

LANKA

GUARDIAN

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SIRIMA
on Civic Rights

LALITH
on the War

interviewed by
Mervyn de Silva



EXCLUSIVE

Militarising Central America
and the Vietnam Syndrome — *Douglas Allen*

Total Provincial Autonomy: The Only Hope?
— *Romesh Fernando*

D. S. and the "Stateless" — *Hector Abhayavardhana*

Our New "Development Set"
— *Dr. Mervyn D. de Silva*

Also: Women's Struggles and Cinema

TULF Proposals **and**

CRM on P. T. A;

English and the English Dept.

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JR ON FREE PRESS

"Publish and be Damned" was the SUN's cheerful greeting on the frontpage while other leading newspapers were equally prompt in welcoming President JR's statement to the government parliamentary group. Opposition newspapers, he said, were publishing reports that were both slanderous and malicious but the best judge of their conduct was the reading public in a democracy.

Editorial comments were all in favour of the President's approach to a press that is obliged to respect its own canons of professional responsibility even on matters so highly charged and controversial as the ethnic conflict and the continuing violence in the north and east. The press and public had already observed that in releasing the last report of the Monitoring Committee on the 'cessation of hostilities', the lengthy account of its inquiries into incidents in Batticaloa and its unfavourable findings on the police were by no means excised or edited. All releases to the press need Presidential approval.

In this connection, the ISLAND's readers may have also noted that the paper re-published the combative reply of **Washington Post** (and **NEWSWEEK**) owner Katherine Graham to Mrs. Margaret Thatcher on the responsibilities of the press in reporting 'Terrorism'.

TROUBLED TEA

Earthslips, floods and now new storms in the cup that cheers. The clever but vicious canard put out evidently by a splinter separatist group in Madras has caused panic among overseas buyers of the tea that still fetches 40% of our exchange earnings. Bushells, a leading Australian buyer and the US Tea Association (buyers and packers) reacted to the rumour of arsenic in Sri Lankan tea so nervously that one suspended imports and the other warned its members to double-check the tea from this country. The US Food and Drug administration has

already introduced 'a special testing' procedure.

While Plantations Minister, Montague Jayawickrema acted with commendable speed in re-assuring the diplomatic representatives of 18 tea-buying countries, the more comforting news was last week's tea auction, a six-month record of 4.8 million kilos, mainly to Egypt, Iraq and Pakistan.

But with prices showing a downward trend, the more worrying for the government was the CWC's decision on a three-month long five hours-a-day "prayer meeting" that would take about 400,000 workers off till late afternoon duty day.

Political rather the economic it was the one-two punch by Mr. Thondaman, CWC boss and Rural Industries Minister. The UNP's union, whose boss is Cabinet colleague and Nuwara Eliya's first MP, Mr. Gamini Dissanayake has challenged the CWC's membership claim. More crucially, will it also raise the question of Mr. Thondaman's place in the Cabinet? Back from India where he took a ride from Madras to Delhi in Mr. Gandhi's plane, Mr. Thondaman's move on Thal Pongal (Jan. 14) day was being closely watched by political analysts and the DPL community.

TRENDS + LETTERS

The message not the medium

What really is good style? One would like to ask Mr. Vittachi, who seems to concentrate so much on the medium that he forgets the message. His recent letter in the Lanka Guardian (1.12.85) though full of sound and fury signifies very little. Of what use are all those high sounding, learned phrases (quelle merveillit, ipse dixit etc.) to the very serious question raised by the CRM?

After the Mahara election petition case the CRM called for an amendment to the constitution suspending presidential immunity from legal action in cases arising from the President's participation in an election campaign. Mr. Vittachi was critical of the CRM demand and viewing the problem from a 'new angle', he concluded that the normal law of the country should be sufficient to prevent any wild and reckless allegations.

Now, any average intelligent person reading this would have

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rubbed his eyes incredulously — that an intelligent man like Mr. Vittachi had failed to understand the central question raised by the CRM, namely the President's immunity from the normal law of the land.

Had Mr. Vittachi and Prof. Carlo Fonseka carried on a debate whether the President should or should not remain immune from all suit or whether the CRM was right in making such a demand, it might have proved beneficial in educating readers on this subject. But unfortunately Mr. Vittachi evaded the issue, bringing in too many irrelevancies that we no longer know what the debate is about.

Mr. Vittachi seems to attach too much importance to 'style', although his own style sounds so pompous and verbose. What is wrong with the phrase 'rub one's eyes incredulously'? I have yet to come across someone (among Sri Lankan writers) who uses the English language more lucidly, clearly and elegantly than Mr. Reggie Siriwardena, one of our well known literary critics and I have often heard him use this phrase. Would Mr. Vittachi seriously suggest that Mr. Siriwardena's style too needs improvement? As a teacher of English I pose this question in all seriousness. To use it as a phrase that conveys the meaning very vividly and clearly in the context used by Prof. Fonseka. A grand style without any substance is good enough for the successful politicians, but to students of English can there be good form without content? Mr. Vittachi's 'good' style only confuses the reader and clouds the issue and that perhaps is really what he wants to do.

Leela Isaac

Dept. of English,
University of Kelaniya.

Halpe's Helpful Role

I wish to draw attention to a statement made by Qadri Ismail in his article "The social misfit and the conscience of the race" *Lanka Guardian* Vol. 8, No. 7, August 01, 1985). Though the subject

in general is beyond my scope as English is not my field of study, the statement that Prof. A. Halpe should have spoken to 'them' (meaning the participants of April 1971) rather than express his own sentiments has to be rebutted. As an active participant of the April 1971 uprising I know that Prof. Halpe befriended those participants who were imprisoned from Peradeniya by not only visiting us in jail with his family but by providing us with books and other requirements necessary for our academic career. The letters of encouragement he sent the students and the visits will not be forgotten by us. Once we were released he not only provided us with financial assistance but extended all support for us to find a place in the university at a time where we received little sympathy from some quarters as we were dubbed 'insurgents.' I wish to recall one instance when I had been requested to visit the CID Head Quarters in Colombo after my release. It was Prof. Halpe who came to my room in Marcus Fernando Hall and personally accompanied me to the Head Quarters. My friends who were activists of the 1971 insurrection undoubtedly agree with me that the kindness and encouragement extended to us at that time was invaluable and unforgettable. A similar stand was taken by Prof. Kumari Jayawardena of the Colombo Campus and I take this opportunity to thank them.

Gamini Samaranyake
Lecturer, Political Science

Peradeniya.

Is this Criticism Refreshing ?

After two years as an undergraduate and one year as a post-graduate student at Peradeniya's English Department I do not consider teaching of literature there as elitist. I believe that criticism unbiased and impersonal is beneficial and while personal denigration leads us nowhere. It makes no difference if all that criticism has led us to a dead-end and

only the critic has emerged triumphant.

When I was a student I never felt the oppressive Leavis tradition weighing upon me. What I vividly remember is Professor Halpe's treatment of Brecht. He was full of admiration for this unique dramatist who wrote for the proletariat. All his students know of his fondness of Brecht and to accuse him of elitist tendencies is a blatant distortion of facts. Brecht gives us a broader perspective so that critical awareness is sustained and a certain amount of objectivity is achieved. Although the fact that there cannot be absolute objectivity is critical appreciation is a truism, undergraduates of University of Peradeniya's English Department were free to take any stand point provided they display a sensibility that gives a work of art its due recognition. One cannot dismiss a work of art taking into account only the extraneous details. A great writer like Tolstoy cannot be denigrated because of his aristocratic birth. During the three years of my campus career I have never found Professor Halpe exhibiting any elitist tendencies. A student prejudiced might read his own thoughts into lines of poetry and interpret them in anyway to distort the truth.

Such a lack of reverence to teachers is not born out of refreshed sensibility. It is definitely a tendency of a social snob who belongs to this elitist class. Once obtaining the required academic qualifications it is necessary for a person to beguile the local intelligentsia to gain recognition. The most appropriate trump-card that one can play is to put on a facade of radicalism. It is fashionable for our academics of this elitist class to be a bit radical so that they are accepted in learned circles. Most of our local elitist radicals are radical only in their social domains. They are always the opposite in their personal lives.

A degree in literature never gives a person competency to pass judgements upon text books

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RESTORE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE

NEWS
BACKGROUND

— Sirima (Interview with Mervyn de Silva)

No. 65 Rosmead Place, once a deserted house most days, was packed with well-wishers on January 1 night and on Jan. 2 and 3. It was an animated and colourfully mixed group, almost an opinion pollster's ideal 'sample' of the national electorate. Posily dressed businessmen, young and old' (and the inevitable sprinkling of 'mudalali types); poorly clad villagers' accompanied by wives and offspring, and armed with sheafs of betel, and the occasional bouquet of flowers; the familiar faces of Colombo's top professionals, lawyers, doctors and accountants; the monks of course, and a few Christian clergymen, and at least one commissioned officer of the Salvation Army, and scores of battle-scarred SLFP veterans of General JR's 1977 blitzkreig, and hundreds of true-blue nondescript old faithfuls, playing 'extras' in this opening sequence of **'The Return of the Mathini'**. (Later even National TV turned up, commentator, camera crew lights and all, to record an eventful moment in the island's contemporary political history but whose enterprise, surprisingly, was not to be rewarded with a public exhibition of their work).

If you were asked to spell out the political significance of what we are watching here now, what would you say, I asked. There was no pause, no hesitation. "At the end of these big meetings we have been having recently and wherever I go and meet small groups of party supporters, they keep asking the same question "But Madam, WHO will lead us?" WHO will lead us when the time comes" and now they have the answer". She told me. For the SLFP at least, those crackers that were lit on January 1st night did not mean welcome 1986. It was an electrifying moment which transformed a demoralised party and gave it something of its old spirit, it was a renewal of self-confidence, of party morale.

Well, what's your next move? Lakshman to resign, and you take to parliament using the a chit to constitu....." The Lady frowned. "Or will you contest Attanagalla?" "Why should I play their game...?" Could you explain that?" "After Mulgirigala, where the UNP got a shock...not only because of the small majority but because they learnt there is a limit to the patience of our people...their tactics, this thuggery and intimidation cannot work every time...I have been addressing meetings in many parts of the country...I know how people feel...not here in Colombo... they are waiting to stand up...to speak out...to tell the UNP what they really feel about the conditions in the country about the ethnic problem and the UNP's utter failure...about corruption and lawlessness and crime and drugs and how their leaders and supporters are behaving...I must continue that work...that's the most important...not to make speeches in parliament...others can do that..."

"But you have all along protested at the loss of your civic rights, which you said was an act of gross injustice...so now that has been corrected, why don't you return to parliament and represent the people of Attanagalla who voted for you...?"

"The people of Attanagalla are being represented by Lakshman Jayakody. my duty is with the people of our country as a whole."

Q. Instead of using the Presidential pardon you received, you insist on calling for a general election, Why?

A. From the beginning, my position was clear. I had not committed a crime under the existing law. If I had, I should be charged in the courts. On the other hand, there have been Commissions of Inquiry of course but not Commissions inquiring into offences not known to

the law...here or in other democratic country. What is this 'abuses of power'? So I have no answer to give to your question about 'receiving a presidential pardon'. Pardon for what?

Q. Madam, that still doesn't answer the question why you connect up this issue with general elections, does it?

A. In my mind, there are connected. Even in 1980, I thought so. Why me? Of course there were Felix and Nihal but I think those were more personal...they had antagonised those big people in Hulftsdorp...and the other UNP big men thought he was the 'brain'... That's why they put Bunty Soysa...have you ever heard a commission or the prosecuting lawyers get so much publicity in the newspapers, radio and so on? They wanted to ruin my reputation.

Q. If so that was also personal...?

A. Not in the same way...Felix was a very able man but even he won't say that he could lead the masses. Of course, I was also very unpopular with the Colombo upper class sections ever since I accepted the invitation of my husband's colleagues and friends to lead the SLFP after his assassination. They didn't expect me to carry on my husband's work on behalf of the people and against the UNP. You know, it is a fact, that within a few months I led the SLFP to a grand victory...then they all said 'sympathy'... 'weeping widow' according to the press. But what about 1970 when I led the SLFP along with the two Left parties whose leaders

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MILITARY BALANCE BETTER — Lalith

The military situation in the north and east has improved sufficiently for the government to negotiate with the Tamils from a position of strength" said National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali in an exclusive interview, asked to comment on his recent statement to a group of Colombo-based diplomats that 'the worst is over', Mr. Athulathmudali gave four reasons for his new assessment of the military balance.

a) In the past four months or so, rebel attacks on police and military establishment have failed. "They have realised now the futility of such frontal attacks" he observed.

b) More information is reaching the security forces from Tamil sources. Earlier the intelligence

flow had been minimal, the Minister admitted.

c) the Muslims had established their identity, and adopted an independent stance, especially in the eastern province. They are not for violence, and also oppose any north-and-east linkage, he added.

d) there has been a distinct change of mood in Jaffna. "I would not say that they are for us but they are clearly disappointed with their "boys" he said.

Did this mean the Army was ready to launch a new offensive?

"I would put it differently" he remarked. "We are now in a position to prevent the terrorists from gaining on the ground".

Pointing to the changed situation in Trinco and its environs, he said 'We have more soldiers, better trained and equipped, and we have gained control over the Nilaweli area".

Does the restoration of Mrs. Bandaranaike's civic rights mean a Sinhala consensus that allows a better chance for a political settlement?

"We must hope that Mrs. Bandaranaike and the SLFP will exercise their right to oppose the government in every area other than this national issue".

What of Mrs. Bandaranaike's demand for a general election? Mr. Athulathmudali referred to President JR's statement to the UNP group which was a firm "NO" elections now. — M. de S.

CRM concerned over arrests

The Civil Rights Movement has since its inception in 1971 expressed its concern about arrests and detentions. These have included concern about arbitrary arrests, prolonged detention without charge or trial, denial of bail, detentions made under emergency regulations of other special laws whereby normal safeguards against ill treatment are removed, detention in police custody, torture and death in custody, refusal of access to families or lawyers, failure to inform family of an arrested person's whereabouts, and degrading and inhuman conditions of detention. These concerns were first expressed in connection with the treatment of thousands of insurgent suspects in the 1970's under the government of Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike. They have been repeated during the term of the present government, mainly in connection with arrests in the North and East.

It is in this context that CRM once again voices its concern about a series of arrests of leftists in the South who are being held either under the emergency regulations or the Prevention of Terrorism Act allegedly for "terrorist activi-

ties" and for complicity with armed separatists in the North. These persons are being held in various police stations, often under acutely uncomfortable physical conditions and in general, CRM understands, without the right of access to family or lawyers. CRM is aware of at least one instance where the family was not even informed of the prisoner's whereabouts.

The series of arrests is now reported to number over 100. Many of them, CRM understands; are of persons alleged to be members of the Samajavadi Janatha Viyaparaya (SJV), a political grouping formed a few years ago which functioned openly, brought out publications, and advocated a peaceful settlement of the ethnic problem on the basis of regional autonomy. Those arrested include middle-aged schoolteachers from rural districts respected in their areas with a record of service to their localities.

CRM's concern is by no means limited to this group alone. A number of members or supposed members of the JVP have been held for longer periods without charge or trial; they are even more likely to become "forgotten pris-

oners" unless their cases are reviewed promptly. Already there has been one police cell death, that of S. P. M. Maitigama in October 1985, which an inquest determined to be suicide.

CRM is naturally unaware of, and therefore cannot comment on, the grounds on which the authorities decided to arrest all those persons. CRM stresses however that the continued and extensive resort to special legislation lacking in basic safeguards is a serious threat to the democratic system. If investigation takes time, the normal procedure should be to release such persons on suitable bail. Where persons are held in custody pending investigation, this should be under the normal law and they should be accorded humane treatment with decent conditions of detention and access to family, friends and lawyers. As in the case of all political prisoners, CRM emphasises that the authorities have an obligation to act promptly; they should either be charged and accorded a fair and early trial, or released.

Desmond Fernando
Secretary
Civil Rights Movement

The TULF Proposals

The Tamil people gave a mandate to the TULF in the 1977 election to establish an independent state of Tamil Eelam. At the all party Conference in Colombo we reiterated our mandate but indicated our willingness to consider any viable and acceptable alternative put forward by the Sri Lankan Government. The Government of Sri Lanka has persistently failed to place any meaningful proposals which merit consideration.

In order not to frustrate India's efforts to work out a satisfactory solution to our problem, we now submit these proposals to the Government of India.

DRAFT

Part I

Sri Lanka that is Ilankai shall be a Union of States. The Northern and Eastern provinces, which are predominantly Tamil-speaking shall constitute one Tamil Linguistic State (See Annexure-I)

The territory of a State, once established, shall not be altered without its consent.

Parliament

The Legislative power of the Union shall vest in a Parliament.

Parliament shall have the exclusive power to make laws in respect of any of the matters enumerated in List One.

The membership of Parliament shall reflect the ethnic proportion of the Union.

Special provision shall be made to ensure the representation of Muslims and Tamils of recent Indian Origin who do not occupy contiguous areas.

No Bill or Resolution or part thereof affecting any nationality shall be passed, unless a majority of Members of Parliament belonging to that nationality agree to such a Bill or Resolution or part thereof.

Part II

Special Constitutional Provisions:

CITIZENSHIP: Notwithstanding anything in the Constitution of any other law regarding citizenship, all those who are not citizens of a foreign country and who were resident in Sri Lanka on 1st November, 1981 and their descendants shall ipso facto be citizens of Sri Lanka.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE: Constitutional provision shall be made to make Tamil also an official language.

UNION SERVICES: Provision shall be made in the Constitution to ensure that the ethnic proportion is reflected in all union services, including the armed forces. Union Services shall also include public sector service.

Part III

STATES: There shall be a Governor for each State. He shall be appointed by the President of the Union, in consultation with the Chief Minister.

There shall be an elected assembly for each State.

Each Assembly will have its elected Presiding Officer.

Elections to State Assemblies shall be on the basis of territorially demarcated electorates. Provision shall be made to ensure adequate representation for Muslims in the Tamil Linguistic State.

The legislative power of the State shall vest in the State Assembly.

The Assembly shall have exclusive power to make laws for such state or any part thereof in respect of any of the matters enumerated in List Two.

When a Bill has been passed by the Assembly it shall be presented to the Governor. He may assent or send it back for reconsideration. If the Bill is passed again, with or without amendment, the Governor shall give his assent.

The Executive Power of the State shall vest in the Chief Minister and Council of Ministers.

Executive power of the State shall extend to all matters with respect to which the Legislature of the State has power to make laws.

Largest Party

The Governor shall appoint the Leader of the largest Party in the Assembly as Chief Minister. The Chief Minister shall choose the members of the Council of Ministers.

The State Assembly shall have power to levy taxes or cess and mobilise resources through loans and grants.

All the revenues received by the Government of a State, all loans raised by that Government, and all moneys received by that Government shall form one consolidated Fund to be titled "Consolidated Fund of the State".

Some duties and taxes shall be levied and collected by the Union Government but shall be assigned to the State within which such duty or tax is leviable.

The President shall appoint a Finance Commission to be presided over by the Governor of the Central Bank. There shall be three other members, one of whom shall be a Sinhalese, one a Tamil, and one a Muslim.

High Court

There shall be a High Court for each State and such other courts and tribunals as are necessary. The High Court will be the Court of Appeal for other courts in the State and shall have superintendence and control over all other courts and tribunals in the State. Appeal will lie to the Court of Appeal from judgements of the High Court. The Supreme Court shall deal with constitutional matters.

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CLD on Civic disabilities and polls

An almost unanimous expression of approval has greeted the restoration of the Civic Rights of Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, former Prime Minister and leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. The Council for Liberal Democracy shares the great joy at an injustice redressed, articulated by a wide cross-section of the Sri Lankan people. The CLD notes with satisfaction the acknowledgment by Mrs. Bandaranaike of the part played in this development by the resolution it was instrumental in getting adopted at the recent Congress of the Liberal International in Madrid. The CLD recognizes that other factors must have been involved in the President's decision but it welcomes this acknowledgment of the importance and impact of international liberal and democratic opinion.

On behalf of Sri Lankan Liberals the CLD thanks President J. R. Jayewardene for the restoration of their Civic Rights to all those upon whom civic disabilities had been imposed, and thus taking a significant step towards the reversal of the erosion of the principles of liberal democracy perpetrated

by the present United National Party government.

The Council for Liberal Democracy is convinced that the tragic erosion of parliamentary democracy wrought by the deprivation of Mrs. Bandaranaike's Civic Rights can only be reversed by the total elimination of the injustice of civic disability. The CLD therefore calls for the repeal of Special Presidential Commission of Inquiry Act No. 7 of 1978 and for repeal in its entirety of Article 81 of the Constitution.

It is also imperative that the people of Sri Lanka appreciate that the deprivation of Mrs. Bandaranaike's Civic Rights marked the beginning of a new and powerful phase in the tragic decline of Sri Lankan parliamentary democracy. The steady decline of the liberal democratic process that began after the General Election of 27th May 1970 accelerated in October 1980, and reached a high point of intolerant and manipulative excess in the Referendum of 22nd December 1982. The postponement of a General Election for six years be-

gan a process that the CLD believes was designed to end in one party state. The heightened political violence unleashed at the Referendum became a prelude to the tragic race riots of July 1983 and to the crisis which engulfs us now.

The resolution of the Liberal International referred to by Mrs. Bandaranaike called for 'an immediate General Election so as to legitimize the governmental process in Sri Lanka and thus enable a settlement acceptable to all parties.' By the restoration of Mrs. Bandaranaike's Civic Rights, the government has reversed the first step on its road to authoritarianism. The Council for Liberal Democracy accordingly earnestly requests the government to hold an immediate free and fair General Election, by which alone Sri Lanka's return to parliamentary democracy which it is hoped the present action initiates, can conclusively be established.

Chanaka Ameratunga
*Joint Secretary,
The Council for
Liberal Democracy.*

The TULF...

(Continued from Page 5)

Each State will have a State Service consisting of:

- Officers and other public servants of the State; and
- Such other officers and public servants who may be seconded to the State.

State will have a State Public Service Commission for recruitment and for exercise of disciplinary powers relating to the members of the State Service.

Part IV

Special provision for Tamils of recent Indian origin:

In order to meet the needs of the Tamils of recent Indian origin, and to ensure that they enjoy a sense of security, and to provide for their participation in Government, suitable administrative arrangements and institutions shall be established, for example the

establishment or creation of an administrative district. Gramasevaka divisions shall be modified so as to comprise estates where Tamils of Indian origin are in the majority. Such Gramasevaka divisions could be brought together to form an AGA's division, in the same manner as the Vavuniya, South Sinhala AGA's division, was created. Such AGA's divisions could be brought together to form an Administrative and/or Electoral District. Tamils of recent Indian origin, resident outside such administrative districts, envisaged above, other than in the Tamil Linguistic State, should be entitled to settle in such Administrative Districts and pursue their legitimate vocations if they so desire. Likewise such persons should be entitled to settle and pursue their legitimate vocations in the Tamil Linguistic State.

LIST ONE:

Defence, Foreign Affairs, Currency Posts and Telecommunications, Immigration and Emigration, Foreign Trade and Commerce, Railways, Air Ports and Aviation, Broadcasting and Television, Customs, Elections, Census.

PART TWO

The following among others:-

Police & Internal Law and Order (See Annexure II), Land and all its uses (See Annexure III), Education including University and Technical Education, Archaeology, Culture, Industries, Fisheries, Local Government, Excise, Agriculture, Irrigation, Agrarian Services, Health, Prisons and Reformatories, State Transport and Roads, Cooperative Development.

The significance of disfranchisement of plantation workers

Hector Abhayavardhana

The importance of the 1947 general election, which was staged under the new Soulbury constitution was that it was the curtain-raiser for the transfer of power to the Senanayake-Kotelawela-Jayewardena group of families, newly dressed up as the representatives of a capitalist class united behind the United National Party, now specially formed for the purpose. The deal between these reactionary politicians and the British Government had already been made behind the back of the legislature. It was vital to prevent the UNP from winning a majority in the House of Representatives or even gaining a majority by nominating its henchmen to the six nominated seats. As things were, the UNP was able to win only 42 out of a total of 95 elected seats and was enabled to form a Government by the Governor who invited D. S. Senanayake to form a Government and thereby qualify for the bonus of the 6 nominated seats. To say that this aim of keeping the UNP out of Government was well within possibility had there been no LSSP split, is, therefore, no exaggeration.

The formation of D.S. Senanayake's Government made it possible for the clique of UNP leaders to carry out their secret deal with British imperialism to the letter. The various communal groups of capitalists were consolidated behind the Government. The formal transfer of power was completed by February 1948. Then a few months later, whether in terms of the deal with the British or not, the UNP Government introduced the most sinister and far-reaching legislative

measures that have aimed at the total negation of radical forces within the parliamentary process. By the Ceylon citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949 virtually all the people of Indian descent who had voted at the 1947 elections, and in particular all resident plantation workers, were excluded from the voters' list. It was alleged that the presence of Indian plantation workers on the electoral lists enabled them to return candidates of Indian descent to 7 parliamentary seats and influence the verdict in another 20 parliamentary constituencies such that Left-minded opponents of the UNP were returned at the 1947 elections. In this way the voter composition for subsequent elections was shamelessly manipulated to deprive the Left parties and their supporters of all chances of winning in at least 27 formerly favourable constituencies out of the 95 that was the total in 1947.

The significance of the disfranchisement of the plantation workers resident on the estates must be assessed in relation to the strategic guide-lines of the LSSP Programmatic documents of 1941 and 1945 that the plantation workers are "the most important section of the working class in Ceylon"; that they constitute "the vanguard of the revolutionary proletariat which is destined to be the emancipator of all our toiling masses." Almost all of them were now thrown out of the political arena in one fell move. This reduced the proletariat for purposes of mobilisation for electoral purposes to the urban workers

in Colombo and its outlying areas. Among these urban workers, those directly engaged in industrial production would be a small number. Thus if it is possible to regard the number of active accounts with the Employees' Provident Fund as an indication of occupational distribution, in the year 1980 (the latest for which figures are available) there were 1,128,257 active EPF accounts, of which 548,127 were in the plantations and 235,205 in manufacturing, 11,258 in mining and quarrying, and 17,551 in construction. But it is not a matter of numbers alone. Most urban workers no longer live in the city but travel to their places of work from suburban or village areas. They retain strong bonds with their families in these places and in many cases own land themselves. According to a table showing the distribution of land-owning families by occupation in Ceylon for 1950-51, the occupation of 17 per cent. of landowners was non-agricultural labour. Unlike the landless plantation labour force, these sections of the proletariat may well be reluctant to support radical land reform.

Much more tragic is the set back to proletarian consciousness and unity brought about by the disfranchisement of the Indian plantation workers. Disfranchisement is not by itself an insuperable obstacle to trade union organisation. In fact, trade unions have extended their influence and membership to all estates of any reckonable size since the Citizenship laws were made. For several reasons, the workers have been

able to win both more rights and wage increases in recent times. Trade Unions, however, are organisations of workers on the simplest level. Their endeavour is to win simple concessions from the employers. The more powerful unions in the plantations today function through intermediaries and discourage the promotion of any kind of class consciousness. Effective class consciousness is political in character and then too is not a matter of individual attitudes. It cannot take root in the mind of the worker unless it finds expression in political organisation.

Disfranchisement has been a set back to this process of politicisation. It has forced him to think of his deprivation as deriving from his belonging to a particular community or nationality. His principal concern has shifted from his class as a worker to his community as an Indian immigrant. Through such dislocation of its largest component section, the entire working class of Sri Lanka has been disoriented.

It was not realistic to expect that the workers in Colombo would rise to the defence of the rights of the plantation workers. The post war years had seen them move into action to win their trade union rights and secure badly needed wage increases and better working conditions. There was an islandwide bus strike towards the end of 1945, a general strike led by Government workers in October 1946 and a second general strike in the middle of 1947, which included Government white-collar employees.

But the second general strike ended in defeat and severe victimisation, which forced the trade unions into a period of ebb for some time. The expulsion of the plantation workers from the parliamentary arena, just three years after the lifting of the repression of wartime, had little repercussion elsewhere in the country. Indeed, their isolation was reflected in the support extended by other minority groups, including the Tamil Congress led by G. G. Ponnambalam, to Government's act of disfranchisement.

But its limited immediate impact was no measure of the far-reaching consequences that the Citizenship Act had for the future of the country. In the first place, the LSSP and the Left parties generally were finally deprived of the possibility of providing a Left rallying point for an independent bid to form a Left Government. This was not realised by the LSSP or the Communist Party and for many years both of them persisted with the strategic line of mobilising the rural poor through a party based on the working class, with the plantation workers as its most militant component. The LSSP fought the March 1960 elections on the slogan of setting up an LSSP Government and in 1963 the LSSP, CP and MEP entered into a United Left Front with a governmental perspective. They stubbornly repudiated the notion that the parliamentary possibilities that they earlier envisaged had been transformed by what was a severe blow at the universal franchise itself.

This was not the only consequence. The Citizenship Act paved the way for the emergence of new middle class parties based on the communal interests of the different communities. Among the plantation Tamils, the Ceylon Indian Congress Labour Union became the Ceylon Workers' Congress under the leadership of Mr. Thondaman. Disapproving of the support given by the Tamil Congress to the Citizenship Bill in Parliament, S. J. V. Chelvanayagam walked out of the party and set up the Federal Party. Among the Sinhalese, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike walked out of the UNP in 1951 and set up the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. All three new organisations were the product of the process of disintegration through which the society was passing. The UNP led by D. S. Senanayake, himself the so-called "father of the nation", had begun the process. Engaged in the main business of gathering votes to remain in power, the UNP was doctoring the electorate. By expelling Indians, it hoped to ensure its majority. Bandaranaike saw no reason they why he should not collect his votes by advancing the interests of Sinhalese as the

majority community in the country. Chelvanayagam saw the necessity of constitutional reforms to ensure that the interests of the Tamils were protected. All of them would be benefited by spreading communal attitudes for the purpose of collecting votes.

The LSSP might have been able to halt this proceeding disintegration if the urban workers could have provided it with a strong enough base to stand on. This, unfortunately, they were in no position to do. They were too small and too weak to confront all alone the alliance of native capitalists and the foreign imperialists that was behind the UNP Government. On the other hand, the industrial sections of the working class emerged in greater measure only in the 'fifties and' sixties with the expansion of Government industries, the setting up of Corporations, the policy of nationalisation and import substitution. Having differentiated themselves but little from the mass of wage-earners, the larger number of whom were in white-collar or menial occupations, urban workers, as a whole, tended to share middle-class aspirations. Mention has already been made of the extent of landowning among non-agricultural labour. All these factors combined to generate the vast mass movement of the Sinhala rural middle classes led by Mr. Bandaranaike in 1956.

In a disintegrating society the bourgeois intelligentsia, English speaking, cosmopolitan and consumer-oriented, could not hold aloft the ideal of an united nation. The more traditional rural intelligentsia could advance in such conditions a claim to control the state in the name of the rural poor. The links of the urban workers with house-property and land in the rural areas permitted the consolidation of a grand alliance of small traders, petty rentiers, small farmers and wage and salary owners in a search for access to the resources of patronage in possession of the state. In the course of this endeavour what was set up for the purpose of a future nation ended in caricature as a Sinhalese state.

Only revolution can change society

N. Sanmugathasan

There has been a spate of articles to mark the occasion of 50th. anniversary of the left movement in Sri Lanka. It is intriguing to note how many of these articles are not only theoretically shallow but, ostrich-like shy away from the fundamental controversies that today surround the left movement.

The entire left movement accepts Marxism-Leninism as its ideology — at least in words. Now, one of the cardinal principles of Marxism-Leninism is Marx's theory of the state which teaches us that the state is the instrument of oppression of one class over another and that is backed by a repressive machinery whose principal form is the armed force. Lenin has emphasised in his "State and Revolution" that without "smashing by force" this state machinery, it would be impossible for the working class to proceed to socialism and, also, that the working class cannot take hold of the existing state machinery and use it for its purposes. Hence the need for revolution.

It becomes necessary to stress Lenin's teaching on this point in his immortal classic, "State and Revolution" because some left leaders seem to have read only his "Left-wing Communism — an infantile disorder." and proceeded to misunderstand it. Why, don't they read his other revolutionary teachings?

Parliamentary Opportunism

It is because the left movement, at an early stage, distanced itself

from these principled policies of Marx and Lenin that it very easily got dragged into the mire of parliamentary opportunism. It was pushed in this direction by the relatively easy twin successes at the 1935 general election to the Second State Council and the good showing (despite total dis-unity of the left) at the first parliamentary elections of 1947. But, the worst influence came from the MEP victory in 1956. The left leadership got fooled into the belief that what Mr. Bandaranaike could do they too could.

What it failed to understand was that while the victory of the MEP over the UNP represented a victory of one section of the bourgeoisie against another and which could be done peacefully, the victory of the left would have to be the victory of one class over another. This has never happened any where in world without violent revolution.

The left leadership did not understand that the bourgeoisie invented parliament as a veil, an adornment to cover the naked dictatorship of Capital; that it was an attempt to dampen the class consciousness of the working people and to distract their attention from the real seats of power which are the armed forces; and that it was an attempt to substitute the struggle by words for the struggle by arms.

We have had more than fifty years of this tomfoolery of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. Yet at the end of it, neo-colonialist exploitation of Sri Lanka today is worse than the colonial exploitation of fifty years ago. Ofcourse, we have had reforms. Yes! The left movement has used adult franchise and parliament to introduce many social reforms which are today

law. There is no doubt that the left movement has raised the political consciousness of the masses and roused the class consciousness of the workers whom it helped to organise in trade unions to fight successfully for their day to day demands.

But, the fundamental task of the left and socialist movement was not to better the conditions of the masses **within** capitalist society but to destroy capitalist society and its state power and usher in socialism and, thereby, end once for all the exploitation of man by man. **This, the left in Sri Lanka failed to do.** You cannot hide this failure by trying "to strike a correct balance between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forms of struggle in which both weight and priority is given to the latter form." Let us not fool ourselves. No amount of extra-parliamentary struggles can add up to armed revolution.

Some of the left leaders even take pleasure in jibing at such famous revolutionary questions as "power grows out of the barrel of a gun". They accuse this saying as being an infantile theory. Who is making this accusation? Men who have never been within even a hundred miles distance of any genuine revolution. Against whom are they making this accusation? Against one of the greatest revolutionaries born into this world and who successfully led the revolution in the world's most populous country! Some conceit.

Have they never read Lenin's statement, "An oppressed class which does not strive to learn. To use arms, to acquire arms, only deserve to be treated like slaves. We cannot, unless we are bourgeois pacifists or opportunists, forget that we are living in a class society from which there is no way out, nor can there be save through class struggle. In every class society, whether based on slavery, serfdom, or as at present, on wage labour, the oppressor class is always armed. Our slogan must be arming of the proletariat and dis-arming the bourgeoisie."

This contribution to the discussion on Sri Lanka's Left movement in the past 50 years is by veteran Communist leader who founded the Maoist C.P., Mr. Sanmugathasan who met Mao-Tse-Tung, on several occasions is now working on his memoirs.

The other point on which the left movement erred irrevocably was in regard to united front tactics. Marxism-Leninism teaches us that the working class must never accept the leadership of the bourgeoisie in any united front; and, instead should lead it. Further, the working class should always take care to safeguard its independence and separate existence inside any united front with other classes.

The left in Sri Lanka did just the opposite. Its reformism and revisionism culminated in its surrender to the SLFP and the formation of the United Front in 1968 and the United Front Government in 1970. Men who refused to play second fiddle to the more brilliant Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike now lay virtually prostrate at the widow's feet.

Once the left movement started slipping down the path of opportunism there was no stopping. People who had been re-echoing Marx's statement about religion being the opium of the people, now started visiting the Kataragama temple before launching their election campaigns; and of paying homage at the Dalada Maligawa before accepting their portfolios. It was an attempt to cheat both god and man.

None of the articles that have so far appeared has explained how a government in which both the LSSP and the CPSL were partners could have broken the 1972 strike of Bank employees. It was left to the capitalist, Mr. S. Thondaman, to give an object lesson to these left leaders in April, 1984 on how to lead a strike while being in the cabinet, and do it successfully.

Sin of Collaboration

Nor has anyone explained away the performance of the two left parties in the government during the 1971 JVP or its policies even though at that time I was also detained for 10 months without rhyme or reason by a government in which both the LSSP and the CPSL were represented. Let us agree that the JVP was mis-guided and mis-led. Does that justify

the massive slaughter of thousands of youth that took place? Can all the waters of the Mahaweli wash away the sin of collaboration of the two left parties in this dastardly action? Do the Sinhala chauvinists realise that many more Sinhala youth were slaughtered in 1971 than by "terrorism" last year.

The parliamentary opportunism of these left parties has led them to a situation where they have come to decide issues not on whether they are right or wrong but whether they are acceptable to the majority community. That is why they have refrained from making a bold and revolutionary call in the matter of the Tamil problem. **It is not without significance that so far they have refused to call for the withdrawal of the armed forces from the north and the east — a fundamental demand of the Tamil people.**

Their attempt to form the United Front Government was nothing more than an attempt to run capitalism better than the UNP and, as such was bound to fail. It was this failure and public disgust and lack of confidence caused by it that was responsible for the mass landslide for the UNP in 1977 and the elimination of all leftists from parliament for the first time.

The reason for the reformism and the revisionism of these two parties really springs from their class character. Most of the left leaders were not only intellectuals but came from families (some of them feudal) who could afford to send their children to Europe and America for higher studies. On their return, these men accumulated a fair amount of capital from whose investment they were able to lead a comfortable life. In 1955 the CP weekly, Janashakthi, published the income tax returns of three of the top leaders of the left which exposed the estates and shares in companies owned by them.

It is this contradiction of being wedded to big capital and a very comfortable life and, at the same time, pretending to espouse the cause of the working class and to stand for the abolition of the very

sources of wealth that gave them their own comfortable life that characterises most of the left leadership.

These people were never serious about revolution. **Revolution was not in their class interests.** It is only the proletariat and its allies that feel revolution as a class need. But none of their representatives are anywhere near the seats of power in these parties.

If the left movement is to retrieve itself and to go forward in the future, it must decisively reject the false theory of peaceful transition to socialism through parliament; and accept the Marxist-Leninist truth that society can be changed only through violent revolution. Marx's famous statement that force is the mid-wife of every old society pregnant with the new is still as true as ever.

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CAT'S EYE



ONLY VIVIE ON STAGE

Many of those who attended the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the LSSP at Navarangahala were struck by the fact that in the Central Committee (which was seated on the stage) there was only one woman — Vivienne Goonewardena. (In the CP today the position is no better, only one woman, Nanda de Silva, being on the Central Committee.) This of-course is in contrast to the early years of the Left movement when there were numerous outstanding women activists, Selina Perera, Kusuma Gunewardene and Vivienne Goonewardena (the wives of Dr N. M. Perera, Philip Gunewardena and Leslie Goonewardena respectively.) The best-known among

them was an English woman, **Doreen Wickremasinghe**, nee Young. She was born in Cheshire, educated at a school in Letchworth started by Annie Besant, (where Krishna Menon was the history teacher) and graduated from the London School of Economics. She came to Sri Lanka in 1930 at the age of 23 and became principal of Sujata Vidyalaya, Matara, a School for Buddhist girls. After her marriage to Dr S. A. Wickremasinghe, she came to Colombo and was president of Suriya Mal movement; This was a movement which challenged British rule by opposing the sale of poppies for British war charities on November 11th each year — a day when the British in Sri Lanka indulged in jingoistic propaganda.

The Suriya Mal movement of the 1930's was to a large extent organised by women. Doreen Wickremasinghe was at that time the principal of Ananda Balika School and the making of the yellow Suriya flowers for sale and the organising of the movement was done from the principal's house.

Many teachers of the school were Suriya Mal workers including Eva de Mel, Shirani Gamage, Lillian Bandaranayake and Eileen Weerasekera. As an LSSP activist Doreen Wickremasinghe was also in all the party-led campaigns of the period and in causes associated with the Communist Party — after its formation in 1943. In 1948 she and many other women of the left parties

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formed the Eksath Kantha Peramuna, the first Socialist women's organisation in Sri Lanka. She has also the unique distinction of being the first English woman in Asia elected to a local parliament; she won the Akuressa seat in the eighties by defeating her brother-in-law, the famous and wealthy Sarath Wijesinghe, one of the leading UNP personalities of his day.

Doreen Wickremasinghe is now 79 years and still active. She participates at demonstrations for ethnic harmony and peace, at picketing for women's rights on March 8th and works for many other causes connected with human rights, democracy and socialism.

•MACHO' SONS & •MAN-MADE' MOTHERS

The current image of manhood is depicted in the latest military posters adorning public spaces in Colombo. Framed in maroon are "boys" in camouflage fatigues hurling grenades and shooting at an unseen enemy. In the centre of this poster, a soldier victoriously brandishes a bayonet in one hand and the Sri Lanka flag in the other.

Defending the "motherland" is what **Rana Gi** (Battle Songs) — the new cassette advertised in this poster — is all about. The cassette is produced by the Music Section of the National Youth Services Council with profits to the Veera Sebala (Heroic Soldiers) Foundation.

The glorification of war and violence perpetrated in the name of patriotism and motherhood by male 'military culture' is the pervasive theme of the 12 battle songs. Significantly, the macho male is constantly counterpoised with the nurturing, male-protected female. A soldier's aggressive behaviour is eulogised as a "duty" to his mother; his filial obligation to her is most consistently articulated as "protection". This notion of protection is predicated on a collective male need to keep women helpless and dependent. Men thereby derive their so-called masculinity from the efficiency with they protect "their" women (including mothers) from the violence inflicted by men of the "other side".

It is on this callow ironic notion of filial piety that the motherland-soldier relationship is based. In the male-authored battle song, **Sat Samudura Se** ("Like the Seven Oceans"), a woman sings,

Defending the motherland, my son,
Is like protecting the mother who bore and nourished you

Motherhood — and through motherhood, "mothercountry-ism" — is appropriated by male military culture to justify war. A woman's ability to bear children has been exploited by martial patriarchy to service death and destruction. Poetic references to mother's milk, for example, are frequently juxtaposed with images of war and death:

With my blood turned-milk I nourished you
To defend the country and the (**Sat Samudura Se**) nation.

Similarly, in the song, **Daeya Venuven** ("For the Sake of the Nation"), also male-authored, a women's chorus sings to soldiers:

You owe your immortality
To the milk of Mother Lanka

It is in the battle song, **Minis Putun** ("Manly Sons"), written and sung by men, that the connections between blood and milk, mothers and soldier-sons, are most explicit.

The blood flowing is the blood-milk of mothers
(Sons) killing sons with mother-made arms are laughing
Mothers! Protect us, we who destroy their arms
Mothers! Tell the world that our arms are not to blame

This song implies that mothers are involved in and responsible for a war fought by their "manly sons". The last two lines complete the co-option of woman-as-mother to the war effort. "Mother" is (mis) used deliberately to rationalise and legitimise violence, thereby absolving men of their martial complicity and consequential guilt.

Women, be they mothers, wives or lovers, are imagined by the male lyricists as a captive audience for macho war games. In a song titled **Satan Bime** ("In the Battlefield"), written by a man, a woman urges her lover:

Don't write to me in pretty handwriting
Tales of innocent love, as in the past
Write to me of how you are doing
Brave and steadfast at the battlefield

In the final verse, she imagines her lover returning home a hero "amidst the joyous sounds of victory". The verse ends on a hopeful note — "I look forward to welcoming you home" — which contrasts starkly with the sealed-coffins so often returned to women.

The same male lyricist, in another song (**Sat Samudura Se**), fantasises a mother living vicariously through her soldier-son:

You are fearless, our country's hero
This, my son, makes me so happy
A son who defends the country

Here, motherly pride derives from a soldier-son's military prowess. Mothers thereby are reduced to vessels filled with braggadocio; vessels from which their soldier sons then drink at will. **Sat Samudura Se**, in short, is an exercise in male solipsism.

(Continued on page 24)

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VIETNAM AND CENTRAL AMERICA

FOREIGN NEWS

Douglas Allen

The 1980s have been a time of renewed interest in learning "the lessons of Vietnam". "El Salvador is Spanish for Vietnam" and similar slogans reveal anti-imperialist struggles attempting to learn from the past in order to analyze and resist present imperialist interventions. At the same time, those in Washington, with their allies in the media and at universities, have been determined to unlearn the lessons of Vietnam; in their rewriting of history, they reinsert the earlier fabrications and expunge the hard lessons learned by Vietnamese and other anti-imperialists through decades of struggle. (See *Monthly Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2, June 1985, for illustrations of this.)

The 1980s have also been a time of continual escalation of U. S. involvement in Central America, of an unprecedented U. S. militarization of Central America, as Washington props up repressive regimes, trains and arms their military, and does little about demands for social justice. For example, U. S. military sales and military aid in 1982 and 1983 to all Central American nations exceeded that of the previous 32 years combined, and this does not include aid to the Nicaraguan contras. (See *The Defense Monitor*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1984, and numerous other recent publications for extensive documentation of this rapid escalation.)

There are thousands of U. S. troops in Honduras, as that nation is transformed into a U. S. garrison state. Washington is determined to destabilize and overthrow the government of Nicaragua, probably

through a more direct U. S. invasion if the contra-invasion, planned and financed by the C. I. A. and others in the U. S., does not become more effective. The U. S. has become increasingly bogged down in counterrevolutionary policies in El Salvador, and Washington frantically arms and supplies the dictators in Guatemala and other Latin American countries. And the U. S., in a move reminiscent of its past gunboat diplomacy, invaded the tiny island of Grenada.

In short, the U. S. is rapidly escalating its military involvement throughout Central America: It is increasing military grants and loans, delivery of weapons, covert aid, direct roles in combat operations, and training activities. What follows is an attempt to apply a few of the lessons of Vietnam to the present situation in Central America.

The False Lesson

What Reagan, Haig, Weinberger, and others in Washington learned from Vietnam is expressed in their obsession with the need "to overcome the Vietnam syndrome." They believe that ever since the U. S. defeat in Vietnam the U. S. has become self-doubting, hesitant-even impotent, a sleeping dismembered giant that has lost its will. It is time to flex our muscled Uncle Sam will not be pushed around anymore. Indeed, *The Wall Street Journal* and others hailed the Grenada invasion as a triumph over this Vietnam syndrome.

This need to overcome the phony Vietnam syndrome — phony because the U. S. has been far from passive since 1975 — has led to Washington and the military becoming increasingly reckless: the insane nuclear arms policies, including the serious widespread discussions, for the first time in many years, of the winnability of nuclear war and the need to develop weapons of first-strike capability; the blatant covert and open involvement in attempting to overthrow the Sandinista government; and the coun-

terrevolutionary policies toward South Africa, Namibia, and Angola, Lebanon, the Philippines, Indochina, and elsewhere throughout the world.

The need to overcome the Vietnam syndrome is the sort of national chauvinism, militarism, neocolonialism, and falsification of history one expects from much of Washington and the establishment press. We shall conclude our analysis with the major lesson of the Vietnam War which is a direct refutation of this fabricated Vietnam syndrome.

Differences

In applying the lessons of Vietnam, it is important not to obscure the profound differences that distinguish Vietnam from Central America and that differentiate the situations in different areas of Central America. Each struggle for justice and freedom has its own specific history, related to the class configurations of its society and to its past colonial and neocolonial relations; to its specific forms of sexual and racial oppression; to its specific ethnic and religious components; etc. All situations cannot be treated in exactly the same way. Each country must respond to its own internal contradictions. Some of the lessons of Vietnam may serve as more of an example for some countries than for others.

Perhaps the most obvious differences between Vietnam and Central America arise from the long history of U. S. interventionism and hegemony in Central America. As Victor Olano, a Salvadoran spokesperson for the Frente Democratico Revolucionario de El Salvador (FDR), stated in an interview (*Intervention*, Premier Issue, 1984):

The biggest difference is that the Vietnam conflict was inherited from the French and the Central American conflict has been created by the U. S. itself. The U. S. created the conditions for revolution in Central America, with the banana plantations in Guatemala and Honduras, and Somoza — who was practically an agent for the U. S. — in Nicaragua. These countries have been entirely dependent upon Washington and Wall Street. There were no other intervening

Professor Douglas Allen, now at Peradeniya on a short visit to Sri Lanka, was educated at Yale and taught political science at the University of Maine, Ohio. He is a member of the editorial Board of the wellknown American journal "The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars"

powers. Consequently, in Central America the U. S. is inheriting the problems from itself.

A frequently cited formulation of some of this past history of U. S. interventionism and domination was presented to Congress by General Smedley Butler in 1935:

I spent 33 years and 4 months in active service as a member of our country's most agile military force — the Marine Corps... And during that period I spent most of my time being a highclass muscle man for Big Business... I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street... I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-12. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped get Honduras "right" for American fruit companies in 1903.

Because Vietnam lacked such a past history of direct U. S. economic and military interventionism and hegemony, it was more difficult to make the case that U. S. involvement in Vietnam was an illustration of a global, systematic policy of imperialism. Liberal critics of the Vietnam War tended to view such U. S. interventionism as a mistake, an aberration, inconsistent with our admirable values and goals. In the case of, say, a Guatemala or a Nicaragua, it is far easier to demonstrate that present oppressive and exploitative policies are consistent with a long history of interventions in those societies.

There are also significant differences in the nature, history, and strengths of anti-imperialist forces. For example, the Vietnamese Communist Party played a role unparalleled in revolutionary struggles in Central America. By the 1930s, the Vietnamese CP had won over considerable support of the peasants and had even liberated entire provinces in its struggle against French colonialism. By the end of WWII, the Vietnamese national liberation forces successfully proclaimed a unified, independent Vietnam, and even if this victory was short-lived, Ho Chi Minh and other communists had emerged as the major revolutionary leaders. In many respects, the battle for "the hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people had been lost long before U. S. troops arrived in Vietnam.

The lessons of revolutionary struggles in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and other areas of Central America take different forms. For example, the Christian-based communities have become major revolutionary forces in El Salvador and elsewhere; there was little precedence for such Christian revolutionary activity in Vietnam. Within such a religious context, peasants in Nicaragua have been saying that previously the Holy Ghost only had a right wing; now that the Holy Ghost has also acquired a left wing, it can finally fly. Religious peasants in Central America have also been known to say that their economic and political problems arise from the fact that seem to be located too far from God and too close to the United States.

There are also profound differences in the nature and level of domestic U. S. opposition. In the early and mid-1960s, there was relatively little domestic opposition to the escalating war in Indochina, and the early antiwar activities were more often than not dependent on the moral outrage of students. The domestic opposition to Central American policies is far more widespread, with the focus more on churches and communities rather than so university-based, and the opposition is at a higher level than antiwar resistance before Lyndon Johnson drastically escalated to hundreds of thousands of U. S. troops in Vietnam.

Similarities

Despite these and other differences, what strikes one is the remarkable similarities between Vietnam and Central America. We shall focus more on El Salvador in delineating a few of these similarities.

First, we are increasingly hearing the very same military terminology and military strategy applied to El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, etc. There are the same types of "strategic hamlet" programs, "scorched earth" policies, pacification projects, etc. There are the forced refugee areas, the use of napalm, and the increasing involvement of the U. S. military. Indeed, many of the same people who designed and implemented unsuccessful Viet-

nam policies are increasingly appearing in El Salvador and other parts of Central America.

Second, just as in Vietnam, the overwhelming number of deaths (about 50,000 in El Salvador during the past few years) are not to military combatants but to civilians. As in Vietnam, the U. S. finds it impossible to distinguish friend from foe. Even mild liberal sources have been alarmed by the widely-documented rape, torture, and assassination of innocent civilians by U. S.-armed and funded contras in Nicaragua.

Third, just as in Vietnam, as U. S. policies fail to achieve their objectives, policymakers feel compelled frantically to feed us highly fabricated, extremely optimistic reports. "Our side" is really making great progress. We can begin to see "the light at the end of the tunnel." All that is needed is more arms, more dollars, more troops, more time to break the will of the enemy.

It may be noted that this illusion of progress is more difficult to achieve in the post-Vietnam world than in the Vietnam of the 1960s, especially after the earlier propaganda around the "Yellow peril" and the "Red menace" had led to massive U. S. escalation with little domestic opposition, followed by the inflated claims and optimistic reports of the 1960s. Much of the Central American propaganda is more of the need for additional funds and arms in order to avoid defeat rather than achieve victory; one rarely hears, for example, of the earlier predictions of an imminent contra overthrow of the Sandinistas. Such efforts remind one more of some of Washington's Vietnam propaganda of the early 1970s.

Fourth, in both Vietnam and El Salvador, as in most of Central America, there is relatively little direct U. S. economic investment at stake. (Less than 1 per cent of U. S. total investment in Latin America is in El Salvador.) This has led some to analyze El Salvador in terms of Washington's political, diplomatic, and strategic interests while denying any economic significance.

But one of the lessons of Vietnam was that even when there is a relatively limited direct investment, the political and strategic interests cannot be so easily separated from interests of the transnational corporations and banks. A major lesson of Vietnam was that Washington was determined to show the nations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia that revolution does not pay. If you try to free yourself from imperial domination, you will be forced to pay an unacceptable price of death and destruction.

Fifth, totally transforming the usual pattern of "invisible wars" in Latin America and other parts of the Third World (invisible, that is, to the U. S. public), what was intended to be an invisible war in Indochina became highly visible; what was intended to be a very limited war became unlimited. An finally the U. S. public would no longer tolerate such an endless, visible, and unlimited war. Even with its manipulation of the news, Washington now finds it difficult to keep the counterrevolutionary covert policies in Nicaragua or the continuing war in El Salvador or the support for dictators in Guatemala and elsewhere invisible from the U. S. public. Contrast this with the massive secret war in Laos in the 1960s or the more than 100 years of an invisible history of continual U. S. interventions in Central America.

Sixth, a lesson of Vietnam has been that Washington ought to be more cautious before committing troops and unleashing the C. I. A. in efforts to topple foreign governments and impose its will on other peoples. Credit here must be given not only to Vietnamese resistance but also to domestic antiwar struggles. There can be little doubt that this was a major reason Kissinger and Ford hesitated in sending U. S. troops to Angola. And it was the opposition of religious and other groups that caused Reagan and Haig to alter their plans for El Salvador in 1981, plans that probably involved the direct intervention of U. S. troops and a far greater escalation.

Seventh, an important lesson of Vietnam was that in so many ways — economically, socially, psy-

chologically, morally — "the chickens came home to roost." When Washington is determined to identify its foreign policies with the welfare of brutal dictators and with the success of counterrevolutionary objectives, then the unintended consequences at home are devastating. To provide but two obvious examples, in order to satisfy the "presidential certification" necessary to continue arms shipments to El Salvador, Reagan had to testify every six months, with the grossest of fabrications, that the Salvadoran military was improving its human rights record; and in lobbying for aid to the contras, Reagan was forced to escalate his rhetoric until these rapists, assassins, and terrorists were transformed into "freedom fighters" and were identified as the equivalent of the heroes of the American (U.S.) Revolution.

Eighth, one of the lessons of Vietnam was the need for us to resist both the subtle and gross ways that our policy makers attempt to identify us with their unjust policies, to make us accomplices to their oppressive and exploitative activities. Just as in Vietnam, we now find Reagan, Weinberger, and others discussing El Salvador, Nicaragua, Grenada, and other areas of Central America in terms of "our national interest," "our national security," "our national honor." What most of us learned from Vietnam was that such policies were not in our interest, did not protect our security, were indeed dishonorable. We must always ask: In whose interests? The peasants of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, or Guatemala? The citizens of Maine or California? Those who profit most from the investments of the transnational corporations and those who control the finance capital?

The Major Lesson

The major lesson of the Vietnam War is indispensable for understanding what is happening in Central America and other parts of the world. The post-Vietnam world is very different from that which preceded it, perhaps most clearly evidenced when one contrasts the post-World War II role of the United States, lasting from 1945 until the late 1960s, with the U.S. role in the 1970s and 1980s.

Every other major power was decimated by World War II both militarily and economically: the United States alone emerged from the war greatly strengthened in its economic, military, political, cultural, and ideological influence. The U. S. was number one, and no one else was even a close second. In area after area, the U. S. was able to establish global hegemony.

The post-World War II period was a time of anticolonial struggles, as the European colonial empires began to crumble throughout the world. The U. S., as the world's number one economic and military power, gradually filled the vacuum created by the weakened colonial powers. Thus one finds the initial U. S. decision in 1945 to support French efforts at preventing Vietnamese independence and recolonizing Vietnam; the gradual increase in Washington's complicity with French imperialism until the U. S. was paying eighty per cent of the French war effort; and finally, after the defeat of the French in 1954, the emergence of the U. S. as the major, outside, neocolonial power.

The U. S., as the world's number one power, defined its national self-interest as maintaining and strengthening that status quo and as preventing revolutions that would drastically alter that balance of power. Thus the U. S. became the leading player — indeed, the director — of a global counter-revolutionary policy. Washington, acting according to the imperative of increasing the capital and maximizing the profits of its powerful corporations, and utilizing its military to enforce its policies, established neocolonial relations with "the haves" of the Third World countries of Latin America, Asia, and Africa: the ruthless dictators, the wealthy landowners, the native capitalists, the military elite. The masses of the people, in their struggle for food, land, literacy, freedom, and independence, become the enemy, since their success would threaten U. S. hegemony.

The major lesson of Vietnam is that the U. S. has lost much of its power relative to the rest of

(Continued on page 19)

Is Provincial autonomy the answer?

Romesh Fernando

"There would be trouble if a centralised form of government was introduced into countries with large communal differences... In Ceylon each Province should have complete autonomy."

— S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike,
Ceylon Morning Leader,
July 17th, 1926.

One of the most important steps towards the solution of the National Question is the devolution of power to territorial units. The TULF have indicated their willingness to accept a measure of internal self-government as an alternative to their demand for a separate state of Tamil Eelam. But two questions that can inevitably be raised, are regarding the territorial unit of devolution and functions of these local government bodies. Interestingly on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists, Professor Virginia Leary in her Report on Ethnic Conflict and Violence in Sri Lanka (1982) has written; "It appears essential that the Tamils be given greater roles in government administration in the areas in which they constitute an overwhelming majority. This can best be accomplished through substantial roles being given to the District Development Councils." However the Tamils for good reasons are not satisfied with District Councils and demand local government bodies which are larger and more powerful.

They claim that the district being a mere administrative entity does not take into account the linguistic, religious and cultural aspirations of the Tamil community. What is more the District Development Council had power only to make by-laws while the chief executive (District Minister) was appointed by the President from outside the Council. Thus they were not legal and executive bodies in the true sense. Also the annual grant given by the Central Government to these Councils was only Rs. forty million per district which amounted to only Rs. one billion for the whole island, which was

utterly inadequate. Even the Development Council Bill was only statutory legislation which had no Constitutional validity and could be abolished by a simple majority in Parliament.

The TULF wants the creation of an autonomous region consisting of both the Northern and Eastern provinces which would satisfy their demand for one Tamil linguistic unity. Regional autonomy which they seek can be given by having a system of Regional Councils with one Regional Council for the Northern and Eastern provinces. (This is exactly what was envisaged in the abortive Annexure C document drawn up by Parathasarthi). But they seem to have forgotten that the Tamils account for only forty percent in the Eastern province while the other sixty percent consists of Muslims and Sinhalese. The Eastern province Muslims though Tamil speaking possess a separate identity of their own and have indicated their opposition to Regional Councils. Also the creation of an autonomous region would split the country into two distinct units; a Tamil speaking area and a Sinhala speaking area, which would achieve a de facto separation. Thus the demand for Regional Councils should be rejected since it is an unjust demand.

What then is the most realistic solution to the Tamil demand for internal self-government. The middle path between the extremes of District Councils and Regional Councils are Provincial Councils. The granting of autonomy to the provinces would also not mean the giving of special privileges to any particular community, since it will be an islandwide measure. Since provincial boundaries are already in existence there would also be no necessity to re-draw the map of Sri Lanka. Even the Donoughmore Commission had recommended the creation of Provincial Councils. In their Report of the Special Commission on the Constitution (1928) they advocated; "the creation of co-ordinating

bodies to which certain administrative functions of the Central Government could be delegated. The argument in favour of the establishment of a Provincial Council in each province is that such a scheme might result...In the special views of the different races predominant in different parts of the Island having effect in the administration of these parts."

Provincial Councils ought to be created by means of a Constitutional amendment and their members should be elected by the people on the basis of proportional representation. Each of these Provincial Councils with their Committee of Ministers should have legislative and executive powers over a specified list of subjects including limited powers in the administration of justice, collection of revenue, maintenance of law and order, and settlement of crown land. In each province there should also be a High Court and a Police Force. But land settlement on major projects such as the Mahaweli Development scheme should be allocated on the ethnic proportion of each community. The leaders of the majority party should be appointed the chief executive (Chief Minister) by the President. Also the annual grant given by the Central Government to these Councils should be a larger amount than now; for example Rs. one billion for each province. But the President should have the power to dissolve these Councils if necessary, during times of national emergency. Since the armed forces will be under the control of the Central Government, the fear that granting provincial autonomy may lead to secession, is unfounded.

Contrary to what is supposed by many, the devolution of power to territorial units is actually an indigenous form of government which existed also during the time of the Sinhalese kings. The Kandyan kingdom was divided into twelve divisions, each under the rule of a division. The divisions enjoyed a substantial degree of autonomy

which even included limited powers in the administration of justice, collection of revenue, maintenance of law and order, and settlement of crown land. There exists however a fear that the creation of Provincial Councils may result in swamping the linguistic, religious and cultural aspirations of the Sinhalese community in the Kandyan provinces and in the Eastern province. The decision arrived at by consensus at the All Party Conference to grant citizenship to all Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka, other than those who are to be repatriated to India, has aggravated these fears. But an examination of the ethnic composition of the provinces will reveal that these fears are exaggerated. Given below are the approximate figures for the ethnic ratio in the provinces, taken from the 1981 Census published by the Ministry of Plan Implementation. The figures given for the percentages of Tamils include also all Indian Tamils in the island; (even those who will be eventually be repatriated to India).

Ethnic Composition in the Provinces (percentages)

Province	Sinhalese	Tamils	Muslims
(national ethnic ratio)	(74)	(18)	(8)
Northern	3	92	5
North Central	91	2	7
Eastern	27	40	33
Central	66	26	8
Sabaragamuva	86	11	3
Uva	76	20	4
North Western	90	3	7
Western	86	7	7
Southern	95	2	3

Vietnam . . .

(Continued from page 17)

the world and that it is extremely unlikely that Washington will ever regain its overwhelming dominance of the two decades following War II. U. S. troops have intervened well over 45 times in Central America, 11 times in Nicaragua alone, from 1850 to the present, since the Western Hemisphere was considered our proper sphere of influence, "our backyard", and we could do with it as we pleased. From 1949 to 1969, Washington greatly expanded such interventions, as the U. S. intervened militarily

Accordingly even if all the Indian Tamils in the island are given Sri Lankan citizenship (we know very well that only part will be given citizenship while the rest are to be repatriated) the Sinhalese will be an overwhelming majority in seven provinces including the Kandyan provinces. The result being that the Sinhalese will rule seven provinces while the Tamils will rule one province. The Eastern province will be ruled by all three communities, which would be an example to the rest of the country in the exercise of power sharing.

A genuine devolution of power to the provinces, within the framework of a unitary state, appears to be the only hope for the survival of our country as a nation state. It is the failure to achieve this much needed unity in diversity that has resulted in the current agony of Sri Lanka. Whether we are able to overcome this dilemma and usher in a new era of peace and prosperity depends much on the wisdom and courage of our leaders and the loyalty and patience of all Sri Lankans.

in the Third World countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America on the average of once every 18 months. In the postwar period, many of the assumptions, attitudes, and policies previously considered most appropriate for Latin America became universalized; the Monroe Doctrine could be extended to anywhere in the world; all areas of the globe became our backyard. Since the 1970s, such interventions, as those in Lebanon, Iran, and Nicaragua, have become much more costly, much more visible, and much less successful.

But U. S. power has diminished not because it has been so vacil-

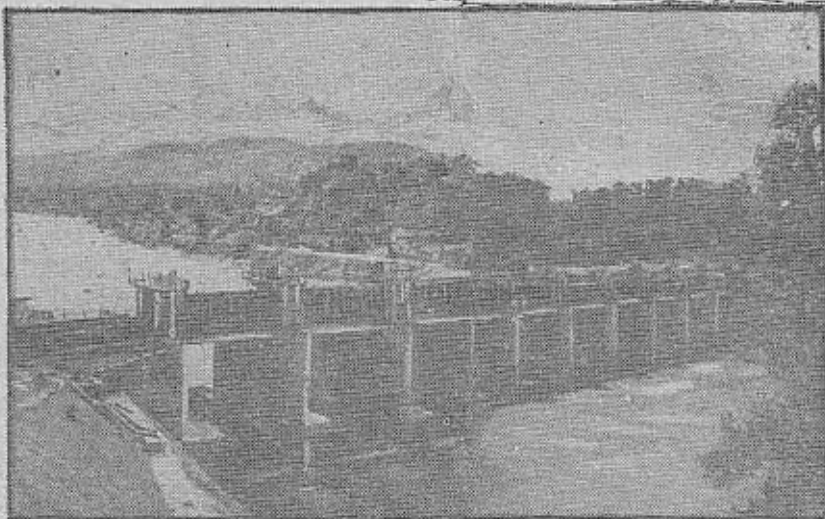
lating and weak, as expressed in the Vietnam syndrome, but primarily because the Third World countries of most of humanity have begun to assert themselves and "to make history." Former victims of racism, colonialism, and class exploitation, the peoples of Latin America, Africa, and Asia are still usually entrapped in neocolonial, imperialist political and economic relations of class exploitation and social oppression. But the direction of history reveals that outside domination and by control the U.S. and other developed powers becomes increasingly difficult to maintain.

In this sense, Vietnam was a watershed, a lesson of history that "invisible wars" were becoming visible, that "limited wars" were becoming unlimited, that big powers must readjust their values and priorities if humankind is to survive. In this sense, Reagan, Kissinger, and others in Washington often hold onto a pre-Vietnam mentality, a determination to rewrite history and undo the lessons of Vietnam, a nostalgia for the good old days when the U. S. had such global hegemony and others feared its might. With their pre-Vietnam (and pre-nuclear) mentality, those with power in Washington, the military, and corporate America are still committed to an escalation of the arms race and to interventionism if this is necessary to maintain or re-establish U. S. imperial power.

At the same time, the contradictions defining such policies are becoming more transparent, and the resistance to such policies is becoming more intense. The Grenada invasion is not the model for the 1980s. Previously Washington could treat large Latin American nations, with vast resources, in the same way it treated the tiny island of Grenada. Today one finds that there simply are not even many Grenadas left. The lessons of the 1980s are more reflected in the difficulty of imposing one's imperial designs on a Lebanon or a Nicaragua or an El Salvador rather than the pre-Vietnam War-type lessons of a Grenada. Those of us who learned the painful, as well as inspiring, lessons of Vietnam must struggle to expose and resist such neocolonial, imperialist policies toward Central America and other areas of the globe.

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improved*



Restore . . .

(Continued from page 3)

...they had been in politics in the time of Mr. Bandaranaike ...they accepted my leadership of a strong anti-UNP force ...against the reactionary elements.

So they picked on me for this undemocratic, unjust, and vindictive punishment because I was the only popular leader they feared and hated.

By depriving me of my civic rights, they robbed the SLFP and the anti-UNP forces of a leader with experience in whom the people throughout the country had enough confidence. They robbed me of my rights to rob the people of leadership. Then in 1982 December after Hector Kobbekaduwe got such a huge vote in spite of my not campaigning for him because I had no rights, they went one step further. They robbed all the voters of their rights for another six years, and also several lakhs of youth who would have been able to vote in 1983.

That is my answer to your question. I can't accept a pardon for a crime I didn't commit, and I can't take advantage of the situation because I must think of the millions who were also deprived of their civic rights for no crime they committed. Except the so-called Naxalite plot. Does anybody believe that plot...? Does anybody here or in the world outside believe that Naxalites would have controlled the SLFP and come to Parliament? Do the UNP leaders believe that?

The vote was given to us by our foreign rulers, the British ...now our own rulers have stolen that vote from our people. They did not commit a crime. Let them also be granted a free pardon.

THE DEVELOPMENT SET

1. Excuse me my friends, I must catch the next jet
I am off to join Sri Lanka's Casino-Development Set,
My bags are packed and my blood is now hot
I carry travellers cheques and letters to big-shots.
2. Lanka's Development Set thinks they are bright and noble
They claim they are always national and global,
And although they move with the robber baron classes,
They feign great love for the crawling masses.
3. In the Tourist hotels of this dharmista nation
Expatriates discuss Mudalalification of the Corporation,
The injustices I detest seem easy to protest
Because Sri Lanka has become a seething hot-bed of social unrest.
4. They discuss malnutrition over imported steaks
And talk of hunger during short coffee breaks,
Whether wet zone floods or Dry zone droughts
They face these issues with open mouths.
5. They bring in foreign Consultant whose circumlocation
prompt them to obstruct every solution,
Thus guaranteeing rounds of regular good eating
By showing the need for the next meetings.
6. Foreign experts believe it no crime
to borrow your watch to tell you the time,
The money spent on seems fully justified
Who think of the jobs they later provide.
7. The Development set has its own spun language
that stretches the Alphabet like a German Sausage,
they use such swell words like epigenetic
Though many don't even know their Arithmetic.
8. Perhaps it a pleasure to be esoteric
It is so intellectually atmospheric,
And though their Establishment never gets moved
Their vocabularies and documentaries get thoroughly improved.
9. When the high sounding talk keeps you mum
Reduce your shame to a minimum,
Then comes the time to show you too are intelligent
Smugly ask the question "Is this true development"?
10. Or say, that's fine in practice — but don't you see
It doesn't work out in theory!
A few may find this incomprehensible
But more will admire you as deep or sensible.
11. Development Set homes are extremely chic
Full of carvings, Curios, and drinking parties hectic.
Eye level photographs subtly assure
That the host is at home with both rich and poor.
12. Enough of these verses — on with the mission!
The task is as broad as the human condition!
Just pray God that the biblical promise will always be true,
"The poor ye shall have always with you".

(With apologies to the unknown author)

— Dr. Mervyn D. De Silva
Former — Advisor, Ministry of Plan
Implementation.

WOMANFILMS II

Sunila Abeysekera

The International Women's Film Forum was one of the most significant features of the UN End of the Decade of Women Conference NGO Forum held in Nairobi Kenya in July 1985. Organised by Harbourfront and the National Film Board of Canada, it offered a wide range of audio-visual presentations. The films were by women, about women, for women; many of them were exposures of the extent of oppression affecting women in Third World countries; following poor women in their day-to-day lives in Peru, Senegal, Egypt or India, the films clearly depicted the similarities in their lives which over-rode the cultural and other differences.

Of special interest were the number of films describing women's attempts to organise themselves, in the case of some, it was manifested in labour struggles, agitation for better wages and decent working conditions; in the case of others, especially women in Third world countries living under repressive regimes, it was a more overtly political struggle for human rights, equality and social justice.

Two films in the latter category were especially remarkable. One was a film from El Salvador, 'El Camino de la libertad' (The path to freedom), made by the Cinematographic Institute of Revolutionary El Salvador. Made in 1983, the film was shot in documentary style. It followed a group of revolutionary fighters in El Salvador over a period of a few months, documenting all aspects of their lives. We saw the general terrain of this small Central American country; we saw its people, living amidst desperate poverty; we saw the group of guerillas moving through the jungles, discussing and planning an attack on a nearby town; and we witnessed the actual attack itself. It was like a regular thriller — only this time it was for real and those boys up there on the screen were not running for cover because they sought the tinselly glamour of filmstardom but because they were committed to a life and death struggle to free their country from its oppressors. The camera ran with them, ducked for cover with them.

At one point there was a big explosion and for a second the

lens was smoked over. There was retaliatory fire from the armed forces of the state and finally, we saw the ignominious surrender of the state militia. More incredibly, we saw the state re-establish control of the town a few days later; the military commander summoned all the townspeople to the square for a session of interrogation (and intimidation); a brutal massacre of young civilian boys 'suspected' of helping the guerillas followed, summary 'justice' and a warning to all those in the town! Amidst the heart-rending wails of mothers and wives, the camera panned slowly over the bodies piled up in the square — most of them of young boys hardly 18 years old.

From here on the film moved on to a different level. It followed the guerillas through the process of building up their cadre and maintaining training programmes in the jungle. In El Salvador, due to constant military action, much of the countryside has been rendered uninhabitable and many peasants now live in the jungles. We saw the guerillas enter these 'villages in the jungle'. They were greeted with affection and respect; whatever food was available was shared with them; when they left, a few of the young people invariably accompanied them. The El Salvadorean people were shown as fervently devout adherents of the Catholic faith, and it was particularly interesting to note the manner in which the guerillas did not attack this religiosity but, rather, used it to their own ends. In fact, the priests among them — and there were quite a few — conducted baptismal and marriage ceremonies in the thick jungle, with interlocking trees providing the canopy and birdsong the music.

Is someone going to ask — but what about the women? Go ahead. The most striking feature of this film was that from the very start,

HOPKINSING

Drive all speech

Before you, like sheep

Words, four-footed, recalcitrant

Into form—

Into lines of sentences

Mass of muscular passages

O white, woolly, bleating

What part, what whole of meaning.

— Patrick Jayasuriya

there were women shown involved in every aspect of the struggle — in training, in combat, in recruiting, in conscientizing — but they were never picked out as being special.

It was only an occasional shot of the battle fatigues which dwelt on the soft curves of a breast or a close shot which showed a pair of ear-rings gleam, that drove the participation of women in this struggle home.

In the second part of the film, attention was focussed on the developing relationship between a young guerilla couple. In between scenes of training and indoctrination programmes, the girl was interviewed in depth — about her initiation into the guerilla movement, her family, her feelings about her life and about the future. We followed her to her home, saw her together with her family, watched her interact with other comrades, both men and women; we heard her speak of herself within the struggle and her perception of the role of women in such a situation. Quite understandably, it had its limitations specific to the context but the film was very positive regarding the possibilities of building a new social order within which all hierarchies based on domination, including sex-based structures favouring the male, would be torn down.

At times, in this part of the film, the visual imagery became almost 'too' romantic — the young girl, and, later on, the couple, were viewed against breathtakingly beautiful shots of green mountains, misty valleys and flowing rivers, their faces alight with smiles as they discussed their future. Yet, the khaki green of their uniform and the very specificities of the future they beheld together belied this superficial 'softness'. And that was the significance of this film — that it was about the struggle of a people fighting to free their society of domination and injustice but, more, that it gave us an insight into the other, more human face of such a bloody battle. At the end of the film was a list of

names — of comrades who had died in the struggle during the weeks the film was made. Many of the names were familiar to us because we had encountered them at one stage or the other in the film — and an involuntary prayer for the safety and success of those left behind to carry on the struggle left almost everyone's lips as the lights came on in the cinema.

The second film was also from a Central American country, Guatemala. Titled 'Cuando tiemblan les montañas' (when the mountains tremble) it was made by Pamela Yates and Tomas Sigel, in 1983.

In a sense, it is a biographical sketch, the story of one young Guatemalan peasant woman, Rigoberta Menchu. But she is a very special woman. And through her story, one learns of the story of all Guatemalan people — and of their struggle for freedom.

Because the recent struggles in El Salvador and Nicaragua have received broad international attention, the problems of Guatemala have been, to a great extent, ignored by the world's media. This film is most important because

it focusses our eyes on Guatemala and on the atrocities that have been going on there for the last thirty years since the military overthrew the liberal government of Arbenz in 1954. The army, which has controlled the country through this period has engaged in extremely repressive actions against the Guatemalan people until what can actually be termed 'genocide' has taken place. It is no small measure of the extent of the brutalities, that the USE withdrew all aid to Guatemala a few years ago because of human rights violations perpetrated by the Guatemalan state.

The systematic brutalisation and murder of the Indian people of Guatemala the majority — by its 'ladino' (non-Indian minority) military rulers forms the backdrop to the tragic tale of this small country. And there could be no more suitable person than Rigoberta to tell that story.

Stark, full-front shots of Rigoberta, an Indian woman dressed in her traditional costume, appear against a blank black background. She speaks slowly, softly, simply; she begins by talking of the way of the Indian people in Guatemala

STAR WARS

*Wheeling high
This hawk is free
From taint of wanting now — to kill
Doesn't see, what he can see
With unhurried grace, craves not his fill
Twirls music from the strings of cloud
Spirals floating in his cry
Sunlit wisps of vapour lit
The sun stilled blue, to peace allowed
But wisps of song from wind and tree
Freeze in the air, so suddenly.
A Gaunt shadow glides in the creeping chill
Death flicks its fingers ere the kill
Though peace is the Imperial theme
The silent song birds know it means
The meditating satellite
Has got all in and trained its sights.*

— U. Karunatilake

in the past — the scarcity of arable land and other resources, the ways in which they eked out a living in a basically inhospitable environment, their harmonious interaction with each other and with nature. We see such a community, we see the life Rigoberta describes. She speaks of 1954 and its aftermath. We see newsreel shots of that era, showing Arbenz' expulsion and the military take-over. Successive Presidents of the USA are shown, pledging military aid and assistance to the new rulers of Guatemala. Rigoberta speaks of the slow beginnings of a popular resistance to military rule. Indian peasants began organising against the military regime from the late fifties onwards, and the movement has grown until today one could say that almost the entire Indian population of Guatemala is engaged in the battle to preserve themselves and their culture.

The story becomes deeply personalised at this point. Rigoberta has seen her mother and infant brother brutally killed by soldiers; she has lost her siblings to the struggle. She knows that one brother is dead, killed in an encounter with the military; of the other brothers and sisters, she knows nothing. In 1980, a group of peasant activists forcibly occupied several foreign embassies in Guatemala City, the capital of Guatemala, in an attempt to draw world attention to human rights violations and the decimation of the indigenous people. A 'mysterious' fire in the US Embassy, which nobody 'bothered' to put out, entombed a number of militant peasant activists. Among those horribly burnt to death was Vicente Menchu, Rigoberta's father. Once again, this section was illustrated with newsreel footage of the embassy take-overs, the fire, the way in which the soldiers forced people to watch the peasant leaders burn.....

One now looks at Rigoberta through eyes that appreciate the personal tragedies that have filled her life and full of respect and admiration for the determination and strength of this young woman, who, a few years ago, knew

only the Indian dialect particular to her region. Her transformation from an illiterate, impoverished Guatemalan peasant woman into one who has assumed a leading role in the struggle of the Guatemalan people in truly worth honoring. She goes on to speak of the struggle her people are now engaged in; we see guerillas, in action, inside Guatemala. This section is quite like that part of the film from El Salvador which showed the guerillas in the jungle, in training, in contact with peasants.

Finally we have Rigoberta's assertion of her decision, and of the decision of the Guatemalan people, to fight on, confident of their ability to win their struggle.

In both the films, the roles of women in the struggle for national liberation is still perceived within a traditional framework. They do bear arms, but their primary role is that of nursing the sick and wounded and providing 'support' services in action. This is only to be expected, of course, when one considers the socio-economic and cultural background against which these struggles are being waged. Yet, the lessons to be drawn from other revolutionary struggles that have triumphed in the past is plain unless there is a clear understanding of woman's role in society, not only in the actual phase of armed struggle but also in the re-construction of a new society after victory is achieved and consolidated, women will resume their traditionally subordinate position once they lay down their guns. And what is important in both these films is that they expressed an awareness of this problem and demonstrated a willingness to confront the issue of women's equality in its totality.

Letters . . .

(Continued from page 2)

of grammar like Samaranayake's "Practical English." As a textbook belonging to the Traditional Grammar it certainly is far better than any text book of Structural Gram-

mar which derives its insights from psycholinguistic theory of behaviourism. In Transformational Generative Grammar Theory linguists found explanation for what Traditional Grammarians could intuitively lay their fingers on. Hence though Samaranayake's **Practical English** does not meet the requirements of a modern grammar it has its place in the development of indigenous works on the subject. It has to be stated here that denigration of local scholars and to quote from authorities unfamiliar to the average reader is a strategy adopted by the elitist academics who aspire for greatness at the expense of denigration of their own teachers.

Wijitha de Silva

Kandy.

Cat's Eye . . .

(Continued from page 13)

The **Rana Gi** cassette glorifies the state of war in Sri Lanka and makes heroes of males who have entrapped themselves in a vicious cycle of violence and counter-violence. The war is perceived as something to eulogise in song. Male military heroes, and their "supporting" cast of nurturing mothers and admiring wives and lovers, are invoked to condone the insanity of organised male violence. Another pernicious objective of these songs is to define women as an intrinsic part of military society.

Therefore, it is heartening to note that women are challenging these male-fabricated myths that justify hatred and violence. Recently, "Cat's Eye" (L. G. 1/1/85) spotlighted some verses from a feminist anti-war song composed and sung by women who represent the collective voice of sisters, wives and mothers. In the same vein, the organisation, 'Women for Peace' has published a pamphlet in which is juxtaposed the stories of two mothers — one from the North and the other from the South. Their mutually tragic experiences transcend their ethnic "differences".



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