisfy the more basic needs of food — was the acute shortage of medicines. People died every day of "natural causes", but the natural causes should not have led to the grave if the basic drugs were more easily available. That the Tigers would use them as pain-killers or for treating their own sick or wounded cadres was probably the fear. But our information was that the Tigers somehow succeed to get

the medicines they need. Those who do not are the non-combatant civilians, who are the overwhelming majority.

Malaria has become a problem in many areas. Yet a course of chloroquin costs Rs 60/= which the great majority of the population cannot afford, or afford only at the cost of going hungry. The danger of rabies has also assumed serious proportions because of the shortage of the anti-rabies vaccine. A high government official however told us that the people tended to use up what little vaccine was available because of unfounded fears that any dog that growled at them probably had rabies. With the shortage of food and the movement of families away from the danger zones, the number of stray dogs had increased. Numerous persons with whom we spoke urged us to do all we could to move the authorities "in the South" to attend with the utmost urgency to the medical needs of the people "in the North".

The first signs that we were about to enter a very special part of the island came to us between Kekirawa and Medawachchiya where we saw military vehicles with armed soldiers in combat fatigues proceeding northwards. At 11.30 in the morning (having left Kurunegala at 7) we reached the final army checkpoint at Thandikulam. When we left Thandikulam to enter a kilometer of so of No one's Land, it was difficult to avoid a lump in the throat as we read BEYOND THIS AT YOUR OWN RISK. Then we came to the first Tiger checkpoint at Paranatungal. Here for the first time we saw and smelt motorbikes running on kerosene oil. I asked the young Tiger sentry in civilian clothes, "Aren't you afraid to die?" I never heard a more spontaneous laugh until I returned to Kandy on the 16th.

"What is your theological reflection?" I asked my silent companion. "I was thinking of the Parable of the Sorrowing Father, waiting first for one son,

and then for the other" he replied. He didn't say which son went away first.

At Omanthai we saw for the first time what was to be seen at every important street corner after that, wall posters and photos commemorating the young Tiger dead. Sometimes the posters read, "These are not dead, they have only sowed the seed." The grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die before the new grains appear, a hundred for one. This seemed to be the dominant ideology of death for the Cause. We were later told of a Tiger cemetery where the Notice firmly ordered visitors at the entrance, 'No one is allowed to cry here'.

From Paranatungal to Paranthan it took us about 3 hours. From Paranthan in 1987 and 1989 the road was the usual one: to Elephant Pass, from there to Jaffna. Now civilians branch off to the east in hired tractors or on the pillion of hired motorbikes, sometimes two adults on the pillion with another small person in front of the rider, on a dusty 10-kilometre track hacked out of the shrub jungle to a place called Uriyan where the lagoon is. The western route through Pooneryn had been closed by army action.

From Uriyan South to Uriyan North across the lagoon in a sailing boat it is about four miles and takes about 90 minutes. How much at peace and suffused with the beauty of dusk was nature on the lagoon with hundreds of flamingoes in the water close to the shore, black-winged stilts looking for fish, pintails and garganey ducks flying in formation in the skies, cormorants and other birds, with the gentle ripple of the water as the oarsman steered the boat forward against the wind. Yet across the lagoon at Elephant Pass with the naked eye could be detected the Army posts. Maybe some weary soldier spotted us with his binoculars and was filled with memories of home. At Uriyan North a Tiger Master of Ceremonies helped us ashore. He

had been instructed to treat us well as we were on our way to Jaffna on a mission of peace and goodwill. Even the Tiger girls who had come ashore with us in another boat relented a little and relaxed when they saw that we were expected visitors and forced themselves to respond to our greetings with reluctant smiles. But, presumably under orders, they did not tarry for a chat but jerked their rifles into position and moved away into various huts and thatched sheds. From Uriyan North one has to get to Iyakachchi from where motorbikes or trucks take people a distance of 30 miles to Jaffna town.

In Jaffna and the North over the next five days the strongest and most lasting impression we received was that the Tamil people want peace, but peace with honour founded upon justice. Our task then in Jaffna and elsewhere during our visit was to investigate what the agenda for such an honourable peace would be.

An agenda calls for agents. The first of these agents would be the people in the North and the thousands in the South who actively want a just peace. In Jaffna itself, we heard two voices: one saying that the alienation was complete and the point of no return had been reached, the other crying that it was yet possible to return to the time when we lived and prayed and played together. But there was a third voice struggling for articulation and an audience: there are points of return and there are points of no return, but the way to the former inexorably passes through the latter.

What then are the points of no return? First, the Tamil wants to be considered as the free and equal Other. The Tamil will no longer settle for the second class. No longer do the Tamils want to be considered even as an oppressed people. They want to be considered as equals. Second, the

Tamil problem needs to be recognized as the problem of the Tamil people. The Tamil problem is not the problem of the Tamil militants. Solve the "numerous problems" of the Tamil people in the areas of land, language, education and employment — admitted to be real problems both by the UNP Manifesto of the 1977 Elections and in the First Statement of Government Policy in Parliament on 4 August 1977 — and the problem of the Tamil militants will disappear. It is the only way, but the way that becomes increasingly rugged with each day of delay.

It is the people above everyone else, whether they be Sinhalese or Tamils or Muslims or Burghers, who have to support all moves, national and international, hitherto made or still to be made towards a peaceful and honourable solution of the crisis. There has been no dearth of even formal attempts at such a solution from the time of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam proposals of 1957 to the Thondaman proposals of December 1991.

In 1987 came the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. Maybe it called for adjustment and modification. Yet it provided a basis for a solution of peace with honour to all sides. What wrecked it was a single, monumentally myopic decision to bring the Tiger leaders caught on the high seas between India and Sri Lanka to trial in Colombo. J. R. Jayewardena came close — but characteristically not too close — to admitting it in his interview with Mervyn de Silva in June 1990 (*Lanka Guardian*, 13:5, 1 July 1990).

MdeS: The Accord broke down in October 1987 — 3 months later, after some LTTE men had taken cyanide?

JR. Yes, but I am sure that was only an excuse...

MdeS. But Dixit told me that he had pleaded with you to have interrogation of the captured 'Tigers' in Jaffna and that he would give an Indian airforce plane to take all

your investigators to where they were being held...

JR. I had to listen to my security officials...

Anyway, I think the Tigers would have found some other excuse to break the Agreement...

The second set of agents are the Government and the Armed Forces of Sri Lanka. They have to agree on an immediate bilateral ceasefire, suitably monitored, probably by both national and international monitors of accepted authority and impartiality. If a full-scale attack is launched on Jaffna, the well-trained Tiger young women and men will take cover, but thousands upon thousands of civilians will die. A steady supply line of all essential goods to the North should be maintained not only for humanitarian reasons but as the surest way to win the support of the Tamil people. It is sterile to say that it is illogical for the Tiger leaders to say that they have the right to want to be the sole rulers of the Tamil people and in the same breath to say that the Sri Lankan Government has the duty to maintain uninterrupted supply lines: you cannot have your cake and eat it. For the Tiger leaders would reply, When Eelam comes, we shall fulfil our duty, but until then the responsibility is the Sri Lankan Government's.

Land colonization is land-mined. The Sinhalese people love the whole of the island. The Tamil people have particular love for that part of the island which history has led them to regard as peculiarly, though not exclusively, their own (Recall *He Comes from Jaffna*.) So until dialogue is resumed, and a consensual accord is reached, all new state-aided settlements in sensitive border areas should be suspended.

With a view to an eventual consensus the Government and the Joint Operations Command should encourage private and official visits of persons and groups from the South to the

North and from the North to the South.

The third agents are the leaders of the Tamil people. Like the Government of Sri Lanka they too should agree on an immediate bilateral ceasefire, help to maintain supply lines, freeze present settlement patterns and encourage free movement of people (maybe asking rich Tamils to return home and not escape to foreign lands), free expression and free discussion of alternate models of devolution and nationhood.

Peace is the agenda of the hour. But peace is not possible without justice. To achieve it what is needed is not knowledge of what is right and just but the moral and political determination to achieve it. The alternative for the Country Beloved is altogether too terrible to consider.

Origins. . . .

(Continued from page 8)

- published no other study has appeared which either duplicates or replaces it" introduction to revised Indian edition xi.
8. Dharm Pal, *Traditions of the Indian Army*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Govt of India, 1961. A second revised edition was put out in 1970. National Book Trust, Delhi.
 9. Twelve "traditions of Gallantry" in the Indian army are related in part one. The only one of South India is that of the Madras soldier, an amorphous term, for the Madras regiment is a totally mixed one like the Parachute regiment and recruits any eligible Indian from the South. The other traditions of gallantry which are recounted 'The Rajput Soldier'; The Sikh soldier etc. refer to specific ethnic caste, religious or regional groups of north India.
 10. *Madras Infantry, 1748-1943*. Lt. Col. Edward Gwynne Phythian — Adams Madras Govt. Press 1943. *History of the Madras Army*, Lieut. Col. W. J. Wilson — Madras Govt. Press 5 vols. 1882-89.
 11. Stephen P. Cohen op. cit. Chapter 2.
 12. A phrase used in instructions given to recruiters in the Madras Presidency.
 13. David Washbrook. *South Asia, The World system, and World capitalism*. *Journal of Asian studies* 49, No. 3 (August 1990); p. 480.

(To be continued)

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Reforming the Charter

L. H. Horace Perera

Mr. B. Wijedoru of Hong Kong has, in his letter appearing in the 15th March issue of the Lanka Guardian (Vol 14, No. 22) raised a question that, inter alia, is today occupying the attention of the organized International Non-Governmental Community (INGOs) whose members are international NGOs having consultative relations with the UN Economic and Social Council or with the Specialized Agencies or with some UN Bodies like UNICEF, UNCATD, UNHCR etc. There is, in principle, no disagreement at all in INGO circles of the need for democratization of the whole UN System. This naturally raises, among other things, the constitution, composition and powers of Security Council, particularly the question of Permanent Membership with the "veto" power that goes along with it. The Council, as at present constituted and functions, is a product of the Second World War and is considered not to reflect present realities. For instance Japan and Germany are today economically stronger than four Permanent Members of the Council. Moreover, the membership of the UN has increased far beyond the expectations of its founders. This development is not reflected in the Council. One must also take into consideration the fact that today there is only one Super Power and that this one power can, if it so desires, exercise its "muscle" and influence or even control the Council. This is one of the unfortunate realities of today.

Democratization of the *entire* UN System in no doubt necessary. This will require a complete reform of the UN Charter

A well known Sri Lankan teacher, the author now based in Geneva, is Honorary President of the World Federation of UN Associations

which can be effected only by a vote of two-thirds of the Member States convoked for that purpose. (Articles 108 & 109 of the Charter). Hence the whole process democratization of the Organisation has to begin with the General Assembly. This naturally raises the question as to whom does the General Assembly represent. In view of the fact that a majority of member states are still under authoritarian or quasi-authoritarian rule it can justifiably argued that the General Assembly does not represent "We the peoples of the United Nations" in whose name the determination is declared to strive for a realisation of the aims and objects of the Organisation. (see Preamble of the Charter). Hence the process of democratization of the United Nations should begin in each and every Member State. Then, and not, till then, can what Mr. Wijedoru calls long over due reforms be effected to "reflect current realities".

It need hardly be said that the reform of the United Nations Charter will take a long time. Not only must all Member States be "democratized" but strong pressure has to be exerted on national governments by international, and more so by national, public opinion to promote the democratization of the Organisation. Even if all governments are so minded the reform of the Charter will take quite some time. This will have to be done at "A General Conference of the Members of the United Nations (convoked) for the purpose of reforms *within the terms of the present Charter* can be effected.

The first of these reforms should be a much more rational method for electing the Secretary General of the United

Nations. The way in which this is done today can result — it is not said that it has — in the election of a monumental mediocrity to what the first Secretary General, Trygve Lie, said is "the most impossible job in the world". Secondly he or she should not be elected for more than one term of say seven years. No one will deny that the prospect of a second term can affect the independence essential to the effective performance of the duties of the incumbent. The officer should also be given wider responsibility and greater power if he or she is to be an effective voice of the international community and to act on its behalf, even without a specific mandate of the Security Council, in cases of serious threats to peace and global security where the situation demands quick action.

The next change that can be effected, and it appears that the present Secretary General has already begun to do this is the reorganization of the Secretariat. Prior to his taking office the question was raised in various fora of the need and the value of there being 25 Under Secretaries - General and 18 Assistant - Secretaries-General 'many of whom' theoretically at least, have to report to him. This is an impossible span for even a genius to control. It is encouraging to note that this matter is being attended to quite firmly. Closely allied to this is the fact that member governments have interfered in appointments, dismissals, transfers, promotions etc. of the staff resulting in a kind of international nepotism. Hence it is not surprising that in the Secretariat there are a fair number of square pegs in round holes. This has not only reduced

(Continued on page 15)

The Federal Alternative

— a reply

H. L. de Silva

This is a brief response to certain comments made by Amita Shastri (L. G. 15/2) in a review of my essay on Federal Alternative for Sri Lanka. The reviewer states that I have "blithely ignored the intransigence of the Government of Sri Lanka in not following through on their promises and swiftly devolving powers to the Provincial Councils, especially to that of the North-East"

This observation proceeds upon misunderstanding of the legal effect of the devolution provisions contained in the Thirteenth Amendment under which these powers were conferred. There were certain specified powers which fell exclusively within the competence of the Provincial Councils and others which were intended to be concurrently exercised by the Provincial Councils as well as the Central Government. In respect of both categories nothing more was needed to be done for their exercise by the Provinces. There were no further powers which were "promised" for the remaining powers were all reserved for the Center. One cannot therefore understand what is meant by the Government's intransigence in not swiftly devolving power "as the Thirteenth Amendment became law in three months and these provisions took effect proprio vigore."

Although I do not hold a brief for the Government of Sri Lanka in this regard, it must be pointed out that the responsibility for the ultimate breakdown of the administration in the North and East must also be borne by the Indian Government and the L.T.T.E. as well. At the heart of the problem was the Indian failure to carry out effectively its primary obligation under the Accord which was to disarm the terrorists. Secondly, the L.T.T.E. was not reconciled to the prospect of entering the democratic process competing for political power with other

groups which also claimed to represent the Tamils and did everything possible to destabilise the North-East administration. Furthermore, the E.P.R.L.F. lacked legitimacy as elected representatives because of the numerous instances of fraudulent practices that vitiated the electoral process which in many instances was carried out with the connivance of the I.P.K.F. whose proteges they were. Finally, the unsettling effect of the highly questionable dealings of the Sri Lanka Government with the L.T.T.E. in the attempt to secure the withdrawal of the I.P.K.F. and eliminate the illegal T.N.A. that had been formed with Indian assistance. So the failure of the constitutional experiment in the North-East was not attributable to any inherent defects in the devolution scheme itself but other and should not be jettisoned for that reason.

Indeed had a fully-fledged federal system been in operation under the chaotic conditions that prevailed in the North-East at that time unilateral declaration of Independence may have assumed a different complexion.

Shastri regrets that I have sought in my essay to advance the views of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists. This is hardly a fair comment and is symptomatic of an unwillingness to consider an argument on its merits without adding extraneous disparagement. I have in evaluating the prospects of success or failure of federalism as a constitutional system in Sri Lanka pointed to the existence of a significant body of opinion which, rightly or wrongly, feels aggrieved by proposals for change which in their view do not recognise their just rights and claims to fair treatment. I have at the same time drawn attention to the insufficient recognition of minority view points by the majority community in the post-independence period, which has

all but destroyed the vestiges of a truly national spirit of unity in this country and which must undergird a federal system, if it is to be a viable one. In doing so, from the majority standpoint I could well be accused of overstating the case for the minority. At this rate no rational discussion of a controversial issue would be possible even at an academic level.

I have drawn attention to the opposing view to underscore the point that federalism of itself cannot help create a sense of mutual trust and unity which is now absent and contemporary history bears ample evidence of the failure of federations that have been imposed upon people or which they have been coerced into acceptance — vide Yugoslavia and Soviet Union. The quotation from Nordlinger is not my "chief argument" but confirms this view point.

This is part of my wider thesis that constitutional mechanisms and legal devices have limited scope in solving deep seated political problems or in reconciling ethnic differences which need pragmatic solutions that take account of the diverse interests of all sections of the community. This is much more difficult than drawing up constitutional documents based on theoretical assumptions that do not always accord with the empirical evidence.

The Thirteenth Amendment, excluding the merger provisions, appears to strike a viable balance between a purely unitarian system and undiluted federalism. Its hybrid character may yet stand the stress of opposing pulls and contrary tendencies if worked with patience and understanding. A realisation of its practical value has however not deterred me from examining its soundness from a juristic standpoint so that we may beware of its weaknesses. By a majority of one, through somewhat strained legal reasoning and a measure of judicious real politik, the Court upheld its constitutionality. Considering the trauma and tribulations that accompanied its birth

let us give it a fair chance of proving its capacity for survival.

The reviewer says that "despite evidence and numerous studies to the contrary" I still continue to make a case for a unitary constitution. She does not disclose the nature of this contrary evidence nor identify the supporting studies to examine their relevance in our own context. I have referred to certain negative aspects of federalism and instances of failure to caution against the false optimism of those who advocate its adoption as a panacea for our political ills. Where federalism has succeeded it is not necessarily because the theory behind it was validated but because it suited the political genius of the people that adopted it. It failed in situations where it was not a natural growth but artificially implanted in a hostile soil.

Dealing with "the crux of the problem" i. e. the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, Shastri detects "a familiar ring" (presumably, echoes of the voice of the Mahavamsa chronicler) but seems to think that it is confined to "segments of the Sinhalese majority" implying that it is not significant. This is hardly the case if one takes note of the recent strong wave of protest and opposition to the Thondaman-Trojan horse. The Government hastily dissociated itself from the proposals on sensing the intensity of the opposition. Along with many sympathisers of the Tamil minority, Shastri has unquestioningly succumbed to the traditional Tamil homelands syndrome. She is evidently disinclined either to examine the rationality of its claim nor consider the validity of the many arguments advanced against it.

Not surprisingly she advocates of federalism link the scheme with the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces as a single territorial unit of the proposed federation. It is made part and parcel of the proposed federal solution. But need this be so? In a well-reasoned presentation Professor C. M. Maddum Bandara has advocated a re-demarcation of provincial administrative

boundaries on the basis of the major river basins in the country in place of the existing divisions that suited the colonial administration. It does not wholly ignore ethnic considerations but provides for a just and equitable distribution of natural resources that is eminently fair and reasonable. If this proposal were to be accepted by the Government the enthusiasm for federalism in this country will evaporate sooner than the morning dew. In an obvious attempt to justify the unequal appropriation of national resources for the minority that would be the consequence of merger, Shastri says that I have failed to take account of the "large areas of national, political, economic and social life over which the majority has increasingly established control". But is this unfair in a democracy when the majority constitutes seventy four percent? If there be imbalances in political representation in Parliament, public employment, university education or in any other sphere of public life, the remedy is to provide effective constitutional

Reforming . . .

(Continued from page 13)

the efficiency of the Secretariat but has adversely affected the morale of many competent and dedicated international civil servants. One can only hope that the present Secretary General will continue, without fear or favour, the reorganization which he has already begun.

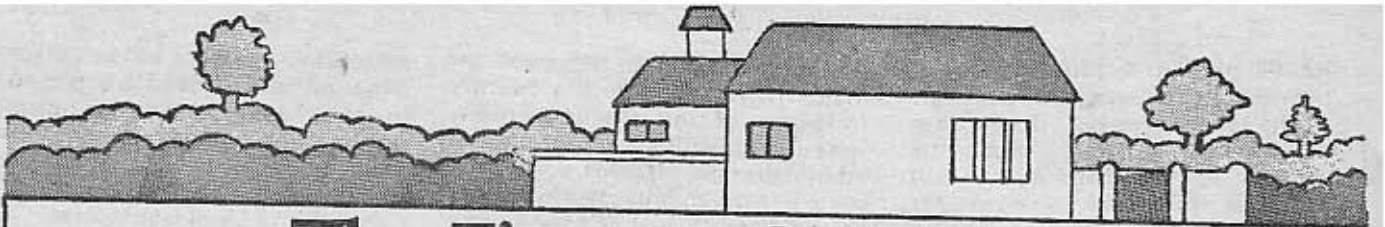
I am sure that Mr. Wijedoru knows that when one speaks of the UN System one is not referring only to the Security Council, The General Assembly and the Secretariat but also to various UN bodies like UNICEF UNCTAD etc. and to the great Specialised Agencies like the ILO, WHO, UNESCO etc. These Agencies are part and parcel of the entire UN System, working for the overall aims of the UN but in special fields. Their ability to contribute to the promotion of the purposes for which the UN was created calls for effective co-ordination of their activities and co-operation in their programmes. Unfortun-

remedies against unfair discrimination and if need be provide for the safeguarding of group rights. The remedy is not the creation of a territorial enclave for the enjoyment of exclusive rights for a single minority.

No solution to the national problem of Sri Lanka is ever likely to succeed unless the contending parties recognise the incontrovertible truth that the solution adopted must be one which accords with truth, justice and equity. No amount of rhetoric expended on the subject of past injustices and oppressions or the inalienable right to self-determination can obscure this fact, if a solution is to be achieved by peaceful negotiation. As the Minister of justice observed at the recent Convocation of the Bar Association, in a democracy no group in community, whether it be the majority or a minority, can seek to hold another to ransom by unconscionable demands. That is why it is futile to plead for Peace without at the same time insisting on Justice for all.

ately the Secretary General of the United Nations is only "primus inter pares" in his relations with their respective heads. He should be given the authority to ensure effective co-ordination and co-operation among them lest these Agencies develop into quasi-feudal systems with the temptation for their heads to act as mediaeval barons in their respective domains. Incidentally, democratization of governments can lead to the democratization of these Agencies that they could respond effectively to need of the peoples whom they are expected to serve.

In conclusion one can say that unless and until all members of the United Nations and the Specialised Agencies have truly democratic forms of government with freely elected legislatures, executives accountable — in the final analysis to their peoples completely independent judiciaries and unfettered media (press radio and TV) it is futile to speak of democratizing the entire UN System with all its component parts.



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The Free Press, the Politicians, and Democracy

Izeth Hussain

In an earlier L.G. article (Jan. 15), I referred to the importance given by Robert Dahl, the foremost contemporary theorist of democracy, to freedom of expression without which there cannot be even an imperfect democracy. I thereafter posed the question whether there can be really free and fair elections without a free press, which is crucially important for freedom of expression.

I have since come across the following from the book *The Politics of Development* by another well-known political scientist, Robert A. Scalapino: "Democracy requires only that the citizenry be given the widest choice in selecting its representatives, and hence its government, from among various alternatives. Second the fullest range of political freedoms must exist to ensure the citizenry access to information in making that choice. Within these perimeters, a variety of democratic systems is possible, and is to be found in our times."

According to Scalapino's formulation, the widest choice in electing the government requires access to the information necessary for making that choice. Obviously the whole process of electoral choice is vitiated should the public's access to information be limited, which certainly happens when the press is not really free. A free press should therefore be regarded not as some sort of accessory to democracy but as integral to democracy, and integral to the democratic electoral process itself. Elections held while press freedom is suppressed are not really free and fair.

Sri Lanka has had no press freedom after 1970. Therefore, in terms of the contemporary

Western understanding of what democracy means, as reflected in the writings of political scientists like Dahl and Scalapino, Sri Lanka has no democracy. Considering the cardinal importance of a free press for democracy, we have to give priority over everything else to bringing about a free press if we are to restore the kind of fully functioning democracy that we had in the 'fifties.

In struggling for a free press, we have to take into account certain misconceptions that evidently prevail among the ranks of the government, judging from what appears in the Government-controlled newspapers. One misconception is that we have a free press because there is full freedom of expression for the opposition political parties. The present Sri Lankan political system is not democratic, but it is not a dictatorship either. It is quasi-democratic because it has several democratic features, notably independent opposition parties, genuinely independent and not token ones as under some dictatorships. The present Government allows such parties to flourish without trying to curb them through anti-democratic frolics like sealing the SLFP headquarters, sealing its press, and depriving Mrs Bandaranaike of her civic rights, the kind of thing that happened under the last government. The latitude allowed to the opposition parties is certainly inconsistent with the fierce intolerance towards any kind of opposition characteristic of dictators. The opposition is represented in Parliament in greater strength than ever before because of the proportional representation system, and can criticize the Government freely, availing of Parliamentary privilege when thought necessary.

There are constraints on the extent to which the President can be criticised in Parliament, but it has to be noted that the DUNF which functions outside Parliament engages in no-holds-barred criticism of the President. And all the criticism against the Government and the President gets reported in the non-governmental press. What more, the Government can ask, is required for a free press?

The counter-argument is premised on a distinction between the representatives of the people and the people. Freedom of expression for the representatives of the people is not the same thing as freedom of expression for the people. The distinction between representative and people is a valid one even in the most democratic societies, but it has a peculiar force in Sri Lanka as can be seen from the following extract from a US Government report, "Under the amended 1978 Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act, Parliament may impose an unlimited fine or up to two years imprisonment on anyone who criticizes a member of Parliament, a clear deterrent to freedom of expression. The amendment was not applied in 1991." (L.G. 15 Feb. 1992) It is quite clear from this that in Sri Lanka the politicians in Parliament, whether of the Government or of the opposition, are ment to be regarded as above the people, sacrosanct and beyond the reach of the people's criticism. The freedom of criticism allowed by the present Government is for the politicians, not for the people, which is just the kind of thing that has to be expected in terms of the dominant political culture of Sri Lanka which found expression in the 1976 amendment referred to above.

The practical implications of the distinction made here become very clear when we look at the problem of corruption. After 1977 there has been serious public concern about corruption which became hectic, an understandable phenomenon because consequent to economic liberalization vast funds than ever before became available for diversion into private pockets. The magnitude of corruption in a society is a function of its cash flow. The President himself has been complaining that the opposition to him has been provoked, among other things, by his putting a stop to corruption. Sometimes he is specific on the subject as when he said that appointments, promotions and transfers in Government Service, used to be arranged while boozing at rest-houses. Among members of the public, we recently had Baku Mahadeva, a distinguished former member of the Civil Service who presently holds the responsible position of Chairman of the National Development Bank, pointing out at a seminar that no Minister or Ministry Secretary has served a term in prison for bribery or corruption in Sri Lanka, as can happen in countries like the US, Japan, or Singapore. He went on to state, according to the Island of 1 March, that bribery and corruption had got worse since Independence, especially in the past few years, in which connection he referred to information supplied to him by business circles. I myself have heard a UNP lawyer saying some years ago that while engaged in official duties he had come across documentary evidence, which would stand up in any court of law, to prove corruption on the part of a well-known UNP politician. It is a reasonable guess that very appreciable numbers of officials, ex-officials and other members of the public can provide information on corruption. However, after 1977 the opposition in Parliament has failed to avail of parliamentary privilege to bring up a single case pointing to bribery and corruption in high places. The Bofors scandal, much

publicised in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, which was a crucial factor in bringing down the Rajiv Gandhi government, failed to provide inspiration to the Sri Lankan opposition. Of what use is freedom of expression for the representatives of the people as distinct from the people?

Sri Lanka has been at the receiving end of international opprobrium over human rights violations, more particularly over disappearances which we must remember involve the right to life itself. Western governments, foreign organizations like Amnesty International, local human rights groups like the Mothers Front, and just that one brave mother of the late Richard de Soysa, have done more to rouse Sri Lankan conscience on human rights than the opposition in Parliament. A member of a UN human rights team which visited Sri Lanka some months ago expressed surprise, in the course of a private conversation, over the number of people who had pleaded that the UN do something effective to stop the human rights violations. He thought that in the last resort really effective action has to be taken by the Sri Lankans themselves, not by the UN, and proceeded to point out that Sri Lanka has an opposition in Parliament.

There are many Sri Lankans who believe that at the present juncture nothing is more important for Sri Lanka than the restoration of a free press and a fully functioning democracy. But hardly anyone seems to believe that this can be done through the politicians. Hardly anyone believes that the opposition politicians who today agitate for democracy will themselves be democratic should they come to power. Actually the DUNF leaders deserve credit for making democracy a central issue, and it is arguable that what they are subjectively is beside the point because what really matters is the objective situation which will make them behave democratically. However, there is public cynicism about the democratic pretensions of the

opposition parties. What after all, it might be asked, is the opposition doing to promote a free press, apart from adverting to the subject occasionally in the course of their ceaseless jabber? Somethings is being done by the miniscule groups represented at the All Party Conference, but not by the major opposition parties. In terms of wide-spread Sri Lankan perceptions, it would appear that a free press and democracy have to be promoted by and on behalf of the people against the representatives of the people. The freedom of expression allowed to the representatives is not going to help. It has been ineffective in relation to problems of corruption, human rights, the free press, and democracy. The list can be extended, but the reader will probably think it superfluous.

It might seem that Sri Lanka is unique in allowing freedom of expression for the representatives of the people, but not for the people. In fact the same situation seems to have prevailed in Europe at one time, according to some extracts I have seen from Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte: "If the parliamentary regime lives by discussion, how can it forbid discussion?... The struggle of the parliamentary orators calls forth the struggle of the scribblers of the press; the parliamentary debating club is necessarily supplemented by debating clubs in the salons and the alehouses." A further extract reads, "The parliamentary regime leaves everything to the decisions of majorities, why then should the great majority outside parliament not want to make the decisions?" Marx, who was great in his anger against injustice and oppression, was protesting against freedom of expression for the representatives of the people, but not for the people, the great unwashed majority outside parliament.

A point needs to be clarified before we proceed further. It would be mistaken to suppose that the West had democracy

at one time on the basis of limited freedom of expression, and we too in Sri Lanka have democracy at present on the same basis. During Marx's time the West had liberalism, not democracy or liberal democracy, a requisite for which is universal adult franchise, which came to prevail in the West only after the first World War. In Sri Lanka, of course, we have universal adult franchise but its exercise has been of rather dubious quality after 1983, according to the revelations of the Elections Commissioner. We seem to have reached something like the liberal dispensation of Western Europe of the nineteenth century, with our dubious franchise the equivalent of limited franchise, and the same kind of limited freedom of expression. Western liberalism evolved into full-fledged democracy, so that the prospect for democracy, in Sri Lanka does not seem hopeless. We may attain it after a century.

I have so far assumed that Sri Lanka has no freedom of expression for the people, and no really free press. The point requires no demonstration at length because few have illusions about it. Newspapers and other publications are said to be proliferating, and the press does seem to be less unfree than at any time between 1970 and 1988, the result of what looks like a process of democratization for which the President has to be given credit. But the press is still far from being really free. It is not so much a question of overt censorship as of undeclared limits which journalists and other members of the public believe they can transgress only at their peril. Writing on the late Richard de Zoysa in the Sunday Island of 23 February 1992, journalist Shamindra Fernando had this to say, "Despite pledges by political and security forces leaderships to protect the press from abuses, threats and intimidation continue. For the Sri Lankan press the working conditions are alarming. A hostile environment prevails around most journalists."

The question of whether the press is really free cannot be determined in terms of precisely defined criteria. The test, which has to be a pragmatic one, is whether or not there is a hiatus between what the people say about the government and its leader and what one finds in the press. The hiatus in Sri Lanka is enormous. A comparison of the Sri Lankan press with that of the Western countries or of India shows quite clearly that the press here operates under severe constraints, and a self-imposed censorship which is regarded as essential for survival. Sri Lanka has no free press as the term is understood in countries which have a fully functioning democracy. The press shows that freedom of expression for the representatives is not freedom of expression for the people.

Further misconceptions arise out of the well-known shortcomings of the press, more particularly of the mass-circulation newspapers, short-comings which have been scrupulously and exhaustively analysed in the West. There are two points to be made about the strictures against the press. The first is that they are absolutely right. The second is that they are absolutely irrelevant to the case for the free press.

I will firstly make some observations on the mass-circulation newspapers, whose role is significantly different from that of the mini-press. The mass-circulation newspapers have to have big money behind them, a fact which by itself imposes constraints upon them. They have to warily respect the principles and prejudices of the advertisers who provide a significant part of the funds to keep the newspapers going. The newspaper owners, whose financial stakes are high, cannot be expected to be over-zealous in testing the limits of freedom by challenging the power of the government or the orthodoxies of the society. They can use their newspapers to pursue personal vendettas, to push partisan econo-

mic, political and other interests. No one in his right mind goes to the newspapers for the truth, nothing but the truth, and the whole truth. All the news that's fit to print does not get printed.

The major limitation of the mass-circulation newspapers is that they have to respect the shibboleths of the tribe, the "tyranny of the majority," which has been an obsession with some of the best minds which have pondered on Democracy, notably de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill. The truth is that all societies, even the most liberal and democratic ones, have their dominant belief systems and norms, constituting an orthodoxy which forbids or marginalizes radically dissentient views. Virginia Woolf writing in one of the most liberal societies of all time, Britain of this century, complained that whenever she took up her pen there were twenty censors crowding around her. She was probably thinking of her role as a feminist.

The tribulations of Bertrand Russell at the time of the Sino-Indian border conflict of three decades ago are very revealing about the extent to which even the most liberal democratic societies can silence dissent. A fanatical hater of communism ever since he went to the Soviet Union in 1920, he assumed with the rest of Britain that China was the aggressor against India. But after he spent some time studying the border problem, he changed his mind and thought he should write an article enlightening the public that it was not just a case of black and white. To his vast surprise, none of the dailies would touch it. One of the two leading highbrow Sunday papers contacted Russell and offered publication, but thereafter changed its mind. The other promised to publish the article, if at all, in full and without any cuts, but went back on its promise and published a censored version. Bertrand Russell, internationally eminent and the leading public philosopher of his time, could not properly com-

municate with the vast British public because the prevailing orthodoxy of the time would not allow it.

A devastating critique can be made of the short-comings of the mass-circulation newspapers, with the arguments given above as well as others, to suggest that freedom of expression for that category of the media is a matter of no great consequence. That would be elaborately miss the point, which is that the mass-circulation newspapers provide a means to the people to influence and control the government. In the fully functioning democracies of the West the people turn not just to the opposition parties, active though they may be on behalf of the people, but also to interest groups and other autonomous associations to influence and check governmental power, and in addition they have the fully free mass-circulation newspapers. In Sri Lanka the Opposition parties have been inactive, or largely inactive, for a long time over matters of the greatest national concern such as corruption, human rights, the press, and the issue of democracy, as argued earlier in this article. There is not just the usual distinction between the people and their representatives, but what looks like a dichotomy between the people on the one side and the politicians, both of the Government and of the opposition, on the other. And considering what has been happening to the mass of the people in this paradise island, it will be readily agreed that just as war is too serious a business to be left to the Generals' Sri Lanka politics is too serious a business to be left to the politicians. It is in this context that the people, who are supposed to be sovereign, should be allowed freedom of expression through the mass-circulation newspapers.

The strictures against the mass-circulation newspapers do not apply to the mini-press, that is to the serious publications, which have a potential for challenging

the orthodoxies of society which cannot be done, or if at all only to a marginal extent, through the mass-circulation newspapers. This is very important because what has happened in Sri Lanka cannot be explained just in terms of the misdeeds of politicians. Democracy collapsed in Sri Lanka without a shot being fired, and with so little opposition, obviously because it served certain interests, in my view the interests of class, caste and communal domination. The factors that brought Sri Lanka to so sorry a pass in 1988, and which continue to operate in our society, have to be analysed in the mini-press, not the newspapers.

It is a misconception that the mini-press hardly matters because it is read by a few thousands, unlike the newspapers which are read by scores of thousands. How many read Rousseau and his fellow writers of the European Enlightenment in those days before mass literacy and the mass-circulation newspapers? Yet their ideas destroyed the ancient regime, shook the whole of aristocratic Europe, and has contributed to a transformation of the world ever since. A convincing example of the potential of the mini-press was provided by Alexander Herzen's magazine *The Bell*. Banned in Russia and published in Geneva, it became for five or six years before the Russian Revolution the most important instrument for forming Russian public opinion. It was read by everyone of any consequence within Russia. It has been written up as the most astonishing phenomenon in the history of Russian, and perhaps of world, journalism. At its height its circulation was 2,500.

The evidence of history shows that it is not just the great political writers like Rousseau, or the great political journalists like Herzen, who transform the world of politics. The poet Heine warned his friends in Paris not to under-estimate the power of that quiet little fellow who spends most of his time

confined to his study, the philosopher. He forecast that the German Idealist philosophers of the nineteenth century would eventually shake the whole of Europe. They certainly did, because they shaped the minds of the German power-elite who pushed their country to war in 1914, and subsequently the mad mentality of Hitler, who very nearly changed the course of human history. The power of ideas has always been understood by power-mongers and their minions, who from the dawn of history to the present day have hated the human mind. A soldier brained Archimedes, and Shakespeare, who had a very exceptional grasp of the dynamics of power, made his Julius Caesar say, "He thinks too much: such men are dangerous."

It has been said that nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has come. One would like to think that the time has come to introduce the idea of democracy into the practical politics of Sri Lanka. For this purpose, apart from removing misconceptions about the press, we have to establish the rationale for the free press both in generalized terms and in specific application to the situation prevailing in Sri Lanka.

The rationale has to be related to the perennial problem of power, the problem of giving sufficient power to the government to enable it to work effectively for the good of the people as a whole and at the same time controlling its power. Nothing can be of more momentous consequence for a people than controlling governmental power, which otherwise sooner or later turns out to be lethally destructive. It is not just that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, but that power tends to drive the power-holders mad and absolute power drives them absolutely mad. The evidence of history, very clear and conclusive, shows that two things can be expected to happen when power continues for some time

to be uncontrolled in any way. One is that the power-holder's grasp of reality is weakened, until all sense of reality is lost altogether, and the other is that the moral sense starts getting eroded quickly until there is no longer the normal human ability to distinguish between right and wrong. A grasp of reality is obviously required for human survival and it may be, for reasons that cannot be explored here, that the moral sense is also part of the human equipment for survival. In any case, the historical evidence is conclusive beyond any doubt that uncontrolled power can be expected after some time to become lethally destructive.

Right through the ages mankind has shown a sound understanding of the dangers posed by uncontrolled power. This is shown by the fact that normative systems of power, whether in the West or in the East, have always controlled power in one way or another. The Eurocentric stereotype of "Oriental despotism", which has been swallowed whole by many Afro-Asians, is tosh. Under normative Afro-Asian systems of government, power so far from being absolute and arbitrary was constrained by the norms of tradition and custom, and more importantly, controlled by the sacred order represented by the clergy, in the case of Islamic societies by a quasi-clergy. Quite often there was a dispersion of power through semi-feudal and local government institutions, as in the case of Sri Lanka. The system may have broken down at times, perhaps frequently during periods of decadence, but it remained normative all the same.

Those are generalizations which now have to be related to the situation we have been facing in Sri Lanka. What happened in Sri Lanka and several other Third world countries was that the traditional polity broke down under the impact of colonialism, and so did the democratic systems left behind by the colonial powers. Thereafter there were

neither the traditional nor the democratic constraints on power, in some cases governments degenerated into virtual gangster-rule, and the consequences have been very terrible for the people.

In Sri Lanka democracy broke down after 1970, but at least Mrs Bandaranaike was prepared to check abuse of power by her Ministers and others. Not so her successor, who appeared to believe with Adolf Hitler that he should never intervene in the affairs of his Ministers as that would make him responsible for all their shortcomings and misdeeds. The result was predictably identical with what happened in Hitler's Germany. Bigwigs, bloated with the insolence of office and drunk on the kasipu of power, abused power as never before as power was uncontrolled as never before in the history of independent Sri Lanka.

The 1977 Government provides an entirely convincing demonstration of the argument that uncontrolled power leads to a weakened grasp of reality, a serious erosion of the moral sense, and sooner or later to disaster. There is no other explanation for a government which began in 1977 with nowhere to go but up, and left the country in near total disaster in 1988. In this little island we had not one but two Pol Potist rebellions, that of the JVP and that of the LTTE, and with the IPKF here a threatened loss of sovereignty over a third of the territory and almost half the coastline. President Premadasa managed to get rid of the IPKF, but if the Rajiv Gandhi Government had continued in office the IPKF might still be here and Sri Lanka could have got stuck in a Cyprus situation with a de facto division of the country. The JVP rebellion was ended with horrendous suffering for the people, but could erupt again. The LTTE goes on killing and getting killed, and we are nowhere near a solution to the ethnic problem. Few Third World governments, if indeed there have been any, could have

begun with so many advantages and left a country in so gory a mess. It is time to recognize that there is a difference between the responsible exercise of power, which always requires control of power of some sort, and kasipu power.

The prospects for Sri Lanka may not be hopeless because there seems to be a dawning recognition that we must learn from the awful warning provided by the 1977 Government. This may be the explanation for the curious fact that the two leaders of the DUNF, Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake, who were prominent actors in the most anti-democratic government we have had since 1948 are today our two leading agitators for democracy. According to Sri Lankan conventional wisdom, the issue of democracy cannot be expected to pull in many votes. But the democratic duo who are known to be skilful politicians must understand how to manipulate people in the mass, and they are about in making democracy a central issue. They deserve credit for it anyway.

On the other hand, President Premadasa deserves credit for engaging in some measures of democratization. Consider the problem of democratic elections in Sri Lanka. It was thought that his predecessor had rolled up the Sri Lankan electoral map forever in instituting a thousand year Reich. His Government's attitude to the franchise was shown when fifty years of universal adult franchise in Sri Lanka was spectacularly celebrated by the blatant rigging of the Jaffna DDC polls. But last year, president Premadasa allowed spectacularly unrigged island-wide local government elections, more or less mini-general elections, the legitimacy of which has not been questioned even by the opposition parties. Consider also the issue of freedom of expression. In Sri Lanka, where a servile mentality has come to prevail, the personage of a leader has been regarded for a long

time as more or less sacrosanct and beyond the reach of public criticism. But the President now allows his antagonists to indulge in outrageously outspoken criticism of the President, which gets reported in the newspapers.

The present situation might even look rather encouraging for democracy and the free press, since there are at least two opposition politicians who seem to have come round to the conviction that Sri Lanka has to save itself by turning to democracy, and, more importantly, the President himself has moved from democratic rhetoric to actually engaging in some measures of democratization. He may yet prove himself a revolutionary leader of extraordinary stature by allowing a free press and restoring democracy in Sri Lanka. But the opposition to him can be expected

to be fierce, considering that the forces which wrecked democracy in the interests of class, caste and communal domination, remain active and powerful in Sri Lanka. He may therefore democratize and stop short of democracy. However excellent his performance, he may find himself forced to leave behind him a non-democratic system which could spawn another 1977 Government and an even gorier mess than in 1988, resulting possibly in a loss of Sri Lanka's independence, the break-up of the country, and Pol Potists coming to power.

The Sri Lankan people have gone through enough to know that politics is too serious a business to be left to the politicians. The sovereign people should assert themselves some how on the issues of democracy and the free press. It

will help to have a wide-spread recognition of the fact that the case for the free press is related to the case for controlling power. The historical evidence has been overwhelming that uncontrolled power can be expected to lead to disaster, Sri Lanka itself providing absolutely convincing evidence through the disaster it faced in 1988. Democracy is only one of the ways in which power can be controlled, but in Sri Lanka it is the prevailing political ideology and the Government itself as well as every political party conceive of democracy as providing the only legitimation for government. Consequently the only meaningful option for controlling power in Sri Lanka is through democracy and we have to proceed from today's quasi-democracy, or caricature of democracy, to democracy. That requires a free press. For the idea of democracy without a free press is nonsense.

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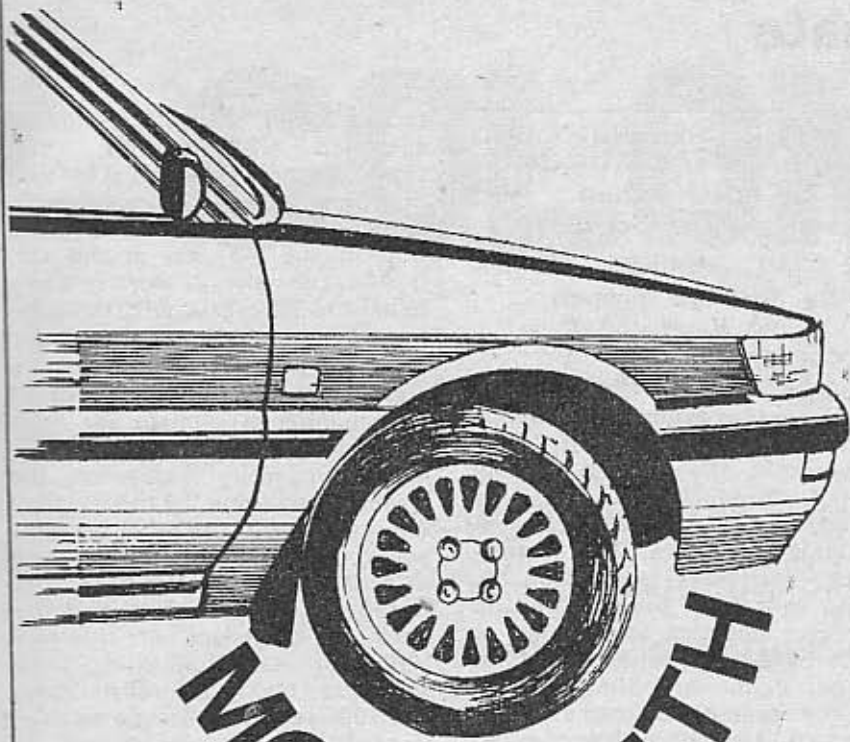
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A change in climate

When the nuclear bomb testers were waiting for the result of the mission to bomb Hiroshima, they expected a coded message. If the mission was successful, the message would read: "It's a boy". But if the bomb was a dud, it would read: "It's a girl." In that code lies a clue to the desire of families all over the world to produce boys not girls, to selective abortion of girls, to infanticide of female children, and to gradual starvation of women in areas of the Third World, where men get first share of the food.

Both Marilyn French and Susan Faludi write of the war against women. For Marilyn French feminism was the first philosophy to challenge patriarchy *per se*. The anger of "men-as-a-caste" at this challenge partly explains the war they are now waging. She cites many examples of this: domestic violence; the abandonment of women and children by men who fail to support them; attitudes to work and food in much of the Third World; employment law and practices; the denial of abortion rights; and the growth of fundamentalism.

Her text is passionately argued and largely convincing. But it sometimes lacks accuracy, rendering it less compelling than Susan Faludi's meticulously researched *Backlash*. Time after time Faludi takes a piece of well-reported research, and re-examines it. While Marilyn French recites a litany of wrongs done to women, and argues, somewhat loosely, that women are fighting back, Faludi records cases of discrimination and the reporting of them, while interviewing the people involved, showing that things are not as they seemed.

For instance, Marilyn French reports that women and their families are on average 73 per cent worse off after divorce in the US. The backlashers, who

BACKLASH: THE UNDECLARED WAR AGAINST WOMEN

By Susan Faludi

Chatto and Windus, £9.99

THE WAR AGAINST WOMEN

By Marilyn French

Hamish Hamilton £9.99

want to toughen the divorce laws, use that evidence to strengthen their argument. But Faludi shows that the figures usually quoted, published by Lenore Weitzman in 1985, were almost certainly inaccurate. Two economists, Hoffman and Duncan, found that that their work on divorce statistics suggested a much smaller decline, of about 30 per cent. And, they suggested the average woman's living standard, five years after divorce, was actually slightly higher than when she was married.

When they published their findings, there was only one brief item on them, in the *Wall Street Journal's* inside-page demography column. Weitzman's figures still tend to be quoted because they suit two discrete groups: those who wish to beat up men for abandoning their families, and those who wish to say that divorce is having the most disastrous effects on the economic circumstances of families, and should be made more difficult. This "evidence," is at the heart of the backlash line: that women are better off "protected" than equal.

Faludi's most telling arguments come from her accounts of women trying to use anti-discrimination legislation to get better working conditions, pay and promotion prospects. The cases of female employees at Sears Roebuck and ABC Television who attempted to use the legislation to improve their lot make depressing, infuriating reading. And the fact that one of the biggest critics of the ABC

tactics, Rita Flynn, a former seasoned CBS reporter, first found her career on the skids and then found herself unemployable when she moved west suggests that in the US, as in the UK, it does not always work to one's benefit to take issue with the company discriminating against one.

Susan Faludi has written a cogent, compelling account of the change in climate for feminism in the US. The UK is different in many respects; the English additions to the original US edition do not work because some of the arguments need modification for the UK and European scene. But Faludi's note of optimism at the end, with her assertion that "there really is no good reason why the 1990s can't be their (women's) decade", is one we would do well to echo. There is indeed no good reason, but what is needed, propounded by neither Faludi nor French perhaps because of their American world-view is a different attitude to children. They need to be recognised as a public concern and the nation's future not a private (women's) matter, with properly funded childcare and child protection — alongside generous maternity rights and benefits.

The UK is poor on these issues in comparison with the rest of Europe, and has resisted protection of part-time employees (blocking the EC directive on part-time work), 86 per cent of whom are female. These are matters that should come to the fore in the last week of the election campaign. Then women voters could use their political power to vote for the party that promises the most for women and children. No party has pledged enough.

Julia Neuberger

*The reviewer is a rabbi. Her book, *Whatever's Happening to Women?*, was published last year.*

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