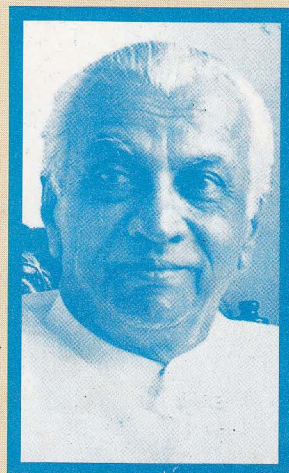


Counterpoint

A 'RAVAYA' PUBLICATION



THE RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD

ISLANDWIDE SALES POINTS FOR *Counterpoint*

ALAWWA	Nandanasiri Stores	Piliyandala	New City
AMBALANGODA	Royal Book Shop	Pitakotte	Pothgula
AMPARAI	Delicia	Ratmalana	Thusitha Book Shop
	Mahajana Picture Palace	Thimbirigasyaya	Missaka Book Shop
ANURADHAPURA	Sathsara	Wellawatte	Windsor Book Shop
BADULLA	Mahinda's		Rohana Book Shop
BALANGODA	Sunil Book Shop		Vivian Traders
BANDARAWELA	Leelasena & Sons	EMBILIPITIYA	Queens Hotel
BATTICALOA	Udeni's	GALLE	New Aradhana Traders
CHILAW	Mayura Book Shop		Vijitha Yapa Book Shop
COLOMBO			Thaksala Nalanda Book Shop
Bambalapitiya	Charles Subasinghe	GAMPAHA	Hema's Book Shop
	Greenlands Hotel		Udaya Stores
	Lanka Traders	GAMPOLA	Davasa Centre
	Liyanage	HAPUTALE	Mallikarachchi & Co.
Battaramulla	Shanthi Vihar	HORANA	Jayathu Hotel
Borella	Pubudusiri Cream House	HIKKADUWA	Coral Garden Hotel
	Madhawa Book Shop	KADUGANNAWA	Daya Traders
	Pushpa Stores	KALUTARA	New Owen Joseph Book Shop
	Ketapatha Prakashana	KANDY	Guneratne Distributors
	Supipi Book Shop		Seevali Book Shop
	Sadeepa Book Shop		Vijitha Yapa Book Shop
Dehiwela	Lakmini Stores		Sithumina Book Shop
Fort	Catholic Book Shop		Malson Book Shop
	Colombo Hilton		Central Book Shop
	Holiday Inn	KULIYAPITIYA	Sastrodaya Book Shop
	Taprobane	KURUNEGALA	Sampath Traders
	Lake House Book Shop	MATARA	Nilmini Stores
	Lanka Oberoi	MATALE	Malaka Traders
	Macillum Book Shop	MIRIGAMA	Gamage Stores
	M.D. Gunasena Book Shop	MONERAGALA	Sumedha Book Shop
	Salaka		Sri Ramya Stores
Union Place	Geethani Grocery	N'ELIYA	Shop No. 3, (Opposite Municipal Council)
Homagama	Perno Stationers	NEGAMBO	Nayana Book Shop, Mahabage
Ja Ela	Srimali Grocery		Nayana Book Shop, Kandana
Kadawata	Jayabima		British Book Center
Kandana	Samanala Book Shop		Negambo Printers
Kiribathgoda	Vijitha Yapa Book Shop		Co-operative Sales Center
Kollupitiya	Malee Book Shop	NITTAMBUWA	Ganga Cool House
	A. Z. N. M. Marikar	PANADURA	Fernando's
Maharagama	Sasiri Book Shop	PILIMATALAWA	Jayasekera Traders
Maradana	Godage Book Shop	PUTTALAM	Lucky Newspaper Agency
	Dayawansa Jayakody	RATNAPURA	Pradeepa Book Shop
	I. P. B. Book Shop	TRINCOMALEE	470, Navy Camp Road
	McCallum Book Shop	VAVUNIYA	Kavidha Stores
Moratuwa	Wijesekera Grocery	VEYANGODA	Somagiri
Nugegoda	National Book Shop	WARAKAPOLA	Ranjith Book Shop
	Sarasavi Book Shop	WELLAWAYA	Suhanda Traders
Pannipitiya	Nimali Book Shop	YAKKALA	Vidyodaya



COVER 5

The UNP in-fighting, continuing Government corruption and its plans for presenting a new face at the forthcoming elections are laid bare. Also included is a candid interview with the party's new General Secretary who has no illusions as to the magnitude of the task ahead.

18 PERSPECTIVE

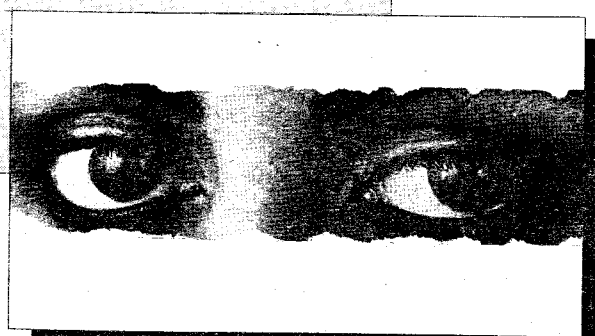
Nelson Mandela has proved himself once again to be a statesman who is above narrow partisan politics. Can we in Sri Lanka not learn from his shining example?

Our columnist discusses possible democratic options for the North-East, while emphasising the plight of the people of the war-torn areas for whom there seems to be no relief in sight.

Richard Simon reviews the two **Platforms** staged so far, using the occasion to comment on the art and science of the talk show.

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Cover
Photograph
Dexter Cruetz

Layout
Asoka Padmasiri

One Man is out, another (*Gentle?*)man is in

There are a number of reasons why one does the right thing. Some of these motivations are so horrendous that they negate the benefit that one's actions have generated. So it is with the entire hype on cleaning up the "underworld". The reason for the arrest and questioning of Soththi Upali has much less to do with his chequered career as a hoodlum than with the fact that his sponsors and benefactors within the party are now in eclipse.

If the logic of the recent arrests is examined carefully, all that takes place in the purge of Upali and his henchmen is the clearing up of space for his rivals (or more precisely, the "supporters" of his sponsor's rivals) to operate over a larger terrain with greater impunity.

Let's not fool ourselves that this is the beginning of an era characterised by a cleaner and more just public life. If that were the case, the questions addressed would have been very different from those that seem to have preoccupied the Government over the past few weeks. For instance, more significant than the fact of Soththi Upali's heinous personal history is the collective culpability of the UNP Government who not merely had (have?) him in their Executive Committee while all these atrocities were allegedly being committed, but who had, to add insult to injury, appointed him to the Reserve Police Force.

In fact, in one newspaper account Soththi Upali is quoted as saying that he is "one of the President's men", a claim that was never refuted and must stand by default, at least. There can be no gainsaying of Soththi Upali's

long-standing association with the Government: this fact is even less in doubt than the allegations of criminality against him. It appeared that these twin responsibilities meshed well together, and, in fact, the latter was the reason for his indispensability in the former. Why, then, was there this sudden parting of the ways? Only one answer can stand up to any scrutiny.

Thus, Upali's connections with certain ruling politicians and not his alleged contract-killings brought about his downfall. Is this, then, not a sad indictment of our political culture, of the system of values and norms by which we live in this country today?

The irony of a situation where there is a supposed purge of corruption and violence in this nation, and that the UNP is now putting on a new honest face, is almost unbearable when one considers the re-entry of Gamini Dissanayake and a host of others to the inner sanctum of power. Dr. Wijesekera, the UNP's brand new General Secretary says in this context that "people change" [see Interview], but we're not so sure. Our sense -- and we hope to be proved wrong, just once at least -- is that people like that don't change except when it is profitable to do so. In this sense, of course, some people change all the time, from pro-UNP to anti-UNP, from anti-Premadasa to not-so-anti-Premadasa to pro-Premadasa to whatever is expedient. Yet, do systematically and deliberately dishonest people change overnight into "gentlemen" of honour? No more, in our view, than hired killers and the hirers of killers become victims or martyrs. ■

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A recently activated economic policy was the liberalisation of motor vehicles which essentially reduced restrictive motor vehicle procedures and specifications, towards a more "liberalised" format (simplifying the permit system and the tariff structure). In consumer terms, prices of certain private motor vehicles have thereby been reduced more than public transport type motor vehicles. And the sermon of sustainable development intertwined with the national NIC dream continues... So one must consider, in an effort to increase social productivity to reach "NIC status", does an increase in private vehicles in the present socio-economic context facilitate this intended objective?

Admittedly road transport is an integral part of economic development, where labour, inputs and products are kept effectively mobile to facilitate the efficient production and distribution of the social product. Over 80 percent are of passenger traffic, mostly by bus, and 80 percent of freight traffic, account for highway transport. However, most of the highway system consists of old roads designed to carry neither the traffic volume nor the vehicle weights now imposed on the system, and is in serious need of improved maintenance and rehabilitation. Considering the socio-economic significance of the road transport system to the economic infrastructure, the present import liberalisation reform seems pre-mature, more likely misguided, inappropriate and constraining.

In an optimistic economic rationality, the present economic costs of liberalisation policy is to be reimbursed, offset, by an imminent increase in productivity and economic

growth. Nevertheless, it is a policy that has currently increased dependency on imported capital, technology and energy consumption. In this pretentious "green" restructuring, it is a policy to

about 10 times higher than in industrialized countries.

While a private vehicle may afford comfort and convenience, it indirectly restrains the mobility of a majority, less fortunate, who

the expense of a marginalised majority.

It is here that we need to focus on the critical traffic threshold in a limiting highway system where private modes of transportation begin to

Cars, Buses and a "Green" NIC

accelerate the consumption of imported fuel (a subsidized, non-renewable resource), adding to the negative trade bill, elusively reinstating the inevitable "restructuring". Consequently, foreign aid and expensive foreign consultants are engaged in various transport projects, from road rehabilitation to road passenger transport, to facilitate the "green" NIC destination.

Increasing private vehicles, increases the burden of an already neglected highway maintenance and rehabilitation expense. Delays due to congestion, road maintenance, etc., restrain and distort the expected increases in social productivity. The present average increase in vehicle operating costs, due to congestion, represent a major economic cost. In the existing horde of mixed traffic (pedestrians, animal and human drawn carts, bicycles, three-wheelers, loose livestock), increased motorized transport combined with lack of driver discipline inherently escalate traffic accidents, and the loss of life and limb. Time spent in hospitals, courts and garages also add on to the disutilities experienced as a result of inflated traffic. The recently highlighted accident rate, even in this motorization-low country, is considered

are condemned to travel by bus. For the small percentage that can afford private cars, there is a majority (over 90 percent of all urban travel) in Sri Lanka that must depend on the public transport system. Time wasted away waiting to commute and commuting, in addition to overloaded, unsafe buses, depict a degenerate collective transport system and a waste, a disutility, of human resources. The physical and mental drain of energy, commuting in an overcrowded bus over an extended period of time, not to mention the negative health effects of toxic exhaust fumes that deteriorate the efficiency of a worker, all have become a decadent normalcy for a majority.

The inadequacy of the present bus transport service to meet the travel needs of the public is obvious. These inadequacies which have been associated with shortage of buses and unavailability of many of those in the fleet, and other impediments to passenger travel should have been the key focus of import liberalisation. While the "liberalisation" strategy of a self-supporting, self-regulating, efficient bus industry is in the free-market Master Plan, implemented policy has defied any notion of practical, responsible restructuring, subsidizing a privileged few at

diminish the general efficiency of road transportation, an avoidable limitation which affects the efficient social production process and the overall quality of life.

On the positive side of the latest reform, the administrative over-burden and inefficiencies associated with the permit system and a complicated tariff structure will release resources towards more productive activities to continue to facilitate the growth of the private sector. Possibly various marginal monetary gains could also be expected as an outcome of the widened base in the number of motor vehicles contributing to an increased collection of road user charges (taxes, license and registration fees and duties).

In a more critical view, relaxing duty charges implies reduction of government revenue. A shortage of funds which has already restrained improvement of roads and bridges, and efficient maintenance and management practices. In effect, the pronounced implication of the reform is the accelerated addition of motor vehicles on an already a congested highway system, and considering the tendency, mostly in the mode of petrol consuming motorcycles and private cars.

Since the banner of

sustainable development has been emphasised in this market transition, the ecological and cultural impact of increased motor vehicles on a limited, battered, highway system needs further examination. The adverse environmental impact resulting from a distorted road transportation re depicted in the form of increased noise, dust and air pollution along with susceptibility of flooding by road-side dwellers.

An increase in motor vehicle use is inevitable, but far more emphasis must be placed on prompting and implementing an efficient mass transport system, that can effectively reduce inequity of transportation, dependence on non-renewable resources and the negative ecological impact on our living space. All segments of society must be sensitized, especially of the well-off, toward the notion of sustainability, as an injunction to preserve the productive capacity of this society through sensible economic practice in the present.

The slogans of "green" development have failed to translate into practical terms mainly as a repercussion of subordinating collective equity to the myopic, compulsive drive for economic growth. Inefficient infrastructure is a key component of the economic maldevelopment, ecological degradation and cultural disarticulation that is already set on course. The thick layer of the market which promotes conspicuous consumption, demonstration of wealth, status, BMWs and Mercedes, must be revealed and registered for its degenerate effects on a productive social arrangement and on reconstructing an ethical, social conscience.

Interrelated to this distortion

in current motor transport is the misconceived comparison of freedom of movement with ones' claim on propulsion. Thus, one is content with his/her mode of personal motorized transport over the freedom to travel in any part of the island, including the North and East. The freedom of movement is narrowly defined as motorized access to a "safe" destination as a consumer rather than enabling social conditions that provided the liberty of unrestricted movement as a citizen.

A critical aspect of conspicuous consumption is the fetishism of high energy, high speed, capital-intensive mode of transportation over the self-powered, labour-intensive mode, such as the bicycle. The personal mobility offered by the bicycle uses less space; by limiting travel speeds, protects against risk and paralysis to limbs; reduces costly dependence on a non-renewable sources of energy; lowers negative impact on the road system; and creates a more ecologically sound relationship with our living space. Given the predicament of social inequity, it is the bicycle that should have been promoted as a form of private transportation especially directed towards the masses. But, even a bicycle is a luxury for most in rural areas while the privileged in urban areas float around in luxury automobiles. In the enchanted world of high-tech, and progressively paralysing speed, rather than blaming the suicidal middle-class family of four on a motorcycle, one must critically examine the constraining social conditions and distorted policy reforms, that have compelled the not so well-off to take such self-limiting, mind-numbing risks. ■

Jinendra Basnayake

A celebration of the fallen

The recent debacles both on land and sea in the war in the North and East are merely the inevitable consequences of a lack of coherent and decisive policy and an end-plan strategy in the pursuit of the war in the North. In view of the recent pronouncements made by the President and the changes in the Army structure and operational control, it appears that at last some effective steps are being taken to render the LTTE impotent, and return the East and North ready for democracy. The nation now awaits with bated breath for the successful outcome.

The past disasters and horrible losses would have had a deleterious effect on the morale of the forces. This will not diminish in the future either, given the kamikaze decisiveness of the LTTE in pursuit of their fascist objectives. It is in this context that I would like to suggest to the nation the idea of 'Rites of National Mourning' to commemorate the dead, to extol the wounded in action, to assuage the remorse of those families devastated by the ravages of war, to encourage our forces at the war front and to express the solidarity, the commitment and the affirmation of the nation that its democracy and unity will be defended by all means at the disposal of the nation.

The recent ready response by the youth for war service is an unequivocal demonstration by them of their readiness to sacrifice their life and limb for the preservation of the country. It is therefore time that the country at large expressed its appreciation, and responded by instituting this celebration in every village and town.

It would be truly a celebration of the bravery of men who fought so that the others could live and die in peace. Such a solemn remembrance celebration does not require tamashas and money. It should be a national affair to demonstrate to the LTTE and the world at large the cohesive unity of the nation. After all, many Tamils, Burghers, Sinhalese, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Muslims, both as service personnel and civilians, have died at the hands of the LTTE. Their sacrifices should be the new foundation stones of a resolute nation.

I hope the NGOs in this field will engender the forces which will lead to this national event. Such an event should not be allowed to be hijacked by the politicians to enhance their own interests. ■

Durrand Appuhamy

Surrey, UK

The Return of the living dead

(& the return of others over his dead body)

President Premadasa who was unceremoniously relegated to the dungheap of history by the very parasites who had fawned their way into power in his heyday, has now been just as unceremoniously reinstated for the same rotten reasons. In fact, the ceremonies that marked Mr. Premadasa's first death anniversary became the site of the petty display of his family's pique, of Mr. Wijetunga's guilt-ridden fear of a snub, and of the old lackeys jockeying shamelessly for kudos. President Premadasa dead became, for a moment or two, almost as powerful as President Premadasa alive. To a UNP looking for reasons for its electoral defeat in the South, the "Premadasa legacy" has become a catch-phrase and a panacea that will herd gullible voters back to the fold. To Mrs. Premadasa and her children, "it's now or never" to bargain for a slice of the pie. To Sirisena Cooray the return of Premadasa represents possibly the only hope of salvage from another dungheap, recently unearthed, that thrived for decades beneath the social surface.

If we cannot with Shakespeare say that "nothing in his life became him like the leaving it," we can certainly echo the classic film in which the return of the dead proved to be much more horrible to the living than their worst fears had conjured up. None of the late President's atrocities can be wished away by this "reincarnation", nor is it conceivable that the people have such short memories. Moreover, the change of heart of the Wijetunga administration is so transparently self-seeking, that it will hoodwink nobody. The UNP has been able to fool itself that reviving the Premadasa's legacy will ensure them victory at the forthcoming election. The only legacy

that the general public is aware of is one of murder, mayhem, civil war, corruption, censorship, poverty, nepotism, and all-round abuse of power. Perhaps, the intricate web of tactics and strategies of staying in power perfected by Mr. Premadasa is what President Wijetunga and his men are looking to emulate, and this is, literally, a deadly thought. For instance, neither Mr. J. R. Jayewardene nor Mr. Premadasa would have had any problem about finding MPs who were only too "willing" to resign in favour of the President's man, though the stench surrounding the chosen nominee in this case would make even the most confirmed of necrophiliacs gag in disgust.

One must not forget that many of the innovations of Mr. Premadasa are exactly opposed to the UNP General Secretary's much-publicised move to make politics a "gentlemanly" pursuit. The utter sexism and classism of this pronouncement notwithstanding, it is a euphemism for curbing "corruption, bribery, nepotism and ... violence" [see interview in this issue] within the party. What is important, however, is the fact that at last someone in power has admitted what the rest of the country has known for 17 long years, but the actions of the last few weeks point to the near impossibility of finding a remedy for the sickness that afflicts the UNP.

The irresistible rise of Mr. Soththi Upali and his incidental fall out of favour as a direct result of the vicissitudes of power are mirrored today by the resisted rise (second coming ?) of Mr. Gamini Dissanayake over the "resurrected" dead body of his sometime arch-foe Mr. Premadasa. One Man is out, another (gentle?) man is in, but the game is still the same, and that certainly isn't cricket! ■

UNP Succession Stakes

With almost the entire UNP coming to the conclusion that President Wijetunga will lose the next presidential election, the battle to become the next party leader has already commenced. The internal battle in the UNP is not only a battle between the Premadasa faction and the DB/Gamini faction but also one in which individuals seek to be in a position to win the leadership if and when Wijetunga loses the election or if the party decides to dump the President at the eleventh hour. Due to the absence of a clear successor or a nationally recognised personality, the battle for control is going to be bitter and hard fought.



Ranil Wickremasinghe

The 45 year old Prime Minister is undoubtedly the principal contender. His succession would also be the most convenient in terms of the hierarchy in that he is the Deputy Leader of the Party and next in line in governmental rank.

However, his major drawbacks are his colourless personality and, ironically, his reputation for financial honesty. The UNP -- from the grassroots to the highest in the hierarchy -- see political power as a way of getting rich quickly. They would not want a party leader who would crack down on corruption. The Prime Minister although considered intelligent, hard-working and competent, is also perceived as

arrogant, shy, aloof, not particularly popular and as having an uninspiring speaking style and personality. The electoral setback in Hambantota in the last Southern Provincial Council election will further damage his reputation.

However, he has been very careful not to alienate any section of the party, staying above the bitter factional fighting between the Wijetunga group and the Premadasa clan. Yet, his chances would greatly diminish with the entry of Gamini Dissanayake whom he has tried hard to keep out of the UNP. With Mr. Dissanayake's entry, the Prime Minister's influence within the party would be reduced greatly and the exit of Sirisena Cooray from the General Secretary's post (his ally in the party to keep Dissanayake out) could turn out to be the end of his ambition to become the President, at least in the short term.

Mr. Dissanayake for his part would not forget Wickremasinghe's role in keeping him in the political wilderness for so long and would want to cut the Prime Minister down to size as soon as he is in a position to do so.

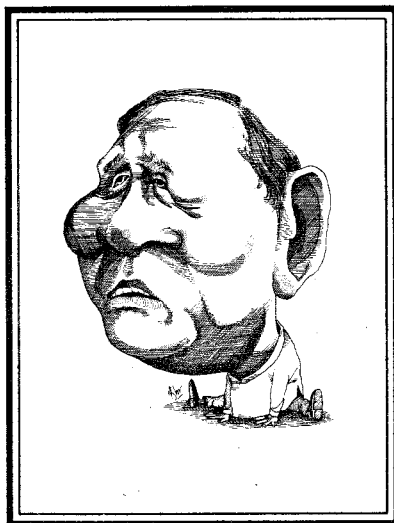
Gamini Dissanayake

The 51 year old ex-Cabinet Minister and the leader of the UNP for a short time, is the favourite of some UNP



old-timers who prefer to think of the attempted impeachment and post-impeachment politics as an aberration. Among younger MPs and the UNP's grassroots leadership too Mr. Dissanayake has some support. He does have the advantage of once being a major political figure, of having a good speaking style and of affecting a personable nature. His ability to move freely among all sections of the people and his ability to charm those he wants to win over will be major advantages over Mr. Wickremasinghe. However, his many political summersaults since 1991 have left him with a reputation for desperate opportunism and an obsession with searching for the shortest cut to the top which so far has eluded him and, therefore, he is saddled with an immense credibility problem. Also, the Premadasa faction will do anything to keep him out. His reputation for corruption would be another incentive among the UNPers. If the UNP decides to dump the President, Dissanayake can be counted on to back such a move if he is the replacement. In the case of a UNP defeat, the party would calculate that Mr. Dissanayake would overcome the negative aspects of his reputation in the six years in the opposition. But they would also have reservations about Mr. Dissanayake's ability to bring together and rebuild the party after an electoral defeat. His biggest problem, however, would be to overthrow Mr. Wickremasinghe who will automatically become party leader when President Wijetunga loses

the presidential election. Mr. Dissanayake's first priority once he enters Parliament and the Cabinet would be to topple Wickremasinghe and take up the number two slot in the party.



Sirisena Cooray

In view of the overwhelming consensus within the UNP after its Southern disaster that it must fully embrace the Premadasa legacy, some contended that the most credible exponent of Premadasa politics would be the late President's closest political disciple and friend, the Minister of Housing, Construction and Urban Development and General Secretary of the UNP. However, Mr. Cooray's attempts to project himself as the successor to Premadasa's legacy has been hotly contested by the late President's family. His position within the UNP has weakened after losing the internal battle with President Wijetunga to such an extent that Mr. Cooray is now in the political wilderness. Certainly, Mr. Cooray demonstrated himself to be a very good organiser during the 1988 and 1989 elections. However, some of the UNP leaders give credit even for this to the late Ranjan Wijeratne for putting together the UNP's powerful organisational structure. They see Mr. Cooray more as a man without any ideas of his own, who was only capable of carrying out President Premadasa's instructions. He was targeted by the

Wijetunga-Dissanayake combine as the principal obstacle to their plan to take over the UNP. He will continue to be the most convenient scapegoat for all the UNP atrocities and lapses.



Anura Bandaranaike

There are those in the UNP who, after watching his energetic campaigning in the South and the immense enthusiasm with which he was greeted at UNP meetings (an enthusiasm often greater than for the President or the Prime Minister) contend that it takes a Bandaranaike to stop a Bandaranaike and see him as a possible Prime Minister designate under Wijetunga or any other UNP candidate in the next Presidential election. Those who believe that a strong nationally-accepted figure is necessary to campaign with Wijetunga feel that he should be designated as PM and be made the running mate in the campaign. However, many in the UNP in the Premadasa, old-guard, Ranil Wickremasinghe and Dissanayake tribes would not accept an Anura Bandaranaike candidacy. In any event, Mr. Bandaranaike has made no secret of the fact that he would be most comfortable being running mate (as candidate for Prime Minister) to his **old** friend Ranil Wickremasinghe. He has also let it be known that he will back his **new** friend Sirisena Cooray

for the Prime Ministership instead of himself, should the latter indicate a willingness to accept. This has made him many enemies in the Wijetunga/Dissanayake camp and as long as they are in control of the party Mr. Bandaranaike would not rise higher than a mere cabinet minister.

Anura Bandaranaike has the greater advantage of being a national figure and an astute speaker on the platform (which is where it counts in an election) as well as in Parliament. But he would be unable to credibly identify himself with the Premadasa development and socio-political agenda which could be crucial to the victory of the UNP. On the other hand, his good relations with minority politicians could help.



Mrs. Hema Premadasa

Her ambitions are well known. She sees herself as the natural successor to the Premadasa legacy and believes that she should lead her husband's party, citing the example of Mrs. Bandaranaike. She would not be happy being a mere cabinet minister and would stake her claim for the party leadership at the first opportunity. She can count on most of the Premadasa wing in the UNP, but is yet to prove her capabilities as a campaigner. At the worst she would bide her time to push her son Sajith, who also has political ambitions, forward. ■

UNP Self-destruction Wijetunga-style



Even one hour before the fateful bomb explosion in Armour Street on 1st May 1993 which killed President Premadasa, his Prime Minister, D.B. Wijetunga was a man Sri Lanka did not take seriously. Mr. Wijetunga was a favourite joke among people of all

classes, who enjoyed hugely the stories of his amazing faux pas, his astonishing ignorance of basic facts, and even his apparent capacity to fall asleep in the midst of a conversation. True to the sycophantic nature of Sri Lankan society, with his elevation to the Presidency such stories about

D.B. Wijetunga came to a rapid halt. Instead, a new spate of stories began doing the rounds, that he was an exceedingly shrewd and firm leader who had intelligently bided his time, that he was a genial and democratic President who would bring to public life an openness which had not existed under his self-willed and autocratic predecessors. Indeed, very soon Colombo society which had had such fun inventing appropriate terms for his initials began reporting enthusiastically that the D.B. in Mr. Wijetunga's name stood for 'Doing Bloody Well'.

On the 24th March 1994, the people of the Southern Province changed all that. Suddenly all classes of society are moving rapidly back to their original assessment. Following the landslide defeat in the South many UNPers too have woken up to this fact triggering off an internal power struggle unprecedented in the UNP since the early 50s following the death of D.S. Senanayake.

Shortly after his appointment the UNP hierarchy who saw Wijetunga as a stop-gap leader and were looking for other options came up with two possible scenarios. One was to adopt as the UNP's Presidential candidate a more electable person than President Wijetunga. The other was to abolish the executive presidency and return to a Parliamentary system in which the personality of a party leader would not be as crucial as in a presidential system. However, all calculations went haywire when President Wijetunga changed his mind and decided that he wanted another term after all. Knowing full well that he was on thin-ice and if given time the UNP leadership will find a consensus candidate to replace him, President Wijetunga forced the UNP to accept his candidacy at the end of last year, a full year before the election. This is where Mr. Sirisena Cooray who led the anti-Wijetunga wing blundered. He happily went along with nominating Wijetunga as candidate to block any attempts by the anti-Premadasa wing of the party to nominate Gamini Dissanayake as the candidate.

Soon after, President Wijetunga also dropped the idea of substantially changing the constitution. After flirting with constitutional reform of a wholly marginal and for the most part unacceptable character (except the proposed reforms on the electoral system) the UNP now seems to have reconciled itself to maintaining the status quo vis-a-vis the Presidential system.

On 24th March all the UNP's chickens came home to roost. The principal argument of senior UNP Ministers was that Mr. Wijetunga lacked the stature of his predecessors. In the thirty four years since 1960 the UNP has had three leaders before President Wijetunga. Dudley Senanayake, J.R. Jayewardene and Ranasinghe Premadasa. They were very different personalities, and each led the UNP according to his own distinctive style, but it is overwhelmingly obvious that each of them was a major national figure before obtaining the leadership as well as subsequently, in a way that President Wijetunga **was** and **is, not**.

The President's difficulties, however, have now been compounded. It is not merely the fact that a less well known and less attractive personality may have to contend with a better known (in the case of both Mrs. Bandaranaike and Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge) and more attractive personality (in the case of Mrs. Kumaratunge). President Wijetunga has also shown himself to be an exceedingly poor political strategist.

Whether one loved him or loathed him (and usually it was the one thing or the other) one cannot but acknowledge Ranasinghe Premadasa to have been a major national figure and a consummate political strategist. He knew that a majority of the votes in Sri Lanka lay in rural areas where economic issues, as they affected the daily lives of underprivileged people, predominated. For them he offered a mixture of bringing enterprise and industry to the village, welfarism with fanfare as in the housing programmes, rural development schemes, Janasaviya etc. It did not really matter

that less than what was promised was delivered. His publicity experts went on the premise that the bigger the lie the more people believe it and spent more money on tamashas than on the programmes themselves. But

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Premadasa calculated that a sizeable section of the urban constituency would remain faithful as long as the opportunities generated by the market economy, consumerism and the hope of improved standards of living could be maintained. To round this off, and make victory certain for the UNP, he built up a formidable coalition of the ethnic minorities. President Premadasa was on closer terms with the CWC leader S. Thondaman than any previous leader. His wooing of the Muslim Congress leader M.H.M. Ashraff had been the one factor that gave him victory in the closely fought and violent Presidential Election of December 1988. He successfully drove a wedge between the LTTE and the ex-militants the TELO, DPLF, EROS, (EDF) and the ENDLF Member of Parliament Mr. K. Sirinivasam, Mr. Thondaman, Mr. Ashraff and many of the Tamil politicians played a crucial role in support of President Premadasa during the attempted impeachment. There can be little doubt that they delivered to President Premadasa a substantial quantum of votes in the areas of their influence.

All this his successor has been oblivious to. Indeed it is perhaps likely that he is unaware of just how important the support of the ethnic minorities is for the victory of the UNP. In both the Presidential Election

of 1988 and the Parliamentary election of 1989, the proportion of votes polled was highest in the Provinces in which the CWC had the most influence Nuwara Eliya, Matale and Badulla. In the Nuwara Eliya District, the area where the CWC has its greatest concentration of support, the UNP-CWC alliance has obtained over 60% of the vote in **every** election from 1988 (the Presidential election of 1988, the Parliamentary Election of 1989, the Local Election of 1991 and the Provincial Election of 1993). In every district where the CWC has strong support -- Nuwara Eliya, Matale, Kandy, Badulla, Ratnapura, Kegalle - the UNP-CWC list obtained over 50% of the vote at **every** electoral contest since 1988 (and even before). In the Presidential Election of 1982 President J.R. Jayewardene obtained 47.60% of the vote in the Eastern Province and 45.2% of the vote in Vavuniya. In the Presidential Election of 1988, President Premadasa obtained 50.1% of the vote in the Eastern Province and 48.5% of the vote in Vavuniya. In contrast, at the recent local election in the Eastern Province and Vavuniya, although the UNP performed reasonably in the border villages, it obtained only 36.7% of the vote in the East and 23.4% of the vote in Vavuniya. Holding other votes constant, this decline in the Eastern Province and Vavuniya is itself sufficient to deny victory to the UNP at a Presidential election.

The votes of the ethnic minorities, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher, elsewhere in the country, largely belonged to the UNP corner at the Presidential Elections of 1982 and 1988 and indeed in Parliamentary Elections whether in 1977 or 1989. The extent to which the minorities have been antagonised by the racist and inept politics of President Wijetunga should not be under-estimated. First he attacked the CWC leader Mr. Thondaman and humiliated him by encouraging a disloyalty in the CWC ranks and even ordered the arrest of his grandson and political heir Mr. Arumugam Thondaman, a piece of unparalleled political stupidity which has not only irreparably damaged the UNP's

relations with the Indian Tamil Community but also pushed another minority towards radicalism in the long term. Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe's intervention on behalf of Mr. Thondaman somewhat eased the situation. Then the President sought to build up Mr. Sellasamy as an alternative leader of the Indian Tamils not realising that when confronted with a choice between Mr. Thondaman and Mr. Sellasamy, the latter would not be able to command any degree of confidence. Now that he has been humiliated in the South, now belatedly when he has discovered that Mr. Sellasamy is a horse that will not run, the President has shamefacedly met Mr. Thondaman to whom he arrogantly refused an appointment for many months. Thus, in his current electoral and, hence, political desperation, has so debased himself that he has kissed Mr. Thondaman's hand and begged forgiveness! His hostility to the minorities and his apocalyptic pronouncements that the Sinhalese will have to jump into the sea as a consequence of a rapacious advance of vicious minorities, has, not surprisingly, antagonised many of them who have been life-long UNP supporters but have now declared they will not vote for him for the presidency. In the Southern Provincial Council election, the defeat of a former UNP Provincial Minister whose base was among the Muslims of Galle and who had won comfortably in 1988 and in 1993, as well as the sharp fall of the Indian Tamil votes for the UNP in Deniyaya and Bentara-Elpitiya amply demonstrate how disastrous was Mr. Wijetunga's political miscalculation.

As was suggested at the outset, the troubles of the UNP at present, in the post-Southern Provincial election phase are not owed only to Mr. Wijetunga's racism and narrowness of outlook, his obvious delight in spreading his largesse vis-a-vis government funds, his lack of stature, his lack of ability as a speaker on the platform, his total lack of appreciation of the feelings of his audience, his paranoid concern with security and

distancing from the people, his remote, lethargic and laid back presidency, his indecisiveness and lack of consistency, his petty and revengeful obsession against the memory and the family of his

Then, when confronted with resistance to this orchestrated by the Prime Minister and UNP General Secretary, Sirisena Cooray, the President went back on his assurances to Mr. Dissanayake. This in turn gravely undermined Mr. Dissanayake's credibility since, in anticipation of his return to the UNP, he had publicly praised Mr. Wijetunga.

revengeful predecessor, are all factors which have contributed and will contribute to the undoing of the UNP after 17 long years in power.

It is a hackneyed phrase that nothing succeeds like success. The converse of this is that nothing fails like failure. Now that the UNP has lost the Southern Provincial Election so decisively, with the PA obtaining a massive 54.5 % of the vote, a vote the opposition to the UNP has not obtained anywhere outside the North and East for well over thirty years, the negatives of President Wijetunga and the UNP have really come home to roost.

The indecisiveness of Mr. Wijetunga, has been politically harmful both to him and others who were hoping to rise up with the aid of his coat-tail. His handling of Gamini Dissanayake's return to the UNP is a case in point. When the Premadasa faction and the Ranil Wickramasinghe group were opposing Mr. Dissanayake's return to the UNP fold, Mr. Wijetunga gave the Dissanayake an assurance that he would be brought back to the UNP and given a major role. Then, when confronted with resistance to this orchestrated by the Prime Minister and UNP General Secretary, Sirisena Cooray, the President went back on his assurances to Mr. Dissanayake. This in turn gravely undermined Mr.

Dissanayake's credibility since, in anticipation of his return to the UNP, he had publicly praised Mr. Wijetunga. When Mr. Dissanayake then associated himself again with the Opposition and in view of the President's antagonising of Mr. Thondaman, was able to work with the CWC in an attempt to capture power in the Central Province, Mr. Wijetunga adopted an aggressive and ultimately unhelpful stance with Mr. Thondaman. When he did bring Mr. Dissanayake into the UNP, it was shortly before the Southern Provincial Election campaign and in a manner that was disruptive of that campaign. Even more importantly, the long delay in bringing Mr. Dissanayake into the party and the President's lack of political strength to make the Ex-DUNF leader welcome in the UNP, denuded the latter of his last shred of political credibility. Indeed, Mr. Gamini Dissanayake has Mr. Wijetunga's inept handling of his return to the UNP to thank for his being present in the worst possible limbo -- for having lost the support of much of the DUNF, for not being able to satisfy his lieutenant, the North Western Chief Minister Premachandra who is again drifting towards the Opposition and for being in the UNP but not in a position of power. At least in this case the ineptness of the president exposed Mr. Dissanayake for what he is.

The last episode in this litany of pathetic non-leadership was Mr. Wijetunga's assurance to Mr. Dissanayake that he would be nominated to Parliament by 7th April. The date has come and gone and poor Mr. Dissanayake is still awaiting events.

Even if he gets into Parliament and into the Cabinet Mr. Dissanayake's image has been damaged to such an extent that his chances of ever achieving his ambition of becoming the country's president is dim to put it mildly.

If the UNP does not overcome its sycophancy towards its leader, and that is what the UNP has always been, the day of the Opposition is very much at hand. ■

CP: Why did you leave the UNP in 1986?

GW: I left the UNP in 1986 because -- unfortunately, I don't have that letter of resignation with me now, where I said that I was very impressed with the macroscopic development that has taken place in the country, but that I was not very happy with the insidious introduction of bribery and corruption and also the concept that the division of the country should have been done after consulting the people -- basically, I maintained that the 13th Amendment should have been implemented after a referendum.

CP: You had cited bribery and corruption as a reason for your leaving the party. When you rejoined the party under President Premadasa, do you mean to say that there was no bribery and corruption then?

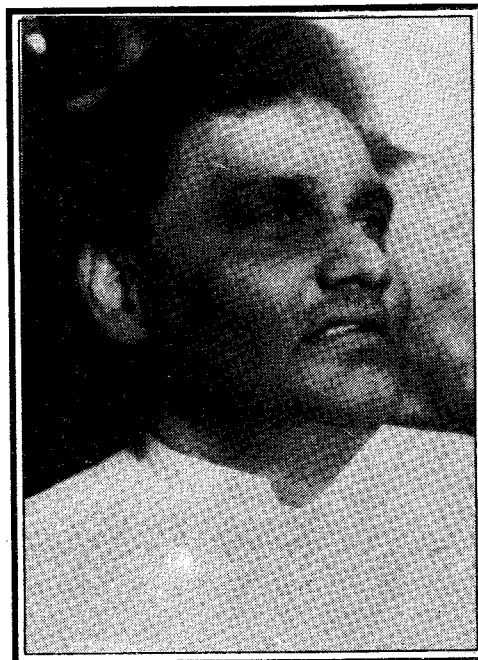
GW: Certainly, not. I don't for a moment say that bribery and corruption had been eliminated under Mr. Premadasa, and as to whether it is more or less I cannot say because I wasn't in the party during that period, but certainly I can tell you one thing that we realised that -- Mr. Rukman Senanayake and I when we went out and formed the new political party -- certain principles for which I had dedicated my political life, such as justice, fairplay and service to the masses... we realise that getting a new party off the platform was virtually impossible, mainly because of finances in our case, and I decided we shall not go for big business to finance us because then you have to be the servant of those people when you are in power or even before you are in power. Then, there was also the logistics of getting a political party organised and we virtually failed. We had three alternatives: one was to give up politics and get back to our professions, the other was to join the SLFP, and the third was to rejoin the UNP. Now, we had an offer from Mr Premadasa who was in my opinion the most dedicated

The toughest job and the most dangerous from within

and the best organiser that the UNP or the country ever had. His absolute dedication to work and his sincerity in the cause of alleviation of poverty was something I was totally enamoured by. That and the offer and the fact that we realised that there was no other way for us as a new political party... but I don't say that there was no bribery and corruption then

CP: If your aims in entering politics is to have a fair and just society, how can you join a party which has proved in the last 17 years that it believes in anything but this? Or for that matter since 1970?

GW: Or for that matter since 1948... No, let's not say 48 because I was a kid in 1948. After '56 I could talk about and remember... I agree with you on that. What happens if I can't form my own party. Let's get into a party in which I have my roots. And now that I am in a position, not that I am the party leader, where I could influence the leadership and where I could in my own way help to formulate policies and methods and manoeuvres which could, even to some extent, take us towards that goal. And I think the people of this country be it the UNP or the SLFP or another political party, the people are sick of politics, they are sick of nepotism, bribery, corruption, insincerity I think people want a change and we can certainly give it to them... My philosophy is this. You see, if I take an example there is a muddy pool. You have a little water and you put into that muddy pool you are not going to change it but you are going to dilute it by 0.000001 per cent. But if others can



Counterpoint Interviews

Dr. Gamini Wijesekara,

the UNP's new General Secretary, who has claimed that he wishes to reintroduce the politics of "gentlemen" to the UNP. He identifies this as a Herculean task, an assessment with which "gentlewomen" and others cannot but agree!

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But I totally agree with you, I'm swimming against the tide.

There may be a time where your own ideals may conflict with the party. You have one of two alternatives. I always believe that your basic principles should never be sacrificed, but there are times when you have to be in the party for the party to go on. I think in the position that I am here today, I will be able to, to an appreciable extent, influence the decisions taken by the party in the future as far as bribery and corruption in concerned.

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follow your example by putting drop by drop may be in 10 or 15 years when I'm dead and gone we might be able to see a trend in this country where the youth who I think are going to take over this country, up to now the feeling is that politics is a dirty game. If you want to do politics you have to be dirty. If you want to get to the top you have to do all the dirty things. I may never go higher than this, but if I can prove to the youth of this country that you can be honest... And that no one can hold anything against me. I have not earned one cent. I am a virtual pauper, except for my practice. I live in a rented house. I started building my own house, I laid the foundation stone ten years ago, and now I have come up to roof level.... But if I can set that trend they will say 100 years later that Gamini Wijeyasekera is a martyr.

But I totally agree with you, I'm swimming against the tide.

CP: Now you are in a position of influence. I expect you will do everything to bring honesty into Parliament.

GW: Certainly.

CP: Can you explain why your first act was to bring in Gamini Dissanayake in to Parliament, and Ronnie de Mel and so on...?

GW: I wouldn't mention personalities, but, yes, my first move was to mend the pieces...

CP: But, let's be specific.

GW: Gamini Dissanayake, Ronnie de Mel, the Athulathmudali group, the Premadasa group, all...

CP: But there is widespread allegations of corruption against Mr Gamini Dissanayake and Mr Ronnie de Mel. In fact, you yourself in 1987 petitioned the court and listed corruption by Mr Gamini Dissanayake.

GW: No, not me.

CP: I'm sorry, you wanted to make such a petition but you didn't finally. Yet you prepared the document.

GW: Yes, that's right.

CP: Now, surely, if your

principle in life is to stand up against corruption, given that you are now in a position of power, isn't there a contradiction between what you say and what you do? I'm not suggesting here that Mr Dissanayake is corrupt, but merely that there were allegations of such corruption, even made by you yourself.

GW: Yes, certainly. One is that people can change. The other is that there will always be a contradiction. ... You see, there are the policies of the party, there are your individual likes, dislikes and ideals. There may be a time where your own ideals may conflict with the party. You have one of two alternatives. I always believe that your basic principles should never be sacrificed, but there are times when you have to be in the party for the party to go on. I think in the position that I am here today, I will be able to, to an appreciable extent, influence the decisions taken by the party in the future as far as bribery and corruption in concerned.

CP: The fundamental problem, however, is that if the strength of the party lies in bringing in people with, let us say, a bad track record, then that party should not run a country, because the strength of the party is corruption.

GW: IF you look back at the history of this country, there is no top politician who against whom allegations of corruption have not been levelled, even Dudley Senanayake.

CP: There's a difference here. Allegations of corruption have to be distinguished from general public belief. Allegations may have been made against D. S. Senanayake, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, Dudley Senanayake and Mrs Bandaranaike, but no one ever believed these allegations.

GW: There was a sizeable population who believed at that time that, for instance, Dudley Senanayake was corrupt... Yet,

today the entire country believes that he is not. I'm not trying to give a "sudu redda" for Gamini Dissanayake.

CP: I'm not referring to individuals here, but to a general principle about UNP politicians.

GW: Yes, of course. I agree that I will be under mental stress and strain on this question. But I can tell you one thing. Whoever comes into this party, I will ensure, with the concurrence of the President and the Prime Minister, because I have implicit faith in the integrity and the honesty of the President and the Prime Minister ... I will assure you that we will not allow any chance for any of those in the party to partake in those activities.

CP: But if you say that your entire stand is based on the believe in the integrity and honesty of the President and the Prime Minister, what would happen if that faith is shattered?

GW: Well, if it is shattered, I will have to take a very difficult decision either to leave the party or to say goodbye to politics, because I don't hope to join any other political party in the future.

CP: When you took over this job you said that you want to clean this party of criminal elements. Can you be more specific?

GW: You mean in the press interviews... Well, what I said was not exactly that... What I said was that I believed in non-confrontational and non-violent politics. I said that I was a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. I think by example we can set it right. Identifying the criminal elements could be rather difficult, but certainly if there is an allegation, if there is an incident where criminal assault is brought to my notice I will certainly ensure that the maximum punishment is given to those people and discipline is maintained in the party.

CP: Regarding the current controversies surrounding

Soththi Upali and others, for instance, as General Secretary, what do you feel about the fact that Soththi Upali who is a well-known underworld figure being a member of the party working committee?

GW: HE was never a member of the Working Committee.

CP: Wasn't he a member of the Executive Committee?

GW: Well, a political party, especially a democratic political party like ours or the SLFP, their doors are wide open. Anyone can come into a party and getting into the Executive Committee is not that difficult. Yet, if there is evidence that there is anyone holding high office in the party who is involved in criminal activity I think the party must take immediate action and remove them from the party. There is no alternative to that.

CP: The foundation of your agenda to clean up corruption in the party is your belief that the President is absolutely honest....

GW: Well, let's put it this way. I have trust in the President and the Prime Minister. I can vouch that the Prime Minister is absolutely honest, and I believe that the President is honest ... But, you know we have to work as a team.

CP: How do you reconcile your view of honesty in public life, and the President removing or "kicking sideways" the Bribery Commissioner and demanding certain files of individual investigations?

GW: Yes, I've been told this. I am not involved in this at the moment, but I will certainly look into this and discuss it...

CP: Tell me, with six months to go for elections, and since your job is to ensure that the UNP wins, what are the weaknesses of the UNP which have to be overcome?

GW: There are a lot of weaknesses stemming mainly from the fact that we have been 17 years in power. It makes people immune

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I think we have to change an appreciable number of our candidates because if there are any serious allegations against whoever it is of bribery, corruption and in activities of a violent nature or of aiding and abetting I think deterrent disciplinary action must be taken against them.

... but in the eyes of others I may be a pain in their neck ... This is the real danger, from within not outside. I don't think I have much danger from outside. ... I've always done decent politics and I've always had their cooperation.

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to the realities, it makes people think that everything is tickety-boo, and all human beings like change, so the only way we can win the elections is to give a new face to the UNP. I think we have to change an appreciable number of our candidates because if there are any serious allegations against whoever it is of bribery, corruption and in activities of a violent nature or of aiding and abetting I think deterrent disciplinary action must be taken against them. And I am hoping to have a network of data from the grassroots in each electorate -- I want to send independent people, not active politicians, people who are faithful to me and the party -- then I will know the ground situation. The Prime Minister, the President and I are going round the District organisations, followed by this I will be going individually to revamp the grassroots organisation... I have a plan where either fifty or a hundred houses (I have to work the logistics out) will be handed over to one person who will be in total supervision. He has to go there regularly, give all the literature, find out who's with us and who's not, check the electoral lists for those who are dead or have gone abroad, that sort of thing...

CP: You said the UNP needs a new face? What kind of face are you planning to give them this time?

GW: What the face will turn out to be is a little difficult to predict, but I hope it won't turn out to be as ugly as mine! ... By the sheer fact of the statements that I have made up to now that I would like to see gentlemanly politics ... I know that it is easy to talk, and a lot of people have said these things before, and until I deliver the goods no one is going to believe that I am the man that I profess to be, I know this. But that fresh air, that little wind, has made people breathe a little freer, especially the educated intelligent people... Of course, we if we don't deliver the goods they will reject us, but at least we have got a foot

in. This is the sort of new face that I want: by certain changes, by what we say, and a disciplined way of doing politics and our personal life, I think by these we can achieve something. But it's an absolutely Herculean task. I think I've got the toughest job in the country and the most dangerous.

CP: Why do you keep saying that it is the most dangerous?

GW: It is the most dangerous because politics has over the last few years -- I'm not blaming anyone, there are a lot of organisations, trends, people that are responsible -- become a gun culture. That's the first reason. Number two is if you look at the history of the General Secretaries of the UNP it's not all that comfortable. And number three, power is a thing that generates enemies. It generates jealousy, and I've been a shooting star in the political firmament. First of all, I came from nowhere, I don't come from a political family ... except for my grandfather who was a secretary to DB. It was JR who brought me, then suddenly one day made me Secretary, Ministry of Transport and CTB Chairman. I didn't know which end of a bus had the engine, but anyway I delivered the goods to a certain extent. Then I went off politics, I lost the elections and then I left the UNP, and now suddenly -- no one knew about this, my name was never mentioned, everyone was caught unawares, including myself -- so I suppose that sort of sudden rise to power that I have today. I, of course, in great humility accept it, but in the eyes of others I may be a pain in their neck ... This is the real danger, from within not outside. I don't think I have much danger from outside. ... I've always done decent politics and I've always had their cooperation. And I think the future of this country is politics at a national level, and I'm convinced the final solution is a national government where we all get together at least for this crisis period.

CP: If you talk to many UNPers, from those in the Cabinet to those at the grassroots, they all feel that President Wijetunga is not their best candidate at the election. This is a fairly widespread feeling. What do you think about this?

GW: The reason for that is we've always had leaders who were very egoistic and also tough -- the examples are J. R. Jayewardene and Premadasa -- for the last 17 years. Suddenly we get a man whose ego is not as big as that whose main strength or attribute is his simplicity and large-heartedness. So it may be construed that he's weak... But I think at the moment he's the only unifying factor and I feel that we have to go with him. This is my personal opinion.

CP: You have repeatedly said that your job is "to heal the wounds." What exactly are these wounds now?

GW: One, I sincerely believe that the DUNF are part of the UNP. They are pure, solid UNP votes. We must get them back. Getting Mr Gamini Dissanayake alone is not the solution. There is the Lalith Athulathmudali faction, and Lalith was the dominant figure in the UNP, in my opinion. I have had preliminary chats with my friends in the DUNF who were in the Provincial Council... They now feel that in me they have a person with whom they can talk on an even keel and someone who is not going to say something and let them down. So I'm going to continue with this dialogue. I haven't yet met Mrs. Athulathmudali, but if I do have the chance and if things work the way I want I will certainly meet her. That's one group.

Then, of course, the Premadasa family and supporters are still UNP, though there have been little misunderstandings... I have already met Mrs. Premadasa and had a very cordial chat with her though nothing definite has come out of it yet... and I think in Sajith we have

someone who has a lot of potential... Then, there's an area where I can really help in bringing in the old stagers...

CP: What can the UNP say at the election platforms? What are they going to give us? An honest government?

GW: No. I think what we have to say is that if you leave corruption, bribery, nepotism and the violence out, you will agree with me that the development that has occurred in this country is absolutely fantastic. It's unbelievable in a way with all these problems, and that track record of the UNP no other government can compare with. I feel that is our strongest argument. ... It was very foolish for us to push back some of the social welfare schemes initiated by President Premadasa after his death, but they have seen this and we are correcting it.

I think we have to stress the economic development aspect, and that this will be a continuing process. The other thing is this business of the open economy. Now, Chandrika has met the business community and vowed that she's going to continue the open economy, but I don't think the people are going to swallow that as far as the PA is concerned. I asked this specific question in the Provincial Council from Mr. Bernard Soysa and he was very non-committal. And I hear, very reliably, that the Communist Party and the LSSP are having second thoughts about this open economy thing. What I say is if it is an alternative between the UNP and the SLFP it would be alright... but it's not going to be so easy for the PA. I sincerely feel that for a developing country such as ours trying to achieve NIC status in an international global atmosphere which is very nebulous and rapidly changing, I think it is only the free markets that will last. ... Yes, I think that the next election will be fought on who has more credibility on the open economy, and, of course, on the question of the cost of living. ■

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Playing with the lottery for sweetstakes

In late October 1993 Cabinet was informed by the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Research of a proposal to establish a Farmers' Lottery Trust which would operate a computerized on-line lottery system. The proposal was initiated by the Berjaya Group, a large Malaysian corporation with extensive experience in lotteries in Malaysia as well as elsewhere. The proposal involved Berjaya investing around US \$ 15 to 20 million, with exclusive rights of management under a Management Agreement for 20 years. The Ministry of Agricultural Development and Research was to be paid 25% of turnover for the Farmers' Fund, 50% for prize monies and 25% for lottery promotion and management (viz. profit!). The Cabinet, however, did not approve the establishment of the Farmers' Lottery Trust on the basis that it was only the National Lotteries Board that was legally constituted to manage such ventures, allegedly based on advice from the Attorney General's Department.

This decision is worth recalling in the face of the present context which concerns another lottery venture, mooted around the same time. In this case, Minister of Housing & Construction Sirisena Cooray submitted for Cabinet approval a proposal by Messrs Layar Pyramid (M) SDN BHD of Malaysia for the privatizing of lotteries in the country. According to this proposal Layar Pyramid would be willing to pay the Government 20% of revenue for the first five years of operation in return for exclusive rights for 25 years, the privilege of converting capital and profits into foreign currency, a complete tax holiday, and that the operation be entirely foreign-owned initially.

The proposal is itself a fascinating document, at once self-incriminating and self-satisfied, yet sophomoric in its formulation, as if the outcome were a foregone conclusion. For instance, in a proposal of this import, there is no profile of the organisation itself, no doubt since this would lay bare the fact that Layar Pyramid lacks proven experience in the field of lotteries. Instead, are descriptions of three individuals representing the company, two of whom are Directors and who haven't the

slightest whiff of a connection with lottery-related business. In fact, they possess impressive experience in real estate, retail furniture, accountancy, the legal profession, aquaculture, merchant banking, timber (there's "work" to be done here for sure!), shipbuilding, the oil and gas industry, resort development (perhaps there's scope for some future "investment" here as well!) and consumer products.

In fact, the gaming industry is probably their only blind spot! The solution, of course, is to involve as "Director of Operations" a third person with Australian Lotto experience, albeit before 1984, at which time the government took control of Lotto in Australia. But, surely, that's not cricket? How can the government of an industrialised country control any venture at all, much less take over one that was originally in private hands? The Aussies must be secret communists, or even worse, guys who don't have a fixed formula such as the locally axiomatic "privatise everything, and make a quick buck to the bargain".

There are three serious preliminary concerns that even a layperson would have about this proposal. The first, of course, is the basis on which a foreign company can submit any such proposition for the consideration of the Cabinet, without any kind of tender procedure or public awareness at all. The second concerns the very nature of the offer made to the Government which appears, even at a cursory

glance, to be unattractive from the national point of view, to say the least. A more detailed analysis of the proposal which follows will more than bear out the average person's fear on this score. The third problem centres on the legal requirements outlined above which render such a venture untenable.

Since the prerequisites of adherence to due process such as the calling for tenders and/or the making public of the proposal, were observed in the breach, surely the matter would have been dealt with summarily by the Cabinet? More about this later.

In considering our second concern first, we are confronted by the glaring differences between the Berjaya proposal and the

LAYAR PYRAMID (M) SDN BHD

The Honourable Sirisena Cooray
Minister for Housing & Construction
Government of Sri Lanka
Colombo
SRI LANKA

Sir

PROPOSAL FOR THE PRIVATIZATION OF
LOTTERIES OPERATIONS IN SRI LANKA

1. Introduction

1.1 Once again we should like to express our gratitude for having been given the opportunity to submit a proposal on the subject. About a month was spent on studying the existing lottery operations in Sri Lanka and on evaluating the future of the gaming industry in the country. The findings (which had just been compiled) have proved to be quite invaluable, and we are now in a position to submit a proposal for the Government's consideration.

2. Status Quo

2.1 Currently, there are in existence three lottery operations, viz the Development Lottery, Sevana Lottery and National Lotteries. While the Development Lottery is independently run though supervised by the Ministry of Finance; the Sevana and National Lotteries, come within the purview of the National Lotteries Board, which in turn is also supervised by the Ministry of Finance.

2.2 The three operators offer in the aggregate a wide spectrum of products, including:

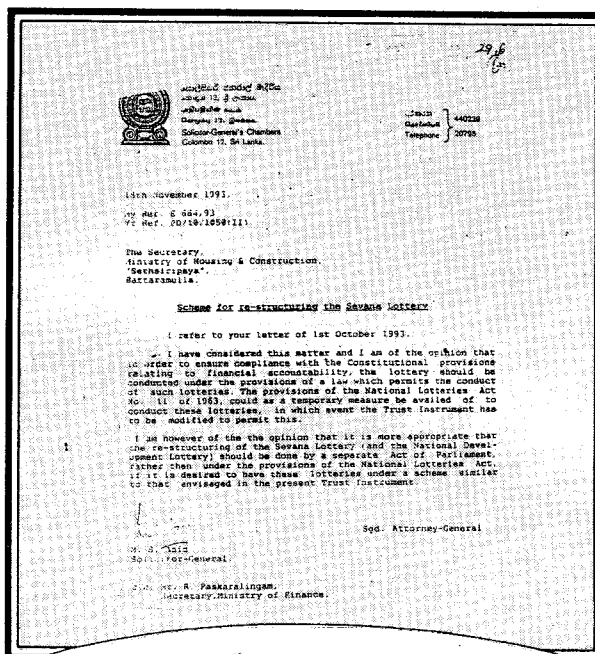
- i. Instant lotteries (by Development and Sevana Lotteries);

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influential Layar Pyramid offer. In the former, Berjaya were to surrender 25% of turnover to the Farmers' Fund, whereas Layar Pyramid only offered 20% which would be increased to 22.5% after five years. This too for taking over two of the most lucrative current state-run organisations, the Sevana and the National Lotteries Board, who made a combined sales revenue of Rs. 674 million in 1992, a 33.7% increase over the past year. The Layar Pyramid proposal indicates a projected revenue of 858 million rupees for 1993 for these two taken together. Yet, in their own projections for the first four years of operation under their management, they indicate a total revenue of only 500 million rupees (in 1994/95), which would be a decline in revenue of Rs. 358 million or over 40%. This would also mean a loss to the Government (at 20% rate of payment) of Rs. 36 million. Actually, this proposal was submitted to Minister Cooray in April 1993, the Prime Minister was appraised of the offer in June, and Cabinet approval was obtained on January 19, 1994 for the original proposal submitted by Mr. Cooray. The Prime Minister's personal seal of approval is what clinched matters in favour of the proposal. Under Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe's direction the Cabinet Sub Committee on Investment recommended, inter alia, that Messrs Layar Pyramid's proposal for the operation of the Sevana Lottery be accepted.

Moreover, the arrangement of operating the Sevana Lottery under a Management Committee comprised of representatives of the National Lotteries Board and Layar Pyramid is perceived as an interim measure until new legislation is passed so that the Sevana Lottery can operate independently. No doubt, at this point in the not-too-distant future, Layar Pyramid will come into its own in terms of its self-seeking proposal, and the country will lose larger and larger amounts of revenue in order to appease the greed of certain individuals. A comparison with the Berjaya proposal will show that whereas Layar Pyramid were attempting to take over an already lucrative lottery which enhanced state coffers, Berjaya were interested in creating a new lottery and, thus, providing a new source of revenue with no government investment.

The current legal position as outlined by the Solicitor General Shibley Aziz on behalf of the Attorney General is that under the provisions of the National Lotteries Act No 11 of 1963, as a temporary measure, the Sevana Lottery



could be restructured with certain modifications. However, the letter dated November 18, 1993 to the Secretary, Ministry of Housing & Construction from the Attorney General's Department states "it is more appropriate that the re-structuring of the Sevana Lottery (and the National Development Lottery) should be done by a separate Act of Parliament, rather than under the provisions of the National Lotteries Act, if it is desired to have these lotteries under a scheme similar to that envisaged in the present Trust Instrument."

This raises many other questions which should be answered by the Prime Minister as Chairman of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Investment. First and foremost, what is the

rationale of privatising these lotteries, since they are profit-making and successful in economic terms? Nowhere in the entire literature on the subject is there any reference, however cursory, to the reason for this move. Next, why such an unsolicited scheme hatched by a foreign company with little or no experience in this area should become the basis for such far-reaching changes that would involve new Acts of Parliament and losses to the state of hundreds of millions of rupees in the first two or three years, is unfathomable. Unfathomable, that is, if personal profit is not brought into the equation. The "special" nature of this proposal can be seen in its being afforded BOI status which, after all, is an incentive for encouraging depressed sectors or those that require a fillip, not money-spinners that investors would fall over themselves to get involved in.

In an interview with <Counterpoint>, UNP General Secretary has vouched for the honesty and integrity of Prime Minister Wickremasinghe. Honesty and integrity are not to be taken lightly; nor is it merely a question of keeping one's hands clean but deliberately allowing others to dirty theirs by aiding and abetting or at least condoning rank corruption in this manner. If Mr. Wickremasinghe is indeed "an honourable man," a shining example among honourable men, then he must vindicate his honour by demonstrating to the people of this country that decisions such as this were taken in good faith with the best interests of the nation at stake. The entire transaction should be made transparent for all to see, not hidden under a cloak of secrecy and Cabinet privilege. This, then, is your personal challenge, honourable Mr. Wickremasinghe, a challenge as well as an obligation towards the people. ■

Saint as politician or politician as Saint?

Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu

Hillary Clinton's remark that Nelson Mandela's inauguration as the first democratically elected president of South Africa is perhaps the most important event of the twentieth century, isn't mere hyperbole. It was in this century after all that over three hundred years of white domination in South Africa was institutionalised as the apartheid regime. The Nazis came and went but in South Africa the international community tolerated racism as the law of the land. There was a time when liberal governments required those resisting this crime, elevated to the status of law, to renounce violence against it. Now it is all over and with relatively little bloodshed. The cry of freedom has been heeded and freedom has come at last. Moreover, in the words of the South African President, let freedom reign.

What happened in South Africa is indeed miraculous. The relatively non-violent transition to majority rule and the absence of inter-racial violence attests to this. The climate of tolerance, of reconciliation between the ANC and the National Party, the bold pragmatism of F.W. de Klerk, the eleventh hour change of heart of Chief Buthelezi and the democratic spirit that pervaded the constitutional talks, make South Africa as unique in its liberation as it was in its hateful bondage.

What makes for events that make the world a better place to live in? A mere fortuitous conflagration of events in which contexts, systems and persons so combine to lift the human spirit? Or is it not human beings who make history and therefore are the crucial factor amongst these others?

There is a great man/person theory that is at one level deeply flawed but at another instructive in identifying the contribution of exceptional people. The liberation of South Africa has been won by the tireless struggle of its people and those throughout the world who gave them solidarity and support. It happened the way it has because of the sheer courage and magnanimity of Nelson Rolihlala Mandela.

The facts are well known, the acceptance of armed struggle in the face of racist brutality, the horrendous imprisonment for 27 years in inhuman conditions, private trauma and tragedy, the indomitable spirit that turned that imprisonment into a remarkable learning process and defined the message of forgiveness upon which the new South Africa is founded. Like Gandhi, like Martin Luther King, Mandela has a dream and the realisation of it will tell

as to whether he is a saint trying to be a politician or a politician trying to be a saint. Mandela's speech at his trial in which he declared that he had fought and would continue to fight against all forms of domination black and white, has been widely quoted and those sentiments expressed by him many times. What marks him out as a true liberal and freedom fighter, is that he has demonstrated the sincerity of his beliefs in prison and out, and especially in the transition period.

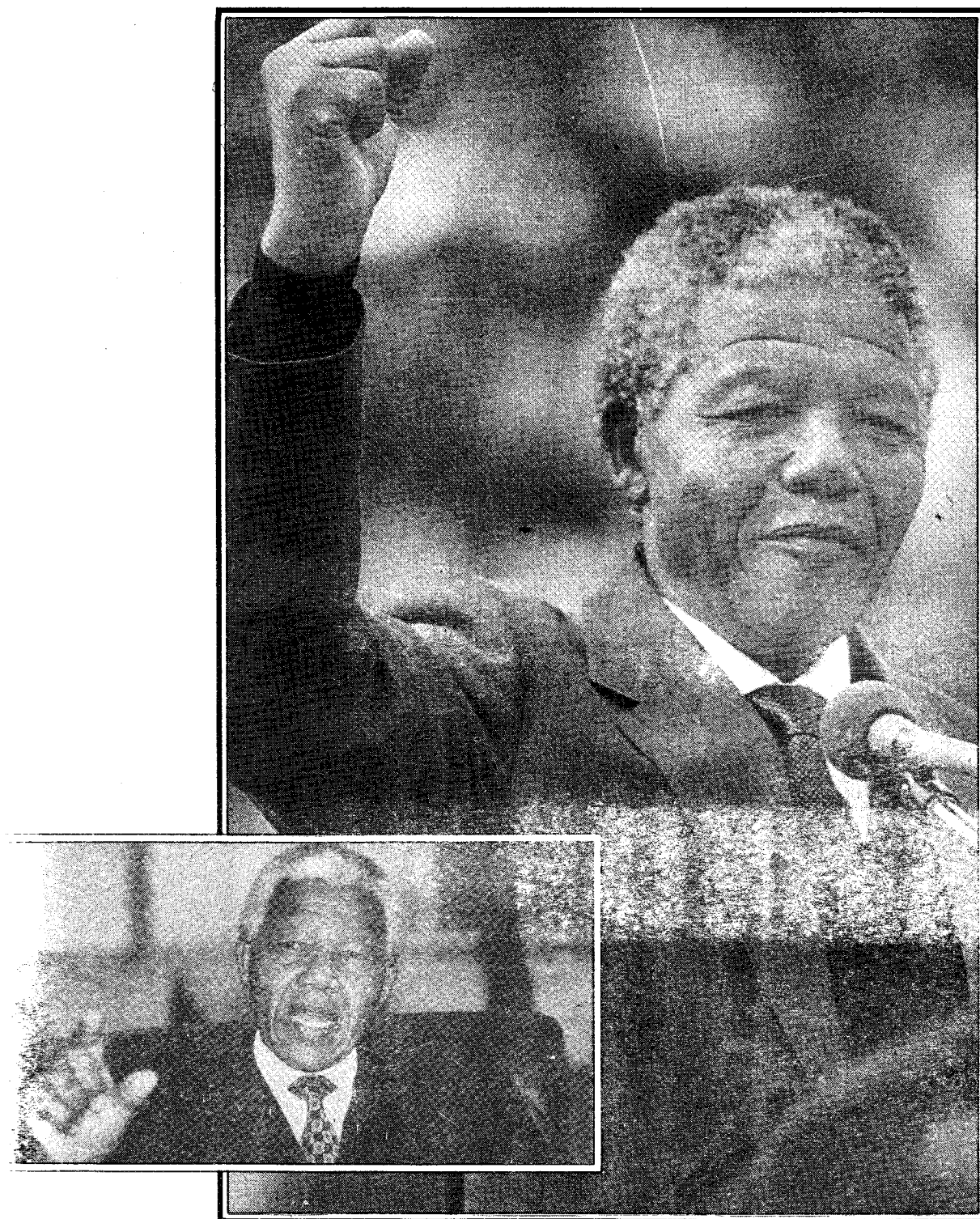
Which politician in the world today would after having won a victory against forces that had oppressed his people for over three centuries and imprisoned him for nearly three decades, declare that he is relieved that his party did not win a two thirds majority?

Mandela's rationale for this statement was that a two thirds majority would have accorded the ANC a mandate to change the constitution which would have perturbed other parties and thereby imperilled national reconciliation. Without a two thirds majority the ANC would have to govern by consensus. As a historical aside, it is worth remembering that Mrs. Thatcher who used to take the position that the ANC ought to renounce violence, rebuked one of her senior cabinet ministers for remarking that landslides were unhealthy for democracy and good government.

Mandela's singular lack of bitterness and his inspiring magnanimity were also exemplified in his stewardship of the ANC negotiating stance at the constitutional talks. The power-sharing arrangements at the centre and at the regional level illustrate a commitment to involve all South Africans regardless of race or political opinion in the new dispensation. The checks and balances, the freedom accorded to the regions to decide their own constitution, the position of the Zulu king, all add up to the solid infrastructure for democratic government.

There is no denying the magnitude of the challenge that confronts Mandela and the government of national reconciliation. Given the huge disparities in living standards between black and whites and the desperate poverty that is the lot of the black majority, meeting their basic needs is a gigantic task in itself. Indeed, the structural adjustment necessitated in the South African economy is by definition of a different variety to the conventional IMF/Bank type. The rest of the world will have to help and not just with moral support but with substantial dollars.

Were the government to fail or be seen to fail, the chaos

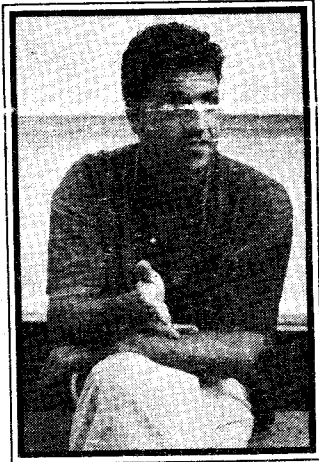


that the host of Cassandras predicted before the transition and de Klerk's historic 2 February 1990 announcement, could ensue. What stands between black revenge, anarchy and white madness, is the moral authority of the Executive President. Only Mandela amongst the political leadership has the status to preach convincingly the gospel of restraint, of forgiveness and moderation. Were he to fail, it would be a defeat for humanity and the hope for a better world.

Mandela is now a part of world history, that is the struggle of the human spirit itself against seemingly insuperable odds. He is also a practitioner of the humanist art of politics in which liberty is never confused with licence and democracy is not mere majority rule. It is almost as if at the end of this century a man and an event have combined to redeem politics, the lifeblood of humanity

Thank you Mr. Mandela for your life and your work and for all that is yet to be done because of you. ■

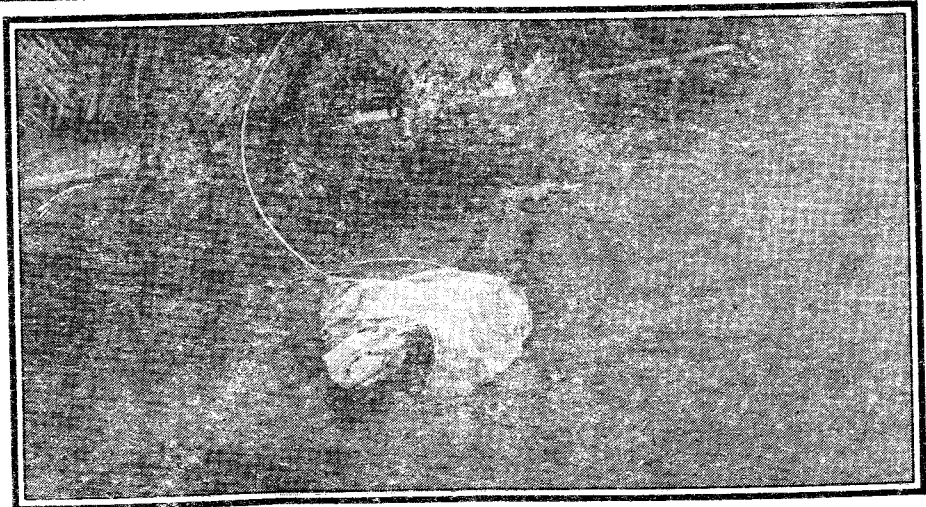
Beauty and violence as stark truth



Photographs from
Stephen Champion's
book
"Lanka 1986-1992"

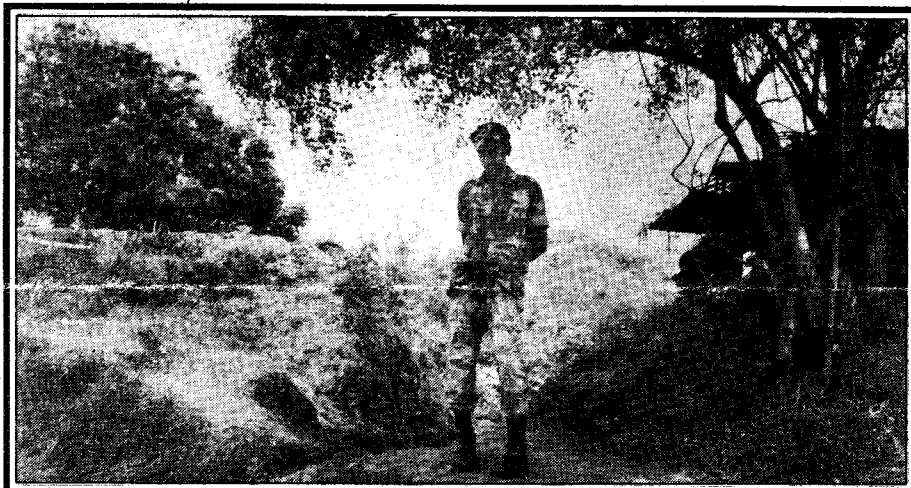
GENBOPIED ?

(Confiscated at Customs)



"Two deaths are told", one just outside a refugee camp in Batticaloa where an electric cable was used to burn a hole in the back of a man's neck, and the other which took place on polling day in 1988 in Tissamaharama. Perhaps, it matters less who was responsible than that such atrocities are condoned, even covered up, by the confiscation at Customs of a book that records, so sensitively, this troubled epoch of Sri Lanka.

A young soldier at Tiriyai appears vulnerable, pensive and isolated – another victim of this senseless war – though the tangible horror of this civilian's plight restores a balance of perspective as to who pays the greater price in the North-East conflict.



An evocatively gentle vision of children setting off to school early in the morning through paddy fields, the enormous electric pylons overhead -- a hint that their future may contain an ominousness beyond their control.

The Search for Alternatives

While the truth is itself absolute, one's perception of it is often coloured by the values and things one holds dear. It is in this sense that Marx's association of truth with class interests, and in particular the economic base of the class, must be understood. When the truth is unpleasant because it portends a threat, then falsehood is generally preferable. Academics, pressmen and commentators who form part of the Colombo establishment have all contributed to this ritual self-deception. We see bouts of despair when the volatility and carnage in the country appear to overwhelm the defences of Colombo and then a euphoria, when briefly, things appear to be under control. Thus, following last year's Provincial Council elections, a number of analysts told us that the ruling UNP had done unprecedentedly well in the rural areas, beating the Opposition in its traditional strongholds. This was also treated as a rural sanction of the government's

Rajan Hoole

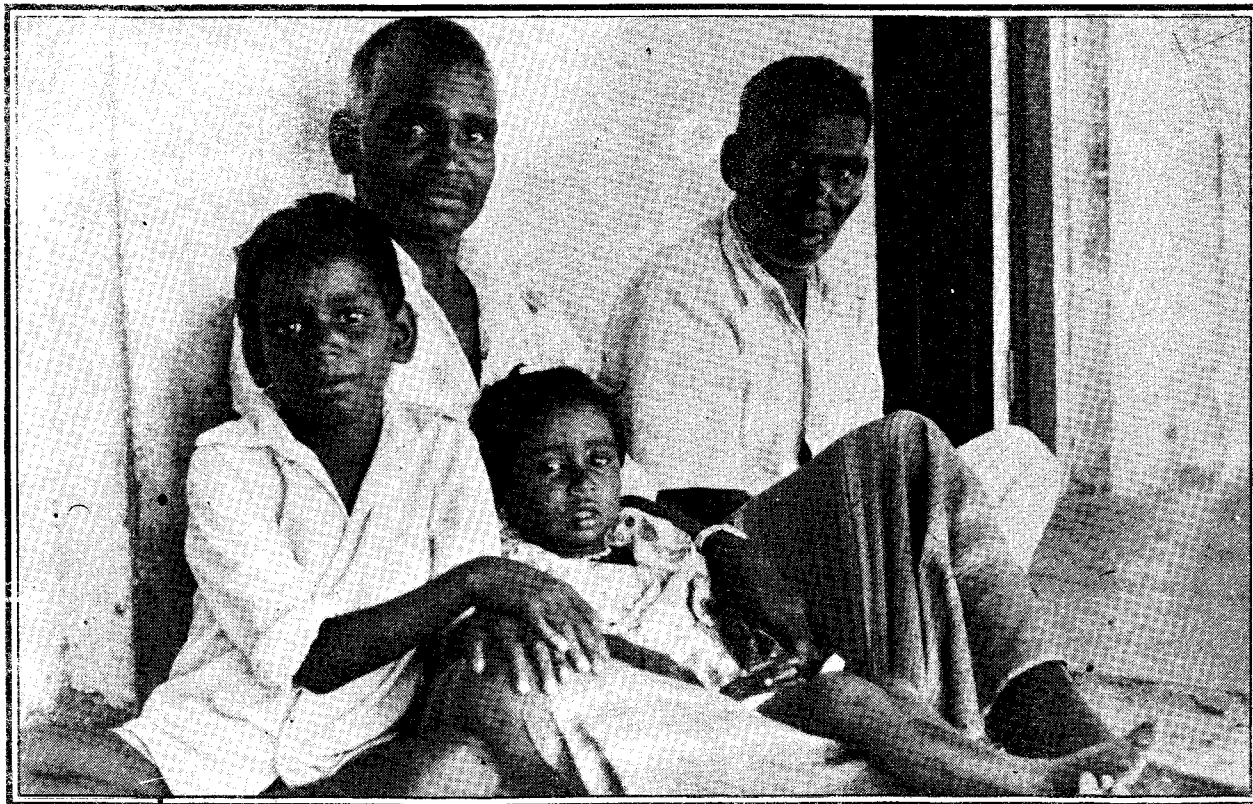
Open Economy. Recently, the results of the local elections were widely acclaimed in the press as a return of democracy to the terrorist-ravaged East. In imposing such options from Colombo, sober and cautionary voices from among the peoples concerned need to be ridiculed or stifled.

Gomarankadawela & the other side of the UNP's success in rural areas

Times are too dangerous to go by appearances. Take the results of the local elections to the Kantalai Regional Council -- an area which was an SLFP stronghold. The UNP polled 9548 against the SLFP's 5887. But talking to ordinary people one comes across widespread anti-government feeling based on official corruption and the behaviour of the armed forces during the JVP troubles. Another significant example is the village of

Gomarankadawela in the Kattukulampattu West Division of Trincomalee District where the UNP polled 1541 against the SLFP's 1209.

This village made its appearance in the 1827 census under the Tamil name of Comaresan Cadaway. It then had 22 inhabitants, only 4 of whom were children, suggesting that it was a shifting or chena village. Owing to the unsettled conditions prevailing in the Kandyan Kingdom following the rebellion of 1817-18, over the succeeding years this village was also settled by Kandyan Sinhalese from Parana (Old) Madawachchiya. The two communities enjoyed close social relations as in several such villages along the Eastern border. The 1901 census again showed it to be a mixed village of 58 Sinhalese and 8 Tamils. Like many rural villages in the country, the village remained neglected. Even in recent times the position of the villagers among the economic and political forces around them, strongly recalled Leonard Woolf's **Village in the Jungle** written more than 70 years ago.



A teacher who worked there about 1970 told me: "The people were very mild and easily dominated by the unscrupulous. A man from the South who worked for the British Navy in Trincomalee came to the village after the closure of the base. In time he became a rich trader (Mudalali) owning a fleet of lorries and used his influence to economically dominate the area. He enhanced his influence considerably by becoming the agent for the UNP. By throwing money around and corrupting the youth with vice, his position became unchallengeable. He walked into people's houses at will and took their wives for his carnal pleasure. I challenged him by trying to organise constructive activities for the young, such as late evening English classes. Had the UNP government not fallen in 1970, my position would have become impossible..." A TULF leader from the area had similar impressions about the people. He had been instrumental in building a road there -- an area where children going to school had to often encounter elephants. He said, "These were humble people who were grateful to me for the road. They continued to look me up even after I had eased to have influence."

It is not hard to understand why a significant section of these people feel "democratically" constrained to vote UNP as long as the forces behind it seem insuperable. While one section of such a village passively accept the intrusion into their small world of an oppressive order for the lack of an alternative, the sense of powerlessness drives many youth into destructive violence. Thus, the so called support for the order represented by the UNP in such areas has been invariably linked to recruitment by groups such as the JVP.

Leading academics have used villages like Gomarankadawela to deny or dilute Tamil links with large parts of the East and to implicitly justify colonisation policies of the state which have brought in communal polarisation alien to such villages. Beyond this they have no interest or curiosity about the people themselves.

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The more sinister ramifications of the regime on their lives is seldom understood even when the consequences threaten to spill over into Colombo. Despite the cyclical and repetitive nature of the climate of violence that is integral to state ideology, a number of liberal intellectuals continue to argue that the state had little choice but to meet insurgent terror with killer squads acting as agents of state terror. This aspect of the current economic regime appears to condemn us to both incipient violence and intellectual paralysis for some time to come.

Democracy in the East !

A man who voiced strong reservations about the Government's pretensions concerning local elections in the East was Fr. Harry Miller, S.J. For this cause the **Observer** choose to lampoon him editorially (Sunday 6th March) suggesting among other things that he was a 'do-gooder'

preaching politics. There was also a clear hint of a Colombo wizard putting down Fr. Miller as a provincial ignoramus. Fr. Miller's point is a very basic one: "As long as there is impunity, there can be no normality or democracy". This impunity is still being used by the forces to obviate accountability before the law even for disappearances that have taken place recently. Fr. Miller was only reflecting what he had experienced with thousands of ordinary people in Batticaloa over many years.

Fr. Miller was present at the Eastern University on 8th September 1990 when the matter of 158 persons taken from the University Refugee Camp three days earlier by troops under the command of Brigadier Karunatilake from Valaichenai was raised. Also present were General Gerry de Silva, Eastern Commander and Brigadier A.M.U. Seneviratne, Batticaloa. There was already a rumour that the prisoners had been killed and women were wailing for their lost ones. Seneviratne had the most glorious moment of his career when an elderly woman weeping for her son grabbed him by his feet and immobilised him. Karunatilake arrived late in a blue pick up truck wearing a cowboy-like wide brimmed hat and swaggered in with a nonchalant look of contempt. He had been promoted for his earlier work in the South, including, Hambantota, which left behind similar associations. The covering up and talking was done by Seneviratne and de Silva. The latter gave the people to understand that those taken were guilty and could not be released. This cruel insensitivity of the state which people have been through again and again is barely hidden below the surface even today.

There are also the two letters of AMU Seneviratne of 21/9/90 written after promising to look into two lists of detained and missing persons taken up by the Batticaloa Peace Committee. The first concerned 76 students. The reply claimed that one student was taken and released to the parents, and went on: "No other student in the referred list was taken into custody by security forces under this Head

Quarters. Signed A.M.U. Seneviratne, HQ Brigade 3 Group." The second to a list of 407 persons was similar, claiming three were taken and released.

Fr. Miller reflected, "I did not get the impression that Seneviratne was really a bad guy. He seemed rather to be following orders. As much as it is necessary, I would hate to see him in the dock explaining how he came to write those letters."

In having to denigrate Father Miller, the real man with a humane vision is also blacked out. As much as he believes in the integrity of the law for a just society, he has little sympathy for homeland claims in the sense of ethnically exclusive zones. He would like to see an East, separate from the North, become an exemplar of communal co-existence and a model for the rest of the country. All this makes hardly the stuff of a political meddler. He has much to offer towards a healthy debate on alternatives for this country's future. If the press cannot fully discuss the experiences of such people and the issues for the country arising from them, they have no moral right to pass off what is happening in the East as a return of democracy.

and tragedy, and yet lacking one. The least one could expect from a government which minimally cares for the people is to offer them room to work towards an alternative. Given the legacy of 17 years of UNP rule, rather a lot is being expected from what one hopes would be a new PA

decline of public morality have affected all sections of the intelligentsia. Diseases of the government sector are also diseases of the NGO sector.

What one might expect soon and should press for is a decisive move to solve the ethnic problem and a dismantling of the executive presidency. The expectation that the minorities are safer with an executive president dependent on their votes has been shown to be illusory. Power breeds corruption and corruption destroys legitimacy. When that happens, the President, to keep the appearances of power, is forced into shadowy accommodations. President Jayewardene's complicity in the 1983 violence against Tamils, in spite of the latter supporting him, is a fruit of such accommodations. The Sri Lankan Presidency had become a ritual of the "Emperor's New Clothes". Jayewardene's two successors found themselves unable to do the most elementary thing of taking political measures to give confidence to the minorities and placing the ball firmly in the LTTE's court.

On the ongoing war, it is not clear



On the ongoing war, it is not clear that the PA has grasped the problem. Lakshman Kiriella, MP, a leading PA spokesman, delivered on 29th March a Rotarian lecture on "the North-East crisis". According to an *Island* report of the lecture, his party's stand on devolution to the provinces was along the lines of the Indian model. He further said that if a new SLFP (PA?) Government came to power, it would invite the LTTE for talks, and if it fails to respond, it would be crushed militarily...

What is also troubling is the ever-so-slight shift in perspective that Chandrika Kumaratunga seems to have made on the ethnic question, though it is too early to say for sure.



The People's Alliance

We have seen two instances among many of people looking for an alternative which offers them dignity and frees them from a cycle of violence

government. As to ending corruption and restoring accountability, one cannot expect too much too soon. It would still require sustained grass roots pressure on the government. The flow of foreign money and the

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This sounds disturbingly similar to the UNP from the time of Premadasa, and the LTTE is far from being crushed. There are two important things.

Firstly, the main issue does not lie with federalism, the Indian model or the unitary state. The demand for devolution is a response to entrenched discriminatory practices in the central government. The armed forces and the ministries of Mahaweli Development, Lands, Rehabilitation and Public Administration are at the centre of the experience of marginalisation by the people of the North-East. If these institutions are reformed and are seen to be non-discriminatory, a healthy balance on devolution could be found. If not, the tension (or more accurate repulsion) would be so great that every step in devolution will be seen and feared as a move towards separation.

Secondly, a key aspect of the Government's failure is its inbuilt inability to distinguish between the LTTE and the Tamil people. The two were in practice treated as identical. When Premadasa ordered his troops to crush the LTTE, the troops crushed the Tamil people (as in Batticaloa above), and the latter were given little choice but to look to the LTTE. Thus, the Tamil people were driven to identify with the LTTE only in a pathological sense for the seeming lack of an alternative.

Does Mr. Kiriella know what he is talking about when he speaks of crushing the LTTE militarily? The LTTE can be cornered politically, but it, or what it represents, cannot be crushed militarily. It is too much to expect the LTTE to enter talks about power sharing with Tamils as distinct from itself, and it never did. It may however enter talks for its survival if its tenuous political base is in a state of collapse. If it could in that event reform itself, it would be a happy occasion, indeed. ■



The displaced in Jaffna

A recent report from Jaffna reads: "In recent times the mounting spate of epidemics has instilled in the people a previously unknown sense of terror. People displaced from the Islands and from the coastal regions of the peninsula now live in densely packed communities on vacant lands assigned to them by the LTTE, in groups of about 20-25 families. Following the recent floods, these crowded hamlets were overtaken by all manner of communicable diseases from malaria and 'fire' fever to fevers which defied diagnosis. A newly discovered fever which people termed 'killer' fever resulted in much panic. A victim of this is sure to die in a couple of days..."

Another NGO reports reads: "Cholera continues to decline. However, the incidence of malaria is still high, particularly in Vadamarachchi and Thenmaratchi. According to Jaffna Teaching Hospital, there have been 1244 positive cases this year (January to March) ... 68 children have died of septicinia this year, which health officers say is symptomatic of a lower level of resistance amongst vulnerable groups within the population..."

These descriptions are reminiscent of harsh conditions which resulted in high death rates and progressive depopulation of several parts of the country's dry zone, which continued well into this century. The LTTE is surely not a little responsible for this state of affairs. But it could point to state terror in the form of bombing and shelling in addition to inexplicable restrictions on essentials placed by the Government. By so shifting the entire blame, the LTTE is able to make political capital out of what would have been a disability. Are these victims, with those in the East, being offered an alternative? ■

Trojan Horse or Empowering the people?

Denmark cut off aid to Sri Lanka about the end of 1989 in response to the massive violations of human rights during the JVP troubles. Two local employees of DANIDA including a sociologist were also affected. One disappeared after being taken by state forces. Another was held without charges for several months. Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA) is part of the Foreign Office. In the course of 1990 when the resumption of the North-East conflict heralded a new bout of violation by the state, a demarche was made by the remaining Nordic countries Norway, Sweden and Finland. They sharply curtailed aid by not renewing funding for several projects, giving technical reasons such as an overall aid cut, citing global recession. But visiting senior Sri Lanka officials were told the real reason -- human rights. That the message was taken seriously

the renewed attack of democratic institutions and the press, the absence of tangible accountability before the law and continuing, albeit reduced, disappearances left the Nordic countries evidently unimpressed.

The task falling on the Foreign Office in Sri Lanka was to sell the accommodation with respect to human rights as having gone far enough, and to thus expedite the resumption of aid. This does not seem to have been a problem with major donors like the US, Japan and Britain, who in effect continued normal relations with token reservations. Although Nordic countries proved more difficult, Ambassador Neville Jayaweera in Sweden thought he was close to success -- or so it seemed until the repercussions of the 'Tamil Gate' affair in Denmark took effect. The affair involving the exposure of government complicity in the use of unlawful pressure on Tamil refugees led to the Prime Minister's resignation.

In the aftermath new personnel were brought into DANIDA leading to a shift from Foreign office bureaucrats to those formerly in the NGO sector. The latter often came from a tradition of an activist approach to human rights. The responses of representations to resume Danish Aid were deemed positive by Ambassador Jayaweera. In January 1993, a Danish Foreign Office team spent two weeks in Sri Lanka, and made their report some months later. A set of proposals was framed by DANIDA and a copy was sent to Mr. Jayaweera, leading to alarm in some circles and mixed reactions in others.

We place the importance of Danish Aid in context. Denmark had previously provided US \$ 10 million a year for the coast conservation project which was stopped in 1991. Denmark in resuming aid proposed to upgrade Sri Lanka to 'Country Programme' status. The indications were that



in Colombo is evident. During 1991 President Premadasa set up a Human Rights Task Force on the advice of his Personal Private Secretary Paskaralingam who had just returned from a visit to Northern Europe. The same year Sri Lanka accepted several of the recommendations made by Amnesty International, and also acceded to monitoring by the UN Commission for human Rights and the AI, apparently for two years. But

budgetary provision had been made for US \$ 30 million aid to Sri Lanka for the year 1994. This figure amounted to US \$ 20 million over and above the coast conservation programme. It was about 3 percent of what was annually pledged to Sri Lanka at the Paris donors meeting and formed about 60 percent of what was spent annually by the Mahaweli Authority.

Denmark is however a small country. But its importance far exceeds the value of its aid package. Denmark wields considerable influence as a member of the Nordic Council and also of the European Union. The Nordic Council is mostly outside the ambit of big time global power politics and tends to take an independent and sometimes radical line on issues. Sri Lankan foreign Office circles were deeply concerned that alienating Denmark could hurt them badly at the annual Geneva sessions of the UN Commission on Human Rights and at the Paris Aid Group meeting, also convened annually.

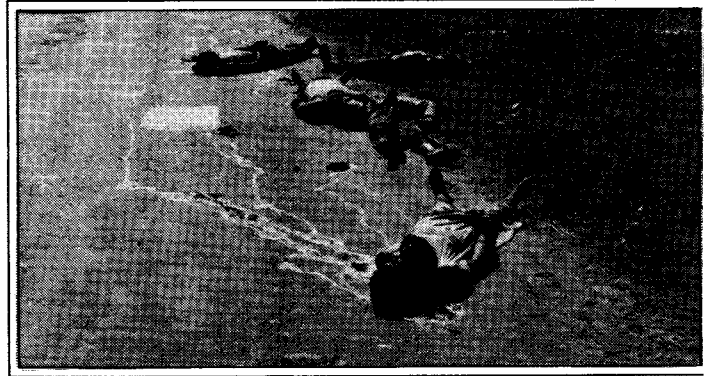
It is in this context that DANIDA's proposals led to some interesting exchanges within Sri Lankan diplomatic circles. The proposals coming from a state ministry, had many original features.

The Danish proposals

The proposals, while formally acknowledging that Sri Lanka had taken some positive steps with regard to human rights, said that much yet remained to be done. Denmark proposed to 'assist' Sri Lanka in bringing about a happier condition of human rights and democratic freedoms. It stated in diplomatic language that aid would at first be directed primarily towards this end, and that a re-direction of aid to normal developmental projects would take place in keeping with improvement in the former.

The novel feature of the proposals was that DANIDA proposed to identify and support work by individuals and persons closer to the grass-roots in areas such as the following: Activity intended to promote ethnic harmony; Providing advice intended to groups

wanting to raise issues in the general framework of rights; Helping those whose activity enhances press freedom and the freedom of information; Helping those who have suffered displacement, losses or loss of income as a result of the ongoing ethnic conflict.



A visit to Sri Lanka by a DANIDA team was proposed for November 1993. Mr. Jayaweera got this visit postponed to February by telling the Danish Foreign Office that time was needed for Sri Lanka to respond to these proposals.

In his advice to the Foreign Office in Colombo on these proposals he was indignant. He described the DANIDA proposals as a 'Trojan Horse' for 'installing a permanent mechanism in Sri Lanka to monitor and meddle in Human Rights affairs'. Mr. Jayaweera went on to point out that the arrangement sought was a bilateral one, whereas the previous ones with AI and UNCHR were multilateral, and their monitoring ended in 1993. Moreover, he said that this would oblige the Sri Lankan government to transport Danish Foreign Ministry officials to Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Jaffna, where they would be free to meet individuals. The move, he said, was a foot in the door through which many others would enter. The old foreign ministry officials, he said, were sympathetic to restoring aid without conditions. He blamed the young blood from the NGO sector for this new direction, which he describes as a licence to insurrectionist activity.

Neville Jayaweera sought clearance to put forward counter proposals to the DANIDA and go on talking to the

Danish FC, last a break occurs with the axe descending at Geneva and Paris.

Mr. Jayaweera's suggested counter-proposals were along the lines of shifting proposed assistance from the grass-roots to established NGOs in Colombo which purported to deal with similar concerns. For example, shifting assistance to groups and individuals say in areas of freedom of speech or ethnic harmony to formally constituted organisations with such aims; or shifting those who suffered as a result of the conflict to victims of torture, requiring specialised and organised activity.

Instead of the team meeting those whom it chose informally Mr. Jayaweera proposed a formal meeting. That is the Sri Lankan government to first obtain applications from NGOs who would like to take up projects in the specified areas and then when the DANIDA team arrives, for these organisations who will assist the work.

In this Mr. Jayaweera showed himself to be astute and experienced. Having himself being a director of a well-known Colombo based NGO, he understood that world very well. He knew the difference between fighting a cause as part of the establishment and doing the same in a village or provincial town where violations are a part of life.

Officialdom in Colombo was evidently not so alarmed. Replying nearly two months later, the Director General of Economic Affairs felt that a formal response was not necessary. He opined, unlike Mr. Jayaweera, that the DANIDA sent the draft proposals to the latter as a matter of courtesy and not officially. Mr. Jayaweera, it was suggested should go on talking. Mr. Jayaweera disagreed and felt the danger was real.

For the vast majority of the people in Sri Lanka, however, DANIDA's ideas offer hope and new responsibilities. More than the money spent, sustained concern in the grassroots would help the potential to usher in a new quality of democracy. Several prominent local groups which were either silent when Sinhalese youth were being killed

recently on a large scale, for whom an ethnic conflict does not exist, whom any activity in which too many of the beneficiaries being the majority community could be counted as violations (given that most violations at present are related to the war) will accuse Denmark of interfering in Sri Lanka's sovereignty.

Indeed, there are many ironies for a sovereign nation. Sri Lankan diplomacy passed through nobler times. As a leading member of the Non Aligned Movement, Sri Lanka was associated in causes supportive of Third world liberation and against imperialism. Such spirit of sovereignty no longer exists. An important role of diplomacy today appears to be to provide a shield for human rights violations against its own people. The DANIDA proposals cannot be treated as one sided or interfering. They deal with issues which Sri Lanka as a party to international conventions acknowledges as having no national boundaries. Moreover, in a state with developed welfare traditions,



such as is Denmark, government funding for minority concerns and grass-roots activity is well established. Such funding is made through devolved bodies delinked from the centre of state-power. If Denmark makes available to citizens of this country what is available to her own, she cannot be faulted on conspiratorial grounds. Of course, to the kind of closed political culture that is taking root in Colombo, anything that questions the centre of power becomes insurrectionist.

In the meantime, it is becoming increasingly clear that DANIDA may be despairing of working in Sri Lanka, if the fact that a scheduled visit was postponed indefinitely is to be relied upon as an index. Perhaps, it is time for ordinary people as well as concerned organisations to step in and push the Lankan government into giving serious consideration to the DANIDA proposals. ■

AMUNUGAMA'S "RADICALLY NEW LIBERAL OPTIONISM":

FAMILIAR OLD POLITICAL OPPORTUNISM ?

Dr. Sarath Amunugama, the new chairperson of the government controlled Lake House Group of Newspapers, former chief government censor, chief strategist and Vice-President of the DUNF, gave a clever but unconvincing interview in the January 1994 issue of **Counterpoint**. In the interview captioned The Radically New Liberal Optionism, Amunugama tried to justify the decision of the DUNF to merge with the Wijetunga UNP on ideological grounds arguing that the DUNF was a neo-liberal party which had after a reasonably successful stint of political activity on its own, had come to the realisation that ultimately the choice before the Sri Lankan electorate was between the pro-liberal UNP and the statist, anti-liberal

Rohan Edrisinha

(Rohan Edrisinha was a founder member of the Liberal Party and its Deputy Secretary-General until his resignation from the National Committee in April 1993 in protest against the party's decision to support the UNP in the Provincial elections of May 1993. He resigned from the party earlier this year.)

SLFP. He said

"If you look at the future -- let's say take the UNP and the SLFP, which has the greater potential to be anti-authoritarian? Both parties were authoritarian. So when you look at it, one is in the

socialistic model, the statist model, which increasingly the SLFP is getting saddled with because the liberal wing is moving away from the SLFP. We have only two options, that is to go along with the statist model and see whether it can be anti-authoritarian or the new liberal model and see whether it can be anti-authoritarian....

...So today I think the only place where a liberal can go is the UNP despite all its defects."

It seems much more plausible however that the decision of the DUNF was motivated by a combination of realpolitik, lust for the perks of power and patronage, the realisation that without the leadership of Lalith Athulathmudali the DUNF support would fade; and the fact that the *raison d'être* for the DUNF, Ranasinghe Premadasa, was no more. The Amunugama thesis is therefore unconvincing on the facts. However even if the thesis were to be given consideration as an argument, it remains fundamentally flawed for two main reasons:

1. The argument implies a hopelessly inadequate definition of Liberalism.
2. The characterisation of the UNP as pro-liberal and the SLFP as statist/socialist is simplistic and false.

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***What is the essence of Liberalism?
Respect for individual freedom and dignity, diversity, pluralism; the belief that the state exists for individuals and not the other way round; a secular state; the belief that the role of the state is limited and that its powers must be subject to effective checks and balances; the primacy of the private sector in the economy subject, where necessary, to regulation by the state.***

way round; a secular state; the belief that the role of the state is limited and that its powers must be subject to effective checks and balances; the primacy of the private sector in the economy subject, where necessary, to regulation by the state.

It is important to remember, however, that Liberalism as a political ideology is broad enough to embrace different emphases and nuances, and has changed and evolved over time and in different parts of the world to adapt to new contexts, problems, and even the challenges posed by competing ideologies. As Senator Lorna Marsden of the Liberal Party of Canada observed at a seminar on Liberalism in Colombo in March 1991:

"The key virtue of liberalism as a political philosophy is precisely that it provides a basis for political action in many different settings. Across time and space, the ideas of liberty, tolerance and diversity have had wide appeal but many different applications. All liberals try to create the conditions of opportunity and incentives for all people to make their own choices, to develop their talents fully and to bear the responsibilities of citizenship but modern liberals

differ in a variety of ways about how this should be accomplished. Some especially in the USA, and present, favour the minimal state. Others

has encouraged state intervention in a number of areas where such intrusion is totally unjustified. Furthermore by paying lip-service to

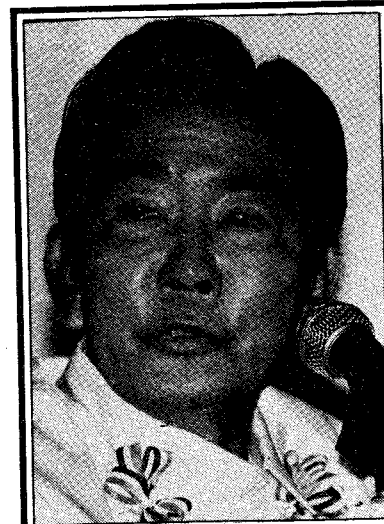
liberalism while practising anti-liberal, crony capitalism, the UNP may indeed be discrediting liberalism and, therefore, contrary to the Amunugama assertion, a liberal should be vigorously opposing the UNP and distinguishing its activities and philosophy from genuine liberalism.

There are several areas where the UNP's record is manifestly illiberal.

The Economy

The manner in which the privatisation process has been carried out in this

country with state assets being sold to cronies of the government and where the process is not transparent, not only fosters Marcos-style crony capitalism but also discredits the principle of privatisation which ultimately works to the advantage of the opponents of liberalism. Furthermore it encourages a pliant and sycophantic private sector which is terrified of displeasing the government for fear of falling outside the charmed



advocate distributive justice. How people are to be protected from the hazards of age, sickness and unemployment; how people individually and as minorities reach equality and liberty - these ideas have been moulded and shaped in many ways."

Despite Liberalism being a broad church, the anti-liberal and indeed statist attributes of the UNP are so pronounced that it would be extremely difficult to describe the UNP as liberal or pro-liberal. The UNP

circle of government beneficiaries. This was clearly demonstrated by the fear of a number of prominent chairpersons and directors of companies (many of them vociferous drawing room critics of the government) to accept the invitation of Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga to hear her views on the economic policies suitable for the country at a luncheon meeting in March this year. In all liberal democracies, attending talks given by prominent opposition politicians is a routine occurrence. The fact that the invitation caused so much anguish in the minds of our private sector elite indicates the degree of power and patronage still wielded by the state despite 17 years of a so-called open economy.

What about the manner in which both Presidents Premadasa and Wijetunga have ordered reduction of prices of food items, electricity rates, and interfered with the market in many other ways? If the SLFP refers to the high cost of essential items it is immediately characterised as socialism by stealth, but the UNP constantly intervenes in the economy, for blatantly partisan reasons, and escapes such criticism. Yet Dr. Amunugama says that the UNP is anti-statist and pro-liberal.

State control in other areas

There are numerous other ways by which the state wields unwarranted influence and control over people in varied types of activities. The state dominance over the media is one important example. The state monopoly of the electronic media is certainly not compatible with liberalism of any variety! The UNP

The law contemplated a gradual reduction of the quantum of state shares as the Public Trustee divested the shares to the public. Both the SLFP and several UNP administrations have flouted the intention of Parliament with impunity. Yet Dr. Amunugama states that the UNP is pro-liberal.

The UNP's Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (even the United Front did not label the country socialist in its constitution of 1972) continued the illiberal practice of politicising the public service by enshrining the pernicious and degrading "pleasure principle" and vesting vast, unchecked powers in the office of the Executive President. Perhaps Dr. Amunugama and his DUNF

Perhaps Dr. Amunugama and his DUNF colleagues have forgotten that under the UNP regimes never have there been so many MPs holding so many ministries of so many bizarre denominations. The constitutional provisions relating to human rights, unlike most constitutions in the liberal democratic world, permit the state to curtail those rights almost at will as there are no requirements that the restrictions should be reasonable.

government has the audacity to permit "private" television channels subject to the condition that they do not telecast local news programmes. The manner in which references to Sri Lanka on BBC news programmes are blacked out, is reminiscent of fascist or communist regimes, certainly not a liberal one. Dr. Amunugama now presides over the illegal Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd., which in blatant contravention of the law which took over the newspaper group in the early 70s, continues in state control.

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Again, unlike all constitutions in the liberal

democratic world, the Sri Lankan Constitution does not recognise the right to property, a right considered paramount by liberals as it constitutes a bulwark for the protection of individual autonomy from state intimidation and tyranny. Indeed when a distinguished group of intellectuals and religious leaders were preparing to issue a statement shortly before the Southern Provincial election, one eloquent retired career diplomat declined to sign the statement on the ground that he feared that his property might be confiscated by the state. When the All Party Conference considered reform of the fundamental rights provisions of the Constitution, the Liberal Party proposed the introduction of the right to property subject to the qualification that the state could acquire property for a public purpose upon the payment of just compensation. Every other political party at the conference, including the "pro-liberal" UNP, opposed the proposal.

The pervasive power of the state fortified by successive UNP regimes manifests itself also in more absurd situations. Today under the liberal UNP, Vice-Chancellors of universities are appointed by the main political actor in the country, the President of the Republic. If a university academic is invited to present a paper at a conference abroad or to participate in a training programme or seminar, or even on a private visit, s/he has to give 40 days notice, fill in 10 copies of a leave application form, prepare a letter of justification, all of which then travel from the Head of the relevant Department via the

Dean, Registrar, Vice-Chancellor, assorted bureaucrats in the University Grants Commission, Ministry of Higher Education (I'm not sure which one) and the Prime Minister's office and finally to the Prime Minister. So much for academic freedom and autonomy.

The fact that Ministers of the Republic, including sometimes

Amunugama and the leadership of the DUNF, past and present, were key players in the UNP of 1977-1989 which was responsible for many historic developments, which were not only anti-liberal but perhaps unparalleled in the liberal democratic world. Depriving the main opposition leader of her civic rights, the infamous Referendum of 1982,

Amunugama's thesis that the UNP is pro-liberal and anti-statist, therefore, is implausible. Liberals, far from supporting the UNP, should rather be scrupulous in affirming what liberal principles are so that liberalism is not discredited by association with that which is not liberal or anti-liberal.

the President, are involved in the selection of sports teams is another feature that makes Sri Lanka unique in the liberal democratic world. How else can one describe the practice that the Minister of Sport must approve the selection of national teams but as an unwarranted intrusion by the state in an area that should be left to non-state voluntary associations? In Britain John Major or his cabinet colleagues do not have to approve the selection of the England cricket team. It would be unthinkable. Yet recently, President Wijetunga, Minister Nanda Mathew and Minister Tyrone Fernando were involved in various ways in the controversy over the selection of the Sri Lankan cricket team. And Dr. Amunugama insists that the present regime is anti-statist.

It must not be forgotten that

intimidating the judiciary by stoning judges' homes, locking them out of their chambers and appointing committees of MPs to sit in judgment over their conduct, and enshrining the illiberal principle that MPs should not vote according to their consciences but in accordance with the diktats of the party leadership, are some of the undemocratic, illiberal actions of the UNP, which the DUNF leadership was closely identified with.

Amunugama's thesis that the UNP is pro-liberal and anti-statist, therefore, is implausible. Liberals, far from supporting the UNP, should rather be scrupulous in affirming what liberal principles are so that liberalism is not discredited by association with that which is not liberal or anti-liberal. ■

It happened many decades ago, even before the UNP was formed. It was the election in 1937, which brought Dudley Senanayake, now held high as the symbol of gentlemanly politics and the epitome of the liberal thinking, to the State Council. The tactic for victory was both crude, vulgar and wholly corrupt.

The Botale Walauwa, through its control over the village headmen, stationed the local thugs of the Dedigama area at the "maha niyaras" along which the rural people came to vote. As groups of village voters, including women, suspected of supporting the other side came along, the thugs raised their sarongs in indecent exposure. As the dirty message of vulgar intimidation spread, both women and men who were opposed to the Senanayakes preferred to stay in their villages. Dudley Senanayake, son of D.S., Senanayake, the alleged Father of the Nation, arrived at the State Council, and later succeeded his father as the second UNP Prime Minister of independent Ceylon.

It is a story worth recalling when there is so much talk today about how the UNP hopes to usher in a new era of gentlemanly politics in Sri Lanka. Almost crushing such hopes was the comment by Mr. Sirisena Cooray, at the height of the political-criminal manhunt for Soththi Upali, that many people were forgetting the good work done by Upali for the Party. Mr. Cooray, although not party secretary, was still in the Cabinet of Ministers when he made that statement. It was more than a broad hint that a man who was wanted in connection with an attempted murder in a courthouse, should not be hunted because, among other things, he put up posters for the party during difficult times. The times indeed are arresting.

The Soththi episode, if you pardon the cross-lingo pun, is at most a lame expression of the UNP's desire to cleanse itself of the criminal corruption of the past 17 years. It is a corruption from which no section of the party leadership has been left untainted. Which makes the task of the new doctor who has been brought to give

Green dirt that cannot wash

Lucien Rajakarunanayake

it the necessary enema and bowel wash, all the more difficult, nay well nigh impossible.

What is more interesting is that this takes place at a time when some powerful sections of the UNP are calling for the restoration of the Premadasa policies, and even blaming the defeat in the South on the departure from those policies. One is not surprised to hear such things being said by the family of the late President. The lack of privilege must be terrible. One can also feel a mixture of pity and contempt for the low country dancer and preacher of burgher gratitude, who think their only role as Members of Parliament is to pave the way for their late patron's widow to sit in Cabinet.

Whatever the immediate inner-party objectives of the UNP leadership in getting the police highly activated in the hunt for Soththi Upali, the man

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who once gave most of their top ranks clear directives on how to soft-peddle on organized crime, and also got them houses through the housing ministry, there is one fact that screams out for recognition. Soththi Upali and all what he is being hunted down for, is what was at the core of the UNP/Premadasa Policies in the politics of Sri Lanka.

As much as the UNP/Premadasa policies made journalism in Sri Lanka fetid with the likes of H.L.D. Mahindapala and Anuruddha Thilakasiri, it dragged our politics, which was never very clean, to the worst depths of criminality and corruption. The situation became so bad that today, an inner-party power struggle cannot be conducted without getting the key players of the underworld of political-crime out of the way, and behind bars.

It's time we laid the ghost of these UNP/Premadasa Policies, to rest and went ahead with the task of strengthening democracy, much to the chagrin of those who believe that what we need for the liberal economy to bear real fruit is more than a little bit of dictatorship -- a la Singapore. Let's get this straight, the dictatorship of the UNP, of which Premadasa was the last exponent, was one where the wheels of politics were enmeshed inextricably with those of crime, violence and corruption. It was not directed at the welfare of the country or its people. It was one big sham, and there are still not enough people who are ready to admit that in the open.

There is nothing that worked in that dictatorship of crime and fear, not even the clocktowers which latterly marked the hours of catastrophe for the country. All the largesse of the State distributed at the President's fancy made no change in the lives of the people. Poverty was not alleviated. So much for the widow who now wants to set up a fund for poverty alleviation. She should take that to the courts, and start a fund through the estate she inherited from her husband, who boasted of his barefoot soccer.

The war in the North and East was not over when he was assassinated,

in fact it was worse over there, than when he took over. If the economy did click, in the figures of growth and investment, it was not due to a peculiarly Premadasa intervention, it was despite him. Even there he made things worse with the garment cavalcade. Premadasa did not make capitalism the engine of growth in Sri Lanka. He, his family and his great defenders of today, made it an even worse form of cronyism than what existed in the Philippines under Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos.

Not all the flowers carried into temples, all the offerings made at churches, the many coconuts broken and ash put on at kovils, and the fake service of Seva Vanithas could hide the fact that the policies of Premadasa were those of the enthronement of family bandyism and criminality in politics. It was corruption at the core. In-laws can now miss saying it with flowers on the National Carrier, but let us not forget that it was under the leadership of Ranasinghe Premadasa that Soththi Upali was appointed to the National Executive Committee of the UNP.

It certainly follows the tradition of extending clemency to a condemned rapist, Gonawila Sunil, and making him an all island Justice of the Peace; of ministers interceding for criminals who tapped petroleum from the pipelines of the Petroleum Corporation. Of having the houses of Supreme Court judges stoned, and promoting policemen found guilty, by the courts, of human rights violations. The examples of the

politico-criminal connections of the UNP leadership require much more space to detail. Most recently, it led to the pardoning of two persons from Kuliyaipitiya, convicted for culpable homicide, even before they began serving their sentence, and despite the repeated demonstration of contempt for the courts, by both the accused and the Police.

The need today is to see the action against the alleged criminality of Soththi Upali, his political patrons

undervalued land and overloaded invoices. They have been through the whole gamut of crookedness, and to make it worse they have robbed us of our decency as well.

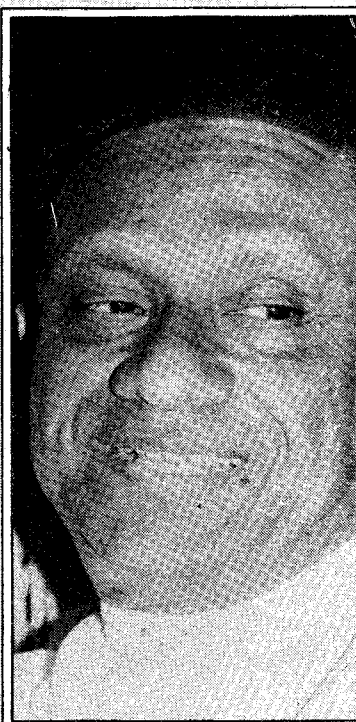
Soththi Upali was the contractor for the supply of grass sods for the thousands of acres that covered each Gam Udawa. He won the sod contract for the Gampaha Gam Udawa too. He was also the man who held the contract for the main public restaurant at every Gam Udawa. He may well

have been a front for others who made the real money. It is natural that those who lose such great opportunity would lament the departure from UNP/Premadasa policies.

The merry-go-round of crooked UNP politics has come to a temporary halt. The brass band is not playing the same tune to please the "catchers" who ride the wooden horses. It does not mean the UNP is cleansing itself. It may shed a few embarrassments, and tell the band to play a different tune. But the beat will remain the same. The merry-go-round will go on the same rails.

That is the danger of believing in the carnival of the UNP. It was conceived in corruption. It wallowed in corruption through 17 years. That is the crisis. Let's not be fooled by the new talk of gentlemanly

politics. Even a searchlight won't bring out the gentlemen, who are said to be lurking under the green canvass. Good luck to you Dr. Wijesekera. There is no known emetic that can do the cleansing that is needed. ■



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and police protectors, not as a great cleansing operation of the UNP, but as the inevitable consequence of thieves falling out. All of these are people who have robbed our people of their wealth, through the national coffers, and fixed tenders. Through

UNP in dire straits takes desperate measures

Oracle

If it can be said that the assassination of President Premadasa on May Day 1993 had irrevocably shaken the foundation of the continued political dominance of the ruling United National Party, then the May day of 1994 can be regarded as having almost sealed the party's fate. For while the UNP struggled miserably to save face following the boycott of President Wijetunga and family members of the late President at ceremonies to commemorate him organized by the departing Secretary-General of the UNP Sirisena Cooray, the May Day showing of the Peoples' Alliance left no one in doubt as to the nation's mood. After many long years it was a welcome change to see the opposition well organized --

The Sri Lanka Freedom Party and its allies have been riding high ever since their victory in the Southern Provincial Council election. While Chandrika's attempts in her dialogue with the Colombo business community to prove she is no "fire breathing dragoness of a rather flaming red hue" may have achieved limited objectives, the confused rhetoric that one hears from the Alliance camp still gives no indication as to the policies a future SLFP-led coalition government will implement with regard to the economy, the ethnic question, constitutional reform and foreign policy among others. Reports of disenchantment already setting in among the partners of the alliance, some allegedly even

who its Presidential candidate should be -- whether mother or daughter -- will also weaken the opposition from taking full advantage of the verdict of the South. While the fact that academics like G.L. Peiris who have decided to cast their lot with the SLFP and technocrats like former GCEC boss Lakshman Watawala awaiting the call to service, may strengthen the SLFP in the skills department and also have a salutary effect on the upper middle class voter, that both these individuals as well as a number of others like Lal Jayewardene who are currently guiding the leaders of the opposition have until recently been singing the praises of President Premadasa and been party to J.R. Jayewardene's misrule of the nation, is a disturbing thought.

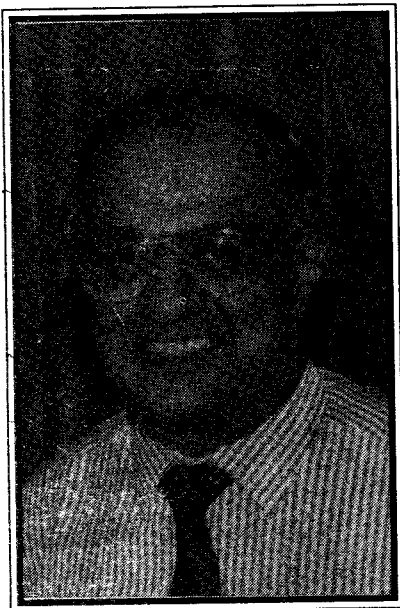
Reconciling the interests of the elitist 'Bourgeois' classes with the aspirations of the lower classes while at the same time cutting through racial and caste barriers is no doubt a major challenge faced by all politicians particularly in the third world. Until recently, the UNP managed to create the perception among the people that it was capable of straddling this hurdle, by attracting and permitting the likes of Ranasinghe Premadasa to rise to the very top. Further, permitting greater social mobility through the adoption of an open economic policy even before the term became sort of a 'panacea' in development also made it possible for the UNP to command unquestioned support among the marginalized sections of society. In contrast, the Opposition despite its slogan of a 'balanced economy' has shown no such capability and the

The UNP's multi-pronged strategy for winning back the people has several strands. But Wijetunga's benevolent May Day bonanza followed by other price reductions and concessions to the lower and middle classes is unlikely to fool anybody, in a country where people are all too familiar with the tricks and gimmicks adopted by politicians of all hues seeking to come to or hang on to power.

not only being able to get its supporters to the rally, but more so taking the trouble to ensure that after the rally these large groups stuck together and followed pilot vehicles from each of the electorates to their respective buses in order to get back home safely.

leading to suicide, is no advertisement in gaining credibility regarding one's capacity to lead the country out of the mess in which 17 years of continued UNP rule has placed it. The suggestion that there is a serious difference of opinion within the SLFP as to eventually

alternate emphasis it has been giving in its critique of the present regime to the people in the South and to the businessmen who gathered at the Taj, leaves one with the impression that it is trying to run with the hare while hunting with the hound. The task before the SLFP and its allies is to reconcile these interests and to come up with



Dr. Wickrema Weerasuriya

a comprehensive policy package that takes care of all sections.

In contrast to the Opposition, the verdict of the people of the South appears to have helped the ruling UNP in diagnosing its problems. But as to whether the medication prescribed is the correct one, and even if it is, whether it is too little too late remains the poser.

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Toning down his 'anti-minority' rhetoric and trying to kiss and make

up with Thondaman might reverse a few minority votes but whether it can decisively alter the electoral arithmetic the UNP has traditionally counted on in winning elections is doubtful. Further, the puritan image the President seeks to cultivate through the much publicized crack-down on crime and vice will naturally raise eye brows but will impress nobody and in fact depress some party supporters who know the crucial role the 'Siri kotha' mafia has played. The UNP will surely miss them in the forthcoming



Sirisena Cooray

hustings. Alternatively, if Wijetunga can also persuade all those in his party to return all monies they unlawfully acquired and resurrect all lives taken during the UNP's period in governance, he may not become President but he surely will enter the history books.

However, the most significant 'medication' on the UNP prescription appears to be the reshuffling of the pack. In that context Sirisena Cooray seems to have been an easy 'scapegoat'. By stripping him, Wijetunga is not only making a pre-emptive strike against his detractors within the party, he is also appeasing the Premadasa family whom he wants to win over

desperately, while at the same time pitting the heirs to the 'Premadasa legacy' one against the other. While the new appointments of Dr. Gamini Wijesekera as Secretary-General of the UNP, Sarath Amunugama as CEO at Lake House and Dr. Wikrema Weerasuriya as Secretary in his old 'haunt' cannot be questioned in terms of capability, they surely can in terms of timing.

The bottom line the people of this country will have to ask themselves come election time is whether they can trust a party which has been in power continually through 3 different Presidents and administrations, just because it tactically acknowledges that it has done wrong and pretends to telescope into less than 170 days, what it should have in any case



Dr. Sarath Amunugama

been doing over the past 17 years. At the same time, unless the Opposition comes clear on its policies as to how it intends to redeem this land from the curses of these long years of 'Dharmista' rule and can truly prove that it is different, they too will have to be judged on their past record, that of promising rice from the moon and leaving the poor starving. ■

View from below the Platform

Richard Simon

When Sunil Situnayake first told me he was planning to produce a talk show, I was intrigued but pessimistic. People are still afraid, I said, you'll never get them to come out into the open and speak their minds. The paranoid shadow hangs over us yet. A talk show, in which a group of well-known figures from widely differing backgrounds comes together in public to debate controversial subjects on which they all hold different and often conflicting views, is a profoundly democratic entertainment. We Sri Lankans seem to prefer more tyrannous sports. And besides, I said, you'll never get it on television.

'Oh, that's all right,' said Mr. Situnayake. 'I'm planning to hold it live.' I told him he was crazy. The premiere of **Platform**, held at the BMICH on 4 March and hosted by Mr. Manik Sandrasagara, proved me wrong. Times, it seemed, had changed: people were brave enough to appear on the show and speak their minds. Not only that, but the audience itself was a willing participant in the debate. Towards the end of the show, when contributions from the house were solicited, the problem was not how to encourage people to get up and speak, but how to make them sit down again when their time was up.

It looks, then, as if the talk-show concept does have a future in Sri Lanka. **Platform** has shown the

way. What a pity, then, that both the premiere and the second show (held at the Lionel Wendt Theatre on 20 April) were so indifferently produced and so incompetently hosted.

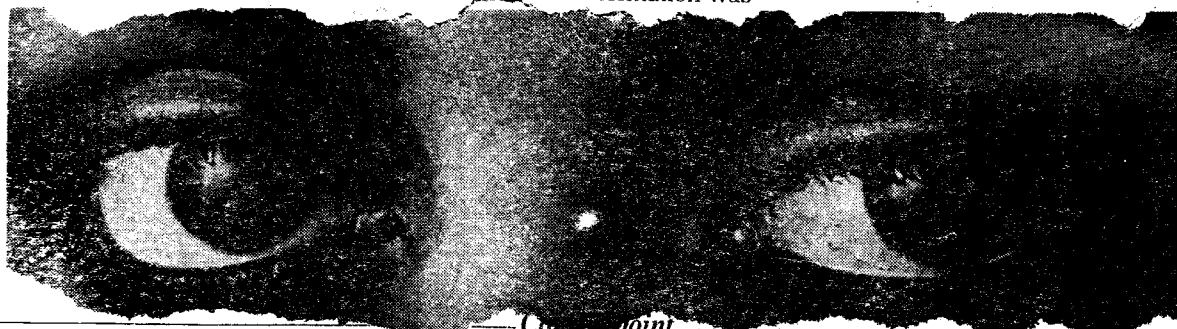
Teething troubles were to be expected with such an innovative venture. The audience at the BMICH on 4 March was disposed to be sympathetic. Good thing, too, for teething troubles there were. Some of these -- the bizarrely furnished set, the big floor-standing microphones -- need only be mentioned in passing. The only truly unpleasant aspect of the production was the lighting, provided by two gigantic barrel floods which spilled a blinding white glare all over the audience and threw ugly shadows on to the stage.

The performance, if that is the correct term, was another matter. The topic selected for the evening's discussion was 'Who controls information?' The guests were Dr. Maya Sittampalam Rainford, an information technology specialist, Dr. Arjuna Parakrama, a literary academic, Mr. Mervyn de Silva, a senior journalist, and Dr. Sarath Amunugama, a politician. The spread of professions was intended to cover the breadth of the topic, and did so rather well; so well, in fact, that when the participants actually got down to discussing the matter, they were unable to agree on what sort of information was

being controlled, never mind who was controlling it.

Mr. Sandrasagara wasn't much help. Rather than bringing the discussion to a focus as a good talk-show host should, he let his guests ramble at leisure through the dense thickets of their own memories, dreams and reflections till everyone was hopelessly lost. He began the show with a long prefatory speech, then invited each of the guests to introduce themselves at equal and unnecessary length, so that the proceedings much more resembled a formal seminar than they did a talk-show. Anyone who has watched a good chat-show on TV (as we all have, by now, thanks to our wonderful new media options, God-bless them) knows that the way to hold an audience's interest is to give each guest no more than a minute to introduce their initial position, cutting in as soon as something they say provides an opportunity for the host to pass the conversational ball on to the next participant. Instead of this, we were treated to five tedious speeches, more than an hour's worth it seemed, before any actual discussion commenced.

But as soon as the guests began talking to each other rather than pontificating at the audience, things began to liven up. Dr. Parakrama, in particular, gave fine value for money: his contributions to the debate were short, pithy, controversial and frequently hilarious, and his dissection of the



...piring Dr. Amunugama was everything one could ask for from a good chat-show. Dr. Sittampalam made perhaps the only intellectual contribution to the debate worth recording: according to her, advanced information technology will soon impose democracy on the world as a kind of side-effect. When everyone has a computer, a Fax modem, video imaging equipment and a satellite feed, she said, the rich and powerful will no longer be able to control what we see and hear through the media. And since free exchange of information (or, if you prefer, free speech) is the lifeblood of democracy, the spread of information technology adumbrates the universal triumph of democracy. The idea is not original to Dr. Sittampalam, but it is the first time I have heard it publicly expressed in Sri Lanka. Perhaps that is because, to the average Sri Lankan, all this wonderful technology is still very much the preserve of the rich and powerful, who use it to consolidate their grip on society without the smallest pang of conscience; nevertheless, Dr. Sittampalam gave us a vision of a future worth having, even if it never comes true. I am also indebted to her for the only quotable remark made onstage at either this or the subsequent show. 'Government,' she said with heat, 'is an antiquated concept!' Hear, hear.

The other two participants were a disappointment. Dr. Sarath Amunugama appears to have perfected the art of speaking at length, often quite passionately, without saying anything at all substantial. As for Mr. Mervyn de Silva, who so bravely carried the torch of intelligent journalism in English through the night of oppression and ignorance, I should like to be able to pay him compliments, but honesty compels me to admit that I found him rather dull.

Eventually, Mr. Sandrasagara turned the discussion over to the house, and it was the audience's

turn to make speeches. Mr. Gamini Fonseka shared some of his experiences as a self-professed lover of freedom trying to make room for his love in company that abhorred her; Mr. Kumar Ponnambalam also made a bit of a speech, of which I'm sorry to say I

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forget the substance; and one or two stock Outraged Citizens got up to let off steam. Finally Mr. Mano Chanmugam made a fine summing-up, cutting out Mr. Sandrasagara's work for him, so to speak, and that was that.

Later, I asked Mr. Sandrasagara why he had been so uncharacteristically reserved. He replied that he had felt obliged to be quiet and let his guests do the talking. Fair enough, had he been hosting them in his drawing-room; but that is not what a talk-show is about. Every other person I spoke to after the show agreed that the speechifying had been oppressive and boring, that the subsequent

discussion had been fun but haphazard and inconclusive, and that the whole thing would have benefited from a stronger hand on the tiller.

I know for a fact that host and producer were both well aware of these criticisms, yet the second edition of *Platform* repeated many of the errors of the first. This time the topic was 'How to end the war' -- possibly the most important question animating our society today. The guests were Mr. Mangala Samaraweera of the SLFP, Mr. Kumar Ponnambalam, Mr. Gamini Fonseka, Brigadier Ranjan de Silva, Mr. M.H.M. Ashraff of the SLMC, and Mr. Waruna Karunatilake, who edits this magazine.

The topic was formulated precisely enough, though in his introductory speech Mr. Sandrasagara attempted to widen the scope to include the fight against narcotics, the battle against poverty, etc. Fortunately, no-one took him up on this, and discussion was confined to **the** war (the one in the 'north and east', in case anyone needs reminding). Once again we sat through several endless 'introductory' speeches. The only interesting one was Mr. Samaraweera's, because he used his time to explain the SLFP's stance on the issue in greater detail than I had ever heard before. For the rest, nothing new was said. Most of the guests were concerned with reiterating the causes of the war rather than discussing how to stop it; Mr. Karunatilake attempted to bring things back to the point, but his inexperience as a public speaker went against him, and he could not make himself heard. Each guest amplified at length the opinions and positions associated with them, with which every intelligent Sri Lankan is already familiar to the point of nausea. The time spent in actual discussion (in other words, the talk-show proper) was reduced almost to nothing. The whole exchange was so pointless and boring that at one point I got

up and walked out, though conscience recalled me to my duty before I was halfway down the foyer of the Lionel Wendt.

After I returned, the discussion was thrown open to the house. Chaos ensued. This, after all, was a hot topic: everyone had an opinion and they all wanted to air it. At first the production crew attempted to control the discussion by handing a microphone around the audience (if you had the mike, you had the floor), but all too soon people were bellowing at each other any old how, mike or no mike, host, guests and audience all together, and the quality of mutual insult was rapidly deteriorating. Some of the bellowers were folk prominent in society, business, and the media; I shall spare them the shame of personal identification, for it was a truly ugly scene. I walked out again, and this time I did not return.

In a letter to the **Ceylon Daily News** of 29 April, one Ken Alex asks, apropos the second **Platform**, 'how can we find a way to end the war when a discussion on the topic ends as a noisy exercise of (sic) futility?' Good question. But Mr. Alex is forgetting something very important. We weren't at the Lionel Wendt that night to find a way to stop the war, any more than we went to the BMICH last March to learn who controls the media. We went to be entertained, and we paid a hundred rupees per head for the pleasure.

What we hoped to see, I think, was a group of important people responding to difficult questions on an issue of national interest -- without the benefit of speechwriters, censors, videotape editors and the other defences behind which important people usually hide. Chat shows are only peripherally about issues; the focus of interest is actually the person, not the issue. We wanted to see those folk put one another on the spot, with a little help from Mr. Sandrasagara. We hoped to see them reveal a bit more about themselves and their true

motivations. And not just for entertainment's sake, either: these people are, in their various capacities, representatives and servants of the people (i.e. you and me) and we have a right to know them better than they want us to. Well, we didn't get any of that from

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Platform.

All we got, in the end, was six hundred people arguing about how to stop the war. Which brings me to another point: a chat show is, as I have pointed out, an insight into the views and personalities of public figures. Audience participation, therefore, has no part in it. Ken Alex appears to disagree. *Chacun a son gout*, but if this sort of thing is to his taste there are more appropriate venues for indulging it.

Credit where credit is due. In spite of my carping, I cannot deny that Sunil Situnayake has shown us, through **Platform**, that talk-shows can work in Sri Lanka, and could

even help us get a little more comfortable with the idea of free expression for everybody. He has broken new ground (I do not count the sycophantic farragoes slopping about on the state-controlled media as proper talk shows), and he deserves to be congratulated.

However, **Platform** in its present form will not work, except as a monthly screaming-match enjoyed by a few hundred vociferous people, completely irrelevant to the rest of us. If a talk-show is to make any impact at all, it has to go on the media -- preferably on television.

And before this happens, **Platform** has got to clean up its act drastically. The thing has to be produced as a show, not as a cross between St. John's fish market on a busy morning and a seminar conducted by some obscure NGO. Above all, the host -- Manik -- has to function better as a moderator.

This means applying a clear and analytical mind to the issues beforehand. It means finding out where one's guests stand -- what they can be expected to say and why. It means formulating strategies to promote controversy and self-revelation among them, and then applying those strategies intelligently. It means planning the show in such a way that it cannot be hijacked by the guests. It means remaining attentive and responsive throughout the performance, butting in tactfully but decisively whenever intervention is required.

Last, but not least, it means staying uninvolved, and keeping your head.

Like the small boy in the fairy tale who made everyone see that the Emperor was naked, the function of a good talk-show host is to strip away the illusory robes of ambition, self-importance and flattery, enabling us to recognize these superior beings as flesh-and-blood mortals like ourselves. It is a role for which Mr. Sandrasagara would seem ideally suited, but he'll have to work a lot harder if he means to succeed at it. ■

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THE BENEFITS OF IGNORANCE

The trigger was pressed and the bullet spun out ill-temperedly.

The man leaning through the window doubled over without making a sound.

The trigger was pressed a second time. The bullet swished through the air, puncturing the water-carrier's goatskin. He fell on his face and his blood, mixing with the water, began to flow across the road.

The trigger was pressed a third time. The bullet missed, embedding itself into a mud wall.

The fourth felled an old woman. She did not even scream.

The fifth and sixth were wasted. Nobody got killed and nobody got wounded.

The marksman looked frustrated, when suddenly a running child appeared on the road. He raised his gun and took aim.

"What are you doing?" his companion asked.

"Why?"

"You are out of bullets."

"You keep quiet. What does a little child know?"

PRECAUTIONARY ARRANGEMENT

The first incident took place in front of the small hotel in the street corner. A sentry was immediately put on duty there.

The second incident happened the next evening, not too far from the local general store. The sentry was moved to the site of the new occurrence.

The third incident took place at midnight just in front of the laundry.

The sentry was ordered to stand guard at the murder spot. "Can you post me where the next incident is going to take place, Sir" he asked.

Saadat Hasan Manto

(translated from the Urdu by Khalid Hasan)

SEE THINGS IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT



LAGER-PILSNER
THREE COINS